



## The effectiveness of forgiveness skill training on sexual satisfaction, aggression, and marital conflict in women

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### Original Article

#### Abstract

**BACKGROUND:** This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of the forgiveness skill training on sexual satisfaction, aggression, and marital conflict in women.

**METHODS:** This was a semi-experimental study with pre-test, post-test design, in which 30 women were selected by the convenience sampling method from the consultation centers in Tehran, Iran, in 2017 and were divided into the case and control groups (each consisting of 15 individuals) randomly. The experimental group participated in the forgiveness skill training in 8 sessions (two sessions weekly; each lasting for 60 minutes), while the control group was in the waiting list. The Sexual Satisfaction Questionnaire, Aggression Questionnaire, and Marital Conflict Questionnaire were used to assess the participants and the data obtained were analyzed using the SPSS software.

**RESULTS:** The results showed that the case and control groups had a significant difference, at least in one of the sexual relations, aggression, and marital conflict variables ( $P < 0.0500$ ).

**CONCLUSION:** The findings indicated that the forgiveness skill training led to the improvement of sexual satisfaction, reducing aggression, and marital conflict in women.

**KEYWORDS:** Forgiveness; Sexual Satisfaction; Aggression; Marital Conflict; Women

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### Introduction

Marriage is the first emotional and legal commitment accepted by people in adulthood. Moreover, choosing a spouse and making a marital relationship is critical in growth.<sup>1</sup> Marital satisfaction includes couples' satisfaction with some cases such as parenting, interaction between them, communicational and social behaviors, marital satisfaction,

religious behavior, personal behaviors, economic activities, and leisure time. Generally, it can be stated that marital satisfaction is a complicated and multi-dimensional phenomenon that can be affected by some variables including sexual satiation, aggression, and marital conflicts.<sup>2</sup> Some other factors like forgiveness can affect marital satisfaction.<sup>3-4</sup> The concept of forgiveness has been considered by therapists more than a quarter of a century.<sup>5-6</sup> Sexual satisfaction is the ultimate love and intimacy between couples and is shared just between a person and his spouse, unlike other common activities. This relationship may be harmed under the effect of

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unsolved conflicts. One of the methods to improve sexual satisfaction is the conflict resolution skill, one of the components of which is forgiveness.<sup>7</sup>

The youth and adults usually feel an increase in their emotional experiences due to biological, mental, emotional, and cognitive maturity as well as due to facing the expanded social networks. One of the common emotional reactions among them is anger.<sup>8</sup> Aggression that is the external aspect of anger leads to interpersonal and marital problems. Implications of aggression in marital relationship have attracted the attention of researchers to this variable.<sup>9-10</sup> Couples cope with marital conflicts and aggression in the family with different methods; While many of these methods are ineffective, there are some healthy options like forgiveness. Suitable training of forgiveness could moderate negative emotions like anger and aggression in marital relationship.<sup>9</sup>

Conflict is an inevitable variable in family relationships and the unsolved conflicts affect the quality of the relationship and sexual satisfaction; it seems that resolution of these marital conflicts can be effective in promoting quality of marital relations. Forgiveness could give a chance for compromise with the guilty person. Therefore, forgiveness can increase marital satisfaction and reduce conflicts.<sup>12</sup>

Marital conflict resolution requires that couples do not blame each other and accept their differences. Couples should revise rules of their relations and correct dysfunctional beliefs.<sup>8</sup>

Forgiveness is one of the most effective interventions that it used to resolve marital conflicts, and means remission and ignoring the mistake of others and wishing bless for him/her.<sup>13</sup> In another definition, forgiveness is a tendency to sacrifice your right for hatred, hostility, anger, and dysfunctional behavior toward the person who has harmed you. Besides, it means feeling sympathy and empathy about the person who has mistreated us.<sup>14</sup>

There are some studies on the effectiveness of the forgiveness training skill in the reduction of negative emotions in family. Some studies indicate the effect of forgiveness skill on reducing and improving marital conflicts. In this regard, a study about the efficacy of forgiveness therapy on aggression and sympathy of male delinquent adolescences showed that forgiveness therapy could significantly increase sympathy and decrease aggression in patients.<sup>15</sup> Samaelvand and Hasanvand carried out a study to examine the correlation between sexual knowledge, marital forgiveness, and mental health of 20-40 year-old married women living in Aleshtar city, Lorestan Province, Iran. The results showed a positive and significant relationship between sexual knowledge and mental health of the married women. There was also a significant positive correlation between marital forgiveness and women's mental health, while sexual knowledge had no significant contribution in predicting statistical levels.<sup>13</sup> Ghafouri *et al.* conducted a study to examine the effectiveness of forgiveness-based spiritual psychotherapy in increasing marital satisfaction and reducing conflicts of couples living in Mashhad, Iran. The findings suggested that forgiveness-based spiritual psychotherapy could significantly increase forgiveness and marital satisfaction leading to a significant reduction in couples' conflicts.<sup>14</sup> In a study, Menahem and Love found that forgiveness therapy could promote the mental wellbeing of a person by creating positive emotions.<sup>15</sup>

Fincham *et al.* performed a study to examine the effect of forgiveness therapy on psychological wellbeing of couples, which indicated that forgiveness was significantly effective in reducing depression, anger, hostility, stress, and distress; This intervention could also promote positive marital satisfaction.<sup>16</sup>

All studies mentioned above showed that forgiveness could lead to a reduction in marital conflicts and aggression and this intervention

could improve marital satisfaction and marital adjustment. Regarding the importance of forgiveness in reducing marital conflicts, this study was conducted to determine the effectiveness of forgiveness skill training in sexual satisfaction, aggression, and marital conflicts in women.

## Methods

This was a semi-experimental study with pre and post-test design and control group. The case group of this study included all married women (for a minimum of 5 years with or without children) who visited the consulting centers in the west of Tehran City, Iran, for marital conflicts in 2017. The convenience method was applied for sampling in which considering the number of the qualified women to be included in the study (having high score in the Marital Conflict and Aggression questionnaires and low score in the Sexual Satisfaction questionnaire, aged between 28 to 38, living together for a minimum of 5 years, and willingness to participate in the study) and the number of the ones not unqualified to be eliminated from the study (using drugs, duration of marriage for 5 years, and willingness to participate in this study), 30 people were selected randomly and divided into the control and case groups. Each group contained 15 people. The case group was intervened during eight sessions, while the control group was on the waiting list. The Sexual Satisfaction Questionnaire, Aggression Questionnaire, and Marital Conflict Questionnaire were used in the baseline and post intervention stages. Data were analyzed using the SPSS software (version 22, IBM Corporation, Armonk, NY, USA).

This study (code: 73/365225, dated 4/9/2017) was extracted from the proposal of a thesis in master's degree at the Islamic Azad University, Varamin Pishva Branch, Varamin, Iran.

*Sexual Satisfaction Questionnaire:* This scale

was first applied by Larson to evaluate the sexual satiation and contains 25 items with the options: never, slightly, often, mostly, and always scored from 1 to 5 in a Likert scale. Given this measure, the tested material is divided into four groups, including people with full satiation, relative satiation, low satiation, and lack of satiation. For validating the questionnaire, the re-test method was applied, with the result of 89%, which is a high ratio. Rastgo et al. obtained a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 89% for this measure.<sup>17</sup>

*Aggression Questionnaire:* The new version of the Aggression Questionnaire was revised by Boss and Peri. This scale is comprised of 4 sub-scales evaluating four different types of aggressive behaviors (physical aggressiveness, verbal aggressiveness, fury, and hostility). The scoring is based on the 5-point Likert scale, with scores 1 to 5 belonging to the options of quite different to me, approximately different to me, moderate to me, somehow similar to me, and completely similar to me, respectively. Then, the scores of each sub-scale are totalized. The higher score indicates a more aggressiveness ratio and the scores are ranged from 29 to 145. The validity and reliability of the questionnaire are 72 and 90%, respectively,<sup>18</sup> so its validity and reliability were confirmed. The results of the pre-test ratio for the four sub-scales (with 9-week interval) ranged from 72 to 80%, and the correlation was 38 to 49%. To measure the internal validity of the scale, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used. Given the results, the internal validity of the sub-scales of physical aggressiveness, verbal aggressiveness, fury, and hostility was 82, 81, 83, and 80%, respectively. The internal validity of the scale was 89% and the reliability was estimated to be 80% by the pre-test method in the study.

*Marital Conflict Questionnaire:* This questionnaire was designed by Sanaei<sup>19</sup> and contains 54 items to measure eight aspects of marital conflicts, including cooperation

reduction, reduction of sexual relation, increasing anxious reactions, increasing attention for having child’s support, extended personal relations with relatives, decreasing family relations with the partners’ relatives and friends, privatizing the financial stuff and information, and reducing effective relation. 5 options were dedicated to each question, with 1 to 5 points regarding their importance. The maximum and minimum scores were 270 and 54, respectively, and the score of each sub-scale equaled the numbers of its items multiplied by 5. In this method, a high score means more conflicts and lower one means a better relation and lower conflicts.

The Marital Conflict Questionnaire has reasonable content validity. During the content analysis stage, the correlation of each item with the whole questionnaire and its subscales was calculated for all of the questions. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was estimated 96% for a group with 270 members and was computed for the rest of the sub-scales, including reducing cooperation, reducing sexual relation, increasing of anxious reactions, increasing attention for having child’s support, extended personal relations with relatives, decreasing family relations with the partners’ relatives and friends, privatizing the financial stuff and information, and reducing effective relation as 81, 61, 70, 33, 96, 89, 69, and 69%, respectively.<sup>19</sup>

### Results

The samples included 30 married women aged 28 to 38 years, with a mean ± standard

deviation (SD) of age of 33.00 ± 22.00 years. The descriptive indexes related to the study variables of the two testing and control groups are elaborated in table 1.

The results showed that the mean scores of sexual satiation, aggression, and marital conflicts varied in both groups. Due to the presence of one independent variable (training forgiveness skill) and three dependent variables (sexual relations, reduction of aggression, and marital conflicts), the multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) statistical test was applied. Therefore, the normality of data distribution was first checked and confirmed through the Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistical test ( $P > 0.0500$ ). So, in order to analyze the data, the parametric tests could be applied. The results of Box's M test expressed the homogeneity of the variance-covariance matrixes ( $P > 0.0500$ ).

The Bartlett's test of sphericity was applied to determine enough correlation among the dependent variables and the results indicated enough correlation among the dependent variables ( $P = 0.0010$ ). The Levene's test confirmed the homogeneity of variance through the study variables ( $P > 0.0500$ ). Therefore, all the possibilities of the MANCOVA statistical test were established and could be used for data analysis. Hence, the overall MANCOVA results on the mean scores of sexual consent, aggression, and marital conflicts was measured by means of quartet test (Wilks' lambda, Pillai's trace, Hotelling's trace, Roy's Largest Root) illustrated in table 2.

**Table 1. Mean ± standard deviation (SD) of study variables**

Variable		Experiment group (mean ± SD)	Control group (mean ± SD)
Sexual satisfaction	Pre-test	68.56 ± 3.39	68.03 ± 2.42
	Post-test	93.58 ± 2.41	67.91 ± 1.98
Aggression	Pre-test	91.60 ± 2.39	90.49 ± 2.67
	Post-test	47.33 ± 2.70	91.44 ± 3.59
Marital conflicts	Pre-test	140.93 ± 2.77	141.97 ± 3.25
	Post-test	109.55 ± 1.98	139.02 ± 2.60

SD: Standard deviation

**Table 2. Overall results of multi-variables covariance analysis**

Test name	Value	df	F	P
Pillai's trace	1.83	3-23	147.12	< 0.0005
Wilks' lambda	0.48	3-23	147.12	< 0.0005
Hotelling's trace	736.18	3-23	147.12	< 0.0005
Roy's Largest Root	736.18	-233	147.12	< 0.0005

df: Degree of freedom

Regarding the results presented in table 3, the control and experiment groups had a significant difference given the scores of variables of sexual consent, aggression, and marital conflict ( $P < 0.0005$ ).

Therefore, regarding the Eta squared in each of the variables (sexual satisfaction, aggression, and marital conflicts), respectively 69, 72, and 66% modifications were applied based on the forgiveness skill training intervention.

### Discussion

This study was aimed at determining the effect of forgiveness skill training on sexual satisfaction, aggression, and marital conflicts in women. The results obtained from the MANCOVA test indicated that forgiveness skill training had a significant effect on improving sexual satiation and reducing aggression and marital conflicts in married women.

One of our finding showed that forgiveness makes couples close to each other and improves intimate relation. The study also led to the reduced marital conflicts that was in line with the results of the study of Ghafouri *et al.* about the effectiveness of forgiveness-based spiritual psychotherapy in increasing marital satisfaction and reducing conflicts among couples living in Mashhad. The findings also

suggested that forgiveness-based spiritual psychotherapy could significantly increase sexual satisfaction, leading to a significant reduction in couples' conflicts.<sup>14,20</sup>

Forgiveness has been typically defined as a way to deal with offences or transgressions or injuries. Forgiveness can be properly regarded as a conflict resolution strategy, as well as a response to offence in couples.

Moreover, couples can use forgiveness skill in order to forgive each other and resolve their marital problems.

If couples have destructive behaviors such as aggression for resolving marital problems, not only they cannot resolve their conflicts, but also they experience more problems and conflicts in their relationship; thus, they should learn some life skills such as negotiation and forgiveness skills for resolution of external and internal conflicts such as rage and resentment.<sup>4-7,20</sup>

Another finding of this study indicated the effectiveness of forgiveness skill training in reducing aggression in women; this finding was matched with some studies. Harris *et al.* showed effects of a group forgiveness intervention on forgiveness, perceived stress, and trait anger. They showed that forgiveness could reduce aggression.<sup>21</sup>

In explaining the above finding, it can be stated that unsolved conflicts can lead to tension and aggression, and aggressive behavior is one of dysfunctional strategy to show anger in marital relationships. Forgiveness skill training could lead to empathy and passion, and forgiving is related to the reduction of aggression and aggressive behaviors in couples.

**Table 3. Separation results of the multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) statistical test**

Dependent variables	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	P	Effect size
Sexual satisfaction	93.30	1	93.30	38.17	0.0005	0.69
Aggression	44.12	1	44.12	16.54	0.0005	0.72
Marital conflict	62.95	1	62.95	29.02	0.0005	0.06

df: Degree of freedom

Another finding of this study indicated the effectiveness of forgiveness skill training on improving sexual satiation in married women. Ghahari and Rad<sup>22</sup> and Ghahari *et al.*<sup>23</sup> showed in their studies that forgiveness could improve sexual satiation in couples, especially in women.

It can be explained that forgiveness therapy improves subjective well-being of couples, so that forgiveness becomes important especially for couples and brings great influence to the individual's subjective well-being. Forgiveness has a very good effect on health and reduction of tension. This consequence could improve marital and sexual relationship in couples.<sup>24,25</sup>

Limitations of the study included the lack of follow-up and gender variation in samples. We suggest follow up and inclusion of husbands for future studies.

### Conclusion

This study revealed that the forgiveness skill training could improve sexual satisfaction and reduce aggression and marital conflicts in married women. Forgiveness as a psychological and spiritual technique could release negative emotion and attach couples together.

So, couple therapists in Iran use these skills in marital therapy.

### Conflict of Interests

Authors have no conflict of interests.

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