

Understanding the role of forgiveness in shaping the flourishing of Hindu married couples

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ABSTRACT

Hindu Marriage is a sacrament that aims to achieve various worldly and spiritual goals. This study explores the relationship between biographic features, forgiveness, and well-being among married Hindu couples. The impact of hurt, untruthfulness, or betrayal within marriage on forgiveness behavior and flourishing is examined. Using a correlational design, the study recruited 300 married Hindu couples aged 25 to 50 years through snowball sampling. Well-being and forgiveness were measured using the Mental Health Continuum and The Heartland Forgiveness Scale. The results revealed that age, years of marriage, and the three types of forgiveness were significantly positively correlated with well-being. On the other hand, the number of children, family members, and socioeconomic status negatively correlated with well-being. Employment status and age were the most significant predictors of hedonic and psychological well-being, respectively. Others' forgiveness was found to have an impact on social and eudaimonic well-being and flourishing. The findings are discussed in the context of Indian socio-cultural conditions, the conceptualization of Hindu marriage, and previous relevant studies. The study concludes that certain biographical attributes, inclination towards a postmodern lifestyle, and others' forgiveness are factors that shape the well-being of married Hindu couples. Future research directions are suggested.

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Eudaimonic well-being; forgiveness; hedonic well-being; Hindu married couples; human flourishing.

Article History:

Received 7th Feb, 2023

Revised 9th March, 2023

Accepted 16th March, 2023

Published 31st March, 2023

How to Cite in APA Style:

Parihar, P., Tiwari, G., Rai, P.K. (2023). Understanding the role of forgiveness in shaping the flourishing of Hindu married couples.

Smaratungga: Journal of Education and Buddhist Studies, 3(1), 46-60.

doi: 10.53417/sjeb.v3i1.99

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Published by Center of Research and Publication of Smaratungga Buddhist Collage

Introduction

Forgiveness has been suggested to play an important role in human relationships of all sorts but its systematic empirical enquiry took a new momentum only after the establishment of Positive Psychology in 2000. Forgiveness involves intra-individual and pro-social change towards a perceived transgression situated in a specific interpersonal context (McCullough et al., 2001; Pandey et al., 2023; Singh et al., 2022a, 2022b). Forgiveness catalyzes positive changes that involve willingness, consent and conscious decision of the forgivers (Worthington et al., 2007). Many benefits of observing and practising forgiveness have been reported by researchers. For example, forgiveness has been observed to be effective in mental and physical health (Harris & Thoresen, 2005). Maltby et al. (2001) have found that forgiveness is an important psychological construct to understand health and other significant life outcomes. For example, forgiveness has been observed to actuate internal harmony, positive emotions and cognitions, reparative vigour, empathy, well-being, positive health outcomes and useful relationships for both children and adults (Ahirwar et al., 2019; Pandey et al., 2020, 2021; Tiwari, Pandey, et al., 2022).

Forgiveness has also been argued to be significant for a romantic relationship, marital longevity and satisfaction (Fenell, 1993). Forgiveness carries relevance in the healing of relationship transgressions involving betrayal (Gordon et al., 2005) and relationship hurts (Fincham et al., 2004). Forgiveness is positively associated with psychological well-being because it helps people preserve and reinstate lost relationships (Karremans et al., 2003). According to self-determination theory, forgiveness is linked with well-being as helps to influence the forgiver's perceptions of his or her relationship and connectedness with the transgressor (Reis et al., 2000).

It has been argued that successful marriage depends upon the forgiveness of couples (Worthington & Scherer, 2004). Forgiveness has been observed to play a facilitative role in facing current problems, avoiding new problems and upholding the relationships of couples (Worthington & Scherer, 2004). It has been suggested that forgiveness can regain faith in a marital relationship in the face of contravention (Gordon et al., 2000). It is also important to understand the relationship between marital satisfaction (Fincham & Linfield, 1997), conflict and negative attributions, lowered loyalty, and non-empathetic attitudes in marital relationships (Fincham et al., 2006). Self-forgiveness helps to give up negative thoughts, feelings and behaviours and helps replace these with positive behaviours towards self (Enright, 1996). Self-forgiveness enables individuals to become aware and deal with their negative feelings. Self-forgiveness enhances well-being by helping people uphold good, useful and compassionate relationships (McCullough et al., 2000).

The present study

The above discussion makes it clear that forgiveness is a positive strength that helps replace negative cognitions, affects and behavioural outcomes with positive ones. It has been observed that forgiveness helps to reinstate fragmented

relationships, lowers resentment and cures emotional injury arising out of worsened marital relationships (Fincham et al., 2002). Despite the growing research on forgiveness, its role in the marriage relationship is not well-studied (Kearns & Fincham, 2004; McCullough et al., 1998). Thus, forgiveness carries relevance to underscore the well-being and other life outcomes of individuals (Karremans et al., 2003). On the other hand, non-forgiving behaviours have been reported to be positively linked with psychopathological symptoms (Berry & Worthington, 2001). McCullough et al. (2001) have suggested that self-forgive helps individuals to make their feelings, actions and beliefs about themselves more positive that make prompt them to think rationally and act constructively. Thus, self-forgiveness may also have significant relevance in close relationships as the nature of marriage relationships is regulated through attributions, emotional reactions and empathy.

Although marriage is a union of two individuals, characterized by close reciprocity and interdependence, some sort of wrongdoing cannot be avoided. Among other measures, forgiveness is an important strategy for removing obstacles in marriage. It represents a relevant construct that facilitates the reconstruction of wrongdoings in a positive incident about perpetrators, acts and their consequences. Therefore, interpersonal, self-referential, and situational forgiveness provide a crucial paradigm for understanding life outcomes in marital relationships. Forgiveness can be relevant to underscoring thriving as it lowers psychological aggression and improves constructive communication. It can also be important in marital relationships as it reduces retaliation and increases goodwill. In contrast, unforgiveness can fuel unresolved transgressions that escalate future conflicts and negative interaction patterns, resulting in poor quality marital relationships.

Samskāras are sacraments or rites in which Hindus reaffirm their connection to the divine. It indicates rituals and ceremonies designed to leave deep spiritual imprints on the individual's conscience (Stefon & Doniger, 2018). They are observed at every stage of a Hindu's life from conception to death. *Griha* sutras or the *Puranas* are the sources of the sacraments. There is no consensus on its types. Differences are based on region, caste, or family. The most accepted list of 16 traditional *samskaras* are *garbhadhana* (for conception), *pumsavana* (to favour male birth), *simantonnayana* (parting of hair to ensure safe birth), *jatakarma* (birth), *namakarana* (naming), *nishkrama* (the children's first glimpse of the sun), *annaprashana* (first ingestion of solid food), *chudakarana* (first tonsure of the boy's head), *karnavedha* (piercing of the ears), *vidyarambha* (learning the alphabet), *upanayana* (initiation), *vedarambha* (beginning study of the Vedas), *kesha* (first shaving of the beard), *samavartana* (returning from the house of the guru), *vivaha* (wedding) and *antyeshti* (funeral rite). Although all sacraments are significant, marriage denotes a significant sacrament that enables the *Grihasth Ashram* that supports people of all walks of life.

The cultural context of Indian society is dissimilar to that of these societies. The Hindu cultural system assumes marriage as one of the sacraments that have worldly as well as eternal aspects. Hindu marriage is assumed to act as a means for people to achieve four *Purusharthas* of life namely *Dharma* (religion), *Artha* (worldly resources), *Kama* (sensual pleasure) and *Moksha* (salvation). For example, marriage helps to free an individual from *pitri rinas* (paternal debt) by giving birth to children. The ultimate goal of Hindu life is to achieve *Moksha* (salvation). It is the marriage

that provides an opportunity for people to attain *Moksha* through Dharma (religion), *Artha* (worldly resources) and *Kama* (sensual pleasure). Thus, Hindu marriage is well-structured in its nature, practice and goals which are significantly different from marriage in other religions. Here in India, marriage relationships are generally arranged and are fixed by a set of familial and cultural rules considering genealogy and *gotra* (lineage). Thus, marriage in India is well-institutionalized and based on a set of philosophical and religious principles. These attributes of Hindu marriage make it a unique system that significantly shapes the relationship of Hindu married couples.

Moreover, socio-cultural realities and traditional practices are facing incessant change in Indian society today. The joint family is being replaced with the nuclear family. Educational and employment opportunities are available to both sexes. In light of these changes, some characteristic changes in marriage relationships may be expected. Some researchers have argued that Indian society is characterized by both individualism and collectivism (Sinha & Tripathi, 1994). This observation has recently been verified in a study in India that found self-esteem (suggested to be relevant to understand behaviours and performance of individuals from individualistic societies) and self-compassion (suggested to be useful to understand behaviours and performance of individuals from collectivistic societies) to be relevant for understanding the well-being of young adults (Pandey et al., 2021; Tiwari, Kashyap, et al., 2022). Thus, it is explicit that there is a lack of research exploring the relationships between three facets of forgiveness (forgiveness of self, others and situations) and various dimensions of the human flourishing of married couples in the changing socio-cultural and demographic contexts.

In the background of these arguments, the present study aims to understand the role of some biographical factors and three facets of forgiveness (forgiveness of self, others and situations) in shaping various aspects of the human flourishing of Hindu married couples. We hypothesize that age and years of marriage positive and the three types of forgiveness will show positive correlations with the various dimensions of the well-being of married couples. Conversely, negative correlations will be observed among number of children, number of family members and socioeconomic. Further, the biographic variables and the three types of forgiveness will contribute significant variability in the various dimensions of the well-being of married couples.

Methods and materials

Sample

In the present study, a correlational research design was employed that used a snowball sampling technique to select the participants. The data were collected from 300 Hindu married couples with the age ranging from 26 years to 50 years of the residents of Sagar city, Madhya Pradesh, India. Most of the participants were chosen from middle-class Hindu families. The biographic details such as education, gender, age, domicile, occupation, length of the marriage, number of children, nature of family and number of family members were recorded with the help of a scale. The

socioeconomic status of the participants was measured through a standardized scale (Aggarwal et al., 2005).

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The participants with at least five years of married with reported normal physical and mental health were allowed to take part in the study. Only Hindu married couples were included in the study. Moreover, the participants whose age ranged between 25 years to 50 years were included in the study. Those couples who belonged to other religious communities (Christians, Muslims, Buddhists and Jain etc.) due to their different marriage rituals, reported some health problems, had recent marriages and did not fall under the prescribed age range were excluded from the study.

Measures

The present study employed the following tools for data collection:

1. Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS)

The Heartland Forgiveness Scale (Thompson et al., 2005) was utilized for the measurement of forgiveness of self, others and situations. The scale consists of 18 items that provided the participants with the opportunity to express their experiences of forgiveness on a 7-point scale that ranged from “Almost Always False Than True” (1) to “Almost Always True Of Me” (7). This measure of forgiveness comprises three subscales for measuring forgiveness of self, others and situation. The Chronbach Alpha coefficients of reliability for the forgiveness of self, others, and situation and the overall scale were reported to be 0.75, 0.78, 0.77 and 0.86, respectively (Thompson et al., 2005).

2. Mental Health Continuum-Short Form

For measuring hedonic and eudaimonic well-being, The Mental Health Continuum-Short Form (MHC-SF) (Keyes, 2005) was used. The scale has been based on the model of flourishing having theoretical origins from three sources: studies on emotional well-being (Diener et al., 1999), hedonic (subjective or emotional) well-being, psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989) and social well-being (Keyes, 1998). This scale consists of 14 items that require the respondents to rate their experiences over the last month on a 6-point scale (‘never’, ‘once or twice’, ‘about once a week’, ‘2 or 3 times a week’, ‘almost every day’, or ‘every day’). The combined scores of psychological and social well-being make eudaimonic well-being. An overall score on the scale is termed human flourishing. The internal consistency reliability is over 0.80 (Keyes, 2005; Pandey et al., 2021).

Procedure

After planning the study, the proposal was submitted to the Ethics committee of a University [BLINDED], India for ethical approval. Then the prospective couples were contacted personally by the first author who debriefed them about the basic objective of the study and asked for their voluntary participation and written consent. All the questionnaires were originally available in English and were

translated into Hindi by adopting a translation-back-translation method. All relevant demographic details like age, sex, residence and education etc. were taken from the participants. The questionnaires were administered during personal visits by the first author.

Data analysis plan

The completed questionnaires were scored and the raw scores were arranged as per the need for statistical analysis. The mean scores, standard deviations (SDs), coefficient of correlation and hierarchical regression analysis were calculated through SPSS 25v available at the University.

Results

Correlation analysis

Table 1 shows that education has significant positive correlations with years of marriage, number of children, socioeconomic status, self-forgiveness, interpersonal forgiveness, situational forgiveness, overall forgiveness, emotional well-being, social well-being, psychological well-being, eudaimonic well-being and overall flourishing of the participants. Age showed significant positive correlations with years of marriage, number of children, number of family members, interpersonal forgiveness, situational forgiveness, overall forgiveness, emotional well-being, psychological well-being, eudaimonic well-being, and overall flourishing.

Years of marriage showed significant positive correlations with age, number of children, interpersonal forgiveness, situational forgiveness, overall forgiveness, emotional well-being, psychological well-being, and overall flourishing. The number of children showed significant positive correlations with age, years of marriage, socioeconomic status and emotional well-being. Number of family members showed significant positive correlations with social well-being, psychological well-being, eudaimonic well-being and overall flourishing.

Socioeconomic status showed significant positive correlations with scores for social well-being, psychological well-being, eudaimonic well-being and overall flourishing. Self-forgiveness showed significant positive correlations with emotional well-being, social well-being, psychological well-being, eudaimonic well-being, and overall flourishing. Interpersonal forgiveness showed significant positive correlations with age, years of marriage, socioeconomic status, emotional well-being, social well-being, psychological well-being, eudaimonic well-being, and overall flourishing (see Table 1).

Situational forgiveness showed significant positive correlations with age, years of marriage, socioeconomic status, emotional well-being, social well-being, psychological well-being, eudaimonic well-being and overall flourishing. Overall forgiveness showed significant positive correlations with age, years of marriage, socioeconomic status, emotional well-being, social well-being, psychological well-being, eudaimonic well-being, and overall flourishing (see Table 1).

Table 1. Correlations Among Demographic Attributes, Forgiveness and Well-Being of the participants (N = 300 Married Couples)

S. No.	Measures	Mean (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1	Age	38.42 (7.89)	1																
2	DOM	1.83 (0.38)	.073	1															
3	ES	1.60 (0.49)	.174**	.034	1														
4	LOML	15.19 (7.80)	.824**	.050	.034	1													
5	NOC	1.47 (0.79)	.500**	-.071	-.083*	.476**	1												
6	NOF	1.64 (0.48)	.108**	-.048	-.013	-.080*	.248**	1											
7	NOFM	6.53 (4.60)	.068	.046	-.018	.066	-.017	.447**	1										
8	SES	56.26 (12.47)	-.006	.150**	.102*	-.070	-.097*	.010	.071	1									
9	SF	25.60 (3.68)	.056	.092*	.047	.018	-.044	-.024	.022	-.031	1								
10	OF	26.34 (4.95)	.149**	.070	.027	.195**	.029	-.054	-.002	.111**	.267**	1							
11	SIF	25.27 (3.57)	.150**	.100*	.050	.088*	-.001	-.038	.063	-.004	.201**	.300**	1						
12	OVF	127.91 (15.09)	.119**	.121**	.005	.113**	-.031	-.043	.031	.116**	.626**	.751**	.505**	1					
13	EWB	10.97 (3.56)	.226**	.171**	.145**	.194**	.110**	-.091*	.007	-.018	.135**	.180**	.167**	.184**	1				
14	SWB	14.66 (5.55)	.043	.006	.104*	-.041	-.008	.111**	.123**	.004	.089*	.136**	.088*	.083*	.388**	1			
15	PWB	21.55 (5.73)	.227**	.169**	.136**	.164**	.067	-.161**	-.103*	-.063	.166**	.255**	.256**	.250**	.639**	.491**	1		
16	EDWB	36.21 (9.73)	.158**	.102*	.139**	.073	.035	.158**	.130**	-.035	.148**	.227**	.201**	.194**	.597**	.859**	.868**	1	
17	HF	46.99 (12.50)	.188**	.128**	.156**	.110**	.060	-.153**	-.101*	-.045	.150**	.239**	.207**	.209**	.758**	.795**	.877**	.969**	1

Note 1. DOM = Domicile, EDU = Education, EDWB = Eudaimonic Well-being, EWB = Emotional Well-being, HF = Human Flourishing, NOC = Number of Children, NOF = Nature of Family, NOFM = Number of Family Members, OF = Others Forgiveness, OS = Employment Status, OVF= Overall Forgiveness, PWB = Psychological Well-being, SES = Socioeconomic Status, SF = Self-Forgiveness, SIF = Situational Forgiveness, SWB = Social Well-being, LOML = Length of married life.

Note 2. * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level, ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Hierarchical regression analysis

Demographic variables (education, gender, age, domicile, occupation, years of marriage number of children nature of family number of family members and socioeconomic status) were entered at step 1 followed by self-forgiveness, interpersonal forgiveness, situational forgiveness, and overall forgiveness that were entered at step 2 in a stepwise fashion. The demographic variables (education, gender, age, domicile, occupation, years of marriage number of children nature of family number of family members and socioeconomic status) also accounted for significant variance by contributing 9.8% in the scores of hedonic well-being ($R^2 = .098$, $F(10, 589) = 6.367$, $p = .001$) (see Table 2).

Likewise, education, gender, age, domicile, occupation, years of marriage number of children nature of family number of family members and socioeconomic status exhibited their cumulative contributions of 7.5%, 14.6%, 12.4% and 12.6% in social well-being ($R^2 = .075$, $F(10, 589) = 4.745$, $p = .001$), psychological well-being ($R^2 = .146$, $F(10, 589) = 10.109$, $p = .001$), eudaimonic well-being ($R^2 = .124$, $F(10, 589) = 8.346$, $p = .001$) and overall flourishing ($R^2 = .126$, $F(10, 589) = 8.455$, $p = .001$) as has been depicted in model 1 of each component of human flourishing, respectively (see Table 2).

Table 2. Hierarchical Regression Analyses Using Demographic Attributes and Forgiveness as Predictors and Well-Being as Criterion (N = 300 Married Couples)

Predictors	HWB		SWB		PWB		EDWB		HF	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Education	.038	.009	.162**	.140**	.160**	.124**	.186**	.153**	.169**	.135**
Gender	.061	.050	.116*	.106	.109*	.094	.130*	.115*	.112*	.097
Age	.141	.112	.222**	.211**	.260**	.215**	.279**	.247**	.257**	.225**
Domicile	.149**	.138**	-.040	-.046	.120**	.103**	.048	.034	.078	.064
Occupation	.155**	.148**	.123*	.116*	.139**	.130**	.152**	.143**	.165**	.155**
Years of Marriage	.053	.040	-.187**	-.210**	-.020	-.037	-.118	-.141	-.079	-.104
Number of Children	.015	.037	-.036	-.021	-.065	-.033	-.059	-.031	-.039	-.011
Nature of Family	-.064	-.053	-.048	-.041	-.090*	-.072	-.080	-.066	-.083	-.069
Nature of Family Members	.022	.013	-.101*	-.105*	-.077	-.092*	-.103*	-.114**	-.073	-.084
Socioeconomic Status	-.055	-.032	-.039	-.020	-.124*	-.094	-.095*	-.067	-.107**	-.078
SF		.066		.023		.049		.042		.042
IF		.088*		.105*		.128**		.135**		.141**
SIF		.085*		.036		.158**		.113**		.113**
R2	.098	.124	.075	.090	.146	.203	.124	.167	.126	.170
ΔR2	.098	.026	.075	.015	.146	.057	.124	.043	.126	.044
ΔF	6.367**	5.867**	4.745**	3.216*	10.109**	13.935**	8.346**	9.970**	8.455**	10.447**

Note 1. All standardized regression coefficients (β) belong to the final step of the analysis.

df Model 1= (10, 589) and Model 2 = (3, 586)

Note 2. EDWB = Eudaimonic Well-being, EWB = Emotional Well-being, SF = Self-

Forgiveness, HF = Human Flourishing. IF = Interpersonal Forgiveness, OF = Overall

Forgiveness, PWB = Psychological Well-being, SES = Socioeconomic Status, SIF

=Situational Forgiveness, and SWB = Social Well-being.

Note 3. *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level, **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

The results also demonstrated that forgiveness of self, forgiveness of others, forgiveness of situation, and overall forgiveness contributed 12.4%, 10.1%, 20.6%, 17.5%, and 17.6% in hedonic well-being ($R^2 = .124$, $F(3, 586) = 5.867$, $p = .001$), social well-being ($R^2 = .101$, $F(3, 586) = 3.216$, $p = .001$), psychological well-being ($R^2 = .206$, $F(3, 586) = 13.935$, $p = .001$), eudaimonic well-being ($R^2 = .175$, $F(3, 586) = 9.970$, $p = .001$) and overall flourishing ($R^2 = .176$, $F(3, 586) = 10.447$, $p = .001$) as has been depicted in model, respectively (see Table 2).

It is also evident that the addition of forgiveness of self, forgiveness of others, forgiveness of situation, and overall forgiveness at step 2 caused a .026 unit significant change in hedonic well-being. For social well-being, the addition of forgiveness of self, forgiveness of others, forgiveness of situation, and overall forgiveness at step 2 accounted for a .015 unit significant change in social well-being. Likewise, the inclusion of forgiveness of self, forgiveness of others, forgiveness of situation, and overall forgiveness at step 2 caused a .057 unit significant variations in psychological well-being. Moreover, the addition of forgiveness of self, forgiveness of others, forgiveness of situation, and overall forgiveness at step 2 caused a .043 unit significant change in eudaimonic well-being. Lastly, the addition of forgiveness of self, forgiveness of others, forgiveness of situation, and overall forgiveness at step 2 caused a .044 unit significant change in overall flourishing (see Table 2).

Discussion

The findings showed that age and years of marriage and the three types of forgiveness exhibited positive correlations with well-being whereas negative correlations were recorded among number of children, number of family members and socioeconomic status and well-being measures of the participants. Employment status and age emerged as the most significant factors to account for significant changes in hedonic and psychological well-being, respectively. Conversely, the other's forgiveness did the same for social and eudaimonic well-being and overall flourishing.

Various biographic attributes exhibited dissimilar predictive strengths to different indices of well-being in Model 1. For example, education, gender and age exhibited their significant predictive potentials for social, psychological and eudaimonic well-being and overall flourishing. Similarly, domicile signified its predictive strength for hedonic and psychological well-being. Employment status showed its significant predictive strengths for all dimensions of well-being measure while the length of married life negatively shaped social and eudaimonic well-being. The nature of the family (nuclear or joint) predicted the psychological well-being of married Hindu couples. The number of family members predicted social, psychological and eudaimonic well-being. The socioeconomic status of the couples also predicted psychological, eudaimonic well-being and flourishing measures. The biographic attributes 1.50% to 14.60% changes in the scores of the various indices of well-being.

In model 2, the role of forgiveness of self, others and situations were explicit. Self-forgiveness predicted positive social and eudaimonic well-being, and flourishing measures while others' forgiveness had positive predictive value for social, psychological and eudaimonic well-being and flourishing dimensions. Forgiveness of situations signified positive predictive strength for all the indices of well-being. It was evident that others' forgiveness carried the highest predictive strength for the eudaimonic measure while forgiveness of situations was most relevant for the hedonic one. The additions of the three types of forgiveness at step 2 caused significant change ranging from 2.70% to 14.60% variability in hedonic, social, psychological and eudaimonic well-being, and flourishing measures, respectively.

The predictive role of forgiveness may be understood in terms of the meaning inherent in the conceptualization of well-being in the measure. The hedonic well-being reflected happiness, interest in life, enjoyment from various sources and satisfaction with life that may be argued to be closer to forgiveness of situations. This might have happened because forgiveness of situations reflected rational and positive thinking, perseverance, tolerance, adaptability, easy acceptance of situations and higher control of negative thoughts. Similarly, eudaimonic well-being is comprised of social and psychological well-being (Keyes, 2005; Pandey et al., 2021).

Social well-being signified the social contribution of the individual, integration with social realities and dynamics, the actualization of social goals, acceptance by others, coherence or interest in social events while psychological well-being reflected self-acceptance, environmental mastery, useful relations with others, personal growth, autonomy and purpose in life (Keyes, 2005; Lupano Perugini et al., 2017; Pandey et al., 2020). Forgiveness of self may have exerted its impacts on eudaimonic well-being as it signified self-reparation, self-criticism, self-promotion, self-acceptance and accumulation of relevant experiences. Likewise, the forgiveness of others shaped eudaimonic well-being more efficiently as it denoted non-punitive, realistic understanding of others, non-retaliation, acceptance, and unconditional and positive behaviours towards others (Thompson et al., 2005).

Education provides individuals with an opportunity to widen their cognitive, affective and behavioural horizons and enhances the feeling of self-worth, efficacy, self-esteem and general understanding. These attributes of education might be behind its positive correlations and predictive strengths for social and psychological well-being. Indian society is still known for its traditional practices and cultural values. Here in Indian society, being male makes assured availability of social and psychological resources. For example, men are still assumed as more skilled, entrepreneurs, worthy, and suitable for most jobs.

These differential conceptualizations of gender in Indian society may have dissimilar experiences of eudaimonic well-being. Rural and urban areas are characterized by dissimilar availability of educational and employment opportunities, autonomy, prospects and quality of life. These attributes of urban domicile may have linked it positively with hedonic and psychological well-being. Employment status determines the availability of resources accompanied by social prestige, power, decision making and positive identity and these, in turn, may have close connections with hedonic and eudaimonic well-being.

The length of married life and the nature of the family (nuclear or joint) had shown negative roles in social and psychological well-being. This may be because middle adulthood is generally characterized by the demands from all sides of life, increased health issues of self and parents, the stress in work life, promotion etc. These factors may have acted as obstacles before the well-being of the participants. The socioeconomic status (SES) of married couples has shown a negative link with their well-being. This may be because a higher SES is coupled with more involvement in business or serving organizations, less time for leisure, family and society and competition in work life. These factors may hinder social contribution, social coherence, social interest, positive relations with others, personal growth, autonomy and purpose in life as conceptualized in the mental health continuum measure (Keyes, 2005; Lupano Perugini et al., 2017; Pandey et al., 2020).

Forgiveness of self, others and situations have shown significant positive links with all indices of well-being and slightly dissimilar predictive strengths for various well-being indices in the present study. Self-forgiveness facilitates positive self-understanding, a positive frame of mind, effective attributions and positive emotionality that, in turn, may be assumed to be closely linked with social and psychological well-being. These findings have been mirrored in some earlier studies that have shown its positive links with a variety of indices of well-being (Pandey et al., 2020). Likewise, the forgiveness of others enhances a positive understanding of other people and interpersonal and social situations. These strengths of forgiveness of others might be working behind its positive and predictive links with social and psychological well-being. Similar findings have also been reported by some earlier studies.

Forgiveness of situations involved realistic and positive thinking of transgressing situations, better adaptability and enhanced self-understanding which might be the major reasons behind its close and predictive associations with all indices of well-being used in the present study. Indian marriage system is a sacrament that is well-structured and aims to fulfil not only worldly goals but also acts as the means to achieve religious, social and spiritual goals in life. Through marriage one is inducted into *Grihastha Ashram* (householder) that helps to satisfy all worldly needs of individuals and also supports other humans and non-humans. It also helps to achieve Dharma (religion), *Artha* (worldly resources) and Kama (sensual pleasure), the three *Purusharthas* (desirable) of life. These finally lead one towards the ultimate goal of human life known as *Moksha* (salvation). This intricate nature of Hindu marriage may also complicate the associated psychological constructs like forgiveness and well-being.

The findings of the study evinced the significance of demographic factors and forgiveness to understand the well-being of married couples. There is much to contribute to the study of forgiveness in association with various aspects of life. Future researchers may contribute to this field by carrying out further studies involving other positive psychological constructs such as spirituality, positive body image, interdependent happiness and compassion. The use of qualitative and mixed methods may constitute another way to contribute to this emerging field. Cross-cultural verifications and establishing similarities and differences with these findings may be a novel addition to this area.

Conclusion

In summary, forgiveness plays a significant role in shaping the various dimensions of the flourishing of Hindu married couples. It was evident in her positive correlations between forgiveness and various components of human flourishing. Some demographic characteristics, such as age and years of marriage, also showed significant positive correlations with indices of well-being, while the number of children, number of family members, and socioeconomic status showed negative correlations with them. Employment status and age were found to be the most important predictors of hedonic and psychological well-being, respectively. Conversely, forgiving others did the same for social and eudaimonic well-being and flourishing. Some biographical features, propensity for a postmodern lifestyle, and forgiveness of others seem to shape the well-being of married Hindu couples.

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