



The moderating role of perceived attachment style in the relationship between a couple's attachment style and their level of forgiveness

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ABSTRACT

Background and Aim: attachment style is one of the effective factors in interpersonal interactions, which is formed as a result of a person's relationships with attachment figures (parents, peers, spouse) and significantly affects the performance and marital relationship. The purpose of this study was to determine the moderating role of the attachment style perceived by parents in the relationship between the couple's attachment style and the level of forgiveness in them. **Methods:** The research method was correlation type. The data were collected through three questionnaires - family forgiveness scale (FFS), RSQ attachment style questionnaire and attachment style scale towards each parent (Hazen and Shiver) from 200 couples living in Tehran (400 people) using multiple cluster sampling method. It was collected step by step. To analyze the data, statistical methods of correlation coefficient and multiple regression were used. **Results:** The results obtained from the data analysis showed that there is a significant relationship between the attachment styles towards the spouse with self-forgiveness, with the spouse's forgiveness ($P < 0.001$) and the perception of attachment styles from parents ($P < 0.001$). Perceived attachment styles from parents had a moderating role in the relationship between attachment style to spouse and self-forgiveness and spouse's forgiveness ($P < 0.001$). **Conclusion:** It seems that these spouses forgive themselves and their spouses more easily. In contrast, people with ambivalent and avoidant perceived attachment style towards mother, avoidant perceived attachment style towards mother and ambivalent towards father are more difficult to forgive their spouse in marital relationship.



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Introduction

Family is one of the important social institutions. As the life of extended families, passes and the crystallization of the nuclear family increases in society, the importance of relationships between family members, especially husband and wife, as the main pillars of the family becomes clearer. Meanwhile, attachment style is one of the effective factors in interpersonal interactions, which is formed as a result of a person's relationships with attachment figures (parents, peers, spouse) and significantly affects the performance and marital relationship. Attachment is a deep emotional connection that a person establishes with special people in his life so that when he interacts with them, he feels cheerful, and when he is stressed, feels relaxed because he is with them. (Berk, 2001). The couple's attachment style is one of the important factors of the strength of the marital relationship because it provides a framework that helps to better and accurately understand this relationship and ways to deal with couple conflicts (Bosmans et al., 2020).

The topic of forgiveness, an important area of health psychology (Lawler et al., 2008), has attracted much attention in recent years (Weiss, 2008). According to McCullough et al. (2012), forgiveness is a set of motivational changes in the injured person, in which the motives of revenge towards the injured person and avoiding him are reduced, and the injured person, on goodwill, increases the motivation to reconcile with the harming person (McCullough et al., 2012). In fact, forgiveness makes it possible for intimacy to be established again after threats and for relationships to remain stable and long-term. Lack of forgiveness creates many problems in different fields of mental health and emotions and increases psychological vulnerability. The results of the conducted research also show that increasing the forgiveness of spouses reduces the symptoms of depression, anger, and resentment and increases life satisfaction, empathy, well-being, compatibility, happiness, problem-solving skills, positive emotions, mental health, and conflict resolution. It becomes a family (Allsop et al., 2021). Maltby et al. (2008) showed that forgiveness is related to two aspects of mental health, i.e., positive affect and life satisfaction. Various studies also indicate that using the forgiveness method can reduce the expression of inappropriate anger (Tibbits, Ellis, Piramelli, Luskin, and Luckman, 2006), increase self-

efficacy and hope (Luskin, Ginzburg, and Thoresen, 2005), reduce anxiety and physical signs of stress (Harris, 2006), resolve conflict and increasing marital satisfaction and marital compatibility, reduce spouses' depression, increase the quality of caring for each other, and reduce aggression in spouses (Lafontaine et al., 2022).

The literature review shows consistent and contradictory findings regarding the relationships between the variables. Considering the results of these findings, as well as the lack of research in the field of the role of attachment styles concerning the forgiveness of spouses and conducting couple studies as well as considering the undeniable role of attachment patterns in behavioral functions and emotional patterns, and considering what has been said, the current study is conducted to answer the following questions: does the couple's attachment style have a significant relationship with their forgiveness? Can the perceived attachment style play a moderating role in the relationship between the couple's attachment style and their level of forgiveness?

Method

The research method of this descriptive study is correlational, and the research design is correlational. The statistical population in this research includes all couples living in Tehran. The sampling method is multi-stage cluster sampling based on urban divisions. First, five areas of the urban areas of Tehran were randomly selected (separately among the west, east, south, center, and north areas). Four alleys in each area and 20 houses from each alley for distribution Questionnaires have been selected. Based on this, the sample size of the research according to the correlation method for the two-domain test and at the confidence level of 95% ($\alpha = 0.05$) and the power of 0.95 obtained using G-Power software is 138 people. Because the sample of this study is a couple, for more certainty, the current study sample consists of 200 couples (400 people). The criteria for entering the sample include being married, having a diploma or higher, living together for one year, and the willingness of both people to participate in the research. The exclusion criteria include marital infidelity and divorce.

Tools

1. Family Forgiveness Scale (Pollard et al., 1998) (FFS): This scale was designed and

developed by Pollard & et al. (1998). It includes five subscales, and each subscale includes 8 items. In Pollard et al.'s (1998) research, the reliability of the questionnaire was calculated as $r=0.80$ through retesting after two weeks, and the validity of its various components varied from 0.67 to 0.85. The standardization was done by emphasizing reliability, factor, detection, and correlation coefficients. Its reliability was estimated at 84.5%, which is excellent. The overall reliability of the questionnaire in the present study was obtained using Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.84 and separately for women and 0.87 for husbands.

2. Relationship Scales Questionnaire (RSQ): This questionnaire consists of 30 questions about close relationships, with respondents responding to each item "not at all me" to "exactly me". Guedeney, Fermanian, and Bifulco (2009) have reported the validity of the questionnaire using Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.41 for safe style, 0.54 for fearful style, 0.22 for preoccupied and 0.64 for avoidant style in the French population. Dibachi Forushani's research (2009) has supported the validity and reliability of the attachment styles questionnaire.

3. Attachment Style Questionnaire: (Hazen and Shaver, 1986): Hazen and Shaver (1986) prepared a test based on the attachment classifications of infants and the recommendations of Ainsworth and his colleagues. This test consists of 6 paragraphs (3 sentences for each parent) describing the respondent's childhood relationships with parents based on the secure, avoidant, and ambivalent styles (Hazen and Shaver, 1986). Cronbach's alpha coefficients for insecure and secure attachment to mother were 0.77 and 0.86, respectively, and Cronbach's alpha coefficients for insecure and secure attachment to father were 0.88 and 0.90, respectively, indicating this scale's validity. In addition to three attachment styles, this test evaluates secure, avoidant, and ambivalent. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha of this questionnaire was reported as 0.85.

Results

In this study, the mean (standard deviation) age of male participants was 45.90 (12.22), and the mean (standard deviation) age of female participants was 41.10 (11.38). The two groups

did not differ significantly regarding mean (standard deviation) age.

The results showed that both in the group of women and the group of husbands, the perceived secure attachment style to the spouse was more average than the other perceived attachment styles from the spouse. Also, the score dispersion in the perceived distant attachment style was higher in women and husbands. Moreover, the average forgiveness towards the wife in the group of women is 47.97, with a standard deviation of 8.44. Finally, In the group of husbands, the average forgiveness towards the wife is 44.48, with a standard deviation of 7.83.

Next, to investigate the moderating role of the mother's perception of avoidant attachment style in the first step, the secure attachment style towards the spouse was analyzed as a predictor variable. In the second step, the perception of avoidant attachment style towards the mother was entered into the equation, and interactive scores were added to the equation in the third step. In this analysis, a significant interaction score with a standardized beta value of 0.23 was obtained. Therefore, the perception of the mother's attachment style moderates the secure attachment style to the spouse and self-forgiveness. Additionally, the results of the moderating role of the perception of the avoidant attachment style of the mother in relation to the fearful attachment style to the spouse and self-forgiveness have been shown. In this analysis, the significant value of the modified coefficient of determination and the standardized beta of the interactive score coefficient showed that the perception of avoidant attachment style towards the mother has a role in moderating the effect of fearful attachment style towards the spouse on self-forgiveness. According to the significance of the interactive score in the third step of hierarchical regression analysis, the perceived avoidance style of the mother has a moderating role in the relationship between busy attachment style to spouse and self-forgiveness. In other words, the modified coefficient of determination in the third step shows that the perceived avoidance style variable towards the mother optimally predicts the forgiveness variable.

In the second step, the perception of ambivalent attachment style does not play a role as a predictor. According to the significant value of the standardized beta of the interaction score in the third step, the moderating role of the perception of the mother's attachment style in

relation to the secure attachment style towards the spouse and self-affirmation. The results of the moderating role of the perception of the ambivalent attachment style of the father in relation to the fearful attachment style to the wife and self-forgiveness have been analyzed. In this analysis, the significant value of the modified coefficient of determination and the standardized beta of the interactive score coefficient showed that the perception of ambivalent attachment style towards the father has a role in moderating the effect of fearful attachment style towards the spouse on self-forgiveness.

Conclusion

This study aimed to determine the moderation of the attachment style perceived by parents in the relationship between the couple's attachment style and the level of forgiveness in them. The results of examining the moderating role of parents' attachment styles in relation to spouse attachment styles and spouse forgiveness showed that the perceived avoidance style of the mother in the relationship between the secure attachment style to the spouse and the forgiveness of the spouse, the perceived avoidance style of the mother in the relationship between Preoccupied attachment style to wife and wife's forgiveness, perceived ambivalent style of father in the relationship between secure attachment style to wife and wife's forgiveness, perceived ambivalent style of father in the relationship between anxious attachment style to wife and wife's forgiveness, perceived style The ambivalent of the father in the relationship between the distant attachment style to the wife and the wife's forgiveness and the perceived ambivalent style of the father in the relationship between the preoccupied attachment style to the wife and the wife's forgiveness have a moderating role, and in other words, in relation to the attachment styles towards Spouses have an optimal effect on the forgiveness of the spouse. Also, the results showed that most of the significant variables in examining the moderating role are related to the perceived style of the father, which has an optimal effect in explaining the variance of the wife's forgiveness. Kirkpatrick's (1994) study showed that there is a congruence between childhood and adulthood attachment styles. Based on these results, although people whose attachment style was secure towards their parents also had a secure attachment style in adulthood, the relationship between avoidant and ambivalent attachment styles in childhood and adulthood was unclear.

People with an avoidant attachment style tended to be ambivalent toward parents in adulthood. In a study that was conducted on 19-year-old teenagers, they found consistency between the attachment styles of teenagers towards their peers or adults with the concept of mental images of parents. The results showed that people who had a secure attachment style in adolescence compared to avoidant and ambivalent people significantly described their mothers as more benevolent and less punitive. In fact, the visualizations of parents of secure adults compared to insecure adults were safer in terms of content and more complex and distinct from the structural angle (Levi et al., 1998). The study of Crawford and Novak (2008) showed that adolescents with an insecure attachment style to their parents are more likely to tend to deviant behaviors, which confirms the relationship between the perception of attachment to parents and attachment to peers or others in adulthood. Chang (2013) determined the path of marital satisfaction based on attachment theory among 208 married Korean teachers with the help of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). He showed that the path leads from adult attachment with the mediation of forgiveness to marital satisfaction. In addition, through a separate path, anxious and avoidant attachment negatively affected forgiveness and marital satisfaction. In explaining these results, it can be pointed out that when changes in the attachment pattern occur in a positive direction, with positive events such as moving to a modified family environment and marrying a person with a secure attachment style, the expression of love and affection from the spouse can secure a person with an insecure attachment pattern (Majors, 2008).

Considering the scope of influence of parents' attachment style on children, it is suggested to consider training classes for parents to transfer the safe attachment to their children. Considering the relationship between attachment styles and forgiveness, during couples therapy, spouses can be helped to become aware of their own and their spouse's attachment styles and their effect on forgiveness, and to use more effective methods to achieve higher compatibility and satisfaction. Knowing people's attachment styles makes it possible to teach them to achieve a safe attachment style and provides the basis for improving the quality of marital relationships. The results of this research can bring valuable guidelines in the field of providing mental health, from the level of prevention to treatment

available to people and various institutions such as psychological clinics and couple therapy consultations, which work around creating awareness at the general level of society.

Conflict of Interest

According to the authors, this article has no financial sponsor or conflict of interest.

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