



## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# The Effectiveness of Forgiveness Based Consultancy on Marital Conflicts of Women with Severe Conflicts Referring to Court in Koohdasht Town

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### ABSTRACT

*The present research aimed at determining the effectiveness of forgiveness based consultancy on marital conflicts of women with severe conflicts referring to court in Koohdasht. The method of the research was half-experimental and consisted of a pre-test, a post test and a control group. The population of the research was women with severe marital conflicts referring to court that were then referred to compromise council in Koohdasht to be helped with their problems. The sample consisted of 30 women who were randomly selected and put in the experimental groups and the control group. The instrument for measurement was marital conflicts questionnaire (Sanaei, 1996) consisting of 7 categories of: decreasing collaboration, decreasing sexual relationship, increasing emotional reactions, increasing individual relationship with one's family, decreasing family relationship with the relatives and friends of one's spouse, and separating financial issues from the other partner. The experimental group received forgiveness based training interference once a week for eight sessions. Considering the consistency of the variances in the questionnaire, the findings were analyzed through covariance analysis. The results showed that the application of forgiveness based consultancy can make a significant difference in decreasing marital conflicts in women requesting a divorce. forgiveness based consultancy can be used as an effective intervention to reduce marital conflicts of couples who have severe conflicts and need counseling.*

**Keywords:** Forgiveness-based consultancy, marital conflicts, women.

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### INTRODUCTION

Family is the most fundamental social organization and is the most important component of society. Having a healthy society is dependent on a healthy family and a healthy family is achieved only when all the members of family benefit from mental health and have good interpersonal relationships. On the other hand, marriage is considered the most fundamental and significant interpersonal relationship, since it is the basic structure for establishing family relationship and children upbringing [1].

One of the most important aspects of a marital bond is the satisfaction that spouses feel [2]. Being happily-married is a psycho-cognitive issue that needs efforts from the side of both partners. In the first few years of marriage, marital satisfaction is very instable and relationships are very vulnerable [3]. Divorce statistics, being the most reliable index of marital confusion, indicates that marital satisfaction is not easily achieved [4].

Conflicts are very common in relationships between humans and they cannot be avoided. In marital relationships too, conflict exists and it's unavoidable. It happens when the actions of one person are not in line with the actions of the other [5]. Conflict force increases as two people get closer to each other. It hurts the unity of family and if it is severe, it causes hypocrisy, aggression and finally deterioration of family relations. Differences and conflicts are human traits and they are necessary to existence. In every marriage there should be some conflicts between partners to help them understand and respect differences in beliefs, values, needs and habits [6].

All of us try to avoid conflicts. However, it's not totally avoidable. Conflicts in couples include threats, verbal abuse, and physically – aggressive behaviors and range from pushing and slapping to threatening

partner's life by gun or objects and it can cause physical injuries or even death [7]. The first signs which warn that conflicts are increasing and getting serious are things such as speaking satirically, finding faults with each other, criticizing, shouting, yelling, and keeping silent heavily [8].

Today, there exist many different methods of couple- treatment which have for years been investigated by researcher, for their validity and effectiveness [9]. A training program aiming at the avoidance of confusion and conflict through the use of communicative and behavioral skills and conflict- management strategies can help couples to benefit from higher levels of positive communication skills and decrease the level of negative relationships and behavioral conflicts [10]. Forgiveness theory in marital consultancy is a new method which is little by little finding its way among the other theories and the factor of forgiveness is one of the variables that have attracted the attention of researchers interested in the field of marital conflicts. According to Worthington, Everett, Jennings & et al [11] family members annoy each other. This means annoyance is in avoidable in family relations. Here, comes the issue of forgiveness. The concept of forgiveness is defined as willingly ignoring your right to express anger and annoyance toward an annoying behavior, through which process the annoyed one chooses to have a warm and kind behavior with the one who has caused the annoyance. The process of forgiveness consists of four stages: annoyance, hatred, healing and forgiving and finally making it up [12]. In order to help family members to decrease conflicts in relationship and considering the fact that it is believed family- therapy can be applied as group- therapy, which is a process in which individuals have no family connections and the individuals with problems can be helped by other in group situations, the present research adopted group treatment and through interfering methods and training sessions based on forgiveness aimed at decreasing and solving marital conflicts.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

The present study is an experimental one in design using a pre-test and a post-test and being conducted on 2 groups: an experimental group and a control group. The independent variable is forgiveness- based interference in 8 sessions which was done weekly. The score for marital conflicts in women suffering from this sort of conflicts was considered as dependent variable.

### Population:

The population of this study includes all the women who referred to court in Koohdasht town in 2013 due to severe conflicts and contacts that were then referred to compromise council to hopefully change their mind and decrease the statistics of divorce. The educational degree of them ranged from second grade of high school to bachelor degree. According to marital- conflicts questionnaire for women, these people must have been married for at least 2 years and must have at least one child. The criteria to enter the experiment were: 1- being married 2- not suffering from mental disorders, depression, bipolarity, psychosis, and behavioral problems 3- being married for at least 3 years and having at least one child 4- having an educational degree of at least first grade of high school 5- being able to attend & continuous sessions of treatment. The criteria to be excluded from the experiment were: 1- not being interested in mending marital relationship 2- having a husband who does not have an appropriate social and professional status 3- being addicted to drug and experiencing domestic violence or having a husband who is so 4- being illiterate or having primary school educational degree 5- having a husband who is unable to continue married life and is addicted.

The sample of the present research consisted of 30 women requiring divorce who were referred to compromise council by court in Koohdasht. The subjects were randomly selected in this way: among the women referring to court for divorce and then being referred to compromise council, 55 women were selected. Out of this 55 women 35 of them were randomly selected (through a lottery). They were then put into two groups: 15 women were selected through simple- random method to go to the experimental group and the other 15 women were put into the control group. The procedure for selecting the members of each group was as follows: first the names of all 30 women were written in a list and each name was given a code. Then each code was written on a piece of paper and then all the codes were put in a bag. Then the codes were randomly taken out of the bag one by one and were put in one of the groups in turn.

The obtained sample was between 25- 37 in ages and had been married for between 3 to 17 years. Their educational background ranged between second grade of high school to bachelor degree and the reasons because of which they'd referred to court were imposed marriage, big age gap, violence and verbal abuse, irresponsibility of husbands, lack of commitment in their husband who had out of – marriage relationships, occupational and financial problems, suspiciousness and lack of trust, educational gap and problems associated with the wife's or husband's family.

### Instrumentation

To measure marital conflicts in this study, marital- conflict questionnaire (MCQ) was used. This is a questionnaire with 42 items which measured conflicts in spouses. The content of the items are chosen in

a way that they're closely related to the intended variable (marital conflicts). Each item has 5 options which are scored between 1- 5 accordingly. Maximum score in the whole questionnaire is 210 and minimum score is 42. The higher the score, the more the conflicts. A score between 70- 114 indicates good relationships and logical conflicts. Those who score between 115- 134 have marital conflicts more than the acceptable level and a score over 135 shows severe conflicts and extremely vulnerable relationship [13]. Cronbach alpha of the questionnaire was measured 0/71 by Dehghan [14] on a 30-people group referring to consultancy centers. Content validity of the questionnaire is acceptable and construct validity of it is 0/73 [15]. The score to this questionnaire is calculated based on T-scores, as all the other tests of characteristic. In T-scale, the mean is 50 and standard deviation is 10. Those whose scores are near the mean or one standard deviation below or over the mean (40-60) have normal and logical relationships. Those whose score is below 40 have satisfactory marital relationships and those who score between 60 to 70 in the test experience some conflicts in their married life and need to receive instructions on control methods and problem- solving techniques. Finally those who score 70 to or over it have vulnerable marital relationships and may refer to consultancy centers or court to solve their problems [16].

### **Procedure**

After being randomly selected, the subjects of both the experimental and control groups took the pre-test. Then, the experimental group received eight one- hour sessions of forgiveness- based treatment in one psycho cognitive and consultancy center, while the control group received no treatment. Finally both groups were given the post-test. Considering the fact that power estimation of over 0/8 is zero to reject hypothesis, and the fact that this figure was 0/99 in the present study, sample size can be claimed to be sufficient. To take moral issues into consideration, the participants were assured that their information will be kept confidential and that they can choose not to participate in the research or give it up at any stage.

At the end of the research, the members of the control group were also provided with 5 sessions of forgiveness- based treatment. Forgiveness- based treatment used in this study was based on the theories of Enright and Fitzgibbons [17], Worthington [18], Worthington et al [10] and DeCaporle-Ryan et al [19]. In the present protocol it is aimed to combine these models in the stages of 1) clarification of anger 2) being motivated to forgive 3) exercising forgiving 4) experiencing getting rid of negative emotions toward one's spouse in order to help couples. Therefore, this protocol tries to help women with marital conflicts who ask for divorce to pass through these four stages via 8 sessions of treatment. In the following a summary of session- plan of forgiveness- based consultancy is provided. By the way, before starting the treatment sessions, the participants attended an introductory session to get familiar with each other, with the treatment and with the consultant.

First session: evaluating the women's problems with the aim of union therapy, recognition of the women's problems, determining the severity and level of conflicts through close and middle-distant interference and if necessary distant interference, drawing the women's genogram for the mentioned problems, measuring the level of the conflicts in the women and her method of conflict- management, and the level of forgiveness in her.

Second session: clarification of cognitive emotional bases of marital problems or marital conflicts with the aim of making group members know emotions intensifying marital conflicts, clarification of scoring strategies and interpretation of results scale of marital conflicts, explanation of illogical beliefs in married life, introducing emotions underlying marital conflicts and explaining the stages of married relationship.

Session three: clarification of anger with the aim of helping the women recognize and control it through recognition strategies and techniques of simmering down, introducing healthy way of anger expression through refreshing method.

Session four: causing motivation to forgive with the aim of familiarizing spouses with the concept of forgiveness through strategies that introduce forgiveness as a human art and a healing factor, knowing about the point of the women about forgiveness (its advantages and disadvantages), defining forgiveness and clarifying its kinds and components.

Session five: Encouraging forgiveness with the aim of preparing spouses for forgiving each other through stimulating strategies for women to forgive and decide to forgive (investigation of useless previous behaviors), motivating women to start the process of forgiveness and decide to forgive.

Session six: working on forgiveness with the aim of motivating woman to forgive and helping her through strategies of understanding each other, showing affection, accepting the annoyance and trying to find a justification for it, and giving the precious gift of forgiveness to husband.

Session seven: experiencing getting rid of negative emotions with the aim of forgiving guilty husband through the strategies of correct and incorrect ways of forgiveness and forgiving properly and stating the sentences "I forgive you" and "(please forgive me)"

Session eight: Determining the effectiveness of forgiveness-based interference in women through the strategy of investigating the level of durability of forgiveness in women and finally conclusion. In each session previous practices were reviewed and homework was given.

### Findings

The age of the participants in this study ranged between 25 to 37 mean and standard deviation for the age of the participants in the control group were respectively 31/73 and 2 and these figures were 31/4 and 1/66 for the experimental group. On average, the participants in the experimental group were married for 9/6 years and the control group for 9/06 years. All the participants had diploma or university degrees. The investigation of the results of t-test indicated that the members of the experimental and control groups are not demographically significantly different ( $P>0/05$ ). Therefore, since there was no correlation between demographic characteristics and the dependent variable, there was no need to statistically control them.

**Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of the scores for marital conflicts in the women into groups and stages**

Variable		Experimental group		Control group	
		mean	Standard deviation	mean	Standard deviation
Marital conflict	Pretest	148/27	12/798	136/27	17/289
	Posttest	131/87	13/695	136/27	15/184

Table (1) depicts mean and standard deviation of the scores for marital conflicts in the women classified into groups and stages. Since a higher score represents more severe conflicts, it is seen that the mean of scores of the experimental group in the post-test is significantly lower than that of the control group ( $P<0/05$ ).

**Table 2: Result of covariance analysis in pretest and group membership**

Marital conflicts	Total square	df	Mean square	F	sig	Eta square	Power estimation
Pretest	4186/531	1	4186/531	67/811	0/001	0/715	1
Group membership	1494/387	1	1494/387	24/205	0/001	0/473	0/997

To evaluate the effectiveness of forgiveness- based consultancy and to control the effect of pre-test, covariance analysis was used. In order to use this test the presumption of normal distribution and equality of variances was investigated. The results of Shapirowilk test revealed that the scores of both groups are normally distributed ( $P\geq 0/05$ ).

Lowin test which investigates the equality between the variances showed that there is no significant difference between the variances ( $P\geq 0/05$ ,  $F= 1/42$ ).

Moreover, another presumption for using covariance analysis is the equality of co variances. For this purpose, box test was used which showed the equality of co variances in the two groups ( $F= 1/07$ ,  $P\geq 0/05$ ). Therefore, covariance analysis could be used. The results of covariance analysis revealed that the effectiveness of forgiveness-based consultancy on marital conflicts is meaningful and the figure for this effectiveness is 47 percent in the post-test. The results showed the observed difference between the mean of the scores of marital conflicts in each group is significant in the post-test ( $P\leq 0/05$ ).

Therefore, forgiveness-based consultancy has been effective in reducing marital conflicts in post-test. Power estimation in the post-test was 0/99 which proves an acceptable statistical accuracy.

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present research is interfering in design and using a pre-test and post-test and a control group, it aimed at investigating the effectiveness of forgiveness- based group interference on decreasing marital conflicts in women referring to compromise council in Koohdasht in 2013. The results of multi- variable covariance analysis for controlling concurrent variables indicated that, after modification of the means and controlling interfering variables, the experimental group showed a significant decrease in the total scores for marital conflicts compared to the control group. Considering the results of the post-test, it seems the pattern of forgiveness is effective in reducing marital conflicts in couples.

The results of the present research are in line with the results of the studies by Fincham et.al [20], Hill [21] and Rainey et al [22] who proved the effectiveness of this interference on marital satisfaction and compatibility; on marital conflicts; and on increasing problem-solving skills, respectively. The results of this study, moreover, supports the results of the findings of Meneses and Greenberg [23] which proved the effectiveness of forgiveness- based treatment on reducing emotional problems and marital conflicts as well as the findings of the research by Worthington [18] indicating the effectiveness of forgiveness on reducing marital conflicts and increasing satisfaction and compatibility. In addition, the findings of the study are in line with the research by Afkhami [24] indicating the significant effectiveness of forgiveness-based group treatment on increasing marital compatibility and decreasing conflicts as well as the findings of the study by Hill [21] which proved forgiveness-based interference can make married life more sustainable and durable, increase satisfaction, increase compatibility and solve marital conflicts. As Enright and Fitzgibbons [17] state out "forgiveness is a treating strategy which helps reducing anger and annoyance which is caused by being hurt and can cause separation of wife and husband."

Hence, the participants in the present study reduced negative emotions such as anger and aggression in themselves and their partners through forgiving them. Also, Fink and Shapiro [25] showed in their research study that teaching communication skills and conflict- solving strategies to couples with marital problems can improve the quality of their relationship, decrease their conflicts and increase their mental health; findings which are all in line with those of the present research.

However, the results of this study are not in line with the results of the research by McCullough and Root [26] who showed when both the wife and husband are in a group, forgiveness based interference does not make a difference in experimental group compared to the control group. Similarly, Worthington, Johnson & Hook [27] found out that there is a negative correlation between the level of forgiveness and marital satisfaction which is again not in line with the findings of the present study.

It seems that interferences aiming at improving the quality of marital relationship (such as training programs) are mainly effective only when couples are after positive purposes (such as improving communication skills in spouses). While, when there are severe conflicts and the spouse request a divorce, which means they don't have a positive purpose, interference- based interferences are not as effective. Snyder [28] believes forgiveness is effective only when people have positive purpose. It seems that one of the reasons for the significant difference in the decrease of marital conflicts in the experimental group was their positive purposes and consequently their motivation to mend their relationship. As it was mentioned, selected purpose can make a big difference in the effectiveness of forgiveness- based interferences.

For instance, those who seek their self-esteem and success only in removing marital conflicts with their spouse (which is a negative purpose) and not in improving their relationship in spite of those existing conflicts (which is a positive purpose, find the solution to removing these conflicts in changing their partner (a completely negative direction) and not in making positive changes in themselves in the hope of making positive future changes in their partner (a completely positive direction); and these people will consequently face some problems, since self-esteem is felt after achieving a success not before it, but hopefulness should exist before achieving a success [29]. Therefore it can be stated that one of the reasons for the effectiveness of the treatment in this study is the participants' good understanding of forgiveness theory and correct training they received on decreasing conflicts. To justify the findings of the present research, it can also be said that forgiveness was used as a treating strategy to help cooling down anger and irritation which can cause separation. Forgiveness can help improving the quality of relationships, proper expression of anger, and emotional recovery. It can cause healthy inter-personal relationship through decreasing the motivation for taking revenge. Another reason for the effectiveness of forgiveness- based interference in the present study is the method of the interference which was group treatment. According to DeCaporle-Ryan et al [19], although forgiveness – based interference done in pairs (not in groups) can be effective in improving the quality of relationships, forgiveness-based interference done in groups can be more effective since couples can have a more positive relationships with themselves and also other couples. Therefore, one of the reasons of the effectiveness of forgiveness-based interference on decreasing marital conflicts in this study is group format of the treatment.

Overall, considering the effectiveness of this interference on reducing problems and signs of marital conflicts, hope- forgiveness interference can be used as a treating method and a supplementary to other kinds of treatment to decrease marital problems. However, every research study has limitations and this study has limitations and this study is not an exception to this rule. Considering the conditions of the selected sample, care should be taken in generalizing the results to people out of the research population. In addition, the control group didn't receive normal consultancy (not hope- forgiveness-based consultancy) due to lack of facilities. Therefore it is recommended that further research remove these limitations and test the effectiveness of hope- forgiveness- based interference in comparison with other

common treatments (such as Alice- Beck ABC model). Finally, since this study used group treatment, it is suggested that the some treatment method be tested individually and the results be compared.

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