

## Relationship Between Relational Humility, Forgiveness, and Relationship Satisfaction in Married Individuals

Elisha Buthello<sup>1\*</sup>, Nyamat Chadha<sup>2</sup>

### ABSTRACT

With rising rates of separation and divorce, there is an increased need to understand factors that promote relationship satisfaction. Advancement in the field of positive psychology has shifted the focus on understanding relational humility and forgiveness - two important virtues in this context. The present study aimed to understand the relationship between relational humility, forgiveness, and relationship satisfaction in married individuals. The sample consisted of 100 married individuals, married up to 3 years. The scales used were the Relational Humility Scale (RHS- 16), Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS), and Couples Satisfaction Index Scale (CSI-16). A Pearson product-moment correlational analysis showed a significant positive relationship between forgiveness and relationship satisfaction. However, no significant association was found between relational humility and relationship satisfaction, and relational humility and forgiveness. This finding has a wide scope to promote healthier relationships and provide couples with skills for healthy marriages. It can aid therapists in understanding relationships and practicing couples' therapy.

**Keywords:** *Relational Humility, Forgiveness, Relationship Satisfaction*

In India, divorce and separation is no more a rare concept, with divorce rates increasing to 7%, but global statistics are even more alarming (Nambi, 2005). Changes in the marital institution in recent times warrant an understanding of relationship satisfaction from a different perspective today (Dommaraju, 2016).

One of the strongest predictors of marital success is the strength of a relationship, which can be established during the first 2-3 years of marriage. Since the focus is on marital context, the concept of marital virtues in positive psychology becomes even more relevant. This study focused on two important virtues- relational humility and forgiveness, attempting to understand their association with each other, and with satisfaction in the relationship.

Theoretical perspectives on these virtues are scarce, but there is evidence that forgiveness can help in forming, strengthening, maintaining, and repairing relationships (Bell, 2016). Considering the variables used in the study, relational humility refers to one person's

<sup>1</sup>Faculty Member at Integrow School, India

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor at S.N.D.T University, India

\*Corresponding Author

Received: June 17, 2021; Revision Received: August 04, 2021; Accepted: August 22, 2021

## **Relationship Between Relational Humility, Forgiveness, and Relationship Satisfaction in Married Individuals**

judgment for another person's level of humility (Davis et al., 2011). It uses the realistic accuracy model (RAM)-a four-step process that focuses on the judgment made, based on the personality traits of others. The four stages include relevance, availability, detection, and utilization. (Letszring, Colman, Roberts, & Krzyzaniak, 2017). Davis and his colleagues presented a new theory called Relational Humility which states five qualities that can be attributed to the person in order to make a judgement and to understand the concept of humility- positive orientation towards others, regulate one's emotions, restrain unpleasant emotions, express positive emotions like empathy, compassion, sympathy, and love and to down-regulate emotions like guilt and shame that can hinder the relationship with another (Davis et al., 2011).

Forgiveness refers to the "framing of a perceived transgression such that one's responses to the transgressor, transgression, and sequelae of the transgression are transformed from negative to neutral or positive. The source of a transgression, and therefore, the object of forgiveness may be oneself, another person or persons, or a situation that one views as being beyond anyone's control (e.g., an illness, "fate," or a natural disaster)" (Thompson et al., 2005). One of the earliest explanations on forgiveness is the interdependence theory, stating that one partner will have an outcome on the other partner (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959 as cited in Wickham & Knee, 2012).

Relationship satisfaction is an interpersonal evaluation of one's positive feelings for one's partner and having an attraction towards the relationship (Miller & Tedder, 2011). One of the models for relationship satisfaction includes the investment model that helps in understanding the framework to stay committed or states the causes of commitment in a relationship (Rusbult, Agnew, & Arriaga, 2011). The basis of this model states that it is not the positive qualities that help in building a relationship, but the investments that the partners make to tie the relationship together.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Some studies have examined these variables in association with each other in the past, such as a study by Bell and Fincham (2017) that aimed to find whether humility was related to partner-forgiveness, self-forgiveness, and relationship satisfaction. Findings indicated that humility was significantly positively correlated with self and partner-forgiveness, which also resulted in a positive correlation with relationship satisfaction. Another study in the USA, however, showed no association between humility and forgiveness (Marshall-Youquoi, 2018).

A study by Gayatrivadivu, Poonguzhali, Ofelia, & Vijayabanu (2014) aimed to find a relationship between resilience, forgiveness, marital satisfaction among married individuals. Findings suggested that forgiveness was positively correlated with marital satisfaction, with no gender differences revealed. A similar study by Arya and Kaushik (2015) found a positive relationship between forgiveness and relationship satisfaction, which could suggest that forgiveness is important for both partners for improving and maintaining the quality of a relationship.

Farrell et al. (2015) examined the role of humility in romantic relationships and found that humility in one's romantic partner is positively associated with relationship satisfaction and forgiveness. The association between the variables was mediated by the role of commitment. Other studies too have shown the relational benefits of humility, such as one by Tongeren,

## Relationship Between Relational Humility, Forgiveness, and Relationship Satisfaction in Married Individuals

Davis, and Hook (2014) that evidenced that humility facilitates the initiation and maintenance of romantic relationships. Their results suggested long-distance relations can elicit greater unforgiveness, whereas having a partner with a high level of humility buffers against unforgiveness, suggesting that humility serves the function of encouraging relational repair in ongoing romantic couples.

Although these studies have evidence of mixed findings, given the paucity of research in the Indian collectivistic context of relationships, the present study aimed to contribute to this literature.

### METHODOLOGY

#### *Objectives of the Study*

The objectives of the study were as follows:

1. To understand the nature of the association between relational humility and forgiveness in married individuals.
2. To understand the nature of the association between forgiveness and relationship satisfaction in married individuals.
3. To understand the nature of the association between relational humility and relationship satisfaction in married individuals.

#### *Hypotheses*

1. (H1) There will be a positive association between relational humility and forgiveness in married individuals.
2. (H2) There will be a positive association between forgiveness and relationship satisfaction in married individuals.
3. (H3) There will be a positive association between relational humility and relationship satisfaction in married individuals.

#### *Sample*

A total of 100 individuals (50 males, 50 females) married up till 3 years were selected using purposive and snowball sampling. All participants resided with their spouses in Mumbai. Employment, familiarity with the English language, and the marriage to only one partner were three inclusion criteria. Individuals below the age of 25 or those with children were excluded from the study.

#### *Instruments*

Three measures were used in this study,

1. **Relational Humility Scale (RHS).** A 16-item scale on a 5-point Likert scale, this tool was devised by Davis in 2010. Using humility ratings from an observer who is in an actual relationship with a target person, the scores are summed up such that higher scores indicate greater humility. There are 3 subscales consistent with relational humility- global humility (5 items), superiority (7 items), and accurate view of self (4 items). The RHS shows evidence of good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha ranging from .90 to .95 and good construct validity (Davis et al., 2011).
2. **Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS).** Given by Yamhure, Snyder & Hoffman in 2005, the HFS is an 18-item 7-point Likert scale with 3 subscales- forgiveness of self, forgiveness of others, and forgiveness of situations. Higher scores indicate higher levels of forgiveness. The scale demonstrates convergent validity and high test-retest reliability. Internal consistency alpha for forgiveness of self is .75, for forgiveness of

## Relationship Between Relational Humility, Forgiveness, and Relationship Satisfaction in Married Individuals

others is .78, for forgiveness of situation is .77 and for HFS overall is .86 (Thompson et al., 2005).

- 3. Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI).** A 16-item scale given by Funk and Rogge in 2007, measures relationship satisfaction such that the higher the score, the greater the relationship satisfaction. Scores of 51 or less are indicative of relationship distress. High estimates for reliability have been found, with a Cronbach's alpha of .94 (Graham, Diebels, & Barnow, 2011). The scale also shows strong convergent validity with the existing measures of relationship satisfaction (Funk & Rogge, 2007).

### *Procedure*

After recruiting the sample using purposive and snowball sampling in various offices and religious institutions, informed consent was taken from each participant, and confidentiality was maintained at all points. The nature and scope of the study was duly explained, post which the three scales were administered. After the data was obtained, basic descriptive statistics and Pearson's Product moment correlation coefficient were computed.

## RESULTS

The present study was carried out to examine whether there is a relationship between forgiveness, relational humility, and relationship satisfaction in married individuals. The analysis of data was carried out using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). Both descriptive and inferential statistics were computed. The statistic used to compute the correlation was Pearson's product-moment correlation, as normality of data was established.

*Table 1: Correlational Analyses of the Variables*

Measure	1	2	3	Mean	S.D.
1. Relational Humility	-	.005	.160	63.27	7.62
2. Forgiveness	.005	-	.287**	89.93	14.20
3. Relationship Satisfaction	.160	.287**	-	67.78	11.27

- Hypothesis 1 stated that there will be a positive association between relational humility and forgiveness. However, relational humility showed no significant correlation with forgiveness ( $r = .005$ , NS). Thus, the obtained analysis does not validate Hypothesis 1.
- Hypothesis 2 stated that there will be a positive association between forgiveness and relationship satisfaction. Forgiveness showed a significant positive correlation with relationship satisfaction ( $r = .287$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The obtained analysis, thus, validates Hypothesis 2.
- Hypothesis 3 stated that there will be a positive association between relational humility and relationship satisfaction. As depicted in the table, relational humility showed no significant correlation with relationship satisfaction ( $r = .160$ , NS). Thus, the obtained analysis does not validate hypothesis 3.

## DISCUSSION

The current correlational analysis did not validate the first hypothesis. With respect to the variables in this study, their role in a marriage could be different for different people, so they can play out differently in each relationship. For instance, forgiveness can be measured as a value or an actual behavior. This is to say that one's self-reported attitude towards forgiveness could also be different from one's actual behavior towards the transgression

## **Relationship Between Relational Humility, Forgiveness, and Relationship Satisfaction in Married Individuals**

(Powers, Nam, Rowatt, & Hill, 2007). Further, these variables may be defined differently as per the religious-spiritual context. As the sample consisted of individuals from different religious-spiritual backgrounds, their conceptualization of the variables may differ. Research by Farrell et al. (2015) also showed how commitment in a relationship can mediate the relationship between humility and forgiveness. The present study has not accounted for a third, mediating variable.

The current analysis, however, indicated a positive correlation between relationship satisfaction and forgiveness, a finding that is also supported by past researches and theoretical explanations. For instance, Arya and Kaushik (2015) found a positive correlation between forgiveness and marital satisfaction, a finding replicated by Askari (2016). Urcan (2011) too found high scores on forgiveness related to higher marital satisfaction. The interdependence theory of forgiveness states that one person's attribute of forgiveness will have an outcome on another partner (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959 as cited in Wickham & Knee, 2012). This suggests that forgiveness in one person can have a positive outcome on the relationship, as a whole.

Finally, Hypothesis 3 of the study was not validated by the current analysis. This, too, can be contributed to the presence of a mediating variable, or a related demographic characteristic, such as the years of the relationship. For instance, participants in their initial months of their marriage mentioned being in a 'honeymoon phase', which could have impacted the variables differently, compared to those who were married for 3 years and had different goals. Also, relational humility is multidimensional that yields the possibility that some dimensions (like having an accurate view of self, modesty, or fairness) were correlated, but others were not.

### ***Limitations of the study***

1. The scales used for this study have been developed in 2005, 2007, and 2011, which could hamper the conceptualization of the variables in the present context, and could also contribute to an inaccurate representation of the real relationship between the variables.
2. They are self-report scales, so there is a chance of social desirability coming into play, and the respondents faking good or even bad.
3. Relational humility, forgiveness, and relationship satisfaction are multidimensional concepts. They are open to personalized interpretations, which means that they can play out differently for different people, which could be understood better using a qualitative analysis.

### ***Practical Implications of the study***

The results of this study can be valuable for future research in relational contexts. Further, they can be used to plan interventions among couples. The present study can, therefore, also have important implications for marriage therapy and counselling.

### ***Suggestion for future research***

- The present study can be replicated using a sample with different demographic variables, such as a different duration of the marriage, or understanding these dynamics in couples with children.
- A mixed-methods study could be incorporated to better understand the interconnections of the variables. Last, developing or using scales from the Indian

## Relationship Between Relational Humility, Forgiveness, and Relationship Satisfaction in Married Individuals

context would make the study more precise culturally, as cultural differences may exist in the relationships between these variables.

### REFERENCES

- Arya, B., & Kaushik, N. (2015). Forgiveness and relationship quality: A dyadic perspective. *Indian Journal of Health and Wellbeing*, 6(1), 57.
- Askari, Z. (2016). Forgiveness and its relationship with marital satisfaction: a sectional study. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology, Volume 3, Issue 3, No. 10*, 84.
- Bell, C. A. (2016). Salt of All Virtues: A Model of Humility, Partner and Self-Forgiveness, and Romantic Relationships.
- Bell, C. A., & Fincham, F. D. (2017). Humility, Forgiveness, and Emerging Adult Female Romantic Relationships. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 45(1), 149–160. doi: 10.1111/jmft.12292
- Davis, D. E., Hook, J. N., Worthington Jr, E. L., Van Tongeren, D. R., Gartner, A. L., Jennings, D. J., & Emmons, R. A. (2011). Relational humility: Conceptualizing and measuring humility as a personality judgment. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 93(3), 225-234.
- Davis, D. E., Worthington, E. L., & Hook, J. N. (2010). Humility: Review of measurement strategies and conceptualization as personality judgment. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 5(4), 243–252. doi: 10.1080/17439761003791672
- Dommaraju, P. (2016). Divorce and Separation in India. *Population and Development Review*, 42(2), 195–223. Doi: 10.1111.
- Farrell, J. E., Hook, J. N., Ramos, M., Davis, D. E., Tongeren, D. R. V., & Ruiz, J. M. (2015). Humility and relationship outcomes in couples: The mediating role of commitment. *Couple and Family Psychology: Research and Practice*, 4(1), 14–26. Doi: 10.1037/cfp0000033.
- Funk, J. L. & Rogge, R. D. (2007). Testing the ruler with item response theory: Increasing precision of measurement for relationship satisfaction with the Couples Satisfaction Index. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 21, 572-583.
- Gayatrivadvu, Poonguzhali. Ofelia, & Vijayabanu. (2014). A study on relationship between forgiveness, resilience and marital satisfaction among married individuals." *Indian Journal of Positive Psychology* 5, no. 4: 382-387.
- Graham, J. M., Diebels, K. J., & Barnow, Z. B. (2011). The reliability of relationship satisfaction: A reliability generalization meta-analysis. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 25(1), 39–48. doi: 10.1037/a0022441.
- Letszring, T. D., Colman, D. E., Roberts, B. W., & Krzyzaniak, S. L. (2017). Realistic Accuracy Model. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318876266\\_Realistic\\_Accuracy\\_Model](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318876266_Realistic_Accuracy_Model).
- Marshall-Youquoi, H. M. (2018). The Role of Humility in Promoting Forgiveness Through Expressive Writing.
- Miller, J., & Tedder, B. (2011). The discrepancy between expectations and reality: Satisfaction in romantic relationships. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 21, 572-583.
- Nambi, S. (2005). Marriage, mental health and the Indian legislation. *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, 47(1), 3. Doi: 10.4103/0019-5545.46067.
- Powers, C., Nam, R. K., Rowatt, W. C., & Hill, P. C. (2007). Associations between humility, spiritual transcendence, and forgiveness. *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion, Volume 18*, 75–94. doi: 10.1163/ej.9789004158511.i-301.32

## Relationship Between Relational Humility, Forgiveness, and Relationship Satisfaction in Married Individuals

- Rusbult, C. E., Agnew, C., & Arriaga, X. (2011). The investment model of commitment processes. *Department of Psychological Sciences Faculty Publications*. Paper 26.
- Thompson, L. Y., Snyder, C. R., Hoffman, L., Michael, S. T., Rasmussen, H. N., Billings, L. S., ... & Roberts, D. E. (2005). Dispositional forgiveness of self, others, and situations. *Journal of personality*, 73(2), 313-360.
- Tongeren, D. R. V., Davis, D. E., & Hook, J. N. (2014). Social benefits of humility: Initiating and maintaining romantic relationships. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 9(4), 313–321. Doi: 10.1080/17439760.2014.898317.
- Urcan, J. D. (2011). Relationship of Family of Origin Qualities and Forgiveness to Marital Satisfaction. Hofstra University.
- Wickham, R. E., & Knee, C. R. (2012). Interdependence theory and the actor-partner interdependence model: Where theory and method converge. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 16(4), 375-393.

### **Acknowledgement**

The author appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

**How to cite this article:** Buthello E.& Chadha N. (2021). Relationship Between Relational Humility, Forgiveness, and Relationship Satisfaction in Married Individuals. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 9(3), 1084-1090. DIP:18.01.099.20210903, DOI:10.25215/0903.099