

## Effectiveness of Forgiveness Therapy Based on Islamic Viewpoint on Marital Adjustment and Tendency to Forgive in the Women Afflicted by Infidelity

Received 1 Feb 2016; Accepted 12 Aug 2016

Fariba Kiani<sup>1</sup>, Seyed Hakime Safavi Mirmahale<sup>2</sup>, Elahe Saberyan<sup>3</sup>, Mohammad Reza Khodabakhsh<sup>3\*</sup>

1. Department of Psychology, Boroujen Branch, Islamic Azad University, Boroujen, Iran.

2. Department of Psychology, Rodehen Branch, Islamic Azad University, Rodehen, Iran.

3. Department of Psychology, Neyshabur Branch, Islamic Azad University, Neyshabur, Iran.

### Abstract

**Background and Objectives:** Orienting its approach based on Islamic viewpoint (Quran and Hadith), this study aimed to investigate effectiveness of forgiveness therapy, inclination to forgive, and marital adjustment in affected women who referred to counseling centers in Tehran.

**Methods:** This study was a semi-experimental research which made use of test-retest methodology and control group. Statistical population contained women who had suffered unfaithfulness by their husbands and referred to counseling centers of Tehran in the summer 2015. A number of 30 samples were selected in purposive and convenience manners and were categorized in two test and control groups. After conduction of pretest, which applied Spanier Dyadic Adjustment Scale and Amnesty Ray et al., members of the test group attended in nine 90-minute weekly sessions of forgiveness therapy based on Islamic viewpoint. Finally, posttest was conducted on both groups with the same tool.

**Results:** Results of multivariable analysis of covariance showed that forgiveness therapy based on Islamic viewpoint has a significant effect on increased levels of willingness to forgive and marital adjustment in women.

**Conclusion:** The results showed that forgiveness therapy based on Islamic viewpoints could be applied in designation of therapeutic interventions.

**Keywords:** Ethics, Forgiveness, Infidelity, Islam, Marriage.

\* **Correspondence:** Should be addressed to Dr. Mohammad Reza Khodabakhsh. **Email:** Khodabakhsh@ut.ac.ir

**Please Cite This Article As:** Kiani F, Safavi Mirmahale SH, Saberyan E, Khodabakhsh MR. Effectiveness of Forgiveness Therapy Based on Islamic Viewpoint on Marital Adjustment and Tendency to Forgive in the Women Afflicted by Infidelity. Health Spiritual Med Ethics. 2016;3(4):38-44.

### Introduction

An unhealthy family is mainly characterized by lack of intimacy (1). Research shows that infidelity happens in successful marriages where couples have good and healthy relations, as well. Prevalence of infidelity is important since individuals believe that it does not pose a great hazard to them and thus they fail to take required precaution (2). The Holy Quran, 3:161 and 3:162, has held infidelity to be a context for divine wrath. Elsewhere in 4:107, 8:58, and 22:38, infidelity has been known as a cause of deprivation from divine affection (3). Reactions made by the afflicted parties as to infidelity of their couples include intense suffering, shame, fear of loneliness, feeling of guilt, disappointment, anger, obsessions about

the behavior of the spouse, nightmares, destruction of confidence, and long-run depression and anxiety. These are also symptoms of trauma. Other consequences of a spouse's infidelity might be referred to as mayhem, killing the spouse, and committing suicide. In several cases, husbands have killed their wives due to existence of a third party, i.e., another partner (4).

Another incident which most possibly occurs after an infidelity is marital maladjustment, which is given rise after discovery of an infidelity. This is, therefore, necessary to amend the damages caused by infidelity. Marital adjustment is generated as an outcome of general satisfaction from common life, sexual relationships, and emotional satisfaction

(4). Frequency of marital relationships in afflicted couples is less than ordinary ones. In verbal communications, afflicted couples express higher degrees of negative statements and criticisms and lower levels of positive descriptions (5). Psychologically speaking, adjusted human beings are better able to properly analyze information and regulate a realistic system of values for themselves rather than being impacted by emotional fluctuations and disagreements. This trend would help such an individual achieve a better feeling. Adjustment is a vital factor of life satisfaction and commitment to marital life (6). Forgiveness therapy constitutes a major approach applied in the field of controlling and treating reactions toward marital infidelities. Studies on forgiveness therapy have made great progress, the one which is a result of a change in psychology's focus concentrating on treatment of problems and promotion of personal development. This positive psychological initiative has managed to attract attention of several scholars and individuals (7), since it has adopted a dissimilar language and focus on such positive emotions as hope, gratitude, astonishment, and delight. Standing as a barrier onto impacts of negative stresses and emotions (8), forgiveness serves as an intrapersonal phenomenon where forgiver undergoes a drastic change. Forgiveness might be examined as an interpersonal process in the area of interrelationships, as well. Primary focus of psychological studies on the issue of forgiveness was basically molded in confrontation with the issue that many victims forgave those who wronged them (7). Forgiveness of others enables an individual to become capable of restoring and maintaining relations in case of conflicts. Forgiveness is releasing negative emotions and recognitions as well as intentions to take revenge and express verbal aggressions that are provoked in response to injustices (9). Forgiveness-provoked motivational changes ultimately lead to lower degrees of peoples' intentions to emanate retaliatory reactions and call forth higher levels of adoption of self-control measures against an offender. Forgiveness is a strongly positive strategy which is employed in

order to deal with others' offences through reorientation of thoughts, emotions, and reactions against an offender. It is an intrapersonal and interpersonal process that is freely chosen by a forgiver (10). Forgiveness contains a positive response of affection against an offender.

The process of forgiveness is not similar to condonation, forgetfulness, and compromise. A forgiver is less likely to make safety relationships with the offender. Individuals' proclivity to forgive influences upon their friendly relations, causing reduced levels of stress through a decrease in amount of cortisol. Individuals who are ranked high in possession of forgiveness tend to report more positive motivations and higher degrees of life satisfaction (11). In Islamic texts, forgiveness is regarded as a quality of the pious and a therapeutic method. The Holy Quran maintains that forgiveness is a feature of virtuous believers, and those who are characterized by forgiveness are more virtuous. It, in addition to its invitation to forgiveness, negates revenge, malice, and enmity (3). On account of our Islamist society and necessity of observance of ethical principles in interpersonal relations, the present research is aimed at examination of effectiveness of forgiveness therapy based on Islam's viewpoints on marital adjustment and tendency to forgive in the women afflicted by infidelity.

## Methods

Research plan of this research was a test-retest study with control group. Statistical population of this research included all women within the age range of 18 to 54 who were wronged by their spouses' infidelity, had experienced from 2 to 30 years of common life, and had obtained academic degrees. All these individuals had referred to Tehran City Consultation Center in 2015 in order to receive counseling and treatment services. Selection of samples for this study was performed in systematic and convenience modes, and subjects orally announced their consent for participation in this research. Accordingly, a number of 30 subjects were selected and classified into two test and control groups.

Forgiveness therapy based on Islamic viewpoints was conducted in nine 90-minute sessions in format of group consultation. All members of therapeutic and control groups filled the questionnaire of forgiveness and marital adjustment both before and after operation of treatment method. Forgiveness therapy is grounded upon following stages:

The first stage: The victim witnesses herself against a sense (revenge) and a thought (forgiveness). She thinks to herself that she is given the right to retaliate just as much as to forgive. Guided by a psychologist, she thinks that religion verifies that she has been wronged and, thus, she is entitled to retaliate; while, this is better for her to forgive (3).

The second stage: The victim feels that her violation of rights is admitted by all, including religion, and that the offender has, as religion suggests, committed a sin in wronging her rights. Her husband is, thus, subject to prosecution for the sin he has committed. She is made sentient that the Almighty God would take revenge for her even if she either finds herself unable to do so or chooses to forgive him. Even the pettiest vices would be retaliated (3).

The third stage: The victims are made aware of negative consequences of unforgiveness and retaliation. They are instructed about continuity of both mental and physical pains in case of choosing not to forgive. They find that there is no way out but to condone the offender's mistakes to get rid of such complications. Imam Ali (pbuh) stated: "Infrequent forgiveness is the ugliest of all deficiencies, and acceleration to retaliate leads to the most adverse effects." He, elsewhere, maintained: "Those who choose not to forgive are subject to appalling collapse" (12).

The fourth stage: The victims find out that they do not have to hold bad conjectures upon others according to both religious and humanistic principles, and that are better to look upon their violators with an eye of mercy and considering his limitations in order to evaluate his position and performance. Imam Ali (pbuh) stated: "You are better to cast your best eye upon actions and conditions of your brother in order not to making sure of the other way round. Never develop in your heart

mistrust of your brother as a result of his erroneous speeches and actions for which you might tailor good justifications" (13).

The fifth stage: Therapist could guide victims to re-identify causes of their forgiveness in order to modify their emotions. In this way, victims would be able to discern their violators' positive points, becoming able to recognize their goodness, services, relativity, being a servant of God, etc. This would gradually lead to achievement of a positive sense as to the violator and forgiving him. The Holy Quran, 57:27, states: "And We placed in the hearts of those who followed him compassion and mercy." The Holy Prophet (pbuh) points to a certain type of emotional relationship among pious brother and all human beings, identifying it as a humanistic feature.

The sixth stage: Therapist explains that forgiveness is dignity, and insistence on non-forgiveness is driving off creditable values. In this way, therapist provokes victims to forgive. The afflicted victims hereby develop inclination to forgive, paying attention to the fact that tendency to forgiveness is much better. The Holy Prophet (pbuh) indicates that: "This is incumbent on you to stick to forgiveness, since it brings about dignity and honor for the forgiver. Hence, forgive each other in order for the Almighty God to forgive you" (13).

The seventh stage: Victims, after above-mentioned stages, ponder about taking required measures and get inclined to forgive. In developing propensity to forgive in his/her applicants, the therapist makes attempts to review reasons to forgive in order for emotions of the pious victims against their offenders to become more positive. This would result in making the final decision: to forgive. About a pious person, Imam Ali (pbuh) states: "A pious person tends to establish affection-centered relationships. There is no benefaction in a person who neither makes a humanistic relation nor admits one" (13).

The eighth stage: Victims decide to forgive, expressing it by means of behaviors like saying hello, shaking hands, and kissing faces. In case offender is not there, victim expresses that she

does not bear a grudge against the offender. Talking about desirability of successful behaviors from the vantage point of Islam, counselor encourages victims to stick to such behaviors. The Holy Quran, 25:63, indicates that: "And the servants of the Most Merciful are those who walk upon the earth easily, and when the ignorant address them (harshly), they say (words of) peace."

The final stage: Negative emotions and thoughts to the victims experience a gradual decrease and finally vanish. They are then replaced by positive positions and respectful impressions. There is an encouragement by psychologist and counselor to desirable behaviors such as reestablishing friendly relations and paying charity. Considering the best values and dignities as disregarding others' mistakes, Imam Ali (pbuh) indicates: "One of the most respected behaviors of a benefactor and noble person is to overlook others' mistakes from which he/she gets acquainted" (13).

Forgiveness Qestioaniare; The main scale has 16 items, which were reduced to 15 after conduction of factor analysis. Sample items included I wish goodness for the one who wronged me or I am able to appease my anger of the person who wronged me. Higher scores in this scale are indicative of higher degrees of forgiveness as to irritating matter. Replies were classified in a Likert 5-point scale ranging from strongly (1) to not at all (5). Rey compared this scale and Enright Forgiveness Inventory (EFI). The correlation obtained in matching form was relatively high (10). Cronbach's alpha of this tool was calculated to be 0.96 in the study undertaken by Zandipour and Yadegari (2007). Reliability of this instrument was obtained to be 0.81 and 0.78 by Cronbach's alpha and splitting methods, respectively—the values which are expressive of high preciseness of this test.

Spinner Marital Adjustment Questionnaire: This questionnaire has 32 items and 4 sub-scales. Spinner (14) calculated reliability of this scale to be 0.96 by Cronbach's alpha. Reliability coefficient of this questionnaire on a samples composed of 15 couples was calculated to be 0.81 and the first minor scale to be 0.68, the second minor scale to be 0.81, the third scale to be 0.77, and the fourth minor scale to be 0.78 by test-retest method in a one-week duration. Reliability coefficient of this instrument was obtained to be 0.79 and 0.81 by Cronbach's alpha and splitting methods (15). Reliability coefficient of the instrument in this research was obtained to be 0.81 and 0.79 by Cronbach's alpha and splitting methods. Collected data was statistically analyzed using descriptive statistics such as mean and SD as well as inferential statistics like multivariable covariance analysis.

## Result

Demographic data culled from participants in this study showed that subjects' age averages in test and control groups were 33.41 and 35.32, respectively. Average of couples' marriage terms in test and control groups were 9.11 and 10.33, respectively. Table 1 exhibits mean and standard deviation of variables.

Table 1: mean and standard deviation of variables forgiveness and adjustment as separated by stages and groups

Variables	Groups	Stages	Mean	SD
Forgiveness	Control	Pretest	19.16	4.33
		Posttest	18.11	3.39
	Test	Pretest	18.33	4.30
		Posttest	34.33	6.11
Marital adjustment	Control	Pretest	34.11	6.99
		Posttest	35.76	7.01
	Test	Pretest	33.12	6.86
		Posttest	48.11	8.51

As observed in the Table 1, average of forgiveness in control group in pretest and posttest was 19.16 and 18.11, respectively. In

Table 2: Results of covariance analysis related to effectiveness of forgiveness therapy based on Islam's viewpoint on marital adjustment

Dependent variable	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Average of squares	F	Significance	Size of impact	Statistical power
Pretest	489.51	1	489.51	46.93	0.000	0.69	0.93
Group	1004.71	1	1004.71	96.32	0.000	0.65	0.90
Error	281.66	27	10.43				
Total	980111	30					

test group, however, it was 18.33 and 34.33 in

Table 3: Results of covariance analysis related to effectiveness of forgiveness therapy based on Islam's viewpoint on tendency to forgive

Dependent variable	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Average of squares	F	Significance	Size of impact	Statistical power
Pretest	3361.51	1	3361.51	123.99	0.000	0.73	0.93
Group	3736.71	1	3736.71	137.83	0.000	0.79	0.90
Error	723.11	27	27.11				
Total	323171	30					

pretest and posttest, respectively. Moreover, average of marital adjustment in control group in pretest and posttest was 34.11 and 35.76, respectively. In test group, however, it was 33.12 and 48.11 in pretest and posttest, respectively. As a result, average of test group in two variables forgiveness and marital adjustment was higher in posttest. Presumption of normality of variables scores was examined. presumption of normality is not rejected in any case, and this is possible to make use of parametric test ( $P>0.05$ ).

Levene test to assess equality of variances for the variable forgiveness in pretest stage in a level of significance equal to 0.17 was 0.76. For the variable marital adjustment in pretest stage, it was equal to 0.51 in the level of significance being 0.21. Consequently, this is possible to employ covariance test to analyze data. As for effectiveness of forgiveness therapy based on Islam's viewpoint on marital adjustment, Table 2 expresses that the difference observed among average of marital adjustment posttest scores in control and tests groups is significant ( $P<0.01$ ). Average of test group was higher than average of control group. In other words, this therapeutic method has been able to leave significant impacts on marital adjustment of the women afflicted by infidelity.

As for effectiveness of forgiveness therapy based on Islam's viewpoint on tendency to forgive, Table 3 expresses that the difference observed among average of forgiveness pretest scores in control and tests groups is significant ( $P<0.01$ ), given the forgiveness pretest scores. Average of test group was higher than average of control group. In other words, this therapeutic method has been able to leave impacts on forgiveness of the women afflicted by infidelity.

## Discussion

After disclosure of infidelity, therapists are responsible for treatment of post-traumatic

reactions and increasing the victims' capability to deal with the issue (16). The present study was intended to investigate effectiveness of forgiveness therapy based on Islam's viewpoint on marital adjustment and tendency to forgive in the women afflicted by infidelity. This method has a significant impact on increased marital adjustment degrees. The results were found to be aligned with prior research (17). The couples who do not have sufficient skills to deal with and forgive conflicts might surrender upon encountering issues as they predict that outcome of their discussions would be negative. In this way, anger and disagreement ensuing from non-forgiven mistakes would be continued, causing their compatibility to be seriously reduced. Marital conflicts are rooted in absence of sympathy and inability to forgive. The couples who are unable to forgive and resolve marital conflicts in their common life are 67% more likely to divorce in the first three years of their marriage (18). Most women who are unsatisfied from their common life due to inability to forgive are subject to communicational problems as they are unable to forgive mistakes made by others. Severe conflicts and mental pressures disturb the relationships made between couples, on the one hand, and their children, on the other. Awareness of forgiveness therapy techniques and reduced tensions between couples largely result in resolution of problems and increased quality of family life (19). In investigation of impact of forgiveness therapy on intimacy and trust in marital relations between 201 couples whose marriage term had persisted more than one year, it was revealed that application of forgiveness therapy in current relationships has significant effect on degree of reliance in relations between spouses. Forgiveness is a psychological structure and a therapeutic approach to treat communicational problems and marital conflicts (20). The spouses who

forgive mistakes made one another would experience higher degrees of commitment. Forgiving mistakes made by oneself and others reduce stress, hostility, and aggressive behavior in interpersonal relationships, making individuals to experience healthier relationships (21). Results of studies showed that forgiveness therapy based on Islam's viewpoints has a significant effect on increased tendency to forgive by women. These results were aligned with prior research (4). Forgiveness provoked a reduction in individuals' stress level. Findings report that forgiveness elevates intimacy and reliance between couples and makes them closer to one another. According to Islam's vantage point, forgiveness, as a therapeutic method in modification of one's behaviors toward others, assists one to better discover himself/herself and get able to identify those who have wronged him/her with respect to their limitations. In this way, one would be able to forgive others' mistakes and draw himself/herself out of affliction.

Results showed that victims, after getting on above stages, thinking about the pains ensuing therefrom, and getting to know others' limitations, would be able to draw themselves out of affliction and arrive at serenity. Aligned with the outcomes obtained here, studies show that forgiveness brings about a decrease in anxiety and depression degrees in college students (22). Another study undertook to examine impact of forgiveness on reduced anxiety and depression levels and improved interpersonal relations. There are studies about forgiveness and its impacts on healthiness of body and spirit. Forgiveness is directly associated with health and improved social relations (23). It brings about development of self-reliance, reduction of blood pressure, and regulation of heart beat.

## Conclusion

Forgiveness is able to help individuals experience better night's sleep and replace negative thoughts by positive ones. Reaching onto the stage in which one becomes able to rationally forgive others requires passage of time, since it is a rational and multistage

process. Internal forgiveness gets back to one's thoughts and internalities. Internal forgiveness, as a matter of fact, is in agreement with religious and mental subjects and thus possesses certain divine prestige just like the prayers which holy prophets made for wrongdoers, since it relates to forgiving an offender before he/she demands so. Give our Islamist country, this is hoped that this type of mythology grows to constitute basis of treatment of mental and behavioral disorders in people. Yet, this study comes with some limitations that should be taken into consideration upon generalization of results. Application of a questionnaire, for instance, that is not specific to certain marital relations pushes forward some limitations. Given the fact that children born in families afflicted by infidelity confront intense tensions and strife ensuing from complications of betrayal, this is proposed to attach importance to arrangement of therapeutic sessions appropriate for instruction of the children born in such families.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Acknowledgements

The researchers express their gratitude from participants in this study.

## References

1. Szapocznik J, Muir JA, Duff JH, Schwartz SJ, Brown CH. Brief Strategic Family Therapy. *Psychother Res.* 2015;25(1):121-33.
2. Moller NP, Vossler A. Defining infidelity in research and couple counseling: A qualitative study. *J Sex Marital Ther.* 2015;41(5):487-97.
3. The Holy Quran. Qom: Maaref Pub; 2012.
4. Sela Y, Weekes-Shackelford VA, Shackelford TK, Pham MN. Female copulatory orgasm and male partner's attractiveness to his partner and other women. *Pers Individ Dif.* 2015;79:152-6.
5. Greeff AP, Cloete M. Family resilience factors in remarried families in south africa and belgium. *Soc Work Pract Res.* 2015;27(2):187-203.
6. Faircloth WB, Schermerhorn AC, Mitchell PM, Cummings JS, Cummings EM. Testing the long term efficacy of a prevention program for improving marital conflict in community families. *J Appl Dev Psychol.* 2011;32(4):189-97.

7. Seligman MEP, Csikszentmihalyi M. Positive psychology: an introduction. *Am Psychol.* 2000;55:5-14.
8. Emmons RA, McCullough ME. *The psychology of gratitude.* Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2004.
9. Breslin KA, Kumar VK, Ryan RB, Browne J, Porter J. Effect of Apology on Interpersonal Forgiveness and Distancing within Familial Relationships. *J Soc Psychol.* 2001;141(4):494-508.
10. Eaton J, Ward Struthers C, Santelli AG. Dispositional and state forgiveness: The role of self-esteem, need for structure, and narcissism. *Personality and Individual Differences.* 2006;41(2):371-80.
11. Bono G, McCullough ME, Root LM. Forgiveness, feeling connected to others, and well-being: Two longitudinal studies. *Pers Soc Psychol Bull.* 2008;34(3):182-95.
12. Khansari, J. M. (1994). *An Explanation to Ghorar al-Hekam and Dorar al-Elam.* Tehran: Tehran University Press, vol. 4
13. Majlesi, M. B. (1983). *Bihar al-Anwar.* Lebanon: AL-Wafa Ins.
14. Spanier, G. B. (1976). Measuring dyadic adjustment: New scales for assessing the quality of marriage and similar dyads. *Journal of Marriage and the Family,* 15-28.
15. Decaporable LN, Steffen AM, Marwit S, Meuser TM. Extension of Enright forgiveness inventory to middle-aged and older wives. *J Relig Spiritual Aging.* 2013;25(4):344-57.
16. Hargrave T. *Families and forgiveness: Healing wounds in the intergener: Healing wounds in the intergenerational family.* New York: Routledge; 2013.
17. Kouros CD, Cummings M. Transactional relations between marital functioning and depressive symptoms. *Am J Orthopsychiatry.* 2011;18(1):128-38.
18. Burpee L, Langer E. Acceptance and mindfulness and marital therapy. *J Adult Dev.* 2005;12(1):43-51.
19. DiBlasio FA, Benda BB. Forgiveness intervention with married couples: Two empirical analyses. *J Psychol Christ.* 2008;27(2):150-8.
20. Van der Wal RC, Karremans JC, Cillessen AH. Interpersonal Forgiveness and Psychological Well-being in Late Childhood. *Merrill Palmer Q.* 2016;62(1):1-21.
21. Peterson SJ, Van Tongeren DR, Womack SD, Hook JN, Davis DE, Griffin BJ. The benefits of self-forgiveness on mental health: Evidence from correlational and experimental research. *J Posit Psychol.* 2016:1-0.
22. Quenstedt-Moe GE. *Forgiveness and health in christian women.* Kansas: Kansas University Press; 2007.
23. Enright RD, Fitzgibbons RP. *Helping clients forgive: An empirical guide for resolving anger and restoring hope.* Washington: American Psychological Association; 2000.