



Research Article

# Does Forgiveness Affect Marital Satisfaction?\*

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## Abstract

This study determines married couples' experiences that negatively affected their lives and their relationships and that they have had difficulty forgiving, what they did to overcome these incidents, and how they have reacted to each other. The study also examines the variables predicting spouses' marital satisfaction. The study employs a nested mixed methods design in which 289 married individuals living in Turkey participated. Of the participants, 97 stated having had an experience with their spouses that they could not forgive. These data were analyzed using content analysis. The Marital Life Scale was administered to determine participants' marital satisfaction. Stepwise regression analysis was used to determine the variables that predict the participants' marital satisfaction. The participants' experiences with their spouses that were difficult to forgive involved neglect and abuse, communication problems and quarrels, problems related to in-laws, distrust and infidelity, economic problems, addictions such as alcohol and gambling, and problems related to sharing household chores. The participants used different methods to solve the problems they have with their spouses. The study has identified having an unforgivable experience and reacting to problems experienced by being cross as the predictive variables of marital satisfaction. Some incidents in married life resulted in marital bonds weakening.

## Keywords:

Forgiveness, Marital Satisfaction, Couple Relations, Family Relations

## Affetmek Evlilik Doyumunu Etkiler Mi?

### Öz

Bu çalışmada evli çiftlerin hayatlarını ve ilişkilerini olumsuz olarak etkileyen, birbirlerini affetmekte zorlandıkları yaşantılarının neler olduğu, bu olayın üstesinden gelmek için neler yaptıkları ve her hangi bir sorun karşısında birbirlerine nasıl tepki verdikleri belirlenmiştir. Ayrıca evli bireylerin evlilik doyumlarını yordayan değişkenlerin neler olduğu araştırılmıştır. Türkiye'de yaşamakta olan 289 evli bireyin katılımı ile gerçekleştirilen çalışmada iç içe karma desen kullanılmıştır. Katılımcılardan 97'si eşleri ile ilişkilerinden affedemedikleri bir yaşantısı olduğunu belirtmiştir. Bu veriler içerik analizi ile analiz edilmiştir. Katılımcıların evlilik doyumunu yordayan değişkenleri belirlemek için ise aşamalı regresyon analizi kullanılmıştır. Katılımcıların eşlerini affetmekte zorlandıkları yaşantıları, ihmal ve istismar yaşantıları, iletişim sorunları ve kavgalar, kök aile ile ilgili yaşanan sorunlar, güvensizlik ve aldatma, ekonomik sorunlar, alkol kumar gibi bağımlılıklar, ev işlerinin paylaşımı ile ilgili sorunlar olarak belirlenmiştir. Katılımcıların eşleri ile yaşamış oldukları bu sorunları çözmek için farklı yöntemler kullandıkları tespit edilmiştir. Araştırmada, affedilemeyen bir yaşantının olması ile yaşanan sorunlara küserek tepki verme evlilik doyumunu yordayan değişkenler olarak elde edilmiştir. Evlilik hayatında yaşanan bazı olaylar eşler arasındaki bağın zayıflamasına yol açmaktadır.

### Anahtar Kelimeler:

Affetmek, Evlilik Doyumu, Çift İlişkisi, Aile İlişkileri

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The concept of forgiveness has a long history and was the subject of religion and philosophy prior to psychology. Many moral and religious traditions state that negative emotions such as revenge, anger, and spite need to be addressed, that more positive emotions can be achieved through compassion and forgiveness toward the person to whom these emotions are directed, and that healing can only be achieved in this way (Ransley, 2004). For this reason, experts working in the field of forgiveness psychology as well as some clients consider forgiveness to be a religious concept and perceive it to be a religious coping method (Fincham et al., 2006). Forgiveness was introduced into the field of psychology in the 1980s (Legaree et al., 2007). The concept of forgiveness is used in many different areas and is very easily misunderstood. Many people define forgiveness as forgetting an experienced problem; reaching a compromise with the person who is at fault; and overlooking, ignoring, and tolerating the mistake (Enright et al., 1998; Landmon, 2002). Others perceive forgiveness as a weakness and permission for the person who made the mistake to hurt them; they may believe they will be unable to prevent the harm that comes their way by forgiving the mistake (Kearns & Fincham, 2004).

In the literature on psychology and psychotherapy, the concept of forgiveness is defined as releasing the anger one feels toward someone who has caused them harm for fixing the relationship and healing from the emotional wounds (DiBlasio & Proctor, 1993). Forgiveness can be defined as people letting go of their desire to take revenge from one who had hurt them, to punish them, and to feel negative emotions toward them; it means to feel compassion, generosity, and even love toward the person in place of feeling negative emotions (Enright et al., 1998). Forgiveness also includes ending the anger felt toward one who has harmed or betrayed the individual (Legaree et al., 2007). Based on these definitions, forgiveness includes social aspects as well as the changes occurring in the individual's inner world due to psychological and interpersonal changes (Ransley, 2004; McCullough et al., 2000).

Spy (2004), considers not forgiving as a strong enemy that grows unnoticed and settles in individuals' lives, just like a cancer gnawing away someone. Forgiveness is not for the person who harms the individual, but for the individual himself because negative emotions such as hate and anger cause physical and mental harm to the individual. With forgiveness, negative emotions decrease, and positive emotions increase. With forgiveness, the individual retakes the control of his life by controlling his emotion. Taking his life under control helps the individual increase his self-confidence (Ransley, 2004).

When emotionally closer individuals hurt each other, it can be more hurtful, and it can be more difficult to restore the relationship back to its old self by overcoming the problems. For this reason, forgiveness has an important effect in removing the hurt in intimate relationships. Especially in relationships with long-term interactions such as

marriage, emotional conflicts and tensions are commonplace (Kerr, 1981). However, the issue is not the experience of negative experiences and emotions, but the way they are handled (Amato & Rogers, 1997; Fincham et al., 2004; Gottman, 1994; Gottman & Levenson, 1999). Generally, both spouses contribute to the problems in marital relationships. Conflicts that cannot be resolved or seem to be resolved but covered up can negatively affect spouses' attitudes towards each other and their good intentions, and prevent them from finding constructive solutions to challenges they will face in the future. Until these resentments come to the surface and voiced by both individuals, solving the problems in the relationship becomes difficult. Furthermore, problems that are not solved can spread to the future conflicts (Fincham, 2000). This may lead to the development of dysfunctional patterns such as decreased cooperation between spouses, decreased sexual intercourse, increased emotional responses, decreased relationships with the spouse's relatives or friends, and spouses acting independently economically. The chronicity of the problems experienced between the married individuals and the suffering of the spouses harm their marriages irreversibly (Asil et al., 2014). Forgiveness is effective in coping with couples' negative experiences, regaining emotional balance and getting satisfaction from their marriage (Cooper & Gilbert, 2004; Diblasio & Proctor, 1993; Paleari et al., 2005).

Retaliation or avoidance behaviors can often be observed among couples who have problems in marital relationships and cannot forgive each other (Fincham, 2000; Fincham et al., 2004; McCullough & Hoyt, 2002; Paleari et al., 2005). Both of these behaviors make the solution of the existing problem difficult. In addition to the decreased frequency of these behaviors in people who forgive to maintain the relationship, benevolent responses to the person making the mistake are also observed (Fincham et al., 2006; Gordon et al., 2009; McCullough et al., 2003). A real forgiveness is an active process. Whenever the depth of the hurt or injustice, or the quality of the relationship between spouses begins to change, full forgiveness takes place (Cooper & Gilbert, 2004). After forgiveness, the people who were forgiven can prevent the negative feelings they feel towards their spouses dominate the interaction they have with their spouses. Their negative feelings, thoughts and behaviors towards their spouses become well balanced, and their desire to punish their spouses decreases (Gordon & Baucom, 1998; Gordon et al., 2005; McCullough et al., 2000). The positive resolution of the conflicts helps to revive the relationship, improve the hurt feelings and fix the relationship (Bono et al., 2008; Diblasio & Proctor, 1993; Karremans et al., 2003). As a result of these experiences, spouses can look at their lives and relationships with a new and richer perspective. Generally, the spouses who have completed the forgiveness process state that the painful experience they had further matured them and strengthened their relationships (Spy, 2004). Forgiveness and being forgiven have an important effect on marital satisfaction and the maintenance of a long-term marriage (Fenell, 1993; Fincham et al., 2002; Gordon et al., 2005; Kachadourian et al., 2004).

Tezer (1996) defines marital satisfaction as the individuals' perception about their level of their needs being met in marriage. Marital satisfaction affects the entire life of the individual. Many people attach more importance to marital satisfaction than many different sources of satisfaction they receive in life because there is a strong relationship between individual's marital satisfaction and life satisfaction (Kasapoğlu & Yabanigül, 2018; Ng et al., 2009). Researchers concluded that couples who show less interest in their spouses, who cannot be a "we", who support conflict, and who experience high levels of frustration and chaos in their marriage get divorced between three and five years. Many people consider marriage as a union that will provide personal and emotional satisfaction and development (Buehlman et al., 1992; Carrère et al., 2000). However, failure to meet expectations leads to disappointment and decrease in their love for each other (Huston et al., 2001).

While some individuals define family as the source of love and care and an institution with a sense of belonging and close emotional ties, the family can also become a source of stress for some. A happy family environment is one of the most important elements for family members to have healthy living conditions and high quality of life. In environments where spouses feel anger towards each other and where problems cannot be solved constructively, family members produce dysfunctional solutions within the family (McGoldrick et al., 2008). In order for the maintenance of other subsystems in the family with integrity and balance, the subsystem between spouses must be functional (Segrin & Flora, 2011). Problems between spouses affect not only two individuals but the entire family system. When the problems between spouses, whether there are children or not, are not effectively resolved, when marriage transformed into a space where the spouses have negative feelings towards each other and try to take revenge, or when the spouses do not make any effort to solve their problems, emotional bonds will be damaged even if the marriage continues. It is an inevitable fact that the spouses will have conflicts in long-term marriages. However, resolving these problems in a constructive way and overcoming these negative incidents positively affect marital satisfaction and thus the entire family system (Gordon et al., 2009; Meredith et al., 1986; Mirzadeh & Fallahchai, 2012). There is a mutual interaction between the quality of the relationship between the spouses and forgiveness. The marital quality predicts forgiveness, and forgiveness predicts marital quality (Fincham et al., 2006; Paleari et al., 2005). Forgiveness-based interventions increase the marital satisfaction of couples who experience conflicts (Asil et al., 2014; Warwar & Malcolm, 2010).

Although the literature has studies on forgiveness between spouses, more studies are needed that examine spousal relationships in order to develop adequate and necessary interventions for families and couples. Spouses' ability to forgive each other has an important effect on maintaining a long-term and satisfying marital relationship. In order

to be able to forgive, individuals must first express their memories and discover the emotion that arose in them. This study aims to determine married couples' experiences that have negatively affected their lives and relationships and that they have difficulty forgiving, what they have done to overcome these incidents, and how they react to each other. In addition, this study also addresses the question of what variables predict spouses' marital satisfaction. The study's findings are believed will help family therapists, counselors, and specialists working in the field of psychology understand spousal relationships. Forgiveness is important not only for the quality of spouses' relations but also for one's own mental health. Healthily organizing relationships helps one balance their inner world and positively affects social and family relationships. Therefore, more studies on forgiveness in marital relationships are needed. For this purpose, the present study seeks answers to the following questions:

1. What memories do spouses have that they cannot forgive in their spousal relationship?
2. What have they done to overcome these incidents?
3. How do they react to each other when they have a problem?
4. Do married individuals' duration of marriage, gender, employment status, ways of reacting toward their spouses, and memories they cannot forgive predict marital satisfaction?

Another question the study addresses involves the variables that predict participants' marital satisfaction. Stepwise regression analysis has been employed to determine the variables predicting participants' marital satisfaction. Participants' demographic information (marriage duration, gender, employment status), ways of reacting toward their spouses when they have a problem, and whether they have experienced something they cannot forgive have been included in the regression analysis.

### **Method**

This study employs a nested mixed methods design and has been carried out with the participation of married individuals. The study has added a quantitative stage within the qualitative stage. The quantitative and qualitative data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted simultaneously (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). The quantitative stage was added to determine how the participants reacted to their spouses when they experienced a problem and the extent of their reaction, as well as how the duration of their marriage, gender, employment status, and having a memory of something unforgiveable predict their marital satisfaction.

Because the information regarding a large number of participants' experiences of something they could not forgive their spouse, a basic qualitative research design was employed during the qualitative dimension of the study (Merriam, 2009/2013). A basic

qualitative research design focuses on participants' comments about the researched subject and the meanings they attribute to their experiences. A form was developed for collecting the data. Questions were developed on the form in order to determine participants' personal information (i.e., gender, employment status, number of children, and duration of marriage) and whether they had experiences where forgiving their spouses was difficult. The developed pilot form was first administered to five married people. After receiving feedback, the final form was developed. In addition to the demographic information, the participants were asked whether they had had any experiences where forgiving their spouse was difficult. If the answer was yes, the participant was asked what it was about, when it happened, how they coped with the situation, and how these experiences affected their marital relationships.

The quantitative dimension of the study used the relational research design, a descriptive research method. Information was obtained on how the participants react toward their spouse when experiencing a problem in their marital life. To do this, some behavioral options were presented to the participants ("I talk with my spouse to resolve the problem;" "I become angry at my spouse/I do not talk to them;" "I cry;" "I yell at my spouse;" "I ignore the problem, think nothing of it, and cover it up;" "I often remind my spouse about what they had done by bringing up the incident over and over;" "I throw whatever is in my hands at my spouse and all over the place;" or "other"). All participants were additionally administered the Marital Life Scale.

**Marital Life Scale:** In the study, the Marital Life Scale developed by Tezer (1996) was used to determine the satisfaction levels of married individuals in their marital relationships. Tezer stated that the name of the scale was named in this way in order not to affect the people to whom it was administered. The scale is a five-point Likert-type scale measuring married individuals' perceptions about their marriage. While the minimum score that can be obtained from the scale is 10, the maximum score can be 50. The test-retest reliability coefficient determined by the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was found as .85, Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient was found as .91 in the first implementation and .89 in the second implementation. In this study, model fit values of the scale [GFI=0.973, AGFI=0.948, PGFI=0.513, RMSEA=0.037, CFI=0.995;  $\chi^2=40.263$ ,  $df=29$ ,  $p=.080>.05$ ] shows that the scale has a very good fit. In addition, the Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale in this study was found as .91.

## Participants

In the study, information was obtained from a total of 289 married participants. 184 (64%) of these participants were female and 105 (36%) were male. While 219 (76%) participants had a job, 70 (24%) did not have a job. 26 (9%) of them graduated from elementary school, 20 (7%) from middle school, 45 (16%) from high school,

and 198 (68%) from university. 77 participants had been married for 1-5 years, 91 for 6-10 years, 37 for 11-15 years, 20 for 16-20 years, 34 for 21-25 years, 13 for 26-30 years, 13 for 31-35 years and four of them for 36-40 years. While 45 participants had no children, 96 of them had one child, 107 had two children, 30 had three children, eight had four children and three of them had five children.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

In the study, the form was put in an envelope and delivered to married individuals in order to collect the qualitative data reliably. In order for the participants to take part in the study, the criterion of being married was determined. Since the researcher chose the closest and easiest participants to collect data, convenience sampling was used in the study (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). In order to reach married individuals, first, university students were asked to send the sealed forms to their parents. Also, extra forms were given to volunteer students who stated that they could deliver the forms to married individuals. In the directive included in the form, the participants were asked to seal the envelope after filling out the form, sign it and send it to the researcher. In this way, 113 data were obtained. In addition to the forms collected with envelopes, an online form was developed, and 176 data were collected from married individuals with this form. In total, 289 data lists were examined. 97 of the 289 participants stated that they had an experience where they could not forgive their spouse during their marital life, and this information was analyzed by content analysis. The research data were analyzed by the expert researcher, who is a psychological counselor and family therapist, using the NVivo program. Qualitative data collected in writing was first transferred to the computer in writing by the researcher. Afterwards, a code list and themes were developed based on the literature reviewed on forgiveness and the data collected. One week after the first coding process, the coding was reviewed and coding lists were formed. In the analysis of qualitative data, repeating the coding process after waiting for a while increases the validity (Furman, Langer, & Taylor, 2010). Then, the coding lists were checked by another expert, a family counselor, and the validity and reliability of the study findings was ensured by taking into account the consistency between the coding made by both experts.

The data obtained from the Marital Life Scale administered to determine the marital satisfaction of the participants were analyzed with the SPSS program. Demographic information obtained from the participants, how they reacted to their spouses when they experienced a conflict, and the data obtained from the Marital Life Scale were analyzed with stepwise regression analysis. The categorical variables (gender, employment status, duration of marriage) were re-coded as dummy variable before being included in the regression analysis (Leech, Barrett & Morgan, 2005). In order to determine whether the assumptions of regression analysis were met, linearity,

extreme values, Mahalonobis values, missing data, normality of distribution and adequacy of the sample size were tested. Furthermore, tolerance values and variance inflation factor values among the variables were examined, and regression analysis was performed after all the assumptions were met.

## Results

The qualitative findings are categorized under two themes: (a) Unforgiveable memories, where participants stated having experienced something where they could not forgive their spouses, and (b) coping styles. In addition to the qualitative findings, the study’s quantitative dimension presents two more themes: (c) how participants react when a problem occurs and (d) the variables that predict marital satisfaction.

### a. Unforgivable memories

97 (34%) of the 289 participants responded with a yes and 192 (66%) responded with a no to the question “Do you have a memory in your marriage where you had difficulty forgiving your spouse?” 81 of the participants who stated having an experience they could not forgive were female (84%) and 16 were male (16%). While 103 of the participants who stated having no experience was unforgiveable were female (54%), 89 were male (46%). The themes related to participants’ unforgiveable memories and their comments regarding these experiences are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.  
*Participants’ memories of not being able to forgive their spouse (n = 97)*

| Unforgiveable Memories | f  | Quotes from Participants’ Statements                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|------------------------|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                        |    | <p>“A week after getting married, I got my first beating because of mistakes others made at the wedding. Then it continued the pregnancy, then the pressure that his family put on us, my husband’s distrust toward me. Worst of all, when I went to the hospital for checkup, he cursed me in front of people, and he wanted me to get an abortion, that was the worst.” (Female, married for 2 years)</p> <p>“During my postpartum period, he didn’t talk to me for a week and left me alone because I did not agree to go on a long journey with his family.” (Female, married for 6 years)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Neglect and abuse      | 42 | <p>“I was sent to prison because of an incident, and my wife did not come to visit.” (Male, married for 30 years)</p> <p>“This is an incident that I will never forget in my life. This is something I will feel remorse for. I cheated on my wife because she wasn’t interested in me or I felt she wasn’t. So, this incident happened. I thought I was in love with the other woman. And I had a big fight with my wife at home. Because I was looking for a haven. I realized that what I was doing was a huge mistake, and my two daughters hated me because of this incident. Because they were at an age where they understood what was happening. But during those times, I believed that my wife was the only reason why I did that. It was an unforgivable mistake I made when I was young. I felt that my wife was the trigger.” (Male, married for 23 years).</p> |



Table 1.  
*Participants' memories of not being able to forgive their spouse (n = 97)*

| Unforgiveable Memories                                 | f  | Quotes from Participants' Statements                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Communication problems / quarrels                      | 26 | <p>"He rubbed my nose in it when I trusted and confided in him." (Female, married for 8 years)</p> <p>"His lying." (Female, married for 17 years)</p> <p>"Every time we argued, he felt justified and made me feel guilty." (Female, married for 3 years)</p> <p>"The arguments." (Male, married for 8 years)</p> <p>"Being disrespectful... Actually she is sick but she doesn't accept that." (Man, married for 4 years)</p>                                                                                                                                             |
| Problems with in-laws                                  | 21 | <p>"In the early days of our marriage, I was very hurt at how he let his mother walk all over me and that he said nothing when she made innuendos." (Female, married for 31 years)</p> <p>"Problems as a result of believing in everything his mother says." (Female, married for 7 years)</p> <p>"My husband helping his family financially." (Female, married for 22 years)</p> <p>"She was disrespectful to my family." (Male, married for 10 years)</p> <p>"My wife came down on my mother like a ton of bricks and swore heavily." (Male, married for six months)</p> |
| Distrust / being cheated on                            | 20 | <p>"I can never forget that he cheated on me while I was pregnant with our son." (Female, married for 23 years)</p> <p>"I want to get away from him when I remember that he cheated." (Female, married for 10 years)</p> <p>"After our wedding, he sold the gold that was given to us at our wedding and told me that he would buy a new piece of gold every month. He cheated me and never bought any." (Female, married for 30 years)</p>                                                                                                                                |
| Economic reasons                                       | 5  | "Financial issues." (Female, married for eight years)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Spouse's addiction to things such as alcohol, gambling | 4  | "He wasn't interested in his work. He gambled. He didn't come home until late, he stayed out some nights, and he didn't care about his home." (Female, married for 33 years)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Problems with sharing household chores                 | 1  | "My husband not helping with household chores." (Female, married for 22 years)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |

According to Table 1, the theme the participants emphasized the most is neglect and abuse followed by communication problems/quarrels, problems with in-laws, distrust/being cheated on, economic reasons, spouse's addictions such as alcohol and gambling, and problems sharing household chores. Also, 11 participants stated that they did not want to talk about the unforgiveable experience they had gone through with their spouse.

## b. Ways of coping

To the question of "*What did you do to overcome the problem?*" the participants who stated that had a memory involving their spouse they could not forgive reacted in ways that are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.  
*Methods used by spouses to overcome the problem (N=97)*

| Methods used                                                            | f  | Participants' statements                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Talking                                                                 | 31 | "I talked with him. I told him I was hurt." (Female, married for seven years)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Patience and leaving to time                                            | 15 | "I left it to time. I just endured." (Female, married for 33 years)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Ignoring the problem, trying to forget the problem                      | 14 | "I ignored. I didn't dwell on it." (Female, married for 12 years)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Continuing the marriage due to children                                 | 8  | "I thought about my child. I thought I should give a chance. I tried to be happy with little things." (Female, married for 16 years)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Nothing worked                                                          | 7  | "I tried many things but I wasn't successful." (Female, married for 40 years)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Exerted the family's elders' influence over                             | 6  | "I spoke to my husband. I asked for help from his sister and brother. They gave a lot of support, thanks. He gave up alcohol. He also started to show interest to my children." (Female, married for 20 years)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Keeping quiet, taking it laying down                                    | 6  | "I tried to shrug it away, be happy in my own way, tried to restrain myself doing the things that made him do this, tried to stay keep." (Female, married for six years)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Getting expert support, getting psychological help                      | 6  | "I tried talking, we went to the family psychologist, but he left the house." (Male, married for six months)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Cutting emotional and sexual relationships with the spouse, being cross | 5  | "We are just friends living in the same house. He works, he brings money, I serve as a maid. I have no expectations, including sex. I'm 35 years old. I feel like I am 70 years old. Let's not call it a relationship, it is an obligation. I asked how our relationship was before. I realized late. I didn't expect anything before, too. But I believed that he loved me, maybe just a little bit." (Female, married for 11 years)<br>"I didn't talk with my husband for a long time." (Female, married for six years) |
| Not doing anything                                                      | 4  | "I didn't do anything." (Male, married for eight years)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Praying                                                                 | 4  | "I prayed all the time. I prayed every night while I cried. I took refuge in Allah. If I didn't have my daughters..." (Female, married for 23 years)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Forgiving                                                               | 4  | "We knew to forgive." (Male, married for 32 years)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Trying to know and understand the spouse                                | 4  | "I try to accept her this way." (Male, married for four years)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Leaving home                                                            | 3  | "I stayed away from my home and husband for a while." (Female, married for six years)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Keeping what happened in mind                                           | 2  | "I tried to be more careful and tried to forget the incident." (Male, married for 31 years)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Dealing with other things                                               | 2  | "I paid attention to my social life more. So to speak, I took my husband out of my social life. I focused more on my work and the future of my children." (Female, married for 11 years)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Rearranging the family of origin relationships                          | 2  | "I did not have my husband see my family." (Female, married for 10 years)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Threatening with divorce                                                | 1  | "I remained silent, I tried to support him. I tried no to confront him. But, when the situation didn't change, I decided to get a divorce. I think when my husband understood the seriousness of the situation; he decided to get his act together." (Female, married for 40 years)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |

As can be seen in Table 2, the participants who had an experience where they could not forgive their spouses stated that they first tried to solve the problem by talking in order to overcome the problem they experienced. Patience was followed by patience and leaving to time. After this, ignoring the problem/ trying to forget the problem,

continuing the marriage due to children, exerted the family’s elders’ influence over, keeping quiet/ taking it laying down, getting expert support/ getting psychological help, cutting emotional and sexual relationships with the spouse/ being cross, not doing anything, praying, forgiving, trying to know and understand the spouse, leaving home, keeping what happened in mind, dealing with other things, rearranging the family of origin relationships, and threatening with divorce respectively followed. Seven of the participants stated that nothing they did to solve the problem worked.

Another question asked to the participants within the scope of the study was “How was your relationship with your spouse before this incident?” 44 of the participants stated that their relationship was much better before the incident and then it got worse. 24 of the participants stated that the relationship was already bad and that it got worse after the incident. 20 of the participants stated that they were still trying to overcome the incident. Some of the statements given by the participants about the incidents they experienced and the effects of these on their marriage and themselves are as follows:

“Before this incident, our marriage was very good. At that time, our marriage was much shaken. Thought of leaving him and killing myself but because of my children, I didn’t have the heart.” (Female, married for 33 years)

“We had a marriage that was very plain and civilized but I couldn’t feel much love. It was a big step taken without a serious thought. I had to continue for my children. Of course, what we experienced had a great effect. My wife’s distrust with me... We couldn’t even sit and discuss anything because I remember not talking to each other for days and days and being cross with each other.” (Male, married for 23 years)

### c. Ways of reaction

The answers given by all the participants to the question of “how do you react to your spouse when you have a problem with him or her” are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.  
*Married individuals’ ways of reaction to react to their spouses (participants marked more than one option, N=289)*

| Ways of reaction                                          | Female<br>(n=184) | Male<br>(n=105) | The ones who had<br>an unforgivable<br>memory (n=97) | The ones who did not<br>have an unforgivable<br>memory (n=192) | Total<br>(N=289) |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
| a. I talk with him/her to solve the problem               | 83                | 55              | 41                                                   | 97                                                             | 138<br>(%48)     |
| b. I become cross with my spouse/I do not talk to him/her | 88                | 32              | 54                                                   | 66                                                             | 120<br>(%42)     |
| c. I cry                                                  | 74                | 2               | 41                                                   | 35                                                             | 76 (%26)         |
| d. I yell at my spouse                                    | 28                | 25              | 20                                                   | 33                                                             | 53 (%18)         |
| e. I ignore the problem, think nothing of it, cover it up | 27                | 23              | 17                                                   | 33                                                             | 50 (%17)         |

|                                                                                             |    |   |    |    |          |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|---|----|----|----------|
| f. I often remind my spouse about what he/she did by bringing up the incident over and over | 39 | 9 | 19 | 29 | 48 (%17) |
| g. I throw whatever I have to everywhere and my spouse                                      | 4  | 2 | 3  | 3  | 6 (%2)   |
| h. Other                                                                                    | 16 | 3 | 11 | 8  | 19 (%7)  |
| ▪ I do not care                                                                             |    |   |    |    |          |
| ▪ I stay away from home                                                                     |    |   |    |    |          |
| ▪ I do not talk and wait for him/her to make a comment                                      |    |   |    |    |          |
| ▪ I do not talk about the subject for a long time, I withdraw                               |    |   |    |    |          |
| ▪ I keep my spouse at a distance                                                            |    |   |    |    |          |
| ▪ Not to say something I will regret later, I generally become quiet                        |    |   |    |    |          |
| ▪ My reactions change depending on the course of events                                     |    |   |    |    |          |

The vast majority of the participants stated that they talk with their spouses to solve the problem (n=138, 48%). A significant majority of the participants stated that they become cross with their spouse and did not speak with them (n=120, 42%). This is respectively followed by I cry (n=53, 18%), I yell at my spouse (n=53, 18%), I ignore the problem, think nothing of it, cover it up (n=50, 17%), often remind my spouse about what he/she did by bringing up the incident over and over (n=48, 17%), and I throw whatever I have to everywhere and to my spouse (n=6, 2%). The participants who stated that they react in different ways expressed that they do not care, stay away from the house, do not talk about the subject for a long time, withdraw and communicate later.

#### **d. Variables predicting marital satisfaction**

Another question addressed in the study is the variables predicting the participants' marital satisfaction. Stepwise regression analysis was employed to determine the variables predicting the participants' marital satisfaction. The demographic information of the participants (the duration of the marriage, gender, employment status) and whether there is an experience that they cannot forgive were included in the regression analysis. Furthermore, the variables of "a. I talk to him/her to solve the problem", "b. I become cross with my spouse/I do not talk to him/her", "c. I cry", "d. I yell at my spouse", "e. I ignore the problem, think nothing of it, cover it up", "f. I often remind my spouse about what he/she did by bringing up the incident over and over", which were all ways of reactions toward their spouses

when they have a problem, were included in the regression analysis. The reactions of “g. I throw whatever I have around to everyway and my spouse” and “h. Other” were not included in the regression analysis due to the small number of participants. Regression analysis results related to marital satisfaction are presented in Table 4.

Table 4.  
*Regression analysis results related to marital satisfaction (N=289)*

| Model | Variable                                                 | B     | SH   | $\beta$ | t     | R    | R <sup>2</sup> | F     |
|-------|----------------------------------------------------------|-------|------|---------|-------|------|----------------|-------|
| 1     | Constant                                                 | 38.10 | .58  |         | 65.74 | .417 | .174           | 60.58 |
|       | Not being able to forgive                                | -7.79 | 1.00 | -.417   | -7.78 |      |                |       |
| 2     | Constant                                                 | 39.02 | .66  |         | 58.84 | .442 | .195           | 34.64 |
|       | Not being able to forgive                                | -7.23 | 1.01 | -.387   | -7.15 |      |                |       |
|       | I become cross with my spouse/I do not talk with him/her | -2.63 | .97  | -.147   | -2.71 |      |                |       |

Stepwise multiple regression analysis done to determine the marital satisfaction of married individuals was completed in two steps. In the first step of the analysis, the variable of having an experience that they could not forgive was included in the analysis [ $F(1,287)=60.58$ ,  $p<.001$ ]. This variable explains the 17.4% of the variance related to marital satisfaction. Regression coefficient value shows that the marital satisfaction of married individuals who have an experience where they could not forgive their spouse tend to decrease. The variable of “I become cross with my spouse/I do not talk with him/her”, which is one of the ways in which participants react to their spouses, was included in the analysis in the second step by contributing 2.1% to the variance [ $F(2,286)=34.64$ ,  $p<.001$ ]. The regression coefficient value indicates that the marital satisfaction of the participants who react to their spouses by becoming cross with them tend to be lower compared to the participants who use other ways of reaction. Both variables explain 19.5% of the variance related to marital satisfaction. It was concluded that the other variables that were analyzed did not contribute to the marital satisfaction variance.

## Discussion

People commonly have conflicts with their spouses during marriage. Spouses that can deal with these conflicts constructively are an important factor in long-term marriage. Although the emotional bond is damaged in some marriages, the marriage continues. However, this marriage is not satisfying to the spouses (Segrin & Flora, 2011). In particular, the inability to forgive an incident leads to the positive feelings spouses have toward each other getting destroyed and harming the spousal relationship. In this context, this study has determined the unforgivable experiences married individuals have with their spouses, how these experiences affect their marriage, what they’ve done to overcome the problem, and the variables affecting marital satisfaction.

This study's findings overlap with the findings of a study conducted by the Turkish Statistical Institute (Turk Stat) in 2016 that examined the reasons for divorce in Turkey. Unforgivable memories are a common reason leading to divorce in Turkey, and the reactions expressed toward these incidents trigger many of the reasons for divorce. The current study has examined the variables predicting all participants' marital satisfaction and has concluded the presence of unforgivable experiences to negatively affect marital satisfaction. Not to talk with the spouse has also been included as the most important communication form affecting marital satisfaction.

This study has obtained findings related to the relationship patterns of families living in Turkey in particular as well as the meanings ascribed to family, marriage, and children. For example, even though some of the participants legally continued their marriage, they stated that their marriage had ended emotionally. They made statements like "I stay married for my child" and "If I didn't have a child, I'd have gotten divorced." This is an indication that the functionality of the spouse subsystem had ended in some marriages. In these marriages, the child acts as the mortar that keeps the family together. Sometimes, one of the children in the family tries to take the role of a parent and thus ensure the continuity of the system. This anxiety the parents experience is reflected onto the children (Carter & Orfanidis, 1976; Dallos & Draper, 2010). This causes dysfunctional patterns to transfer from one generation to the next (Haefner, 2014; Kerr, 1981).

Another study finding reflecting the cultural difference is that some of the participants stated that they could not forgive their spouses due to the problems with the family of origin. In their study, Bayraktaroğlu and Çakıcı (2013) reached the conclusion that the level of understanding between their spouses and their own parents and their parents-in-law affects individuals' marital adjustment. Problems with the family of origin influence the individual's relationship with the nuclear family he has just formed. This can be explained by the difficulty the individual has in separation from his or her own family of origin and individuation. However, especially in societies with a collectivist structure like Turkey, this can also be related to newlywed individuals not being able to balance their relationships with their own parents and their relationship with their spouses and their spouses' parents. Conflicts of roles and tasks cause crises in the lives of married individuals who cannot achieve this balance. Some individuals living in Turkey experience difficulty in establishing and maintaining psychological boundaries in their relationships both with their family members and their social surroundings (Gülerce, 1996). Meaning ascribed to family, parents and children in Turkey can cause problems related to roles being mixed and boundaries being crossed (Kurter et al., 2004). The effect of parents on children is quite evident in important decisions. Problems between individuals' own family of origin and their spouses and problems with their spouse's family can make

individuals end their marriage. Indeed, according to a study conducted by the Turkish Statistical Institute in 2016 examining the reasons for divorce in Turkey revealed that “disrespectful attitude towards spouse’s family” and “in-law’s interference in family matters” is among the most important reasons for divorce for both women and men. In Turkey, family members not being able to adequately express their feelings even though their bonds of affection are strong and family member not accepting each other as they are affect the newly established family system (Gülerce, 2007). According to the family systems approach, it is not enough to examine the interaction among the family members in order to understand the source of the problems in the family. The family exists in large social structures. Therefore, these social structures should be examined (Segrin & Flora, 2011). Although the marriage institution is a contract between two people, it is also an institution that affects many individuals and is affected by many individuals. Social values, norms and ties of the past are as effective as individual characteristics in the satisfactory continuation of marriage (Asen et al., 2004; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Peterson & Nisenholz, 1991).

A significant portion of the participants who stated that they had an experience where they could not forgive their spouse expressed that they could not forgive because of their *neglect and abuse*. While some of the participants who explained their experiences under this theme stated that they were subjected to physical and verbal violence, some stated that their spouses did not care about them and their children and that they were negligent. In literature, there are many studies showing that there is a relationship between spouses’ marital satisfaction and the violence they experience (Banaei et al., 2016; Hammett et al., 2017; Oguntayo et al., 2016; Shortt et al., 2010). In the current study, female participants stated that they were exposed to physical, verbal and emotional violence and neglected by their husbands, whereas male participants stated that they were generally neglected by their wives. Some of the male participants often blamed their wives for their own behaviors stating that their wives’ triggering behaviors forced them to make those mistakes. The four male participants who stated that they could not forgive their wives because of their negligence made statements like “I cheated but my wife’s behavior caused that”, “I went to jail and she did not visit me”, “We had a violent fight with my wife, I hit my head against the wall and my wife did not care” and “for no reason, I got laid off. My wife wanted to divorce me because I neglected the house and my wife and my kids”. At the end of their longitudinal study carried out for 14 years, Orbuch et al. (2002) concluded that men expected their wives to emotionally affirm them. They also expected their wives to make them feel good and their wives to pay attention to them. This study suggests that men want to be approved and accepted by their wives even if they make mistakes, and that they try to meet their need of care and love indirectly from their wives. Stith et al. (2008) determined that sex is an important mediator in the relationship between marital satisfaction and partner violence. In 2019, 134 of the

474 women who were killed were murdered by their husbands, and 25 of them were murdered by their ex-husbands (Gülersöyler, 2020). In this study, on the subject of unforgivable experiences, female participants talking more about physical violence and their emotional effects on them compared to male participants is a point that should be paid attention to.

In the study, another theme among the unforgivable experiences is communication problems and quarrels. During the quarrels they had with their spouses, the participants stated that their spouses did not accept that they did something wrong, were constantly defensive, lied, became crossed, acted as if they did not exist, blamed them for problems with others, shared their problems with others, disregarded or ignored the problem they experienced, held against a private moment they shared together, not consulting them while and swore. The communication style established between spouses is one of the important factors in solving a problem. The methods such as usage of destructive and humiliating communication style between couples, always making different and negative inferences from each other's behaviors, expecting their spouse to understand them by reading their mind instead of talking and cutting communication do not just ensure the solution of the problem but add new problems on top of the existing problem. There are many studies showing that communication problems negatively affect marriage (Amato & Rogers, 1997; Orbuch et al., 2002; Rogge & Bradbury, 1999; Rogge et al., 2006; Clements et al., 2004; Stanley et al., 2002). As a result of long-term research, Gottman (2000) identified behaviors that harm the spouses' relationships and listed them as criticism, always getting defensive, behaviors that belittle and cutting of the communication. These behaviors make it difficult to solve problems and increase spouses' resentment and anger towards each other. Unless the problems are solved, non-functional ways are used much more. This causes the existing situation to become more insolvable. In the study, it was concluded that the participants with experiences where they could not forgive their spouses were trying to solve the problem they experienced with their spouses in some non-functional ways. These were ignoring or trying to forget the problem, continuing the marriage because of children, making family elders interfere, becoming cross, cutting emotional and sexual relations, abandoning the home, keeping the pain and anger alive by not forgetting the problem, reviving the problem, and paying attention to other things to reduce the pain caused by the problem. While some of the participants stated that they tried to solve the problem by talking, some stated that they tried to ease the weight of the problem by being patient and praying. Some of the participants who had problems with the family of origin expressed that they rearranged their relationships, while the participants who thought that they could not solve the problem anymore expressed that they would get a divorce when they could not solve the problem. Only a few of the participants received expert support to solve the problem. However, unfortunately, many of the



married individuals seek professional help as a last resort when they have problems. Among the reasons for getting professional help as a last resort are cultural attitudes like not accepting talking about family life to strangers. They also have difficulty in reaching professional people, not knowing where to get help, and not having sufficient economic income to meet with experts (Arslantaş, Dereboy, Aştı & Pektekin, 2011).

Mistrust and infidelity, which is among the experiences where the participants could not forgive their spouses, is one of the themes that were mentioned by the participants and that still give them pain. Under this theme, in addition to the participants who stated that they did not trust their spouses because they cheated on them, some participants stated that they did not trust their spouses because of money issues and because they lied. Infidelity causes the marital relationship to be shaken deeply and the spouses' trust towards each other ends (Fife et al., 2013). The person who was cheated on may show many psychological symptoms such as depression, anxiety, anger, feeling of being abandoned and rejected, mistrust towards himself and the spouse, and decreased self-esteem (Cano & O'Leary, 2000). In addition, some individuals who committed adultery may experience guilt, anger, loneliness and shame due to their actions (Rokach & Philibert-Lignières, 2015; Fife et al., 2013). In this study, some of the participants who were cheated on stated that their marriage was not the same afterwards and that they could not forgive their spouses. Some of the participants who learned that they were cheated on by their spouse expressed that they even thought about suicide but continued their marriage because of their children. Individuals who have an experience of infidelity and have high forgiveness skill have less negative feelings (Onaylı, 2019). To ensure that the relationship continues satisfactorily, couples reunite and regain trust after experiences where one or both of the spouses have shaken trust in each other. After experiences where one or both spouses stop trusting each other, forgiveness should be brought to the agenda during the psychological counseling process in order for the relationship continue satisfactorily, for the couples to get back together and for trust to be established again to reunite couples and to rebuild trust.

Another theme highlighted by the participants is the theme of *addictions like alcohol and gambling*. In the long run, substance abuse ends the family functionality. Marital satisfaction of people with spouses who have addictions such as alcohol and gambling decreases over time (Habibian et al., 2015; Homish et al., 2009). In marital relationships, people with such addictions do not fulfill their duties and responsibilities towards their spouse, children and home. Furthermore, these addictions bring along economic difficulties (Ferland et al., 2008) and sometimes domestic violence (Zilberman & Blume, 2005). Indeed, in the present study, the participants mentioned that their spouses' alcohol and gambling addiction was accompanied by economic difficulties. Some of the participants who experienced this problem said to their

spouses that they wanted to divorce or asked for help from the family elders. It is a culture-specific approach to ask for help from family elders in solving family problems. When there is a problem in the family, couples living in Turkey usually get help first from relatives, later from friends, and from experts in the field as a last resort (Arslantaş et al., 2011; Beşpınar & Beşpınar, 2017).

Under the theme of *economic problems*, spouses conveyed financial losses and negative experiences accompanying them. Participants stated that their family relationships were negatively affected due to reasons such as work not doing okay, having economically difficult days, unemployment, and one of the family members spending money unnecessarily. In the study, some of the participants stated that they had problems not because of their spouses' work going south but because of their spouses' neglect of their home and family. The deterioration of economic conditions or unemployment reduces the self-confidence of the individual (Goldsmith et al., 1997). Low income and financial problems negatively affect the quality of marriage (Ratra & Kaur, 2004; Obradovic & Obradovic, 2006).

Some participants stated that they could not forgive their spouses because of the problems they had in *sharing household chores*. Marriage and the establishment of a new nuclear family can cause crises among some spouses. This may be particularly related to the inability to adapt to tasks and roles in the new nuclear family. Some habits brought from the family of origin may sometimes lead to family conflicts. Especially in cases where both spouses work, there may be problems related to the sharing of household chores. Indeed, according to a 2006 Turkish Family Structure Study conducted Turkish Ministry of Family and Social Policies, 60.7% of the male participants and 64.7% of the female participants believed that a woman's main duty was to look after children and do household chores. When the spouses of people with these attitudes and values have similar attitudes and values, there is no problem between the spouses related to sharing household chores because women do the housework and take care of their children, and men do the chores outside the home. Thus, there is no problem. The task each person will complete is clear, and both have accepted that it is their task. However, one of the spouses having different values and attitudes about this issue may cause conflicts within the family.

The individuals with experiences where they cannot forgive their spouses tend to have lower marital satisfaction. Participants having an experience where they could not forgive their spouse and trying to overcome the problems in their marriage by becoming cross with their spouses explain the marital satisfaction variance at the level of 19.5%. There is a relationship between forgiveness and high level of marital satisfaction (Gordon et al., 2009; Mirzadeh & Fallahchai, 2012). The breakdown of communication leads to the silence of the spouses, losing hope from each other and to

finally give up on marriage (Gottman, 2000). The fact that the spouses stay away from each other and isolate themselves from their spouses causes the spouses to address problems individually and to find solutions on their own. In this case, the time spent between the spouses generally decreases, and the spouses tend to make their own life plans alone. In this case, the feeling of loneliness decreases satisfaction in marital relationship (Segrin & Flora, 2011). If these patterns and interactions between spouses are not interfered, the emotional relationship ends even if the marriage continues. As a matter of fact, in long happy marriages, spouses do not stay cross with each other for a long time when they have problems (Demir & Durmuş, 2015).

### **Limitations**

As with all studies, there are some limitations in this study. While determining the sample group of the study, no criteria regarding the marriage duration of the participants and the process of how they made the decision of marriage were set. In Turkey, while people with high socio-economic status and education level decide on their own to get married, parental views and decisions are more effective on people with low socio-economic status and education level (Yiğit, 2016). Especially in marriages where the woman is married under the age of 18 and where there is a wide age gap between the woman and the man, it is highly probable to experience family problems. At the root of the problems, how they gave the decision to get married and the duration of the marriage may be effective.

### **Implications for Researchers**

The study includes married individuals' memories about their spouses that they cannot forgive. In this study, it is not clear whether there is a memory that the other spouse could not forgive and whether they both have the same level of marital satisfaction because both spouses could not be reached. It is necessary to conduct detailed interviews with both spouses in order to understand whether the problems experienced reflect the same feelings in both spouses. In this study, a descriptive evaluation was made. However, by conducting in-depth interviews, relationship patterns and chain of events can be discussed in more detail. At the same time, how the participants who could forgive their spouses deal with this process, how the ones who could not forgive evaluate the situation emotionally, intellectually and behaviorally, and communication forms and relationship dynamics between the partners can be examined. In the study, the behaviors exhibited by the participants towards their spouses should be examined in detail because while the marital satisfaction of participants who stated that they tried to talk and solve the problem when they had problems is expected to be high, this variable was not included in the regression analysis. Communication forms of spouses can be examined in more detail. There is a cybernetic situation in relationships. That is, saying that something started and

continued the problem can lead us to discuss the phenomenon only in a causal context and when we look at it from this point of view, we can make wrong interpretations. In this context, many problem areas such as family of origin relationships, subsystems, and the effect of the problem on children can be examined in more depth. In addition, longitudinal studies can determine whether individuals particularly with memories where they cannot forgive their spouses tried to divorce their spouses.

### **Implications for Practitioners**

In terms of making some inferences, the findings obtained as a result of this study can be a guide for family counselors and therapists. First of all, spouses' accumulation of negative memories in their marital relationships and their inability to cope with these negatively affect their marital satisfaction. Especially some memories can be much more hurtful. Culture, family of origin relationships and patterns passed on from generation to generation can be influential on these experiences. Although some participants have low marital satisfaction, their marriage continues in the name of their children. Also, some participants' marital relationship is disrupted by conflicts with the family of origin. These findings are culture-specific findings. One of the points that family therapists and counselors should pay attention to is the cultural characteristics of families because while some problems arise from family relationships, some problems may arise from the effect of culture transmitted from generations.

Communication barriers are one of the points that experts in the field should pay attention to when working with the family. Although some participants state that they solve their problems by talking, there may be problems in their communication forms. Especially the behavior of becoming cross between spouses negatively affects marital satisfaction. The behavior of becoming cross, which is a passive method, encourages the partners to read each other's minds. This causes them to make inferences about each other's behaviors, that is, they expect expectation. In some marriages, even making the couples realize the communication forms they use can help them realize themselves.

Some experiences in marriages can be quite shocking for some individuals. In this case, the reaction to the incident may be similar to the reactions given in cases of traumatic stress. Cognitive, emotional and behavioral disorders may occur in the life of the individual (Gordon & Baucom, 1998). As in many traumatic lives, spouses' perspectives on life and the meaning they ascribe change in traumas experienced in marriages (Spy, 2004). If deep discomfort occurred between the spouses due to the behavior of one of the spouses and this situation caused the relationship between the spouses to be strained, then forgiveness therapy should be used. Forgiveness is a bidirectional process involving both the person making the mistake and the person exposed to the mistake, and the process involves both parties. In marriage therapy, forgiveness can only be realized by the person

who made the mistake noticing his or her behavior and the effect it has on his or her spouse and asking for forgiveness. A simple “sorry” is usually not enough. Or forgiveness therapy does not work if one of the spouses does not request for forgiveness. Business will remain unfinished when the spouse who is at fault does not want to be forgiven or shows no indication of regret. For these reasons, forgiveness must be requested by both spouses (Cooper & Gilbert, 2004).

### **Ethical Statement**

Since this study was conducted on the data collected before 2020, the ethical committee approval condition was not sought. However, the author declares that all the procedures of the study were conducted in compliance with the Helsinki Declaration.

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