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The Predictive Role of Interpersonal Forgiveness in protecting against Marital Instability in Married Couples

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The dynamics of human relationships have made researchers study the factors that affect marriage stability in families. Focus on interpersonal behaviour as a preventive and therapeutic action to decrease marital instability led to the assumption that the characteristics of individual spouses play important roles in the marital outcomes of. However, there is increasing interest in the role of pro-relationship behaviors in repairing and maintaining couples' relationships. This paper is studying the predictive role of interpersonal forgiveness to decrease marital instability among married women andand men. To reach this purpose three hundreds andand eighty four married people (192 males and 192 females) from five different regions across Qazvin City were selected by multistage cluster sampling. They answered 14-item marital instability scale by Edwards et. al. and 40-item Family Forgiveness Scale of Seif andand Bahari (FFS). The result from administrating the Pearson's correlation test and analysis of stepwise regression showed a strong negative correlation between marital instability with general and and marital forgiveness, also, the negative correlation between marital instability and the stages of forgiveness was observed. The results show that forgiveness in marital relationship generally, and resolution andand understanding as two stages of forgiveness can predict the marital instability of married men. Also, the predictive role of marital forgiveness in the marital instability of married women was confirmed.

Keywords: marital forgiveness, marital instability, Qazvin.

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Marriage is the mutual relationship of the husband and wife who are joined in a special kind of social and legal dependence for the purpose of founding and maintaining a family (Gove, 2006), this union represents a lifelong commitment that could be threatened by many trajectories thatcan cause marital instability. Marital instability is described as a situation in which a married couple has not been divorced or separated during their marriage (Oranthinkal and Vansteenwegen, 2006), but because of many reason have the tendency to separate. The remarkable statistics of divorce showed how hard it is to create a good relationship that lasts, so that, only 25 percent of spouses consider themselves "happy together" (Luskin, 2008). Hence, marital stability as the counterpoint of marital instability is defined as an index of continuity and perpetuation of nuclear relations of mutual dependency, trust, and friendship which remains a measure of prediction of a more or less happy marriage (Kang and Jaswal, 2009).A variety of factors can contribute to an unsatisfied andand instable marriage such as different religious tendencies (Wilcox and Nock, 2006), disloyalty to marriage (Stanley & Markman, 1992*)*, weakness in parenthood (Umberson, Williams, Powers, Chen, and Campbell, 2005), poor family background *(*Wolfinger, 2003*)*, poor communication between spouses (Omoniyi-Oyafunke and et al, 2014), negative psychological traits between couples (Fincham, 2003, Parker and Pattenden, 2009) and so on. Some interpersonal characteristics of spouses play key roles in marital outcomes (Fincham, 2003), some of them have the capacity to modify partners' reactions to every day or occasional disruptive events or actions that decrease satisfaction with the partner or the relationship (Parker and Pattenden, 2009). Gratitude, forgiveness, respect and the art of partnership are important interpersonal sub-virtues that contribute to love, support

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compassionate feelings among couples and protect against marital instability (Lombardo and Lombardo, 2008). Among these virtues, forgiveness must be as much an interpersonal as an intrapersonal phenomenon (Walrond-Skinner, 1998) and refers to a stable characteristic or personality trait (Lawler-Row and Reed, 2008) that may have substantial implications for long-term relationship outcomes as well as short term patterns of interaction (APA's Team, 2006; Allemand and et. al, 2007). Spouses having a greater tendency to forgive are less likely to avoid the partner or retaliate in kind following a transgression by the partner. Indeed, spouses themselves acknowledge the fact that the capacity to seek and grant forgiveness is one of the most important factors contributing to protect marital instability (Fincham, 2003). *Forgiving* is similar to other relationship-constructive transformations, such as *accommodation*- the inhibition of destructive responses and the enacting of constructive responses following the destructive interpersonal behavior of a relationship partner and *willingness to sacrifice*- the propensity to forego immediate self-interest to promote the well-being of a partner or relationship. From the perspective of close relationships, all three transformations cause partners to refrain from taking actions that might be perceived as protective of his or her self-interests but ultimately destructive for the relationship and, instead, they engage in actions that contribute to relational health (McCullough et al., 1998).

For a long time, forgiveness has been a concept primarily in use within religious communities. It was only during the past two decades that it came out of those confines into a larger circle of discussion by psychologists and sociologists (Morimoto, 2009). Many social scientists conceptualize forgiveness as an intrapersonal phenomenon, adopting victim-focused explanations of its causes and consequences (Worthington and

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Everett, 2005). Forgiveness usually occurs within a relational context and the nature of the relationship (e.g., closeness, quality) (Fincham, Beach and Davila, 2004). In fact, some theorists and practitioners have argued that forgiveness can be used as an effective means of promoting the healing of pain associated with the hurtful actions of close family members (Enright and Fitzgibbons 2000; McCullough andWorthington 1994). That is to say, as hurtful actions between couples increase, marital instability should increase (Chinitz and Brown, 2001).

The family theorist who has come closest to providing some framework for understanding the concept of forgiveness is Boszormenyi-Nagy (1987). He consistently points to what he feels is a crucial inevitability in the sphere of human relationships, that is, that relationships have consequences and carry a range of emotional investments in terms of indebtedness, entitlement and cost (Walrond-Skinner, 1998). However, Forgiveness clearly plays a positive role in the wellbeing and happiness of individuals and lasting relationships (Parker and Pattenden, 2009). Forgiveness is a process or the result of a process that involves a change in emotion and attitude regarding an offender (Enright, Santos, and Al Mabuk, 1989, Fincham, 2000). One can also interpret the word *forgive* as "fore-give," that is, "giving before" (Morimoto, 2009). It is offered to an offender as a gift, not as a right (Landman, 2002). It can be considered as "giving up all hope for a better past," and at least one part of forgiveness is planning the future rather than lamenting the past (Luskin, 2008). Many people think that forgiveness necessarily includes reconciling with the offending person. Understood this way, encouraging a person to "forgive" a harmful and potentially dangerous partner would be sending them back into an unsafe situation (Wade, 2010). So,

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forgiveness is not a "one shoe fits all" situation. In some cultures, sometimes people feel pressured to forgive. That could lead to guilt or shame when they are unable to measure up (or perhaps to false or ambivalent forgiveness), this concern highlights the importance of the motivations behind forgiving (Safer, 2000). Reductions in revenge and avoidance motivations and an increased ability to wish the offender well are features of forgiveness that can impact behavioral intention without obliging reconciliation (Staub, 2005). McCullough et al. (1998) distinguished four levels of determinants of forgiveness: social-cognitive, offense-related, relational, and personality variables.

Social-cognitive variables include cognition and affect victims experience toward the transgressor and the offense. *Offense* variables include offense severity and apology. *Relational* variables include variables such as relationship closeness and commitment. Personality variables include dispositional variables in the victim that facilitate forgiveness. According to pollard et al. (1998) forgiveness consists five stages as follows: 1) realization: the intrapsychic awareness, in either the offender or offended, of an incident which caused pain and suffering; 2) recognition: an assessment of the painful incident by either the offender or the offended; 3) reparation: three interactional elements; first, confrontation about the painful incident, second, admission of responsibility by the offender, and third, reciprocal asking for and giving forgiveness; 4) restitution: making of amends by offender; 5) resolution: relinquishment of past hurts by both the offended and the offender.

After reflection upon the subject; according to Walrond-Skinner (1998) there are different types of forgiveness, 1) Premature or instantaneous forgiveness– Occurring prior to any account being offered of the relational transgression, 2) Arrested

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forgiveness– The need for forgiveness is denied or refused by one or both parties who are in conflict, 3) Conditional forgiveness– Forgiveness is offered in exchange for the acceptance of blame, an apology, promise of changed behavior, etc. These conditions range from the simple apologizing to the subtle relational conditions that may operate in a marital conflict, 4) Pseudo or pseudo mutual forgiveness– Premature forgiveness is offered and /or accepted, in the erroneous belief that the necessary work has been done to restore the system to its pre-conflictual relational capacity, 5) Collusive forgiveness– As a means of avoiding opposition or conflict and where grave injustice remains, this then amounts to unconditional capitulation by the injured party like abusive relationships, 6) Repetitious forgiveness– Successive incomplete attempts to deal with a relational transgression and which do not succeed in either restoring the relationship or freeing the parties from it. In this research, the conditional forgiveness in couples' relations with the five stages of realization, recognition, reparation, restitution andand resolution in marital relationships andand its predictive role to decrease marital instability was studied.

Given the strong emotional dimension of committed relationships it is perhaps not surprising that significant research attention has been focused on the role of forgiveness within marriage. As the limited researches in the relation of forgiveness andand marital instability, most of reported researches here are studying the linkage of forgiveness to marital outcomes. Substantial research has been done on the benefits of forgiveness to relationships. Fincham and his colleagues (2004, 2007) have shown that behaviors by one partner in a couple-relation affect behaviors by the other partner. Bono, McCullough, and Root (2008) reported that higher levels of forgiveness were associated with less conflicts and less negative mood, *as well as* fewer

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physical health symptoms (Toussaint and Webb, in press; Lawler, Younger, Piferi, Jobe, Edmondson, and Jones, 2005; Afkhami, Bahrami and Fatehi zadeh, 2006). Hall and Finchem (2006) found that forgiveness decreased instability of marital relations (the likelihood of the couple remaining together). Other studies showed that forgiveness deceased the likelihood of divorce (Fincham, Hall, and Beach, 2006; APA's Team, 2006), such studies reveal that couples can improve the quality of their marital relationship overtime if they apply the principle of forgiveness in their marriage (Mirzadeh and Fallahchai, 2011; Safarzadeh, Esfahaniasl and Bayat, 2011; and McNulty, 2008; Orathinkal and Vansteenwegen, 2006; Frousakis, 2010; Baskin, Rhody, Schoolmeesters and Ellingson, 2011). Some researchers showed the effectiveness of forgiveness interventions in marriage therapy, their results showed that forgiveness skills, anger expression, and marital satisfaction had improved after intervention (Sells, Giordano and King, 2002; Greenberg, Warwar and Malcolm, 2009; Baskin and Enright, 2004), The study of Fincham and Beach (in press) showed the association between forgiveness and marital quality mediated the longitudinal relationship between them for wives but not for husbands. Navidian and Bahari (2013) showed combining hope and forgiveness-focused interventions can be used to decrease irrational marital beliefs, irrational expectations and interpersonal rejection among couples.

Some studies showed some mediators like gender roles in Influential power of forgiveness such as the important role of wives' forgiveness of husbands' transgressions (Gordon, Burton and Porter, 2004), engaging the men with high marital satisfaction in forgiveness (Fincham and Beach, 2007), the dominant position of men to be forgiven with more probability (Tsang, and Stanford, in press), the condition of transgressors

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(McNulty, 2011). In summation, various studies have found that forgiveness may negatively relate to or influence the marital instability and likelihood of divorce. This study aimed to investigate the relationship of interpersonal forgiveness in couples with marital instability and to answer this question that to what extent marital forgiveness can predict marital instability in married men and women living in Qazvin City?

Method

The research method is descriptive and correlational. The research population includes all married men and women living in Qazvin City (Iran). The sample size was three hundreds and eighty four (384) married people, 192 of whom were male (ranging in age from 24 to 74) and 192 were female (ranging in age from 20 to 69) who were selected by multi-stage cluster sampling from five different regions across Qazvin City (Iran).

In the first step, the city was divided into five regions (north, south, center, west and east), then from each region some streets and alleys were selected and finally from these streets and alleys, some houses were selected. Two questionnaires consisted: Family Forgiveness Scale and Marital Instability Index were completed individually by married men and women with their consent to participate in the research. The selection of married people is done with respect to required information of age and gender and their willingness to participate. The Pearson's correlation coefficient and analysis of stepwise regression was used to analyze the data that had been collected by the following scales and was administered individually by going to the homes of the research participants.

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Instruments

Participant's probable behavior towards their offender was measured on a subscale of the Family Forgiveness Scale (FFS) (Seif, Bahari and Khosravi, 2001). They were asked to rate on a 4 point Likert scale how much they agreed or disagreed with each item. FFS is measuring the extent of forgiveness in a family between couples. It consists of five dimensions or sub-scales such as A) Realization, B) Recognition, C) Reparation, D) Restitution and E) Resolution. The realization construct is defined as intra-psychic awareness in either the offender or offended, of an incident that caused pain and suffering. The recognition construct is an assessment of the painful incident by either the offender or the offended. The reparation construct is of three elements. First, confrontation of painful incidents, second, admission of responsibility by the offender, and third, reciprocal asking for and giving forgiveness. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated at 0.78 which places the scale in a high range of uniformity and intra-consistency.

Marital Instability Index (MII) is a 14-item instrument to measure marital instability and especially, proneness to divorce. This scale is binomial 0-1 and assesses the probability to divorce in couples. If the score of couple in this scale is between 0-2, he/she probably has a 22% chance of divorce in the next three years of his/her marital life. If the score is between 3-4, the likelihood of divorce increases 26%, if the score is between 5-6, probability of divorce will be 31%, %, if the score is between 7-9, probability of divorce will be 38% and the score of 10 and more, increases the probability of divorce to 43%. It has excellent internal consistency with an alpha of .93 (Edwards, Johnson, and Booth, 1987). In this study, reliability has also been shown, with a Cronbach's Alpha of .81.

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Result

Table 1
Marital Instability and Forgiveness in General and Marital Relationship: Descriptive Statistics (N=384, F=192, M= 192)

Sex		Marital Instability	General Forgiveness	Marital Forgiveness	Realization	Recognition	Reparation	Restitution	Resolution
Female	M	1.41	125.57	62.05	25.40	25.77	24.93	24.53	24.93
	SD	1.97	12.43	7.57	3.15	3.68	3.25	2.94	3.26
	N	192							
Male	M	1.25	128.84	64.5	26.17	26.59	25.61	24.99	25.46
	SD	2.33	12.06	7.33	3.15	3.86	3.32	2.98	3.13
	N	192							
Total	M	1.33	127.21	63.27	25.79	26.18	25.27	24.76	25.2
	SD	2.16	12.34	7.54	3.17	3.79	3.31	2.96	3.20
	N	384							
	range	0-1	1-4	1-4	1-4	1-4	1-4	1-4	1-4
	N of items	14	40	20	8	8	8	8	8

In Table 1 the mean proportion for women and men in marital instability (1.41, 1.25), general forgiveness (125, 128), forgiveness in marital relationship (62.05, 64.5), and the stages of forgiveness like realization (25.40, 26.17), recognition (24, 93, 25.61), reparation (24.93, 25.61), restitution (24.53, 24.99) and resolution (24.93, 25.46) are respectively reported. It is observed that average marital instability in men and women is between 1.25-1.41, this means that the probability of divorce among married men and women is in the lowest level, (22%) couples have relative stability in their marital relationship.

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The results from the participants show that there was a strong negative linear correlation between marital instability with general forgiveness (N: 384=– .37, p< .00), marital instability with marital forgiveness (N: 384= – .44, p< .00), also, this table shows a strong negative linear correlation between marital instability with each stage of forgiveness like realization (N: 384=–.18, p<.00), recognition (N:384= – .31, p< .00), reparation (N: 384= – .27, p < .00), restitution (N: 384= –.27, p< .00), resolution (N: 384= – .33, p < .00).

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Table 2
Correlations of Marital Instability and Forgiveness in General and Marital Relationship

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Marital instability	_								
2. General Forgiveness	-.37**	_							
4. Marital forgiveness	-.44**	.82**	.35**	_					
5. Realization	-.18**	.73**	.59**	.61**	_				
6. Recognition	-.31**	.84**	.68**	.69**	.51**	_			
7. Reparation	-.27**	.72**	.63**	.54**	.40**	.50**	_		
8. Restitution	-.27**	.70**	.56**	.59**	.40**	.517**	.35**	_	
9. Resolution	-.33**	.75**	.59**	.64**	.44**	.544**	.42**	.41**	_

** P≤ .01

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Table 3
Stepwise Regression Analysis of Forgiveness in Predicting Marital Instability of Married Men and Women (N: 192,192)

Women (N: 192)	**Predictor**	**R**	**R^2**	**B**	b
1	Constant			8.11	
	Marital forgiveness	.42	.17	-.11	-.41
Men (N:192)	**Predictors**	**R**	**R^2**	**B**	b
1	Constant			10.63	
	Marital forgiveness	.46	.21	-.15	-.45
2	Constant			12.11	
	Marital forgiveness	.49	.24	-.11	-.34
	Resolution			-14	-.20
3	Constant			10.95	
	Marital forgiveness	.51	.26	-.15	-.46
	Resolution			-.15	-.20
	Realization			-.14	-.19

The results of Table 3 indicate that forgiveness in marital relationship can predict the marital instability of married women [R^2=.17, F (1,190)=39.44 p<.00]. In this table marital forgiveness has a negative significant role in predicting marital instability (β= –.417, p < .00)

The results of this table also show the predictive role of marital forgiveness to decrease marital instability in married men [R^2=.21, F(1,190)=49.89 p<.00], in this step marital forgiveness has a negative significant role in predicting marital instability in men (β= –0.45, p<.00); In step 2, marital forgiveness and resolution can predict the marital instability [R^2=.24, F(2,189)= 29.08 p< .00], in step 2 resolution entered in regression analysis, also this variable has a negative significant role to predict marital instability in men

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(β= –.20, p< .00); and finally in the 3th step, realization entered in regression analysis and it could predict the marital instability [R^2=.26, F(3,188)= 21.71 p<.00], so, realization has a negative role in predicting the marital instability (β= –.19, p< .00)

Discussion

Marital instability, as an index of the probability of separation and divorce in couples' relations was influenced by many cultural, social and psychological factors. Among psychological factors, interpersonal virtues and engaging the couples in positive behaviors such as forgiveness was the subject of research. It should be said that transgressions in marital relationships are inevitable. To understand how couples maintain relationship over time in the face of such transgressions, it is essential to know how they deal with negative experiences and how they overcome interpersonal hurts. When interpersonal transgressions occur in marriage they can elicit strong negative feelings and have the potential to disrupt the relationship. Perhaps not surprisingly, spouses report that the capacity to seek and grant forgiveness is one of the most important factors contributing to marital longevity. For a spouse to forgive his or her partner logically requires the spouse to be conscious of being injured/wronged by the partner. Without injury there is nothing to forgive, so forgiveness is a construct that is relevant to the reconstructive action after marital disputes. Forgiveness as an interpersonal protective strategy and one of the relationship-constructive transformations causes the couples to engage in actions that contribute to relational health. This research focused on forgiveness as a negative predictor of marital instability.

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In addressing the relation between forgiveness and marital instability, this study replicated previous research documenting an association between the two constructs. The contribution of forgiveness to the quality, decrease instability, repair and maintenance of couple relationships appears to be supported by many researches. In this study, consistent with prior studies like Hall and Finchem (2006; Mirzadeh and Fallahchai, 2011; Safarzadeh et. al., 2011; Frousakis, 2010; Baskin et. al., 2011; Navidian and Bahari, 2013; Afkhami, et. Al., 2006; McNulty, 2008; Allemand and et. al., 2007 and Greenberg et. al., 2009) for both husbands and wives significant correlations were found between forgiveness and marital instability (range

–0.18 to –0.44). In support of the goals of this research, the results indicated that there were strong negative correlations between general forgiveness, forgiveness in marital relationship and the stages of forgiveness with marital instability of married men and women. According to Parker and Pattenden (2009) forgiveness clearly plays a role in fostering happy and lasting relationships. So, as Fincham (2003) believes spouses having a greater tendency to forgive, are more eager to contribute to marital longevity and to avoid divorce. A willingness to forgive means to give a new chance to the partner to leave and compensate for his or her mistakes in the past may foster relationships and build interpersonal resources, which may have a positive correlation to marital quality and negative relation to marital instability. As the present research reveals, those who have a high tendency to forgive, ar are less willing to break up their marital relationship. It is probable that partners in high–quality relationships may have a long–term orientation that might motivate them to overlook hurts in order to

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maximize the likelihood of preserving the relationship. The present findings indicate the important role of marital forgiveness for intrapersonal transgressions and decreeing the likelihood of instability. Such findings show that the construct of forgiveness has the potential to enhance our understanding of couple's relationships for attention to stability of marital relationships. In particular, there is evidence that men and women's tendency to forgive is negative predictive of their future marital instability. Another finding of this study was high negative predictive power of marital forgiveness for marital instability in women and high negative predictive power of marital forgiveness, realization and resolution to marital instability in men.

The results show that the predictive power of marital forgiveness is stronger in men rather in women and so men may feel greater responsibility for the resolution of relationship difficulties. Each partner is intrinsically expected to protect the other, and to be part of the team that encourage and reinforce the other, However when difficulties arise in the relationship, the couples try to protect each other and sacrifice their individual desires to save the relationship. In conflict of interest in individual and couple relations, one partner ignores their own well-being in order to retain the relationship that is threatened by individual wishes and demands. In such a crisis, it seems that the protective role of men facilitates the potentiality to realize and solve problems and difficulties in the family system. As Fincham, et al (2002) believed although women are found to be the more empathic sex, empathy was more strongly associated with men's ability to forgive their wives, but this trait has not been stable over time. In summary, *lasting peace* cannot be brought about between couples if the aggression-revenge cycle is not broken at

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some time. This cycle can be broken if the couples decide to negotiate and forgive.

One limitation of this study is answering the married women and men about the questions contained within their personal relationships. On the other hand, due to the cross-sectional nature of this study, information about interpersonal transgressions was not available. Due to random selection of participants in this study, results could be generalized to small cities like Qazvin. So, it is recommended for further study on how transgressions affect marital quality in long-term relationships, this is to be considered qualitatively with a small group of couples.

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