

A Study to Assess the Impact of Self- Compassion on Willingness to Forgive Infidelity in Married People

Ms. Harshita Sharma^{1*}, Dr. Annie Khanam²

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the intricate interplay between self-compassion and forgiveness in the context of marital infidelity. It aims to evaluate how self-compassion influences the readiness to forgive infidelity among married individuals. The study surveyed 140 married individuals, aged 30 to 45 from Delhi and nearby regions through purposive sampling. The Self-Compassion Scale Short Form (SCS-SF) and Rye Forgiveness Scale (RFS) assessed self-compassion and forgiveness willingness, respectively. Statistical analyses, including correlation, regression and t-test, were conducted using SPSS v21. The study found a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.709$, $p < .01$) between self-compassion and forgiveness readiness, thus supporting the study hypothesis. Furthermore, gender differences were observed where males exhibited higher self-compassion ($M = 43.03$) and willingness to forgive infidelity ($M = 52.82$) compared to females (self-compassion: $M = 40.62$, willingness to forgive infidelity: $M = 46.82$). Overall, this study sheds light on the nuanced dynamics between self-compassion and forgiveness within marital contexts, offering valuable implications for relationship counseling, support groups, restorative justice programs, and educational settings.

Keywords: *Self-Compassion, Infidelity Forgiveness, Marital Relationships*

Existing within a social context, individuals experience both positive and negative impacts on their mental health and overall well-being through their interpersonal relationships (Canevello & Crocker, 2017; Feeney & Collins, 2015, as cited in Miyagawa & Taniguchi, 2020). However, these connections can also lead to emotional distress when individuals face breaches in trust or other interpersonal transgressions (Worthington et al., 2007, as cited in Miyagawa & Taniguchi, 2020).

Infidelity in marriage can profoundly damage trust and intimacy, resulting in intense emotional turmoil such as feelings of betrayal, anger, and sadness. This upheaval often undermines the fundamental aspects of a relationship. Forgiveness emerges as a crucial aspect of rebuilding and healing from such experiences, but it entails more than simply pardoning the wrongdoing; it represents a complex journey. At the heart of forgiveness lies

¹Student, Amity University, Noida, India

²Assistant Professor, Amity University, Noida, India

*Corresponding Author

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self-compassion, which involves treating oneself with kindness, empathy, and understanding during difficult times.

Self- Compassion

As outlined by Neff (2003), self-compassion encompasses three primary elements: Firstly, self-kindness involves the capacity to offer oneself encouragement and compassion instead of resorting to excessive self-criticism. Secondly, common humanity entails recognizing that one's experiences, including difficulties and struggles, are part of the universal human condition rather than unique or isolating occurrences. Lastly, mindfulness refers to maintaining a balanced awareness of one's challenging thoughts and emotions without allowing them to overwhelm or suppress them entirely.

Research distinguishes self-compassion from self-esteem, highlighting its association with lower anxiety and more consistent self-worth (Neff & Vonk, 2009, as cited in Neff & Beretvas, 2013) without the drawbacks often linked with high self-esteem. Therefore, self-compassion offers many benefits of self-esteem while mitigating its potential drawbacks.

Research conducted with 140 couples provided empirical evidence supporting the notion that self-compassion can serve as a predictor of marital satisfaction. The study's results suggest that individuals who exhibit self-compassion tend to be more resilient in navigating the challenges inherent in marriage (Janjani et al., 2017, as cited in Fahimdanesh et al., 2020).

Willingness to forgive Infidelity

According to Rye et al. (2001), forgiving infidelity comprises three essential aspects. Firstly, cognitive forgiveness entails reshaping perceptions of both the individual who committed the infidelity and the act itself, possibly by reframing negative judgments. Secondly, affective forgiveness involves changing emotional reactions toward the individual and infidelity, potentially reducing anger and fostering empathy. Lastly, behavioral forgiveness involves adjusting behaviors in response to infidelity, which could include expressing forgiveness verbally or nonverbally while minimizing retaliatory actions.

Perspective-taking and empathy, although distinct, are both associated with forgiveness. Perspective-taking involves understanding others' viewpoints and serves as a precursor to empathy. Empathy, rooted in perspective-taking, facilitates understanding and compassion, crucial for forgiveness and relationship repair (McCullough et al., 1997, as cited in Cochran, 2014).

As per relational interdependence theory, couples deeply committed and satisfied in their relationship tend to prioritize its preservation, even in challenging situations like infidelity. Their commitment arises from the substantial investment, despite the betrayal of infidelity, these couples are inclined to opt for forgiveness (Rusbult et al., 2005, as cited in Dacka et al., 2023).

Relationship Between Self- Compassion and Willingness to Forgive Infidelity

Numerous research investigations have explored the relationship between self-compassion and the inclination to forgive infidelity, yielding varied findings. While certain studies propose a positive connection between self-compassion and forgiveness of infidelity, suggesting that individuals with self-compassion can adeptly navigate betrayal in a

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constructive manner (Tandler & Peterson, 2018). Others indicate a negative correlation between self-compassion and forgiveness of infidelity. This implies that individuals high in self-compassion may prioritize self-preservation and setting boundaries when faced with betrayal (Wu et al., 2018).

These conflicting findings may be influenced by various factors, including the severity and frequency of the infidelity, the nature and duration of the relationship, the remorse and motivation of the offending party, as well as the cultural and personal beliefs of the forgiver. Understanding the relationship between self-compassion and willingness to forgive infidelity in married people is essential to deepen theoretical understanding and offer culturally sensitive interventions. This understanding can inform interventions to promote enduring marriages by aiding couples in surmounting the challenges of forgiveness and rebuilding trust post-betrayal.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Mosharafi et al. (2024) study investigated how self-compassion and emotional maturity relate to the likelihood of marital infidelity. The study found that higher levels of self-compassion and emotional maturity were linked to lower chances of marital infidelity. In other words, being more emotionally mature and self-compassionate was associated with a reduced likelihood of cheating in marriage.

Another study by Maheshwari and Barman (2023) aimed to grasp the viewpoints of young unmarried individuals in India concerning divorce and its justifications. Results indicated a tendency among participants to favor divorce as a solution for cases involving infidelity rather than incompatibility. Participants expressed the belief that instances of infidelity had a more significant impact on mental and physical health.

Parihar et al. (2023) study investigated the relationships among demographic variables, self-compassion, and interdependent happiness within married Hindu couples in India. Results revealed that certain demographic factors such as age, family size and duration of marriage to be positively correlated with self-compassion. Conversely, the number of children and SES demonstrated negative correlations with self-compassion.

Another study by Záhorcová et al. (2023) used quantitative techniques to explore gender differences in attitudes towards forgiveness in romantic relationships among 649 participants from Slovakia. Surprisingly, the findings diverged from typical expectations. Men showed a greater inclination to prioritize forgiveness as essential in relationships compared to women, with more men expressing readiness to forgive their partners unconditionally.

Miyagawa and Taniguchi (2020) study investigated the impact of self-compassion on forgiving others for interpersonal errors. They surveyed 254 individuals aged 21 to 59 in Japan. The results suggest that self-compassionate individuals seem to mitigate rumination, promoting emotional detachment from past conflicts and facilitating forgiveness towards those who have wronged them.

METHODOLOGY

Objective

To examine the relationship between self-compassion and the willingness to forgive infidelity in married people.

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Hypothesis

There will be a positive correlation between self-compassion and the willingness to forgive infidelity in married people.

Research Design

The study utilized a correlational research design to explore the relationship between self-compassion and forgiveness of infidelity among married individuals. The purpose of this method is to determine whether changes in one variable are related to changes in another, without implying causation.

Variables

Independent Variable- the factor that is manipulated or varied to observe its effect on DV. Self-compassion is IV as it can influence the capacity to forgive infidelity. Dependent Variable- the outcome that is measured to see how it is influenced by the IV. Willingness to forgive infidelity is DV as it is affected by self-compassion level.

Participants

The survey collected data from 140 married individuals through purposive sampling. The sample comprises 44.6% males and 44.6% females, with a minority identifying differently or opting not to disclose their gender. Aged between 30 to 45, hailing from Delhi and various other Indian regions, participants had encountered infidelity (emotional, physical, solitary, or technological) in their marital relationships. Employment status was also factored in, with 65.5% being employed and 34.5% unemployed participants.

Tools Used

Self-Compassion Scale Short Form

Self-Compassion Scale Short Form (SCS-SF) was developed by Raes et al. (2011). It is a 5-point Likert scale ranging from never to always consisting of 12 items. This 12-item scale measures three aspects of self-compassion: self-kindness vs. self-judgment, common humanity vs. isolation, and mindfulness vs. over-identification. The scale has good reliability (Cronbach's alpha 0.861) and validity (convergent and discriminant validity). The scoring is simple, item number 1,4,8,9,11 and 12 are reverse scored (1=5, 2=4, 3=3, 4=2, 5=1).

Rye Forgiveness Scale

Rye Forgiveness Scale (RFS) was developed by Rye et al. (2001). It is a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree consisting of 15 items. This 15-item scale assesses affective, cognitive, and behavioral responses to forgiveness in romantic relationships, particularly among college women who have experienced wrongdoing. The scale has good reliability (Cronbach's alpha 0.87) and validity (convergent and discriminant validity). The scoring is simple, item number 1,3,4,5,8,10,12 and 14 are reverse scored (1=5, 2=4, 3=3, 4=2, 5=1).

Statistical Technique

Pearson's product moment correlation analysis, linear regression analysis, and independent t-test were among the statistical analyses performed on the gathered data using SPSS v21.

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RESULT ANALYSIS

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables

Variables	n	M	SD	1	2
1. Self-Compassion	140	41.72	6.98	—	.709**
2. Willingness to Forgive Infidelity	140	49.77	9.76	.709**	—

Note. M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation ** $p < .01$

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics alongside correlation coefficients. The substantial correlation coefficient of ($r=.709$), significant at the $p < .01$ level, underscores a strong positive relationship between self-compassion and readiness to forgive instances of infidelity. This implies that individuals who possess higher levels of self-compassion tend to demonstrate a greater inclination towards forgiving their partners for acts of infidelity within the context of their relationships. Such findings shed light on the pivotal role of self-compassion in fostering forgiveness and reconciliation following instances of betrayal, suggesting its potential significance in promoting relationship resilience and well-being.

Table 2: Regression Coefficient of Self Compassion on Willingness to Forgive Infidelity

Variable	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	8.40	3.55		2.36	.019
Self-Compassion	.99	.08	.709	11.81	.000

Note. N = 140, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .503$

Table 2 shows the impact of self-compassion on willingness to forgive infidelity in married people. The R^2 value of .503 indicates that the predictor variable accounts for 50.3% of the variance in the outcome variable. With an F-statistic of 139.51 and a significance level of $p < .001$, these results demonstrate a statistically significant relationship. Specifically, the analysis reveals that self-compassion positively predicts the willingness to forgive infidelity ($\beta = .709$, $p < .001$), suggesting that higher levels of self-compassion are associated with a greater propensity to forgive instances of infidelity within marital relationships.

Table 3: Mean Comparison of Male and Female on Self Compassion and Willingness to Forgive Infidelity

Variables	Male		Female		t(126)	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Self Compassion	43.03	7.45	40.62	5.84	2.03	.044	0.36
Willingness to Forgive Infidelity	52.82	11.62	46.82	6.60	3.59	.000	0.63

Note. M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation, t= T value, $p < .05$

Table 3 shows the mean disparities between males and females concerning two constructs. Noteworthy distinctions emerged in self-compassion, as indicated by a significant difference with $t(126) = 2.03$, $p < .05$. The results unveiled that males displayed higher self-compassion scores ($M= 43.03$) compared to females ($M= 40.62$). Cohen's d suggested a small effect size, indicating a modest variation between two groups. Similarly, substantial mean differences were observed in willingness to forgive infidelity, with $t(126) = 3.59$, $p < .05$. Males exhibited greater readiness to forgive infidelity ($M= 52.82$) in contrast to females ($M= 46.82$). Cohen's d reflected a medium effect size, indicating pronounced variation between two groups.

DISCUSSION

The study aimed to assess the impact of self-compassion on willingness to forgive infidelity among married individuals. The objective for the study was to assess the relationship between self-compassion and willingness to forgive infidelity in married people. In line with the objective, hypothesis was formulated i.e. There will be a positive correlation between self-compassion and willingness to forgive infidelity in married people.

The correlation coefficient of $r = 0.709$ at $p < .01$ revealed a robust positive association between self-compassion and the inclination to forgive infidelity in married people, thus supporting the study hypothesis. The correlation observed between self-compassion and willingness to forgive infidelity likely arises from a multitude of psychological and relational factors. For instance, higher levels of self-compassion are often associated with a secure attachment style, characterized by feelings of self-worth and expectations of acceptance from others. This sense of security may make forgiveness more attainable, as individuals do not perceive infidelity as a reflection of their own value. Another possible explanation for the correlation obtained is that self-compassion nurtures empathy, facilitating a deeper understanding and forgiveness of others. A person with a strong sense of self-compassion may empathize with their partner's struggles that contributed to the infidelity, viewing it as a human flaw rather than a personal affront.

Additionally, the coefficient of determination R^2 value of 0.503, or 50.3%, signifies that self-compassion accounts for approximately half of the variance in the willingness to forgive infidelity. This indicates a moderate level of predictive capability, that slightly more than half of the fluctuations in individuals' willingness to forgive can be attributed to differences in their levels of self-compassion. Self- Compassion predicting willingness to forgive infidelity can be explained by multiple factors. As the study was conducted on Indian participants the cultural context would have been a major source for instance, the substantial social stigma surrounding marital discord can prompt individuals to turn to self-compassion as a means of coping with societal pressure and striving towards forgiveness and reconciliation to mitigate potential repercussions. Also in India, values like non-violence, duty, and forgiveness encourage people to forgive, and being kind to oneself fits in with these values. So, being kind to oneself can make it more likely that someone will forgive.

Furthermore, males displayed higher levels of self-compassion ($M = 43.03$) and greater willingness to forgive infidelity ($M = 52.82$) compared to females (self-compassion: $M = 40.62$, forgiveness: $M = 46.82$). The results are even supported by research studies, for instance, a study where females exhibited slightly lower levels of self-compassion as compared to males (Yarnell et al., 2015). Additionally, a meta-analytic review highlighted that men's self-compassion and self-esteem are influenced by factors such as shame and adherence to masculine norms, with higher levels of shame and adherence to these norms associated with lower levels of self-compassion and self-esteem (Reilly et al., 2014). Another study revealed that male participants, particularly those endorsing growth beliefs, showed greater forgiveness towards emotional or solitary infidelity compared to females (Thompson et al., 2020). Furthermore, another study conducted by a dating site Ashley Madison found that men are more inclined to forgive an affair than women. Specifically, 86% of men stated they would forgive a partner for straying, whereas only 82% of women expressed the same willingness (Mens Health Staff, 2021).

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study add valuable insights to the existing body of research by illuminating the intricate interplay between self-compassion and forgiveness of infidelity. Through these insights, the study aims to inform more effective interventions geared towards promoting forgiveness and fostering healthier relationship dynamics among couples confronting challenges such as infidelity.

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Conflict of Interest

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