

# Effectiveness of Forgiveness skill on worry and hopelessness in Women Victims of sexual abuse in childhood

## Abstract

**Objective:** Sexual abuse is a major health problem and a trauma if encountered in childhood. This study was conducted about the effectiveness of Forgiveness skill on worry and hopelessness in Women Victims of sexual abuse in childhood.

**Method:** This is a semi-experimental study with pretest-posttest as well as control and test groups. Statistical population of study consisted of 30 depressed women who reported a sexual abuse by relative and referred to several psychological clinics in Tehran in 2017 were studied. Studied sample consisted of 30 women who were selected randomly (how the author has used random sampling) (the author should have used purposive sampling rather than random) and signed into two 15-member experimental and control groups. Sample members of test group were under intervention individually within 12 sessions with forgiveness approach and control group members were remained in waiting list. Both of groups filled out worry and hopelessness scale in baseline and after intervention. The data were analyzed using covariance analysis through IBM SPSS 22.0 software.

**Results:** Results obtained from study indicate difference between worry and hopelessness level of women victims of sexual abuse in control and experimental groups after forgiveness training.

**Discussion and Conclusion:** Forgiveness skill is effective in reducing worry and hopelessness in women victims of sexual abuse in childhood.

Keywords: forgiveness, worry, hopelessness, women, sexual abuse

## Introduction

Sexual abuse has been considering as a phenomenon since 1980s and it seemingly is expanding in all of modern societies and cultures [1]. Such prevalence is higher in developing countries compared to the developed countries [2]. It is difficult to diagnose epidemiology of sexual abuse of children due to its hidden nature. The results obtained from studies on the outbreak of sexual abuse indicate that prevalence of this phenomenon among boys equals 2-30% and 4-60% among girls [3]. It was estimated in 2008 that about 772000 children were victims of mistreatment, 120000 children were victims of physical abuse and 70000 children were victims of sexual abuse [4]. Social Injury Prevention Office of Iran's Social Welfare Organization has reported outbreak of sexual abuse of children equal to 8-15% in Iran [5]. According to

Zinzow et al. [6]. Depression and hopelessness are the most common symptoms in victims of child sexual abuse. Worry and anxiety can be named as other common symptoms [7]. Other studies have proved that victims of child sexual abuse suffer from worry, hopelessness, depression and anxiety during their adulthood [8&9]. Johoson [10] and Rodriguez [11] introduced anxiety and worry as common symptoms in studied victims.

The concept of forgiveness is defined as the process of voluntary waiver of resentment and hatred against others so that not only the person forgets the hostility and hatred but also wishes transgressor the best. Forgiveness consists of four steps including awareness of unpleasant experience and its implications, decision on forgiveness, forgiving self and others, and finding a new concept [12, 13]. Forgiveness is reported as a treatment to give away the anger caused by psychological injuries [13]. Walker [14] introduces forgiveness as a tool to release from mental conflicts, worries, ruminations and mental obsessions as well as a method used to increase quality of life of the person. Ghahari and Mazloumi found that forgiveness is a skill contributing to reduction in depression and anxiety in women who are victims of childhood sexual violence. According to Reed and Enright [16] and Leach et al. [17], forgiveness is a skill, which reduces negative mood.

In line with the target studies, this study also was conducted to examine effectiveness of forgiveness skill in reducing worry and hopelessness of women victims of sexual abuse during their childhood.

## **Method**

Convenient sampling method was used to select women, who had reported sexual abuse during their childhood among clients referring to psychology and psychiatry clinics in Tehran in 2017. Considering the inclusion criteria such as diploma degree, experience of sexual abuse before 7 years old, lack of alcohol consumption and drug, lack of psychotic disorders, subjects filled out worry questionnaire (1994) and Beck hopelessness scale (1974) then 30 members were selected based on their high scores of hopelessness and concern questionnaires. These 30 subjects were assigned to two groups (n=15) randomly. Experimental subjects were trained through 12 forgiveness sessions individually while control group remained on the waiting list. Experimental

and control groups filled out the worry and hopelessness questionnaires before and after intervention. Data were analyzed using ANCOVA through SPSS22 Software.

### **Instrument**

Following instruments were used in this study:

**Beck Hopelessness Scale (1974):** This 20-item tool measures negative thought about the future. This scale evaluates hopelessness rate and risk prediction of suicide [18]. Hopelessness test was standardized on students of Islamic Azad University Tehran Branch by Dezhgam [19]. The correlation between scores of each item with total score was examined and it was found that Beck Hopelessness Scale measures a unique structure. Reliability of scale obtained to 79% by using internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's alpha). To examine validity of test, the main components were analyzed and five factors were extracted: 1- loss of motivation to achieve goals 2- hopelessness about the future 3- attitude toward the future 4- life prospect 5- confidence in future. The aforementioned factors could explain 48.9% of total variance.

**Penn State Worry Questionnaire (PSWQ) (Molina & Borkovec, 1994):** this 16-item questionnaire was designed to evaluate worry and obtain extreme, pervasive and uncontrolled features of pathological worry. This questionnaire is scored at 5-point Likert scale from 1 (never) to 5 (very high). Cronbach's alpha and reliability of 2-10 week retest obtained to 0.86-0.93 and 0.74-0.93, respectively. Shirinzadeh et al. [20] reported test reliability to 0.86 and 0.77, respectively using Cronbach's alpha and 4-week retest.

### **Forgiveness Protocol**

Forgiveness protocol was designed like other treatment protocols in order to be implemented for patients. This protocol was introduced by Palvino and Lee (1995) based on the Enright's studies [16]. The protocol is as follows:

Session 1: introducing group members, defining forgiveness and examining advantages of forgiveness for self-empathy

Session 2: investigating psychological defenses

Session 3: understanding the grief caused by sexual abuse

Session 4: exploring feelings towards the abuser

Session 5: investigating consequences of not forgiving the abuser

Session 6: grieve for the loss caused by abuse

Session 7: facing the anger and hatred; finding a meaning for the unfair abuse and grief

Session 8: practicing the kindness and empathy

Session 9: practice to forgive the abuser

Session 10: practice to forgive self

Session 11: fifying new goals in life to forgive self and abuser

Session 12: reviewing all of sessions and receiving participants' feedback.

## Findings

### Demographic data of subjects

Most of the participants were women; 14 members (44%) were single and 86 members were married; 78% had diploma and 225 had BA degree. All of participants were at age range of 20-33 and all of them had experienced sexual abuse by their neighbors or relatives when they were younger than 7.

Table 1 indicates pretest and posttest results of experimental and control groups in terms of anxiety and depression. The obtained results show that mean scores of experimental group were reduced after intervention.

**Tale 1. Pretest and posttest results of experimental and control groups in relation with dependent variable**

Experimental group		Control group		Variable
Posttest	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	
8/06	87/ .90	23/01	97/ .65	Hopelessness
7/11	65/01	62 /05	66 /34	Worry

The obtained values indicate difference between mean scores of control and experimental groups in dependent variables.

Table 2 shows the adjusted means and covariance results of dependent variables indicating effect of independent variable on dependent variable.

**Tale 2. Mean and adjusted standard deviation and results of ANCOVA of dependent variables**

Covariance			Control Group		Experimental group		
Eta	P	F (26, 1)	SD	M	SD	M	
0.50	0.00	17.31	1.40	87.55	1.64	94.03	Worry
				61.12	1.26	56.20	Hopelessness

Table 3 shows that there is a difference between adjusted means of two groups.

**Tale 3. MANCOVA for measuring hybrid variable**

level Eta	significance	F (25,2)	value	Source
0.65	0.00	23.28	0.37	Hybrid variable (group)

**Note:** multiple variable can be calculated using Wilks' Lambda formula.

Eta square that is related to results of hybrid variables of Wilks' Lambda test was significant indicating significant difference between participants in two groups. Accordingly, the research hypothesis of effectiveness of forgiveness skill in reducing worry and hopelessness in women victims of sexual abuse in childhood was confirmed.

## Discussion

This study was conducted to examine effectiveness of forgiveness skill in reducing worry and hopelessness of women victims of sexual abuse in childhood.

Investigations indicate that interventions with forgiveness approach of Enright Model [16] lead to decline in negative emotions.

Results of this study were in line with results obtained from following studies: Brown and Phillips [21], Tse and Yip [22] who found forgiveness as a protective factor against depression and reduces it; Diblasio and Benda [23] who found a positive significant correlation between inability to forgive self and depression, anxiety, distrust, low self-esteem, and social introversion; Leach et al. [17] who showed that forgiveness increases positive emotional reactions and reduces negative emotional reactions such as worry and hopelessness; Suchday and Freidberg [24] who found negative correlation between forgiveness and anxiety, hopelessness and depression; Lavafpour Nouri et al. [25] who proved the effect of forgiveness on reducing depression, anxiety and worry in adolescences. The results of present paper were also matched with results of the study conducted by Ghahari and Mazloumi [15] who showed that forgiveness could reduce anxiety and depression symptoms in victims of sexual abuse.

It seems that forgiveness training leads to reduction in negative feelings and increase in positive feelings in victims by improving their mental health and quality of life, which contributes to reduction in depression and anxiety in such victims.

**Limits:** the studied group was just consisted of women with unequal conditions in terms of age, education, job and social class; hence, therapy was implemented for them individually and this was a limit in this study. Another heterogeneity of study was abuse experience in childhood that had happened for some of subjects once or it was experienced by some other several times.

#### **SUGGESTIONS**

We suggest forgiveness intervention for improvement of psychological problems in women with history of sexual abuse

#### **CONSENT**

patient's written consent has been collected and preserved by the authors.

#### **ETHICAL APPROVAL**

written approval of Ethics committee has been collected and preserved by the authors.

#### **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Author A and B designed the study and monitored research process, Author C and D performed the statistical analysis, Author Cand E and F review litreachers, and wrote*

*The first draft of the manuscript. Author G read and edited paper in English language. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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