

## Impact of a Forgiveness-Based Intervention on Marital Commitment and Trust Restoration

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of a forgiveness-based intervention in enhancing marital commitment and restoring trust among married individuals experiencing relational distress.

**Methods:** A randomized controlled trial was conducted with 30 married participants from Indonesia, randomly assigned to either an intervention group (n = 15) or a control group (n = 15). The intervention group received six structured forgiveness-based therapy sessions over six weeks, while the control group received no intervention. Standardized measures of marital commitment and trust were administered at three time points: pre-test, post-test, and five-month follow-up. Data were analyzed using repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Bonferroni post-hoc tests, with SPSS version 27.

**Findings:** Results from repeated measures ANOVA revealed significant time × group interaction effects for marital commitment ( $F(2, 54) = 17.12, p < .001, \eta^2 = .39$ ) and trust ( $F(2, 54) = 19.68, p < .001, \eta^2 = .42$ ). Bonferroni post-hoc analyses indicated that both marital commitment and trust significantly increased from pre-test to post-test ( $p < .001$ ) and were maintained at the five-month follow-up ( $p < .001$ ), with no significant decline between post-test and follow-up ( $p > .05$ ).

**Conclusion:** The therapeutic gains were not only immediate but also sustained over time, supporting the use of structured forgiveness interventions in marital counseling settings. These findings highlight the potential of forgiveness as a valuable tool in relationship repair and emotional healing.

**Keywords:** *forgiveness-based intervention, marital commitment, trust restoration.*

### 1. Introduction

Marital relationships are often viewed as one of the most significant and emotionally intensive human bonds, yet they are also highly susceptible to conflict, betrayal, and emotional injuries. The presence of trust and

commitment plays a crucial role in maintaining relational stability, satisfaction, and long-term harmony. However, when violations such as infidelity, deception, or emotional neglect occur, the foundation of the marriage may be severely weakened. In such situations, forgiveness emerges as a pivotal process in emotional recovery and the restoration

of relational bonds. Forgiveness is not only a moral virtue but also a psychological mechanism that can facilitate healing and promote marital resilience in the face of interpersonal injuries (Dacka et al., 2023). As growing bodies of research demonstrate the transformative potential of forgiveness-based interventions in improving marital dynamics, it becomes increasingly important to explore their specific effects on key relational outcomes such as trust and commitment.

Trust is a fundamental component in all intimate relationships. It entails expectations of reliability, emotional safety, and mutual respect, which are essential for long-term relational maintenance. A breach of trust can severely disrupt emotional closeness and lead to withdrawal, resentment, or relational breakdown. According to findings by He et al., trust is deeply interwoven with marital quality and stability, particularly during the formative years of marriage (He et al., 2018). When trust is broken, partners often experience emotional distancing, reduced cooperation, and a decline in overall satisfaction. In this context, forgiveness offers a means of emotional release and the restructuring of negative cognitions about the offending partner, thereby supporting the gradual restoration of trust (Safari et al., 2023). The forgiveness process allows individuals to reevaluate their partner's intentions and rebuild confidence in their shared future, even after significant relational ruptures.

Marital commitment, on the other hand, refers to the personal intention and resolve to maintain the relationship over time, even in the face of challenges. It reflects not only a cognitive decision but also an emotional investment that is essential for the durability of the marital bond. Research has shown that commitment is positively associated with forgiveness, especially in long-term relationships, where partners are more inclined to repair rather than dissolve the relationship (Li et al., 2023). In a longitudinal study, Li and colleagues observed that forgiveness and commitment demonstrated reciprocal associations, influencing both partners' emotional security and marital well-being over time. This mutual reinforcement suggests that interventions aimed at enhancing forgiveness could concurrently foster higher levels of commitment, making them especially relevant for couples experiencing relational distress.

Several studies have supported the effectiveness of forgiveness-based interventions in improving marital outcomes. For instance, Salehi et al. found that integrated couples therapy, which included forgiveness training, significantly improved intimacy and marital forgiveness

among women affected by extramarital relationships (Salehi et al., 2023). Similarly, Behrang et al. reported that emotionally focused therapy helped maladjusted couples increase sexual assertiveness and marital harmony through enhanced forgiveness processes (Behrang et al., 2022). Such interventions often integrate emotional expression, perspective-taking, and cognitive reframing, which help reduce resentment and cultivate empathy between partners. By reprocessing relational hurts and promoting emotional clarity, forgiveness-based therapies offer a structured path for couples to reestablish emotional bonds and strengthen relational commitment.

Forgiveness in marriage is also influenced by personality traits, attachment styles, and attributional patterns. Farsani highlighted the mediating role of relationship attributions and marital forgiveness in the association between neuroticism, attachment insecurities, and marital satisfaction (Farsani, 2021). Individuals with secure attachment styles are generally more capable of forgiving their partner's offenses, as they are less likely to catastrophize conflict and more open to reconciliation. In contrast, those with high levels of neuroticism or anxious attachment may find it harder to overcome feelings of betrayal, which may, in turn, compromise trust and commitment. This variation underscores the importance of tailoring forgiveness interventions to the emotional and cognitive profiles of each couple, making psychoeducational components and emotion-focused dialogues critical to therapeutic success.

Cultural context also plays a significant role in how forgiveness is perceived and enacted within marriages. In collectivist cultures such as Indonesia, where this study was conducted, forgiveness is often emphasized as a communal value that promotes harmony and preserves family integrity (Makena & Kamunyu, 2021). Research by Riaz et al. further shows that marital status moderates the impact of forgiveness on psychological resilience among women, indicating that forgiveness in marriage can have unique gendered dimensions and psychosocial implications (Riaz et al., 2024). Moreover, Najibzadegan et al. found that Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), which fosters emotional flexibility and value-driven behavior, significantly improved intimacy and marital forgiveness in women affected by extramarital affairs (Najibzadegan et al., 2024). These findings suggest that culturally sensitive forgiveness-based interventions may not only support relational repair but also enhance individual psychological well-being.

The application of forgiveness-based therapy has gained increased attention in recent years, particularly in populations experiencing high relational stress. Faryabi et al. demonstrated that such therapy not only improved anger management and marital adjustment but also increased emotional expression and frequency of love among women in conflictual marriages (Faryabi et al., 2021). Likewise, Khatir et al. reported reductions in marital tension and improvements in forgiveness among women undergoing ACT-based treatment (Khatir et al., 2022). These results point to the therapeutic versatility of forgiveness work, which can be integrated into various psychotherapeutic frameworks to support relational transformation.

Beyond its emotional and cognitive effects, forgiveness also has behavioral implications. As highlighted by Gholipor, mindfulness-based cognitive therapy improved forgiveness and overall marital quality among women in second marriages by reducing reactive behaviors and fostering greater self-awareness (Gholipor, 2025). Brudek and Kaleta further emphasized that forgiveness serves as a mediator between personality traits and marital satisfaction, especially in older couples, by facilitating emotional regulation and meaning-making (Brudek & Kaleta, 2021). Their work, grounded in gerotranscendence theory, highlights how forgiveness can be a lifelong adaptive resource that reshapes relational narratives and supports continuity in marital life.

The measurement of forgiveness in marital contexts has also become more standardized in recent years. Sari and Cihan developed a validated marital forgiveness scale that captures emotional, behavioral, and cognitive components of forgiveness, offering a reliable tool for both clinical assessment and research (Sari & Cihan, 2024). Such instruments are essential for evaluating the efficacy of forgiveness-based interventions and understanding their impact on various dimensions of relational functioning.

Despite the growing evidence base, research gaps remain in understanding the long-term effects of forgiveness-based interventions on trust restoration and commitment in diverse marital contexts. Most studies have focused on short-term outcomes or specific populations, with limited follow-up to determine sustained behavioral and emotional changes. Moreover, few studies have systematically examined both trust and commitment as interrelated outcomes within a randomized controlled trial framework. This limitation is significant, given that both trust and commitment are key indicators of relational health and stability, and their improvement through therapeutic means has important

implications for marital counseling and couple therapy programs.

The present study aims to address these gaps by evaluating the impact of a structured forgiveness-based intervention on marital commitment and trust among couples in Indonesia using a randomized controlled trial design.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study utilized a randomized controlled trial (RCT) design to examine the effectiveness of a forgiveness-based intervention on marital commitment and trust restoration. Participants were heterosexual married couples residing in Indonesia who reported relational distress linked to trust violations or unresolved interpersonal hurt. A total of 30 individuals (15 couples) were recruited through community mental health centers and social media advertisements. Following eligibility screening and informed consent, couples were randomly assigned to either the intervention group ( $n = 15$ ) or the control group ( $n = 15$ ). Inclusion criteria required participants to be legally married for at least two years, aged between 25 and 50, and willing to attend all sessions. Exclusion criteria included severe mental illness, ongoing extramarital affairs, or concurrent participation in other psychotherapy programs. The intervention group received six weekly sessions of the forgiveness-based program, while the control group received no intervention during the study period.

### 2.2. Measures

#### 2.2.1. Marital Commitment

To assess marital commitment, the Commitment Inventory developed by Stanley and Markman (1992) was used. This standardized tool is widely applied in marital and relationship research to measure individuals' dedication and perceived constraints within their romantic partnerships. The inventory consists of 25 items and includes two major subscales: personal dedication (e.g., desire to maintain the relationship and a long-term orientation) and constraint commitment (e.g., social pressure, concern for the partner's welfare, and structural barriers to leaving the relationship). Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating greater levels of commitment. The inventory has demonstrated high internal consistency, with Cronbach's

alpha coefficients typically exceeding .80, and its construct and convergent validity have been confirmed in numerous studies across diverse populations (Lioe, 2023; Moghadamnia & Soleimani Farsani, 2023).

### 2.2.2. Trust

Trust was measured using Rempel, Holmes, and Zanna's Trust Scale (1985), a well-established instrument designed to assess the level of trust between partners in close relationships. This scale comprises 17 items and includes three subscales: predictability (consistency of partner behavior), dependability (faith in partner's reliability), and faith (belief in the partner's caring and responsiveness in the future). Each item is rated on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), with higher scores reflecting a stronger sense of trust. The scale has been extensively validated in marital and relationship research, showing excellent psychometric properties, including high internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha values typically above .85) and strong evidence for both construct and criterion validity in various empirical studies (Avanti & Setiawan, 2022; Gorjian Mehlalani et al., 2023).

## 2.3. Intervention

### 2.3.1. Forgiveness-Based Intervention

The forgiveness-based intervention was designed as a structured, six-session program aiming to promote emotional healing, rebuild trust, and enhance marital commitment among couples experiencing relational distress. Each session lasted between 60 to 75 minutes and was conducted in a supportive, semi-structured format, combining psychoeducation, guided exercises, individual reflection, and couple dialogues. The sessions drew upon established forgiveness models, particularly those emphasizing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of forgiveness, and were facilitated by a trained therapist with experience in marital therapy.

#### Session 1: Understanding Forgiveness and Relationship Hurt

The first session focused on establishing a therapeutic alliance and creating a safe space for both partners. Participants were introduced to the concept of forgiveness and how it differs from reconciliation, condoning, or forgetting. The therapist guided couples in identifying and sharing specific relational hurts that had undermined trust and commitment. Psychoeducation included common

emotional responses to betrayal and the psychological benefits of forgiveness. Homework involved reflective journaling on personal experiences of being hurt and hurting others.

#### Session 2: Exploring Emotional Responses and Unmet Needs

This session aimed to help participants explore and express their emotional reactions to relational injuries, such as anger, sadness, or betrayal. Partners were encouraged to articulate unmet emotional needs underlying these reactions. The therapist facilitated emotion-focused dialogue to foster empathy and active listening. Techniques from emotionally focused therapy (EFT) were used to support vulnerability and reduce defensiveness. Homework included writing an unsent letter to their partner expressing feelings related to the identified injury.

#### Session 3: Developing Empathy and Perspective-Taking

The third session emphasized empathy as a core component of the forgiveness process. Couples participated in guided exercises that encouraged viewing the offense from the partner's perspective. The therapist introduced structured activities, including role reversals and perspective-taking prompts, to deepen understanding of the motivations behind each partner's actions. Discussion focused on how past experiences and stressors may have contributed to relational conflict. Homework involved a reflective exercise on times when each partner had been forgiven in the past.

#### Session 4: Cognitive Reframing and Redefining the Narrative

In this session, participants worked on challenging maladaptive thoughts and cognitive distortions about their partner and the relationship. Using cognitive-behavioral techniques, the therapist helped couples reframe blame-based narratives and replace them with more balanced, compassionate interpretations. Emphasis was placed on distinguishing the person from the behavior and considering change and growth as possibilities. Partners created a new shared narrative about their relationship challenges and recovery journey. Homework included reviewing this narrative together and adding to it throughout the week.

#### Session 5: Practicing Forgiveness and Emotional Release

This session centered on the active practice of granting and receiving forgiveness. The therapist guided each partner through a structured forgiveness dialogue, emphasizing emotional release, responsibility-taking, and commitment to future change. Rituals such as symbolic gestures (e.g., writing and shredding a letter of resentment) were

incorporated to facilitate emotional closure. Couples were encouraged to express appreciation for their partner's efforts toward healing. Homework included daily affirmations of forgiveness and commitment to relational repair.

#### Session 6: Restoring Trust and Strengthening Commitment

The final session focused on rebuilding relational trust and affirming long-term commitment. Discussion included setting boundaries, identifying trust-building behaviors, and developing joint goals for the relationship's future. Couples collaboratively created a "Relationship Agreement" outlining mutual expectations and accountability steps. The session concluded with a review of progress, a shared celebration of growth, and planning for potential setbacks. A follow-up strategy was provided to maintain the gains achieved during the intervention.

#### 2.4. Data Analysis

To evaluate the intervention's effectiveness, data were collected at three time points: pre-test, post-test (immediately after the sixth session), and five-month follow-up. The primary outcome variables were marital commitment and trust, measured using standardized self-report instruments. Data analysis was performed using SPSS version 27. A repeated measures analysis of variance

(ANOVA) was conducted to assess within-group and between-group differences over time. Where significant main effects or interactions were found, Bonferroni post-hoc tests were used to identify specific differences across time points. Statistical significance was set at  $p < .05$ , and assumptions for repeated measures ANOVA were checked and met. The effect sizes were also reported to estimate the practical significance of the intervention.

### 3. Findings and Results

The study included a total of 30 participants (15 in the intervention group and 15 in the control group), all of whom were married individuals from Indonesia. The sample comprised 18 females (60.0%) and 12 males (40.0%). The mean age of participants was 36.4 years ( $SD = 5.7$ ), with ages ranging from 27 to 48 years. In terms of education level, 10 participants (33.3%) held a high school diploma, 13 participants (43.3%) had a bachelor's degree, and 7 participants (23.3%) possessed a postgraduate degree. Regarding marital duration, 9 participants (30.0%) had been married for 2 to 5 years, 12 participants (40.0%) for 6 to 10 years, and 9 participants (30.0%) for more than 10 years. The majority (83.3%) reported no prior experience with psychological counseling or therapy.

**Table 1**

*Means and Standard Deviations for Marital Commitment and Trust Scores by Group and Time Point*

Variable	Group	Pre-test (M ± SD)	Post-test (M ± SD)	Follow-up (M ± SD)
Marital Commitment	Intervention	61.47 ± 5.23	71.20 ± 4.89	70.33 ± 5.10
	Control	60.93 ± 4.98	61.40 ± 5.26	60.87 ± 5.12
Trust	Intervention	82.60 ± 6.34	91.27 ± 5.77	90.13 ± 6.01
	Control	81.87 ± 6.12	82.53 ± 6.44	81.93 ± 6.18

At baseline, both groups were comparable in marital commitment and trust scores. Post-intervention, the intervention group showed a substantial increase in marital commitment ( $M = 71.20$ ,  $SD = 4.89$ ) and trust ( $M = 91.27$ ,  $SD = 5.77$ ), which remained stable at follow-up (commitment:  $M = 70.33$ ,  $SD = 5.10$ ; trust:  $M = 90.13$ ,  $SD = 6.01$ ). In contrast, the control group's scores remained largely unchanged across time points (Table 1).

Before conducting the repeated measures ANOVA, the assumptions of normality, sphericity, and homogeneity of variances were assessed. Shapiro-Wilk tests indicated that the distribution of scores for marital commitment ( $W =$

$0.973$ ,  $p = .612$ ) and trust ( $W = 0.968$ ,  $p = .478$ ) were not significantly different from normal at each measurement point. Mauchly's test of sphericity was non-significant for both marital commitment ( $\chi^2(2) = 3.172$ ,  $p = .205$ ) and trust ( $\chi^2(2) = 2.889$ ,  $p = .236$ ), indicating that the assumption of sphericity was met. Levene's tests confirmed the homogeneity of variances between the intervention and control groups for pre-test marital commitment ( $F(1,28) = 0.213$ ,  $p = .647$ ) and trust ( $F(1,28) = 0.334$ ,  $p = .568$ ). These results supported the suitability of repeated measures ANOVA for further analysis.



**Table 2**

*Repeated Measures ANOVA Results for Marital Commitment and Trust*

Variable	Source	SS	df	MS	F	p-value	$\eta^2$
Marital Commitment	Time	936.42	2	468.21	18.33	<.001	.41
	Group	672.67	1	672.67	26.33	<.001	.49
	Time $\times$ Group	874.93	2	437.47	17.12	<.001	.39
	Error	1536.40	54	28.45			
Trust	Time	1211.18	2	605.59	22.67	<.001	.46
	Group	587.60	1	587.60	20.07	<.001	.43
	Time $\times$ Group	1014.22	2	507.11	19.68	<.001	.42
	Error	1444.90	54	26.75			

The repeated measures ANOVA revealed significant main effects of time and group, and significant time  $\times$  group interactions for both marital commitment and trust (all  $p <$

.001). Effect sizes were large ( $\eta^2 > .40$ ), indicating that the intervention had a strong impact over time on both dependent variables (Table 2).

**Table 3**

*Bonferroni Post-Hoc Comparisons for Marital Commitment and Trust*

Variable	Comparison	Mean Difference	SE	p-value
Marital Commitment	Pre-test vs Post-test	-9.73	1.42	<.001
	Pre-test vs Follow-up	-8.87	1.38	<.001
	Post-test vs Follow-up	0.87	0.95	.374
Trust	Pre-test vs Post-test	-8.67	1.58	<.001
	Pre-test vs Follow-up	-7.53	1.62	<.001
	Post-test vs Follow-up	1.13	1.01	.273

Bonferroni-adjusted comparisons revealed significant improvements in both marital commitment and trust from pre-test to post-test ( $p < .001$ ) and from pre-test to follow-up ( $p < .001$ ) in the intervention group. No significant changes were observed between post-test and follow-up for either variable (marital commitment:  $p = .374$ ; trust:  $p = .273$ ), indicating that therapeutic gains were maintained over time (Table 3).

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of a structured forgiveness-based intervention in enhancing marital commitment and restoring trust among distressed couples in Indonesia. The results, derived from a randomized controlled trial with a five-month follow-up, revealed significant improvements in both marital commitment and trust in the intervention group compared to the control group. These gains were not only evident immediately post-intervention but were also sustained over time, as indicated by repeated measures ANOVA and Bonferroni post-hoc analyses. Participants who engaged in the forgiveness-based sessions demonstrated greater emotional investment in their

relationships and a notable reduction in mistrust, suggesting that forgiveness work can serve as a powerful relational repair mechanism.

The observed increase in marital commitment aligns with previous research that emphasizes the interdependent relationship between forgiveness and long-term relational dedication. As demonstrated by Li et al., commitment and forgiveness reinforce one another by promoting emotional safety and future orientation within the marital bond (Li et al., 2023). The process of granting forgiveness requires individuals to reflect on their partner's positive qualities and shared history, which can reignite a sense of responsibility and affection. Such emotional reframing appears to have taken place during the intervention, particularly in the sessions focused on empathy, perspective-taking, and joint narrative construction. This finding is further supported by the work of Moghimi et al., who proposed that forgiveness, mediated by marital intimacy, serves as a precursor to heightened marital commitment and relational satisfaction (Moghimi et al., 2022).

The intervention's effect on trust restoration was also significant, suggesting that forgiveness plays a central role in the recovery of relational security after interpersonal

transgressions. According to He et al., early trust development in marriage predicts stability and quality, and forgiveness is critical when this trust is compromised (He et al., 2018). In this study, partners engaged in structured dialogues that allowed them to express vulnerability, acknowledge past hurt, and affirm intentions for change—components that are essential for rebuilding trust. The success of this approach is echoed in the findings of Safari et al., who noted that men's forgiveness significantly predicted marital satisfaction and improved coping strategies among infertile couples, highlighting the transformative power of forgiveness in emotionally sensitive contexts (Safari et al., 2023).

Several components of the intervention, such as the use of emotionally focused dialogues and cognitive reframing techniques, likely contributed to the positive outcomes. The use of role reversals and narrative rewriting enabled partners to move beyond rigid blame narratives and adopt more balanced, empathetic perspectives. These methods are consistent with those employed in emotionally focused therapy, as reported by Behrang et al., who found increased marital harmony and sexual assertiveness in couples following such interventions (Behrang et al., 2022). Similarly, the forgiveness-based compassion therapy studied by Faryabi et al. significantly improved marital adjustment and emotional expression, supporting the notion that forgiveness is a multi-dimensional process involving emotional release, cognitive shifts, and behavioral change (Faryabi et al., 2021).

The emotional and psychological shifts observed in participants of this study can also be understood through the lens of personality and attributional processes. As Farsani demonstrated, marital forgiveness mediates the link between neuroticism, relationship attributions, and satisfaction (Farsani, 2021). Participants who engaged in the forgiveness process may have begun to reattribute their partner's actions in less hostile or global terms, allowing for emotional softening and behavioral rapprochement. The structured nature of the sessions likely facilitated this reappraisal by guiding couples through reflective exercises, empathy-building tasks, and joint future planning.

Furthermore, the cultural context of Indonesia may have amplified the receptivity and effectiveness of the forgiveness-based approach. In collectivist societies, the preservation of harmony and family integrity often outweighs individual grievances, making forgiveness a culturally congruent intervention (Makena & Kamunyu, 2021). Riaz et al. emphasized that women's marital status

moderated the impact of forgiveness on psychological resilience, highlighting how forgiveness may hold different meanings and implications depending on societal roles and expectations (Riaz et al., 2024). Similarly, Najibzadegan et al. found that women involved in extramarital relationships experienced increased intimacy and marital forgiveness following acceptance and commitment therapy, pointing to the broader emotional benefits of forgiveness within marriage (Najibzadegan et al., 2024).

It is noteworthy that the gains in trust and commitment were sustained at the five-month follow-up. This temporal durability aligns with findings from Salehi et al., who observed that integrated couples therapy had long-term effects on intimacy and forgiveness among women affected by infidelity (Salehi et al., 2023). The present intervention's emphasis on emotional clarity, perspective-taking, and practical trust-building behaviors may have facilitated deeper internalization of the therapeutic principles, allowing participants to continue applying them well after the sessions concluded. This supports the assertion by Kaleta and Jaśkiewicz that forgiveness is not merely a reaction to specific offenses but a sustained relational practice that fosters overall marital satisfaction (Kaleta & Jaśkiewicz, 2023).

Additionally, the intervention's ability to foster cognitive and emotional flexibility echoes the findings of Khatir et al., who noted that ACT-based forgiveness work reduced marital tension and promoted healthier emotional responses among women seeking divorce (Khatir et al., 2022). The present study corroborates this dynamic by demonstrating that structured forgiveness interventions can not only reduce emotional reactivity but also enhance long-term relational resilience.

The role of gender, although not the primary focus of this study, warrants mention. Previous studies suggest that women may engage with forgiveness interventions differently than men. For example, Dacka et al. identified that determinants of forgiveness following infidelity often vary by gender, with women placing more emphasis on emotional repair and relationship continuity (Dacka et al., 2023). While the current sample was evenly split by gender, future studies should examine whether the mechanisms of change differ by sex, especially in cultures with strong gender-role expectations.

Moreover, the study's findings align with the conceptualization of forgiveness as both a mediator and an outcome in marital functioning. Brudek and Kaleta's work demonstrated that forgiveness mediates the relationship

between personality and marital satisfaction in older couples, highlighting its enduring relevance throughout the marital lifespan (Brudek & Kaleta, 2021). Jain and Arya also emphasized that forgiveness, when paired with conflict resolution strategies, significantly predicts marital satisfaction, reinforcing the present study's findings (Jain & Arya, 2024).

The relational benefits of forgiveness are not confined to marital settings. Öztürk's research in organizational contexts revealed that forgiveness enhances commitment and emotional cohesion, suggesting that its psychological mechanisms are universally applicable in close, trust-dependent relationships (Öztürk, 2018). By applying these principles to marriage, the present study contributes to a growing understanding of how forgiveness operates across different interpersonal domains.

Finally, the structured and culturally sensitive nature of the intervention likely played a key role in its success. As Gholipor observed, mindfulness-based cognitive therapy enhanced both forgiveness and relationship quality in women with remarriage histories, underlining the importance of intentional, well-designed therapeutic frameworks (Gholipor, 2025). Similarly, Fetrus and Soetjningsih found a positive relationship between forgiveness and marital satisfaction among wives with multiple roles, further validating the practical relevance of forgiveness-based approaches in diverse marital contexts (Fetrus & Soetjningsih, 2020).

## 5. Suggestions and Limitations

Despite its promising findings, the current study has several limitations. First, the sample size was relatively small (30 participants), which may limit the generalizability of the results. Larger samples across more diverse demographic groups would help validate the findings. Second, the participants were all from Indonesia, a collectivist culture that may view forgiveness and commitment differently than individualistic cultures. This cultural specificity might restrict the applicability of the results to other settings. Third, the control group did not receive any form of placebo or attention-control intervention, meaning that the observed effects may partly reflect non-specific therapeutic factors such as time or attention. Lastly, the study relied exclusively on self-report measures, which may be subject to social desirability bias or inaccuracies in recall.

Future research should aim to replicate these findings with larger and more diverse samples, including couples from varying cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. It would also be valuable to examine whether certain personality traits or relational histories moderate the effectiveness of forgiveness interventions. Longitudinal studies extending beyond the five-month follow-up period could provide insights into the long-term maintenance of trust and commitment gains. Furthermore, incorporating partner-reported and behavioral observational measures could enhance the robustness of the findings. Finally, future trials might compare the effectiveness of forgiveness-based interventions to other therapeutic modalities such as emotionally focused therapy or cognitive-behavioral couple therapy.

Clinicians working with couples experiencing relational distress should consider integrating forgiveness-based modules into their therapy protocols. Structured forgiveness interventions can serve as powerful tools for rebuilding emotional connection, particularly in cases involving betrayal or long-standing resentment. Practitioners should be trained to facilitate emotionally safe dialogues, guide cognitive reframing, and encourage narrative restructuring to help couples process hurt and restore relational security. Therapists must also remain sensitive to cultural values surrounding forgiveness and commitment to ensure interventions are both effective and respectful of clients' worldviews. Group formats or online adaptations could further increase accessibility to forgiveness-based therapy in community settings.

## Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

## Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

## Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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## Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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## Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. The design of this research has been approved by the Ethics Committee of Islamic Azad University, Shiraz Branch, under ethics code IR.IAU.SHIRAZ.REC.1402.153. All participants were fully informed that participation in this research was voluntary, and they had the option to withdraw at any time without penalty.

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