

Research Paper

## Relationship between Relationship Satisfaction, Resilience, Optimism, and Forgiveness among Young Married Couples in India

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### ABSTRACT

Marriage is a religious sacrament between two individuals. Nowadays many couples are easily opting for the option of divorce. There are many factors that play an important role in maintaining a satisfactory marriage. The aim of the study was to investigate the relationship between relationship satisfaction, resilience, optimism, and forgiveness among young married couples in India. A correlational study was employed using purposive sampling techniques. The study followed a simple procedure. Informed Consent was acquired from the participants. The demographic details were collected as well. The scales were administered in the following order: Relationship Assessment Scale, Brief Resilience Scale, Life Oriented Test–Revised, and Marital Forgiveness Scale (Dispositional). The analysis was conducted on a sample of 100 participants (50 males, 50 females) who were between the age range of 25-35 years. The sample consisted of young married Indian couples living in India who fall in the range of 1-10 years of marriage. Descriptive statistics were computed for the variables. A Pearson’s Product correlation was used and the results obtained were used to validate the hypotheses.

**Keywords:** *Young Married Couples, India, Relationship satisfaction, Resilience, Optimism, Forgiveness*

Marriage is a social institute. Since our childhood, we have been noticing our parents as a couple and how they have handled each and every situation in a responsible way. As children, we have picked up on our parent’s footwork in regards to maintaining a relationship. We have mostly been exposed to them as our ideal couple, and that’s the same behavior individuals practice when they get into this holy bond of marriage.

A romantic relationship is a widespread feature of human society and is one of the most influential factors in daily life (Kawamichi., 2016). India serves as an interesting context to study romantic relationships because Indian mythology (e.g., *Mahabharata*), and Sanskrit literature (e.g., *Puranas, Kama Sutra*) hold one of the most passionate and strong views in regard to the human race’s relationship satisfaction and understanding between the spouse.

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## **Relationship between Relationship Satisfaction, Resilience, Optimism, and Forgiveness among Young Married Couples in India**

A deep meaningful passionate love can have various facets and types. In general, the romantic love concept has been adopted by the Western culture, mostly arranged marriages are practiced in the Eastern culture and prominently seen in India. Not all individuals have the same interests and types for their romantic relationships, the love language, nonverbal behavior, qualities, and those little things that matter are folded into many types of relationships like infatuation, casual dating, friends with benefits, dating, cohabitation, commitment, marriage, and open relationship.

The marriage lifestyle has been evolving rapidly and many divorce cases are rising lately. Past few generations, couples have been much harder on themselves and are used to making their marriage work by fixing it. In today's time, individuals' needs are supposed to be met instantly and if not done then they call off the marriage. If the base of the marriage isn't strong, the probability of the pillar of marriage being shaken is 10 times greater.

Relationship satisfaction is defined as an interpersonal evaluation of the positivity of feelings for one's partner and attraction to the relationship (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). The majority of behaviours used to maintain relationships are prosocial, which help promote relational closeness, trust, and like in the relationship. Commitment is the biggest factor that holds the relationship. Commitment is enriched when the couple experiences relationship satisfaction. Not only that but expressing your intimate feelings and self-disclosure make a lot of difference in the outlook of relationship satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction is one of the factors which is always progressive and subjective to one's life.

A research study by Latifa and Mar'at., 2011 on the relationship between resilience and marital stability was conducted in Indonesia. There were twenty – nine participants (5 men, and twenty - four women) married. The results indicate that resilience contributes to managing problems in married life which enables them to endure, persevere, and negotiate adversarial circumstances. Resilience protects the relationship from external stressors and involves strengths in couples' functioning that protect them against stressors and challenges (Connolly, 2005). A person with resilience also can work as a team with their couple and can make contributions to solving problems during hard times, thereby strengthening their marriage (Farmer, 1999).

A study on a review of the relationship between religious attitude, optimism, and attachment styles with marital satisfaction in the spouses employed in the education department by Bandaeypour and Samavi., 2013. The statistical population consists of three hundred and eighty teachers in Iran who were selected by a random stratified sampling method. The result indicated that optimism had a positive and significant relationship with marital satisfaction.

A lot of studies and research have been done on resilience. In layman's words, a resilient person is someone who has the ability to bounce back during stressful situations. Resilience can be defined as, "Resilience is the capacity and dynamic process of adaptively overcoming stress and adversity while maintaining normal psychological and physical functioning" (Russo et al., 2012; Rutter, 2012b; Southwick and Charney, 2012). There are two ways to understand resilience, one is when a person is exposed to a threatening and stressful event while bouncing back and using coping strategies. The second one is, individuals are doing great, and that sets their behaviour to the expectations.

## Relationship between Relationship Satisfaction, Resilience, Optimism, and Forgiveness among Young Married Couples in India

A research study on resilience as a predictor of marital adjustment among couples by Ahmad and Jhangir, 2020. According to Masten and Colleagues (1990), resilience is the capacity to adapt despite threatening and challenging circumstances. Resilience plays a vital role in dealing with stressful situations in married life.

The aim of positive psychology is to begin to catalyze a change in the focus of psychology from preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to building positive qualities (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p.5). Optimism is defined as, “Optimism is a tendency to believe that good rather than bad things will happen” (Scheier & Carver, 1985). Learned optimism is very much a positive psychology concept; it’s the opposite of learned helplessness: a phenomenon whereby individuals believe they are incapable of changing their circumstances after repeatedly experiencing a stressful event (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978; Seligman & Garber, 1980; Maier & Seligman, 2016). There are types of optimism as follows: explanatory style, dispositional style, situational optimism, unrealistic optimism, strategic optimism, realistic optimism, and comparative optimism.

A study conducted on Optimism in close relationships: How seeing things in a positive light makes them so by Srivastava et al., 2006 examined dating couples over a span of a year with one hundred and eight couples which leads to (N = 216) participants. Couples were exclusive and had been dating for 6 months to sixteen months. Whereas twelve percent of couples were cohabiting. Participants' ages ranged from eighteen to twenty-five years. Participants were paid \$15/hr for their participation. The hypothesis was that optimists and their partners would experience their relationships as more satisfying. The actor-partner interdependence model (APIM) the analysis uses optimism to predict relationship satisfaction in couples. The results indicated that optimists reported greater relationship satisfaction.

Another research study on path analysis of the relationship between optimism, humor, affectivity, and marital satisfaction among infertile couples by Ostovar et al., 2020. The sample consists of one hundred and sixty Iranians (eighty women; eighty men) who used to visit infertility clinics. The findings present that optimism would predict more marital satisfaction and it was proven right; a positive and significant relationship between optimism and marital satisfaction among infertile couples.

Forgiveness means different things to different people. It’s all about perspective and how we perceive it. Generally, it involves a decision to let go of resentment and thoughts of revenge. Letting go of grudges has many benefits, an individual can have less anxiety, improved mental health, lower blood pressure, and improved self-esteem. Being hurt by your close ones can break your trust at times, and also create anger, frustration, and sadness. Generally letting go of and forgiving someone, gives relief to an individual and improves their interpersonal relationship. There are seven steps of forgiveness, acknowledge, consider, accept, determine, repair, learn, and forgive.

A study by Sheldon et al., 2014 on the relationship between forgiveness tendency, communication of forgiveness, and relationship satisfaction in married and dating couples. One hundred and seventy-four participants filled out the survey forms regarding their attitudes and beliefs about forgiveness after an isolation transgression and their general response tendency in a relationship. Participants were even asked about their overall relationship satisfaction after the event. Pearson-product moment correlations showed that

## Relationship between Relationship Satisfaction, Resilience, Optimism, and Forgiveness among Young Married Couples in India

for married partners, the tendency to forgive was positively related to the use of lessening non-verbal forgiveness strategies.

Another study on the relationship between Forgiveness and Marital Satisfaction by Mirzadeh and Fallahchai., 2012. The study focuses on the relationship between forgiveness and marital satisfaction in married women. The sample consisted of two hundred people using stratified sampling. The data collection included 3 measures of the demographic questionnaire. Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis of data stated a positively significant correlation between marital satisfaction and forgiveness.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study was conducted amongst the young married couples in India. Young married couples All the information including demographic information and responses to the used instruments was collected by the respondents over a period of two months. All the participants were asked to fill out the form keeping their current marriage life.

The questionnaire (google form) was sent via social media platforms. The participants were first briefed a little about the study, then they had to give informed consent. All the scales were self-administered. If participants had any queries or were unable to understand the test items, they were allowed to reach out to the researcher. The data collected was kept confidential and only accessible to the supervisor and the researcher.

The sample (n = 100) consisted of 50 males and 50 females across India. The inclusion criteria for the participants were as follows, their age had to be between 25-35 years, their years of marriage should be between one to ten years and all the participants should be the citizens of India who are currently residing in India. The study considered purposive sampling techniques to collect the data according to the inclusion criteria.

#### ***Four instruments have been used to collect the data in the research:***

The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) was developed by Hendrick, S.S (1988). It is a 7-item scale designed to measure general relationship satisfaction. It is measured using a 5 – point scale ranging from 1 (low satisfaction) to 5 (high satisfaction). Items 4 and 7 are reversed-scored. Scoring is kept continuous. The higher the score, the more satisfied the respondent is with his/her relationship. Scoring is kept continuous. The higher the score, the more satisfied the respondent is with his/her relationship. Through a newspaper questionnaire, a door-to-door survey, and 3 laboratory experiments, the authors examined a proposed effect of shared participation in novel and arousing activities on experienced relationship quality. RAS was administered to 125 college students who reported themselves to be “in love.” The scale correlated significantly with measures of love, sexual attitudes, self-disclosure, commitment, and investment in a relationship. In the second study it was administered to 57 college student couples in an ongoing relationship where an alpha reliability of .86 and correlation with relevant relationship variables.

A Brief Resilience Scale was developed by Smith and colleagues (2008). It is a 6-item scale with three positively worded and three negatively worded. Items 2, 4, and 6 are reverse-scoring items. The test is scored by finding the mean of all the six items and scores range between 1-5, where 1 represents low resilience and 5 represents high resilience. BRS is measured on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. The scale was administered to four different samples.

## Relationship between Relationship Satisfaction, Resilience, Optimism, and Forgiveness among Young Married Couples in India

Sample 1 included 128 undergraduate students while sample 2 consisted of 64 undergraduate students. Sample 3 consisted of 112 cardiac rehabilitation patients and sample 4 consisted of 50 women who either had fibromyalgia ( $n = 20$ ) or were healthy controls ( $n=30$ ). The samples were included from a medium-sized metropolitan area in the southwestern U.S. Internal consistency was good and Cronbach alpha ranged between 0.81 – 0.91 (sample 1 = 0.84, 2 = 0.87, 3 = 0.80, 4 = 0.91). One-month test-retest reliability for 48 participants in sample 2 was 0.69- and the three-month test-retest reliability for 61 participants in sample 3 was 0.62. Zero-order correlations were found between the BRS and personal characteristics, social relations, coping, and health outcomes for each sample.

The Life Orientation Test 1985 was developed by Scheier and Carver in 1985 to measure optimism and then it was revised in 1994. The revised version consists of 10 items with 4 fillers, 3 positively framed items, and 3 negatively framed items. The scale is measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Negatively framed items are reversed coded and then the overall score is calculated by summing up the responses for all six items. The norms were established on a sample of college students ( $N = 2055$ ) and bypass patients ( $N = 159$ ). Test-retest reliability was tested for 4 months, 12 months, 24 months, and 28 months which ranged between 0.56 – 0.79. Cronbach's alpha was 0.78 indicating an acceptable level of internal consistency.

Dr. F. D. Fincham and S. R. H. Beach developed the Marital Forgiveness Scale (MFS) in 2002 to measure a person's dispositional forgiveness. It consists of 6 – items. The scale is measured on a 6- point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 6 (Strongly Agree). In the study 66 British couples participated. Husbands averaged 32.64 ( $SD = 7.69$ ) and wives 30.66 ( $SD = 6.23$ ) years of age. The husband or wife had completed a university undergraduate degree. The scale yields both positive and negative dimensions. The study aims to analyze the Cronbach alpha reliability of the MFS. Reliability indices of each subscale were obtained using Cronbach's alpha: positive dimension, wives = .79, husbands = .78 and negative dimension, wives = .81, husbands = .78.

## RESULTS

The first section shows the results of the descriptive statistics including means and standard deviations of the variable's relationship satisfaction, resilience, optimism, and forgiveness. In the second section, the table shows Pearson's product-moment correlation ( $r$ ) results between the variables Relationship Satisfaction, Resilience, Optimism, and Forgiveness.

### Descriptive Statistics of the variables

*Table 1.1: Mean, SD of Relationship Satisfaction, Resilience, Optimism, and Forgiveness among young married Indian couples (N = 100).*

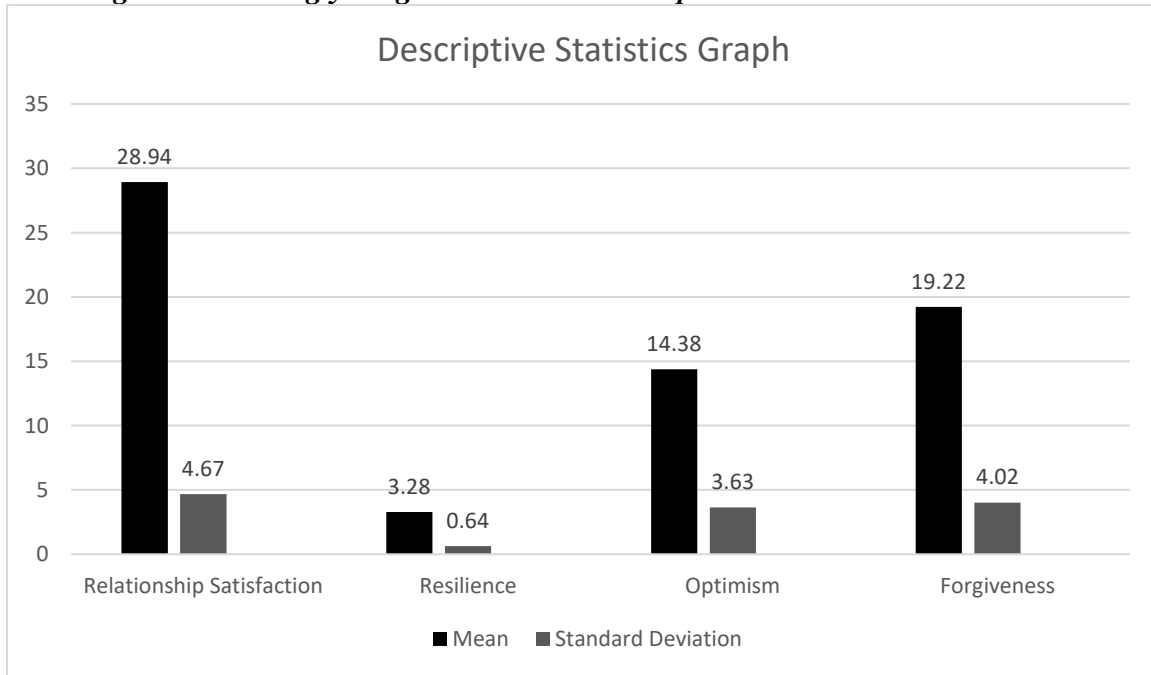
	Relationship Satisfaction	Resilience	Optimism	Forgiveness
Mean	28.940	3.281	14.380	19.220
Std. Deviation	4.679	0.647	3.634	4.029

Above table 1.1 mentions the descriptive statistics, which consist of the mean and standard deviation scores of the variables. The mean value and standard deviation of relationship satisfaction are 28.94 and 4.67 respectively. The mean value and standard deviation of resilience are 3.28 and 0.64 respectively. The mean value and standard deviation of

**Relationship between Relationship Satisfaction, Resilience, Optimism, and Forgiveness among Young Married Couples in India**

optimism are 14.38 and 3.63 respectively. The mean value and standard deviation of forgiveness are 19.22 and 4.02 respectively.

**Figure 1.1 shows the Mean and SD of Relationship Satisfaction, Resilience, Optimism, and Forgiveness among young married Indian couples.**



The above figure 1.1 shows the descriptive statistics graphical representation of the mean and SD of Relationship Satisfaction, Resilience, Optimism, and Forgiveness among young married Indian couples.

**Table 1.2: Pearson’s correlation of Relationship Satisfaction, Resilience, Optimism, and Forgiveness for young married Indian couples. (N=100)**

Variable		Relationship Satisfaction	Resilience	Optimism	Forgiveness
Relationship Satisfaction	Pearson's r	—			
	p-value	—			
Resilience	Pearson's r	0.339***	—		
	p-value	< .001	—		
Optimism	Pearson's r	0.312**	0.353***	—	
	p-value	0.002	< .001	—	
Forgiveness	Pearson's r	-0.202*	0.177	0.022	—
	p-value	0.044	0.079	0.829	—

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

The above table 1.2, shows the results of Pearson’s product-moment correlation between the variables, Relationship Satisfaction, Resilience, Optimism, and Forgiveness for young married Indian couples.

As can be seen from the table, Relationship Satisfaction and Resilience amongst young married couples in India show a + significant correlation of  $r(100) = 0.339$ ,  $p < .001$ . Relationship Satisfaction and Optimism amongst young married couples in India show a +

## Relationship between Relationship Satisfaction, Resilience, Optimism, and Forgiveness among Young Married Couples in India

significant correlation of  $r(100) = 0.312, p < 0.002$ . Relationship Satisfaction and Forgiveness amongst young married couples in India show a – significant correlation of  $r(100) = -0.202, p < 0.044$ . Optimism and Resilience amongst young married couples in India show a + significant correlation of  $r(100) = 0.353, p < .001$ . Optimism and Forgiveness amongst young married couples in India show a + correlation and a weak significance of  $r(100) = 0.022, p < 0.829$ . Resilience and Forgiveness amongst young married couples in India show a + correlation and a weak significance of  $r(100) = 0.177, p < 0.079$ .

Thus, the results indicate that the correlation between Relationship Satisfaction and Resilience among young married Indian couples is valid. The correlation between Relationship Satisfaction and Optimism among young married Indian couples is valid. The correlation between Relationship Satisfaction and Forgiveness among young married Indian couples is invalid. The correlation between Optimism and Resilience among young married Indian couples is valid. The correlation between Optimism and Forgiveness among young married Indian couples is invalid. The correlation between Resilience and Forgiveness among young married Indian couples is invalid.

### DISCUSSION

This study was primarily carried out to examine a correlational relationship between Relationship satisfaction, Resilience, Optimism, and Forgiveness in young married couples in India. The result obtained will help to contribute to the understanding of the factors that play a role in a young married couple's lives.

The results found a Positive correlation between relationship satisfaction and resilience among young married couples in India. As the partners are resilient towards each other, they make a good team and overcome hurdles together, which leads to satisfaction in one's relationship. This not only provides a sense of teamwork but also makes the marriage stronger and gives hope to solve future hurdles and concerns in one's marriage.

The study on the relationship between resilience and marital stability finds out that resilience enables them to endure, persevere, and negotiate adversarial circumstances. A person with resilience also can work as a 'team' with their couple and can make contributions to solving problems during hard times, thereby strengthening their marriage (Farmer 1999). As Carrere, et. Al. (2000) says 'glorifying the struggle' which is when a person has gone through difficult times but perceives the marriage to be stronger because of these difficult experiences. According to Latifa et al findings, their marriage is the center of their lives, and they are proud of the struggles they have gone through which gives satisfaction to the relationship. Moreover, the team approach creates a sense of competence and hope for the future and develops unity and a sense of oneness, which would make the marriage long-lasting and increase the level of relationship satisfaction (Latifa, 2011).

A Positive correlation between relationship satisfaction and optimism amongst young married couples in India was noticed. When a partner is optimistic about any hurdle they face in a marriage, the other partner feels a sense of support and would want to come to a middle ground and think of solutions that are in favor of both partners. Moreover, an optimist would see their relationship positively with their partner which will boost their trust and love and lead to satisfaction in their relationship. Optimism would lead the partners to be motivated, reach a constructive outcome and deal with the problem with the utmost sanity. Optimism in a marriage life will not only be beneficial in the early years of marriage

## **Relationship between Relationship Satisfaction, Resilience, Optimism, and Forgiveness among Young Married Couples in India**

but throughout the lifetime, as the base of the foundation is strong which will lead to supportive behavior and satisfaction in their relationship.

Similar findings were reported by Willoughby et al. (2020) found that married couples' belief in their marriage would increase their commitment and this positive belief was indirectly related to a higher level of relationship satisfaction.

The results say that there is a negative correlation between relationship satisfaction and forgiveness amongst young married couples in India. Not many married couples have a forgiving nature due to many factors like their personality, and their upbringing and they might have always seen their parents as their role models and looked up to them in regard to marriage. Forgiveness should come willingly, if it is forced, it will lead to more problems in the future. Thus, not all couples are flexible enough to respect their mistakes and be merciful to accept and tolerate them. This could probably be one of the reasons why the partners don't feel satisfied in a relationship if the other one isn't forgiving. Secondly, the ego might come in between and not let the partners put their guard down to forgive. This would lead to a lack of satisfaction in their relationship. Moreover, it would create a lot of misunderstandings between the partners.

McNulty (2008) has shown that forgiveness is adaptive for couples only when relationships do not have high levels of negative communication (2008), ostensibly because there is a "penalty" for bad behavior, so the bad behavior continues and over time erodes relationship satisfaction. Others have observed similar findings (Luchies, Finkel, McNulty, & Kumashiro, 2010).

There is a positive correlation between optimism and resilience amongst young married couples in India. As the results are in line with the hypothesis, it means that individuals with a high ability to bounce back from traumatic events are highly optimistic and have a positive approach toward their married life. Moreover, optimism consists of two major components, learned optimism and dispositional optimism. Learned optimism is a concept that we can change our attitude and behavior by challenging our negative self-talk. Whereas dispositional optimism is the generalized, relatively stable tendency to expect good outcomes across life. When one partner is optimistic about the hurdles and concerns faced in the marriage, the other one might pick it up by learning optimism too. To add to the previous point, when the partners are resilient during facing a problem, they become optimistic which leads to supportive behavior and a positive approach for both partners. The moment the partners have emotional or physical support, it becomes easy to be resilient. This shows that when the partners work as teammates and bounce back while facing the problem, the partners would lay a strong foundation for their marriage and look up to each other. It has been observed that individuals who are generally optimistic, and hopeful also are high on psychological resilience (Klohn, 1996; Masten, 2001).

The results found that optimism and forgiveness aren't correlated with each other in young married couples in India. The partners might not be optimistic regarding the situation and would not want to forgive their partners. Moreover, when the partner forgives most of the time, the other one would take it for granted and not respect the efforts of forgiveness. Thus, this could make forgivers less optimistic about forgiving their partners in the near future. Perhaps if this continues in a loop and becomes a habit, it might affect the relationship and lose the essence of respect towards each other. Forgiving might be difficult for partners who



## Relationship between Relationship Satisfaction, Resilience, Optimism, and Forgiveness among Young Married Couples in India

are not much flexible to adjust and likely stubborn in their approach which might create an imbalance in a relationship. A marriage relationship works two ways, give and take. If the partner is only giving in the relationship and not receiving anything in return from the partner would lead to a pessimistic approach and the forgiver will eventually stop forgiving the partner.

In the theories of operant learning (Skinner, 1969) posit that people will continue to demonstrate existing patterns of behavior unless those behaviors are followed by unwanted consequences for their offenses. Hence, it is possible that the partner might take the forgiver for granted unless and until the forgiver doesn't stop forgiving as a consequence of the other one's action which might impact the optimism level too. This could lead to learned helplessness, a state that has occurred multiple times with a stressful situation, where the partner has already given up and isn't optimistic about the situation.

The results found no correlation between resilience and forgiveness among young married couples in India. To be resilient is to be patient enough to understand the problem and deal with sanity. Being resilient could actually help the partner forgive easily, but if it isn't reciprocated the same way, it might break the capacity to withstand the problem. When equal importance and justice are not given in the relationship then it could lead to disappointment among the partners and not wanting to forgive each other. Moreover, when the partner takes the other one for granted, the resilience towards the relationship and marriage might break down too. This could even lead to an increase in the emotion of anger and lead to grudges.

### CONCLUSION

The research study concludes that significant correlational pathways were obtained between relationship satisfaction with resilience and optimism. Significant correlations were also found between resilience and optimism. Moreover, a significant negative correlation was found between relationship satisfaction and forgiveness, and insignificant correlations were found between forgiveness with resilience and optimism.

### *Research Limitations*

Some factors are not in the hands of the researcher and cannot be fully controlled. Even in the current study, certain limitations will be discussed in this section. Firstly, the data was collected online as the study was all across India, which could impose certain restrictions during data collection (like difficulty in communication, lesser possibility to verify/clarify the authenticity of data, higher chances of participants randomly filling the test items, and not being able to observe the verbal and nonverbal cues). Thus, the test-taking environment cannot be controlled and so there is limited scope for understanding nonverbal cues, clarification, and observation. Secondly, in this study, relationship satisfaction, resilience, optimism, and forgiveness aren't compared between the couples (husband and wife) as the identity is anonymous, thus the researcher couldn't compare the scores of each couple and share the scores with them. The generalizability of results to other geographical regions (countries) is very limited as the data was collected from different parts of India only. Apart from lower generalizability, the sample size was small which may not be completely representative of the population under study. Lastly, there is no scope for social desirability or faking could be checked as the instruments/scales used in the study did not have any lie/motivational distortion/ validity scales, and neither there were any external questions added to verify the same. Also, there is a possibility of under-reporting or biased responses.

## Relationship between Relationship Satisfaction, Resilience, Optimism, and Forgiveness among Young Married Couples in India

### *Future Direction*

Limitations of the current research could be taken into account while planning research in the future. Some recommendations are discussed in this section. Firstly, it would be advised to conduct the study on a larger sample size. It would also enable the researcher to conduct regression analysis and predict the trends across variables. A comparative study can be conducted between the dating couple's population and the married couple's population with the variables to understand the intensity and trend of it in a relationship. Moreover, cross-cultural studies can be taken into consideration to understand the impact of cultural and religious differences in a romantic relationship setting. As a researcher, I would want to explore the variables of forgiveness with relationship satisfaction, resilience, and optimism among young adults and their take on it.

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**Relationship between Relationship Satisfaction, Resilience, Optimism, and Forgiveness among  
Young Married Couples in India**

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

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