



## The Relationship between Forgiveness and Marital Satisfaction

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### ABSTRACT

The study examined the relationship between forgiveness and marital satisfaction in Bandar-Abbas married women. The sample included 200 persons who were selected through stratified sampling. Data collection tools, including 3 measure of Demographic Questionnaire, The Enright Forgiveness Inventory [EFI], was translated and adopted into Persian by Ghobari et al and the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction scale [EMS], was translated and adopted into Persian by Soleymanian. This type Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis of data ( $P < 0.001$ ) saying that a significant positive relationship between marital satisfaction and forgiveness. Results of multiple correlation analysis also suggests the existence of multiple relationships between forgiveness marital satisfaction and forgiveness was the best predictor of marital satisfaction

**Keywords:** Forgiveness, Marital satisfaction, Married women

### INTRODUCTION

The family is a vital institution in American society, often serving as the principal source of social support for individuals. Strong marriages provide spouses with a sense of meaning in their lives as well as serve as protective factors against life stress [1]. They also provide a stable primary structure for establishing a family relationship and rearing the next generation [2]. Though marriage is a common and highly desirable relationship, statistics indicate that satisfaction within the marital relationship is not easily achieved or maintained.

Couples choose marriage for themselves hoping to build a future with one special person [3], but the young adults of the 21st century are at greater risk for marital failure than previous generations, as many have not had the personal example of a stable marital relationship [4]. High rates of marriage, and subsequent high rates of divorce, may indicate a general psycho-socio-behavioral gap in understanding the knowledge and skills necessary to maintain a satisfying and stable marital relationship [5]. Strong marriages provide spouses with a sense of meaning in their lives [1], as well as providing benefits to the family unit and society [6].

Marital relationship in the life, like other relationships has its own positive and negative dimensions and the most important index and determining factor in marriage is quality and kind of relationship between couple [7]. Generally satisfaction of individual from marital life counts as his satisfaction from family and satisfaction from family counts as satisfaction from life, so this subject will causes facilitation in material and spiritual growth, excellence and development in society [8].

The topic of forgiveness has attracted increased interest in the social sciences in the past 20 years, both as a psychological construct and as a relevant concept for empirical study and qualitative exploration [9]. The most recent and commonly accepted definition of forgiveness suggests that it is two-dimensional, including positive and negative forgiveness dimensions [10, 7]. Positive forgiveness in marital relationships has been defined as lower levels of blame, increased understanding of one's spouse, decreased levels of anger in regard to the betrayal, behaviors which reflect moving on from the betrayal and a sense of emotional peace experienced by the forgiver [7].

The likelihood of forgiveness in intimate relationships has been found to have an influence on couples' satisfaction level [11, 12]. Individuals who are in a long-term marriage report that willingness to forgive is an important construct that elongates and maintains marital relationships [11].

Recent research on marital satisfaction has been focused on its relationship to forgiveness within the context of marital relationships. This research has shown a correlation between the ability to forgive and marital satisfaction. McNulty explored the relationship between forgiveness in marriage, marital satisfaction and marital outcomes [13]. This researcher also examined the impact of negative verbal behavior on forgiveness, marital

satisfaction and marital outcomes. Participants in this study were 72 newly married couples who participated in a two year longitudinal study. The Quality Marriage Index was used to assess marital satisfaction with internal consistencies of this measure being high [13]. McNulty found positive correlations between forgiveness, marital outcomes and marital satisfaction, the relationship between these variables was a function of the amount of negative verbal behavior exhibited by each couple [13]. It was shown that while forgiveness can have positive effects on marital satisfaction in couples who rarely engage in negative verbal behavior, lower levels of marital satisfaction were observed in couples who forgave a spouse who frequently engaged in negative verbal behavior. Gordon et al. found a negative relationship between negative forgiveness and marital satisfaction for both husbands and wives such that higher levels of negative forgiveness were associated with lower levels of marital satisfaction [7]. However, higher levels of trust were shown to assist in decreasing the effects of negative forgiveness on marital satisfaction.

The correlation between forgiveness and quality of marital relationship has been greatly researched in the past years; as spouses are more forgiving of each other's transgressions, it positively impacts their marital relationships [11, 12]. According to Fincham and Beach, couples who are more forgiving report higher marital satisfaction; this satisfaction may be due to the findings that forgiveness leads married couples to a road of reconciliation, closeness, and cooperation [11]. Kachadourian et al. [14] emphasized that forgiveness endorses positive marital adjustment in married couples. Additionally, forgiveness is said to facilitate married couples to communicate effectively without exhibiting psychological aggression toward each other [12]. According to the first forgiveness and marital relationship longitudinal study conducted by Paleari et al. [12] the correlation between forgiveness and the reported positive quality of marital relationship is said to last for more than 6 months. Specifically, a recent study has reported that wives who are forgiving of their husband's transgressions resolve marital conflicts effectively even 12 months later [1]; however, this finding was only applicable to wives, not husbands. Essentially, it can be said that forgiveness is an important variable in marriage that predicts how marital couples manage future conflicts [15]. Seif and Bahari have examined the relation between pardon and couple mental health and showed that there is a significant relationship between forgiveness and mental health [16]. Khodayarifard et al. [14] have studied the forgiveness therapy method from Islamic perspective and concluded that using forgiveness therapy is effective in the correction of thoughts, feelings and behavior of offended people and improve relations [17].

Hypothesis of Study: First hypothesis: there is relationship between forgiveness with satisfaction among married women.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Participants and Sampling:** Statistical community of this study consists of whole married women who dwelled in Bandar-Abbass in 2011, and the sample of study consists of 200 subjects, and for selecting them we used non-sampling method. Those who were separated or strongly considering separation or divorce were not included in the study, as well as those who indicated moderate to severe violence in their relationship in the past year.

### Measures

1. Demographic Questionnaire: This form was drafted by a researcher aiming at gathering information such as age, educational level, marriage duration, etc.

2. Enright Forgiveness Inventory: The Enright Forgiveness Inventory [EFI] was developed by Enright and the Human

Development Study Group at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. It is a 60-item self-report measure of interpersonal forgiveness with items equally divided among six subscales:

Positive and Negative Affect, Positive and Negative Behavior, and Positive and Negative Cognition. Each item were scored on a 1–6 Likert type scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, with a range of scores from 60–360 with a high score representing a high level of forgiveness. There is the 1-item forgiveness scale, which is an independent measure of construct validity. In previous studies, internal consistency .90, test–retest reliability of .67 to .91 and validity has been documented [18]. This scale were translated and adopted into Persian by Ghobari et al and they found the internal consistency [Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ] for EFI to be 0.93 and split-half reliability coefficient as 0.88. Also, we found the internal consistency to be 0.89 and split-half reliability coefficient as 0.85 [19].

3. ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale: The ENRICH Marital Satisfaction scale [EMS], according to Fowers and Olson, yields a valid and reliable measure of marital quality or satisfaction, and it consisted of 10 items rated on a five-point Likert scale that included 10 domains of marital quality [i.e. communication, conflict resolution, roles, financial concerns, leisure time, sexual relationship, parenting, family and friends, and religion] with one question per domain [20].

The content validity of the EMS is expressed by the fact that it measures 10 dimensions of marital satisfaction that were found to be most important by Fournier et al. [20]. The EMS scale provides a 1-item sampling of the 10 dimensions of marital satisfaction [20]. The item-total correlations for the EMS ranged from 0.52 to 0.82 with a mean of .65 for men and 0.68 for women which reflected that the items on the EMS are cohesive [20].

The internal consistency of the EMS Scale indicated by Cronbach's alpha revealed an internal reliability of 0.86 [20]. The test-retest reliability of the EMS scale using an interval of 4 weeks was 0.86. Concurrent validity of the EMS was expressed by the correlation that it has with the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Scale which was 0.73 when using individual scores and .81 with couple scores [20]. The scale was translated and adopted into Persian by Soleymanian. He found the internal consistency [Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ] for EMS to be 0.92 and split-half reliability coefficient as 0.86. Also, we found the internal consistency to be 0.89 and split-half reliability coefficient as 0.83 [21].

## RESULTS

Demographic information including that age, level of education, length of marriage and number of children. The majority of participants had diploma and higher with a mean age of the respondents being 33.31 years [S.D. = 7.74]. The respondents reported an average length of marriage of 11.62 years [S.D. = 11.35], an average age of time at marriage of 26.49 years of age [S.D. = 3.75] and the average number of children reported was 1.97 [S.D. = 0.91].

**Table 1.** Mean, standard deviations, minimum and maximum of score in variables including marital satisfaction, forgiveness, perfection and sincerity of married women

Statistical indicators Variables	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum score	Maximum score	Number
Marital satisfaction	171.62	25.63	101	222	200
Forgiveness	33.124	24.12	85	145	200

Means and standard deviations for the measures utilized in the present study are provided in Table 1. Marital satisfaction was measured on a scale with possible scores between 0 and 235, with higher scores indicating higher levels of marital satisfaction. Trait forgiveness was assessed on a scale ranging from 33 to 165, with higher scores indicating a more forgiving personality.

**Table 2.** Results of correlation between forgiveness, perfection, sincerity and marital satisfaction

Criterion variable	Predictive variable	Correlation coefficient [r]	Significant level p
Marital satisfaction	forgiveness	0.63	0.001

Pearson correlations were calculated between marital satisfaction and forgiveness. As it is shown in Table 2, there is significant relation between forgiveness and marital satisfaction [ $r=0.63$  and  $P=0.001$ ]. So our hypothesis of research is confirmed.

**Table 3.** Multiple correlation coefficient of scores of forgiveness with marital satisfaction using method a) concurrent entry b) step-by-step

Statistical indicator		Regression coefficients			
Criterion variables	Predictive variable	Multiple correlation MR	Coefficient of determination RS	Possibility P	Ratio F
Marital satisfaction	Forgiveness	0.63	0.369	0.001	64.148
					B=0.63 T=7.677 P=0.001

According to table 3, multiple correlation for linear combination of forgiveness and marital satisfaction is equal to MR= 0.63 and coefficient of determination is RS= 0.369 that is significant in  $P < 0.001$ . So our main hypothesis of research is confirmed. Given to coefficient of determination, it is determined that about 37 percent of marital satisfaction variance is determined by predictive variable, forgiveness.

## DISCUSSION

The main findings of this study provided partial support for the role forgiveness influences as predictors of marital satisfaction in married women. Further findings of the present study provided support for the role of trait forgiveness in predicting marital satisfaction. Higher levels of trait forgiveness were found to be significantly associated with higher levels of marital satisfaction.

The finding that trait forgiveness is significantly positively correlated with marital satisfaction is consistent with previous findings from research examining the relationship between these two variables [11, 6, 13, 7, and 22]. Research examining the relationship between forgiveness and marital satisfaction has found that higher levels of forgiveness were significantly associated with higher levels of marital satisfaction [13, 7]. Forgiveness was selected as a variable in the current study because it represents the current trend in marital satisfaction

research. Findings from the current study provide further validation for the hypothesized relationship between forgiveness and marital satisfaction. These findings are not surprising given that when measuring the tendency in people to be oriented towards or away from forgiveness, some people will be more inclined to forgive, leading to the resolution of marital discord and therefore higher levels of marital satisfaction.

For explaining this hypothesis, we can say that probably given to this point that talent, skill of forgiving others mistakes is one of factors causing positive and desirable feeling among people and it leads to kindness and sincerity among them, this factor has double effect on satisfaction from marital life. Because probability of seeing individual mistake is higher when they live together and spend most of their time with each other so forgiving spouse mistake is a factor for decreasing conflicts and/or preventing defamation and negative relations in marital life. In general, couples should be flexible and merciful, tolerate each other mistakes and respect each other character. Only if these features are existed, marriage would gradually actualize and mature and feeling of marital satisfaction is provided [23].

Forgiveness has been hypothesized to short circuit the use of ineffective conflict strategies likely to emerge from an unforgiving transgression [15]. Research has found that forgiveness predicts less ineffective arguing in a relationship [12]. In addition, individuals are more willing to forgive partners with

Whom they feel conflict discussions are typically constructive [24]. Lastly, forgiveness was also found to predict later reports of effective conflict resolution behaviors [1]. Due to its prosocial nature, gratitude may also operate in this fashion to encourage more effective, constructive forms of conflict resolution [25]. Also, from a forgiveness perspective, relational changes and challenges can result in inevitable relational hurt and misunderstanding. Without a positive forgiveness dynamic, families may not be able to operate in a mode of second-order change, making the absence of forgiveness a crucial dynamic in a family's ability to adapt and evolve.

### Limitations of the Study

While several limitations of the present study exist, the biggest limitation involves external validity and a lack of generalizability. The current sample was very homogenous, with the majority of participants being highly educated and reporting significantly higher levels of marital satisfaction than the normative population. The sample is clearly not representative of the greater population, and this limitation could be rectified in future research by sampling a more representative cross-section of the population. Additionally, future research could offer a monetary incentive in order to obtain data from a wider cross-section of the population.

Clearly, for future research to make any headway into exploring and understanding the forgiveness construct within a family relationship or family systems context, the issue of classification and measurement must be addressed.

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