

The Effectiveness of Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy on Marital Relationship Quality and Forgiveness in Women in Second Marriages

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The present study aimed to determine the effectiveness of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy on marital relationship quality and forgiveness in women in second marriages.

Methods and Materials: The research method was quasi-experimental with a control and experimental group design. The statistical population consisted of women in second marriages who attended counseling centers in Babol city in 2022. Using convenience sampling, 30 individuals were selected as the sample size and randomly assigned into two groups: experimental (15 individuals) and control (15 individuals). Data collection was conducted using the Marital Relationship Quality and Forgiveness questionnaires. Initially, a pre-test was administered to both groups (experimental and control) using the aforementioned questionnaires. Subsequently, the experimental group received eight 90-minute sessions of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy, while the control group received no intervention.

Findings: The findings indicated that in the experimental group, the post-test scores showed an improvement in the mean marital relationship quality and forgiveness compared to the pre-test scores.

Conclusion: Therefore, mindfulness-based cognitive therapy impacts marital relationship quality and forgiveness in women in second marriages.

Keywords: *Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy, Marital Relationship Quality, Forgiveness, Second Marriage*

1. Introduction

Marriage is one of the most complex human relationships, forming the foundation of family in all societies. It constitutes a significant aspect of both individual

and social life, with profound effects on personal and societal health. When a young individual faces challenges in marriage and their age increases, collective efforts are made to find solutions (Saadati & Parsakia, 2023; Surijah et al., 2024). However, less attention is given to individuals who

have been married once and are now single again, even though re-entering singlehood is much more challenging. The decision-making process for remarriage is significantly more complex than for a first marriage, as failure in a second marriage can result in more severe social and psychological consequences. The greater the emotional and impulsive decision-making, the higher the risk of an unsuccessful remarriage (Sadeghi Miab et al., 2022).

Overall, second marriages are associated with higher risks. Men and women often carry emotional scars from a stressful and conflict-ridden previous marriage that led to divorce. They require healing and mutual understanding from their new partners. Sufficient time must pass for individuals to be prepared for entering a new marital life (Aqili & Beizai, 2022). Among the significant factors influencing couples, marital relationship quality is noteworthy (Alimohammadi & Aghajani, 2021; Hashemi Tngestani et al., 2022). Marital relationship quality refers to the spouses' internal and subjective attitudes toward their marital relationship and their assessment of happiness and satisfaction in marriage. Marital relationship quality is a psychological and interpersonal construct that broadly affects the family and its various components (Emadi et al., 2020). In addition to variables such as satisfaction with marital quality and sexual relationship, conflict management, and communication, marital relationship quality is one of the primary determinants of optimal family functioning. Marital conflicts significantly influence the quality of marital relationships.

Forgiveness involves a series of motivational changes in the injured individual, wherein motivations for revenge and avoidance toward the offending party diminish. Simultaneously, the injured individual increases their goodwill and motivation for reconciliation with the offender. Research indicates that forgiveness enhances intimacy in marital life. Emotional intimacy in relationships, a key emotional need for couples, is a vital source of happiness (Rahimkhani, 2021). Forgiveness is a process involving changes in feelings and attitudes toward the offender, leading to a reduction in the motivation for retaliation or estrangement and eliminating negative emotions toward the offender. Theorists argue that forgiveness involves replacing negative feelings with positive attitudes, such as compassion and benevolence. Essentially, resentment resulting from a partner's transgressions can exacerbate marital conflicts and hinder successful conflict resolution. Conversely, forgiving a spouse is a potential tool for reconciliation, even in the face of painful and troubling events. Thus, forgiveness can have

significant applications in long-term relationships and provide patterns for short-term interactions (Fincham et al., 2007).

Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) refers to paying attention to the present moment in a specific, purposeful, and non-judgmental way (Chiesa & Serretti, 2011). The goal of MBCT is to foster awareness in a deliberate and non-judgmental manner focused on the present. Unlike cognitive-behavioral therapy, which emphasizes altering the content of thoughts, MBCT focuses on developing metacognitive awareness and refining metacognitive processes that perpetuate mental rumination. The effects of MBCT are associated with disconnecting the link between depressive thought reactions and poor outcomes, resulting in enhanced mindfulness and patience during treatment. MBCT emphasizes attention to the present moment in a purposeful, specific, and non-judgmental manner. This technique is used to reduce stress and anxiety and enhance attention and focus (Segal et al., 2012).

In line with this, Samkhaniyani et al. (2020) investigated the effectiveness of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy on forgiveness and marital intimacy among couples. Their findings revealed that MBCT improved the mean levels of forgiveness and marital intimacy in the experimental group's post-test compared to the pre-test. Therefore, MBCT influences forgiveness and marital intimacy among couples (Samkhaniyani et al., 2020). Similarly, Ashouri et al. (2023) conducted a study to determine the effectiveness of MBCT on family processes among couples attending counseling centers. Their results indicated that family process scores in the experimental group were significantly improved in the post-test compared to the pre-test. Hence, it can be concluded that MBCT affects family processes among couples seeking counselling (Ashouri et al., 2023).

Based on the above, this study seeks to answer the fundamental question: Does mindfulness-based cognitive therapy influence marital relationship quality and forgiveness in women in second marriages?

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study design and Participant

The research utilized a quasi-experimental design with a control and experimental group. The statistical population consisted of women in second marriages who attended counseling centers in Babol in 2022. Using convenience sampling, 30 individuals were selected as the sample size and randomly assigned into two groups: experimental (15

individuals) and control (15 individuals). Data collection was conducted using the Marital Relationship Quality Questionnaire and the Forgiveness Questionnaire. Initially, a pre-test was administered to both groups (experimental and control) using the mentioned questionnaires. Subsequently, the experimental group received eight 90-minute sessions of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy, while the control group received no intervention.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Marital Relationship Quality

This questionnaire, developed by Fletcher et al. (2000), consists of 18 items covering six dimensions of marital relationships: satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, trust, sexual passion, and love. Participants respond on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (completely). Fletcher et al. (2000) aimed to enhance the face validity and internal consistency of each dimension while avoiding item overlap. To achieve this, they selected items for each dimension that were similar in form and meaning. The validity and content of this questionnaire have been confirmed in the Iranian population based on the prior findings (Hashemi Tngestani et al., 2022; Rahimkhani, 2021; Sadeghi Miab et al., 2022).

2.2.2. Forgiveness

The original version of this scale was developed by Pollard and Anderson in 1988 to screen and measure forgiveness within families. According to Pollard et al. (1998), the scale aims to assess the degree of forgiveness within families and its various dimensions. The original scale comprises 40 constructed-response items that evaluate forgiveness in individual family members and within the family system as a whole. In another study by Asgari and Roshani (2013), the reliability of this scale was reported as 0.80 using the test-retest method. Additionally, in a study by Sadati, Mehrabizadeh Honarmand, and Soudani (2014), the scale's reliability was found to be 0.79 using Cronbach's alpha (Kalantari & Meiri, 2023). In the present study, the overall reliability of the scale was calculated to be 0.80 using Cronbach's alpha.

2.3. Intervention

2.3.1. Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)

The intervention consisted of an eight-session mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) program tailored to improve marital relationship quality and forgiveness in women in second marriages. Each session lasted 90 minutes and was structured to progressively develop mindfulness skills, enhance emotional regulation, and foster forgiveness in participants. The sessions combined psychoeducation, mindfulness exercises, and practical applications to address participants' specific needs in the context of their marital experiences (Ashouri et al., 2023; Chiesa & Serretti, 2011; Samkhaniyani et al., 2020; Segal et al., 2012). Below is an outline of the protocol for each session.

Session 1: Introduction to Mindfulness and Cognitive Therapy

The first session introduced participants to the concepts of mindfulness and cognitive therapy, explaining the importance of present-moment awareness and non-judgmental acceptance. Participants learned about the link between mindfulness, emotional regulation, and forgiveness. The session included a guided mindfulness exercise focused on breathing awareness and a discussion on setting personal goals for the intervention.

Session 2: Understanding Emotional Triggers and Thought Patterns

This session focused on identifying emotional triggers and cognitive patterns that influence marital relationship dynamics. Participants were guided to recognize automatic negative thoughts and their impact on behavior and relationships. A mindfulness exercise on observing thoughts without judgment was practiced to enhance awareness.

Session 3: Building Awareness of the Present Moment

Participants were trained to cultivate present-moment awareness in their daily lives. The session emphasized the importance of reducing mental rumination and staying focused on the "here and now." Practical exercises included mindful eating and sensory awareness activities, which were followed by a group discussion on their experiences.

Session 4: Managing Stress and Emotional Reactivity

This session introduced techniques for managing stress and emotional reactivity using mindfulness. Participants practiced body scan meditation to develop awareness of physical sensations and reduce tension. They also explored strategies to remain calm during interpersonal conflicts and stressful situations.

Session 5: Enhancing Empathy and Compassion

The focus of this session was on cultivating empathy and compassion for oneself and others. Participants engaged in a loving-kindness meditation to foster positive feelings toward their partners and themselves. The group discussed how compassion can facilitate forgiveness and improve marital interactions.

Session 6: Practicing Forgiveness

This session delved into the concept of forgiveness as a deliberate and healing process. Participants identified personal barriers to forgiveness and explored ways to overcome them. A mindfulness exercise on letting go of resentment was introduced, and participants shared their reflections on applying forgiveness in their marital relationships.

Session 7: Strengthening Communication and Trust

Participants learned mindfulness-based communication techniques to improve understanding and trust in their relationships. Activities included mindful listening and expressing emotions without blame. The session also included role-playing exercises to practice these skills in a safe environment.

Session 8: Consolidation and Future Applications

The final session reviewed the skills and concepts learned throughout the intervention. Participants discussed their progress and challenges and developed action plans to sustain mindfulness and forgiveness practices in their daily lives. A closing mindfulness exercise focused on gratitude and positive intentions for the future was conducted to conclude the program.

This protocol aimed to empower participants with tools to improve their marital relationships and emotional well-being, providing a foundation for long-term personal and relational growth.

2.4. Data Analysis

The data collected in this study were analyzed using SPSS 26 software. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were used to summarize the demographic and research variables. The normality of the data distribution was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, ensuring the appropriateness of parametric tests. Inferential statistical analyses were conducted using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention while controlling for pre-test scores. Effect sizes were calculated to determine the magnitude of the intervention's impact on marital relationship quality and forgiveness. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$. These analyses provided a robust examination of the differences between the experimental and control groups.

3. Findings and Results

As shown in [Table 1](#), the means and standard deviations of the pre-test and post-test scores for the variables of marital relationship quality and forgiveness in the experimental and control groups indicate an improvement. Specifically, the results show an increase in marital relationship quality and forgiveness from the pre-test to the post-test stage in the experimental group.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of the Research Variables in Pre-Test and Post-Test Stages

Variable	Pre-Test Mean	Pre-Test SD	Post-Test Mean	Post-Test SD
Marital Relationship Quality (Experimental)	55.86	6.57	68.86	7.41
Marital Relationship Quality (Control)	54.45	6.67	53.67	6.58
Forgiveness (Experimental)	49.23	5.14	58.58	6.64
Forgiveness (Control)	48.87	5.24	47.97	5.37

One of the key assumptions in multivariate analyses is the normality of the variable distributions. Various methods exist to assess normality; in this study, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used. The test results showed $p > 0.05$ for

the variables of marital relationship quality and forgiveness, indicating that these variables were normally distributed within the sample.

Table 2*Results of ANCOVA for Dependent Variables Controlling for Pre-Test Scores*

Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	Effect Size
Marital Relationship Quality	3815.867	1	3815.867	16.86	0.007	0.57
Forgiveness	2259.867	1	2259.867	23.87	0.007	0.45

The results in [Table 2](#) demonstrate that the F ratio for the analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) for the experimental and control groups on the variable of marital relationship quality is statistically significant, indicating a meaningful difference between the two groups for this variable. Therefore, mindfulness-based cognitive therapy has a significant impact on marital relationship quality in women in second marriages.

Similarly, the results show that the F ratio for ANCOVA for the experimental and control groups on the forgiveness variable is statistically significant, highlighting a meaningful difference between the two groups. Thus, mindfulness-based cognitive therapy has a significant effect on forgiveness in women in second marriages.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings showed that the experimental group experienced an improvement in the mean score of marital relationship quality in the post-test compared to the pre-test. Therefore, mindfulness-based cognitive therapy positively impacts marital relationship quality and forgiveness in women in second marriages. These results align with the studies conducted by Millard et al. (2023), Nikparvar et al. (2023), and Karimifar and Farahani (2023).

Mindfulness training can enhance cognitive coping processes, such as positive reappraisal, and strengthen emotional regulation skills, including resilience and distress tolerance. It also provides problem-solving training, which can lead to increased psychological security. Practicing mindfulness over time can result in observable changes in individuals' lives and psychological functioning. By fostering better coping strategies and defense mechanisms, mindfulness contributes to their psychological well-being.

Mindfulness allows individuals to respond thoughtfully and deliberately to events rather than reacting impulsively. This capacity equips them to better recognize, manage, and resolve daily challenges. Numerous studies have demonstrated the impact of enhanced mindfulness on psychological well-being, which in turn improves the quality of relationships, particularly among couples. Furthermore, in explaining the findings of this study, it can be argued that

mindfulness-based therapy helps couples reduce prejudgments and provides strategies for engaging in peaceful dialogues. Overall, mindfulness therapy fosters improved self-awareness and awareness of others, leading to better communication between partners. This improvement strengthens commitment, intimacy, trust, cooperation, and consensus-seeking with one's spouse.

The findings also indicated that the experimental group showed an improvement in the mean score of forgiveness in the post-test compared to the pre-test. Thus, mindfulness-based cognitive therapy significantly impacts forgiveness in women in second marriages. These findings align with the prior studies ([Ashouri et al., 2023](#); [Chiesa & Serretti, 2011](#); [Samkhaniani et al., 2020](#); [Segal et al., 2012](#)).

Mindfulness increases acceptance, fosters nonjudgmental emotional awareness, and helps individuals recognize that emotions need not be controlled or suppressed but can be tolerated and experienced. This approach often includes mindfulness practices, such as meditation, stretching-based yoga, introductory training on hopelessness, and managing negative moods like depression. Exercises such as body scans and cognitive practices highlight the connections between mood, thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations.

In explaining the findings, it is essential to note that forgiveness is a psychological factor that plays a crucial role in familial well-being. Forgiveness is an intrapersonal process that involves cognitive, emotional, and behavioral changes toward the wrongdoing and the wrongdoer. Specifically, forgiveness refers to a deliberate and conscious motivation to reduce withdrawal, anger, and revenge toward the offender while increasing positive feelings to replace negative emotions.

Hargrave (2010) emphasized that forgiveness is an effective intervention for addressing issues such as anger, depression, problems related to the family of origin, sexual trauma, personality disorders, guilt, divorce, and infidelity. Forgiveness is linked to reduced psychological stress and harm, as it lowers withdrawal, anger, and revenge while fostering positive emotions and replacing negative ones ([Kalantari & Meiri, 2023](#); [Samkhaniani et al., 2020](#)).

5. Limitations and Suggestions

This study had several limitations that should be acknowledged. The small sample size and the use of convenience sampling may limit the generalizability of the findings to a broader population. Additionally, the study focused exclusively on women in second marriages, which may restrict the applicability of the results to other demographics or marital situations. The intervention's reliance on self-reported measures introduces the potential for response bias. Furthermore, the lack of long-term follow-up assessments limits the understanding of the sustainability of the observed effects over time.

Future research should consider larger and more diverse samples to improve the generalizability of the findings. Studies could also explore the impact of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy on marital relationship quality and forgiveness in different populations, such as men, first marriages, or cross-cultural settings. Longitudinal designs are recommended to evaluate the long-term efficacy of the intervention. Researchers could also compare the effectiveness of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy with other therapeutic approaches, such as emotion-focused therapy or acceptance and commitment therapy, to identify the most effective methods for enhancing marital relationships and forgiveness.

The findings of this study have important implications for clinical practice and marital counseling. Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy can be integrated into counseling programs for couples, particularly those facing challenges in second marriages, to improve relationship quality and foster forgiveness. Training programs for mental health professionals should include mindfulness techniques as tools to address relational conflicts and emotional regulation. Policymakers and organizations working on family welfare can incorporate mindfulness-based interventions into community support programs to enhance psychological well-being and relationship satisfaction among couples.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

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.

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