

**Experience of forgiving in
Indian marriages: A Qualitative Inquiry**

By

Karshila Essop

**Submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements for the degree of
Master of Social Science in Health Promotion
in the School of Applied Human Sciences, College of Humanities,
*University of KwaZulu-Natal***

Supervisor: Dr Mthokozisi Hlengwa

September 2022

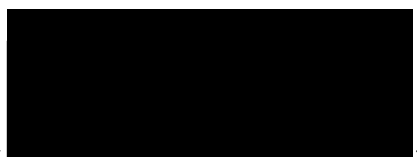
DECLARATION

I, Karshila Essop, declare that:

1. The research outlined in this dissertation, except where otherwise indicated, is my own and original research.

2. This dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree or examination at another university.

Signed



K Essop (215065007)

Date: 15 August 2022

Signed:

MW Hlengwa (Supervisor)

Date:

DEDICATION



This dissertation is dedicated to my eldest brother who has always been my supporter
Mohamed TaufEEK Essop,
my parents
and to all struggling couples that are trying to find the light in their relationships through
forgiveness and building trust.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincere gratitude and deep appreciation to God Almighty for the courage and strength that I had throughout this journey, and to the following people, without whom the completion of this research study would have not been achievable.

Firstly, I would like to thank my grandparents for always pushing me forward. Without your presence in my life, this research study and my journey into psychology would not have been possible. You both have always believed in me when I doubted myself and my strength.

Secondly, to myself, despite the challenges exposed in my darkest times, I have pulled myself out and allowed kindness to pave the way through to my dreams and goals. This journey has taught me to love and forgive myself sincerely. Love conquers all.

I would like to thank my lecturer Professor Anna Meyer-Weitz for her gentle guidance and support in the prior stages of my dissertation. I would also like to thank my supervisor Dr Hlengwa for his expert assistance, support, and guidance throughout my dissertation. I would like to thank every participant involved in my study for taking out the time, allowing me into their lives and being a part of their subjective experiences. It takes true courage to speak about these vulnerabilities and interactions. Without you, this research study would have been incomplete.

Lastly, I am thankful to every friend that has reached out and supported me through fulfilling my research study. For walking through these challenging times by my side and displaying unwavering love throughout this process.

ABSTRACT

This research study concentrated on understanding the experience of forgiving in Indian marriages in Durban, KwaZulu Natal. The qualitative research study involved eight participants who were interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule. With the consent of each participant, every interview was recorded utilising an audio recorder and then later transcribed by the researcher. The ecological systems theory was utilised as a framework for the study. The data that was obtained during the data collection period was evaluated, analysed and organised through thematic analysis. This assisted the researcher to organise data into themes, sub-themes and sub-sub-themes. The five themes that were discovered and discussed are: Understanding forgiveness, the experience of forgiving, the psycho-social influences of forgiving, dominant cultural influence and improvement of forgiveness in Indian marriages. The research study found that the participants experienced forgiving more positively than negatively. Forgiveness allowed for trust to be rebuilt in marriages and paved the way for harmony in both spousal and/or family systems. The research study found that reconciliation in Indian marriages plays a vital role and affects every participant's family system, spousal system, psychological health and well-being. A strong correlation between forgiveness and personality was drawn indicating that personality is one of the more significant influences on forgiving. More so, social, cultural and theological influences were seen as strong motivators of forgiving in Indian marriages. Participants recommended marital counselling and face-to-face conversations about transgressions created between spouses to assist marital forgiveness in Indian marriages. Through the limitations of the research study discussed in chapter six, it is proposed that further research on the experience of forgiving in Indian marriages should be conducted.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Despite the recency of research on forgiveness being explored, forgiveness has been a significant concept embedded in various religions and cultures for centuries. As research becomes more versed, one begins to understand the concept of forgiveness being applied to various types of settings. Humans are seen primarily as social beings as they possess a psychological need to create and nurture relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Chan, 2011). These interpersonal relationships produce positive social results. However, transgressions and conflicts may also arise. According to Maio, Thomas and Fincham (2008), forgiveness plays a significant role in the nature and functioning of these relationships which may consist between married adults, siblings, parents, offspring or friends. Every relationship assumes contrasting roles and assists various psychological needs. However, one must understand the concept of forgiveness.

Various researchers have recognised the discrepancies between definitions of forgiveness and have agreed on a consensual definition (Fincham, Paleari & Regalia, 2002; Maio et al., 2008; Saunders, 2011; Tucker, Bitman, Wade & Cornish, 2015; Campbell, 2017). According to Campbell (2017) and Saunders (2011), forgiveness is seen as an intrapersonal and interpersonal process of forsaking negative feelings for the transgressor and enabling qualities of compassion, love and empathy. A significant element to acknowledge in forgiveness studies is the differences in empirical, theoretical and lay definitions of the general public, as an inability to differentiate and understand these definitions hold significant implications in understanding and experiencing individual and couple behaviour in clinical settings (Kearns & Fincham, 2004; Reed, Burkett & Garzon, 2001; Kotze, 2006; Tucker et al., 2015).

There has been a notable degree of forgiveness studies that have been established internationally (Kotze, 2006; Tucker et al., 2015; Lijo, 2018; Mroz, Kaleta & Soltys, 2020; Kaleta & Mroz, 2021). Comparative studies that have been conducted between Westernised and Eastern cultures on forgiveness have produced fundamental distinctions. Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (2010) and Flicker and T Bui (2018) mentioned that the Western culture understands and experiences forgiveness as individualistic and produces an emphasis

on independence. It is highlighted as an intrapersonal process that abandons bitter feelings for the transgressor and allows for inner peace and compassion. It provides evidence of forgiveness being produced without a need for reconciliation and may enable an individual to terminate the relationship with the transgressor (Flicker & T Bui, 2018). On the contrary in Eastern culture, forgiveness and reconciliation are seen as co-existing elements. Forgiveness is understood and experienced to enable the restoration and maintenance of social harmony (Hook, Worthington & Utsey, 2009; Everett, Worthington & Wade, 2019). Along with the cultural influence of forgiveness, religion plays a valuable role in influencing forgiveness (Tucker et al, 2015).

It is important to acknowledge the existence of both the individualistic and collectivistic perspectives of the African culture of forgiveness in South Africa. Forgiveness studies in South Africa have concentrated largely on the reconciliation process. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established in the country to aid in bringing justice to families affected by Apartheid (Bolden, 2014). The notion of Ubuntu, “I am because you are” has a valuable influence on the forgiving culture in South Africa (Tutu, 2013). Intersubjectivity, interdependence and inclusivity are emphasised in Ubuntu and differ significantly from the individualistic culture of forgiveness. Ubuntu does not see the person as segregated from society and gives importance to community building and an individual's feelings (Bolden, 2014).

This research study focuses on the relationship between two adults in a marital relationship. The act of forgiveness fundamentally depends on the nature of the relationship which involves the closeness of individuals in the relationship and the quality of the relationship (McCullough, Fincham & Tsang, 2003). Forgiveness is critical for maintaining a marriage and is seen as a crucial factor in aiding the healing process because of likely transgressions (Souders, 2021). It is significant to acknowledge that in marriage, forgiving is a process between both spouses. The benefit of forgiveness is significant in the psychological and communicational process to enable solace in interpersonal relationships (Souders, 2021).

With the recognition of forgiveness in maintaining healthy relationships, emotional well-being as well as physical health, the exploration of forgiveness in marriage is seen as a compelling aspect for practitioners and future researchers (Fincham, Hall & Beach, 2006). The various factors that influence the likelihood of forgiving and unforgiving will be thoroughly explored. Both intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects will be explored.

1.2. The rationale for the study

Previous international studies have concentrated on forgiveness in close relationships. However, there is a lack of research conducted on forgiveness in cultural marriages in South Africa. Asian cultures are seen to place a significance on forgiveness in relationships as opposed to Western cultures (Joo, Terzino, Cross, Yamaguchi & Ohbuchi, 2019). An impression of individualism is emphasised in the Western culture, whereby, the 'self' is given significance and viewed as independent (Kitayama, Curhan, Ryff & Markus, 2010; Kitayama & Uskul, 2011; Cortina, Arel & Smith-Darden, 2017). In contrast, Eastern/ Asian cultures cultivate a sense of community and are seen as interdependent (Gudykunst & Nishidi, 1986; Fiske, Kitayama, Markus & Nisbett, 1998; Cortina et al., 2017).

South African research on forgiveness is at a predominant development stage through a well-documented social experiment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that enabled the diversification of forgiveness in South Africa (Bolden, 2014; Worthington & Cowden, 2017). However, local studies have lacked research on the cultural influence of forgiveness in marriage and make no mention of the influence of Indian culture on forgiving in marriage. This qualitative research study will address this gap in our current knowledge. The findings related to this study will serve to inform forgiving and the act of forgiveness in Indian marriages. It will facilitate health promotion interventions that are culturally sensitive and will promote culturally sensitive marriage counselling.

1.3. Aim of the study

The qualitative study aims to explore the lived experiences of forgiveness in Indian marital relationships by providing a detailed understanding of the aspects that influence the process of forgiveness to better enhance the knowledge of health promotion interventions and understanding of cultural sensitivity in marriage counselling.

1.4. The objectives of the study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To explore the participant's understanding of forgiveness in a marital relationship
- To better understand the participant's lived experiences of forgiving in a marital relationship.
- To explore the psychosocial and cultural influences on forgiving in marriage.

- To explore participants' views on ways to foster forgiveness in Indian marriages.

1.5. Research Questions

To accomplish the above-mentioned aims and objectives of this research study, the following questions were included:

- How do the participants understand forgiveness in the marital relationship?
- What are the participant's lived experiences of forgiving in the marital relationship?
- What are the psychosocial and cultural aspects that influence one's willingness to forgive or not?
- How can forgiveness in marital relationships be improved?

1.6. Brief outline of dissertation

Below is an outline of the dissertation with a brief description of the aspects involved in each chapter:

Chapter one: Introduction

An overview of the background with rationale, aims and objectives, and questions to be asked in the research study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

A detailed literature review was conducted on the various conceptualisations of forgiveness, theological foundations of forgiveness, psychological perspective, forgiveness in the South African perspective, an Asian and Western perspective on forgiveness and gender influences. The marriage structure and institution, the importance of marriage in Indian culture, the significant influence of family on marriages and causes of marital transgressions are also discussed. Lastly, a presentation of the theoretical framework that has informed the study is included.

Chapter Three: Methodology

A description of the research methods that have been used, participant selection/ sample and instruments that have been used in the study. The chapter includes a detailed description of the procedures that have been followed for data collection and analysis.

Chapter Four: Results

A qualitative approach has been used to present the findings of the study in accordance with the research questions. With the use of thematic analysis, the experiences of participants and their views on forgiveness will be documented.

Chapter Five: Discussion

A detailed discussion of the study findings will be included. The findings will be informed by the literature review and theoretical framework.

Chapter Six: Conclusion, Limitations and Recommendations

A summary will be included with the limitations of the study. A discussion of concluding comments and recommendations will conclude the dissertation.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This literature review will provide a detailed description of forgiveness. It will explore the various discrepancies in the definitions created by researchers. It analyses forgiveness from a psychological perspective and the implications of misunderstanding the concept of forgiveness in a clinical setting. Understanding forgiveness, allows researchers and clinicians to accurately understand the general public's idea of forgiving. Despite the recent interest in forgiveness studies, theological origins create a foundation for understanding forgiveness. However, the understanding and experience of forgiving differ between cultures and religions.

It highlights the importance of forgiveness in a South African context and its prevalence of Ubuntu as a concept that encourages forgiving which highlights the collectivistic element and reconciliation in South African culture. It then examines the Westernised culture that is linked to an individualistic element and understanding of forgiving. It also highlights the prominent distinctions that are found in Eastern Asian culture. Eastern culture draws a similarity with South African culture as it portrays collectivism and the importance of social harmony and community. Cultural elements and influences have been discussed that will enable individuals to understand Indian marriages that exist predominantly in South Africa.

Researchers have mentioned that forgiveness in marriage is vital in producing a successful marriage (Fincham et al, 2006; Pronk, Buyukcan-Tetik, Ilias & Finkenauer, 2019). The characteristics of a marriage structure and institution is discussed whilst drawing into the importance of marriage in Indian culture. It emphasises the importance of family systems, hierarchy and patriarchy in Indian families. The causes of marital transgressions have been further discussed. This literature review will allow for a holistic understanding of forgiveness, the origins of forgiveness and the influences of forgiving or unforgiving.

2.2. Defining forgiveness

The idea of forgiveness has existed for thousands of years. The majority of religions have promoted forgiveness in their scriptures and have acknowledged a variety of benefits in the act of forgiving (Rye, Pargament, Ali, Beck, Dorff, Hallisey, Narayanan & Williams, 2000; Tucker et al., 2015). In philosophical history, Nietzsche's (1887) argument had been based on the deeply-rooted power variance between victim and transgressor that births forgiveness or unforgiveness. There are various definitions of forgiveness that have been well-established in the religious, philosophical and theoretical literature. Since the 1980s, researchers had begun investigating the concept of forgiveness in psychology (McCullough, Pargament & Thoresen, 2000; Tucker et al., 2015).

Through these variations of definitions of forgiving, most researchers have reached a collective definition of forgiveness (Fincham et al, 2006). Forgiveness is defined as a desire of forsaking one's right to animosity, negative discernment, and distant behaviour and responding to the transgressor with qualities of compassion, generosity and love (Saunders, 2011; Campbell, 2017). Forgiveness occurs when an individual logically by right, identifies their mistreatment and forgives another by abandoning all forms of resentment and replacing it with a moral principle of beneficence towards the transgressor (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Kotze, 2006). Forgiveness is viewed as an intrapersonal and interpersonal process that is characterised by a prosocial change towards the transgressor in a particular interpersonal condition (Fincham et al, 2006; Saunders, 2011; Campbell, 2017).

2.2.1. Theological foundations of forgiveness

Before psychological research on forgiveness was explored, religious scriptures held knowledge about the concept of forgiveness. All religions, cultures and traditions have addressed and given importance to an aspect of forgiveness (Tucker et al., 2015). Forgiveness was seen to have a crucial role in existential beings. According to Tucker et al. (2015), forgiveness, philosophy and existential beings are interconnected. Koenig, McCullough and Larson (2001) believed that philosophy is a fundamental foundation for one to achieve wholeness through human fulfilment, spirituality, hope and commitment. A familiar ground of spiritual experience is shared between philosophy and faith. However, there had been distinctions in the understanding of forgiveness in various religions. Buddhist, Jewish, Hindu, and Islamic scriptures and philosophies have held the earliest

understandings of forgiveness (Tucker et al., 2015). Particularly in Zen Buddhism, a belief of right or wrong, you or me and good or bad are viewed as an illusion and highlights the concept of forgiveness as individuals are seen as interconnected. Some Buddhist scholars have described forgiveness as the need of unburdening oneself of resentment and forsaking the need for retaliation or vengeance (Tucker et al., 2015).

Forgiveness is viewed as a gift that the victim may intentionally give without any coercion to understand or know why the transgression had transpired (Bhikku, 2006; Tucker et al., 2015). Other Buddhist scholars view the concept of forgiveness as achieving a non-reactive mind and the belief of being angry is to be angry with oneself. Buddhism highlights strong intrapersonal characteristics and views forgiveness as a process that can be accomplished without the transgressor's presence or knowledge. According to Walsh-Frank (1996), Buddhist traditions seek to achieve wisdom by seeing no distinction between self and others through empathy and understanding (Tucker et al., 2015).

The belief in interrelation and interconnectivity is shared by the Hindu religion and philosophy. With a specific emphasis on the concept of karma. Karma is defined as actions in previous and current existence that decides the individual's fate (Hunter, 2007; Tucker et al., 2015). It argues that to forgive, one is to understand the transgressor as it is seen as a consequence of the victim's past action or behaviour (Hunter, 2007). When viewed from the Buddhist and Hindu perspective all living beings are the same, a victim offering forgiveness to another removes the conceptual sense of forgiveness (Tucker et al., 2015).

The meditative exercise of understanding self and the illusion of oneself is emphasised in the Hindu and Buddhist cultures. The neuropsychological model of forgiveness by Newberg, d'Aquili and DeMarici (2000), proposed that these meditative exercises enable the victim to re-examine their interpersonal hurts with reconciliation of the understanding of oneself and the relationship of self and world. Tucker et al. (2015) proposed that a meditative individual that concentrated on forgiveness partakes in a parasympathetic nervous activity that assists in improved immune functioning, relaxed breathing and a decrease in pain perception and heart rate.

In Judaism, forgiveness is highly significant. However, in contrast to Buddhism and Hinduism, the theology and tradition of forgiveness differ. The understanding of forgiveness in Jewish tradition is derived from the desire of God to forgive when one

repents and is taught to be practised amongst the people (Johansson, 2011). Forgiveness is seen as a religious obligation if the transgressor sincerely apologises (Hunter, 2007; Tucker et al., 2015). Jewish culture views forgiveness as a critical relational element and assists in improving interpersonal relational stress. Relieving interpersonal relational stress is linked to a reduction in endocrine system activation and contributes to a healthier degree of stress hormones in these interpersonal interactions and to a decrease in social anxiety and distress (Berry & Worthington, 2001).

As opposed to Islamic and Christian theologies, if the transgressor does not apologise, the victim is not ethically obligated to forgive the transgressor. Yet, these theologies encourage forgiveness despite the transgressor's apology (Tucker et al., 2015). Christianity promotes forgiveness despite transgression, level of repentance or the ramifications of transgression (Rye et al., 2000). In contrast to the interpersonal element of the Hinduism and Buddhism view, non-reactivity is not always highlighted by Christianity. According to McMinn, Meek, Domingues, Ryan & Novotny (1999) and Tucker et al. (2015), Christians often reflect on the ways of life of Jesus Christ, their personal sins, and the grace and mercy of God when questioned about the concept of forgiveness.

Similarly, to the Islamic perspective, the motivation to forgive and the understanding of forgiveness are alike. It brings into focus that Allah (God) is Al-Ghaffur "the most forgiving" and Ar-Rahman "all-merciful" and encourages this belief to be practised amongst others. It is mentioned in the Quran, "if you pardon and overlook and forgive- then indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful" (64:14), providing encouragement towards a moral obligation towards forgiveness despite their willingness not to forgive (Islamic Awareness, 2013; Tucker et al., 2015). Religious Muslims and Christians are significantly encouraged and obligated to partake in forgiveness and have a high probability of being able to forgive. The commitment to religion and disposition to forgive is highly correlated (Lutjen, Siltan & Flannelly, 2012).

However, with the benefits of motivating individuals to forgive, there are hurdles in regard to moral obligations (Tucker et al., 2015). It can be viewed as traumatic when one is in a situation where forgiveness is not an easy choice. These situations require time, assistance and effort. If this process of forgiveness is seen as inappropriate to oneself, others and their God, it may provide negative implications for the victim's health as

feelings of self-blame, post-traumatic stress symptoms and psychological stress may be experienced (Tucker et al., 2015).

2.2.2. A view from a psychological perspective

The variations in definitions of forgiveness span from basic dictionary definitions to intricate definitions that incorporate psychological processes that strive to disintegrate them into empirical elements. Theoretical definitions of forgiveness, empirical or lay definitions do differ greatly and are significant in understanding the general public's perception of forgiveness in applied settings (Kearns & Fincham, 2004; Tucker et al., 2015). The differences between forgiveness have created several misconceptions among healthcare professionals in forgiveness interventions (Reed et al., 2001; Kotze, 2006). Lay definitions of forgiveness have significant implications for understanding a couple's behaviour and clinical tasks with individuals. Therefore, there is a need for clinicians to discover the client's perception of forgiveness prior to an effort in facilitating forgiveness (Fincham et al., 2006). Researchers must utilise a careful definition of forgiveness, as lay definitions will provide a fundamental basis in observed relationships.

According to Tucker et al. (2015), it is necessary for clinicians to understand their personal backgrounds when conducting research of a particular nature. Religious scholars, the public and philosophers attempt at conceptualising forgiveness and discuss whether it is correlated to rationality or morality. Researchers and clinicians possess personal religious, moral and cultural experiences of forgiveness that may influence their understanding and how they experience forgiveness equivalent to the lay definitions created by the public. The implications of differing definitions create distinctions in an individual's experience of forgiveness (Tucker et al., 2015). Psychologists and clinicians strive to operationalize forgiveness to better understand the psychological characteristics, health benefits and circumstances of occurrence (Exline, Worthington, Hill & McCullough, 2003, Tucker et al., 2015). Empirical psychology aims to recognize the distinction between intrapersonal and interpersonal processes that notably account for the individuals' experiences of forgiveness, the predictors and their outcomes (Tucker et al., 2015).

Numerous individuals believe that in order to forgive, it is essential to forget a transgression and then reconcile with the transgressor. Some individuals correlate forgiveness with feelings of vulnerability and allow transgressors to continue creating transgressions (Kearns & Fincham, 2004; Fincham et al., 2006). These beliefs create hindrances in working

with clinicians and may prevent clinicians from encouraging the forgiveness process, especially in cases that involve infidelity and domestic violence. This may be seen as promoting an accepting demeanour and encouraging reconciliation, which may be harmful to the counselling process (Fincham et al., 2006). Clinicians may be cautious with the belief that forgiveness is a religious act that is seen as a “method of coping, often religious in nature” (Pargament, 1997, pg. 303; Tucker et al., 2015).

In a study conducted by Lawler-Row, Scott, Raines, Edlis-Matityahou and Moore (2007), there were contrasting views of forgiveness. Whereby, forgiveness was defined as having either an intrapersonal or interpersonal focus only, others viewed forgiveness as an intrapersonal and interpersonal process and as a passive and/or active process. A qualitative study by Younger, Piferi, Jobe and Lawler (2004) yielded results of forgiveness as accepting or condoning an offence, abandoning negative feelings and reconciliation and restoration of the relationship with the transgressor.

2.2.3. Forgiveness in the South African perspective

With a history of Apartheid, South Africa had chosen to abolish unfair treatment and enabled the unification of individuals to create a rainbow nation. To assist forgiveness of victims and their families, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was created. This enabled justice, forgiveness, restoration of relationships and reconciliation amongst affected families (Bolden, 2014). The TRC had proposed hope to other affected countries of conflict, oppression and injustices. In this attempt, forgiveness had been widely explored and research in South Africa had soared to newer heights (Worthington & Cowden, 2017). The TRC created a platform for South Africans to come out and tell their story, and listen and understand their individual experience and perspectives to pave the way to forgiveness and reconciliation (Chapman & van der Merwe, 2008; Worthington & Cowden, 2017). Substantial research on forgiveness in South Africa was directed at the TRC and examined its effectiveness of the TRC (Chapman & van der Merwe, 2008). Victims, observers and offenders had high expectations of results from the TRC. However, inquiries about benefits, degree of benefit and degree of harm experienced were raised. The TRC aimed at decreasing victim pain yet various criticisms of the TRC had been presented where individuals felt justice lacked (Chapman & Spong, 2003; Worthington & Cowden, 2017).

Forgiveness studies in relationships have lacked particularly in South Africa, although conducted in other parts of Africa by Rief, Abdelali, Stone, Famose, Akhurst, Castanheira and Tassel (2013) and Worthington, Griffin and Provencher (2016). Research findings have resulted in social psychological descriptions of forgiveness and apology in personal relations (Fehr, Gelfand & Nag., 2010; Riek & Mania, 2012; Worthington & Cowden, 2017). Further research has been conducted on the shift of an individualist perspective in understanding forgiveness and reconciliation in the Western culture to a more collectivist perspective in African culture (Hook, Worthington, Utsey, Davis & Burnette, 2012; Worthington & Cowden, 2017). The reconciliation focus is likely to stem from an integration of the collectivistic and individualistic perspectives of South African researchers. Collectivist cultures place a high value on society (group) rather than the self (Everett et al., 2019). South African forgiveness studies have focused largely on reconciliation and the reconciliation process rather than paying attention to the two distinct types of forgiveness; decisional forgiveness and emotional forgiveness (Exline et al., 2003; Worthington & Cowden, 2017).

Forgiveness researchers have noted a somewhat influence of Ubuntu in their findings, however, the unification of action had been mostly restricted to a behavioural domain rather than a common internalised experience of Ubuntu (Worthington & Cowden, 2017). The sense of Ubuntu had lacked in this context and had been characterised by criticism and opposition rather than the unification of individuals (Worthington & Cowden, 2017). The dissatisfaction was experienced by Black South Africans, Indians and of European descent. With European and African cultures interconnecting in South Africa, there are various drives for justice and reconciliation. Justice and relational matters have received great attention in forgiveness studies conducted in South Africa.

Collectivistic cultures that are presented in South Africa are influenced by Ubuntu. The Ubuntu philosophy encompasses qualities that involve oneness, hostility, respect, compassion and humanity. The word Ubuntu is derived from a Zulu phrase of “Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” which is defined as “I am because you are” (Desmond Tutu, 2013). The concept of Ubuntu differs from individualistic and utilitarian approaches that are taken from western culture (Bolden, 2014). The word Ubuntu is distinct in many African cultures and languages. Ubuntu is traced back to the origins of the Bantu tribe in Southern Africa and is widely utilised in the African continent (Bolden, 2014). The

interconnectedness philosophy of Ubuntu steered the African Renaissance by Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu and Thabo Mbeki in post-apartheid. The spirit of Ubuntu had been injected into education, and public services and provided a foundation for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to assist victims and transgressors in sharing their experiences and perspective (Bolden, 2014; Worthington & Cowden, 2017).

Bolden (2014) highlights three points of Ubuntu, namely, interdependence, inclusivity and intersubjectivity. Ubuntu is viewed as a relational belief that holds a constructivist stance in which it does not see an individual detached from a social context. It gives importance to subjectivity and the emotionality of an individual's experience. Ubuntu highlights the importance of community and cooperation (Bolden, 2014). This inclusivity stance values respect and care for other individuals and unity. Whereby, unity and respect are significant in creating and maintaining relationships with others. Intersubjectivity draws attention to the person and the collective rather than prioritising one over the other (Bolden, 2014). The collectivistic culture that highlights Ubuntu is portrayed as a social binding that ties African communities together (Bolden, 2014; Worthington & Cowden, 2017). It may be viewed as detaining conflicting individuals in a relationship and coercing them to forgive without the emotional desire to forgive or reconcile (Everett et al., 2019).

2.2.4. An Asian and Western perspective on forgiveness

A distinction is drawn when forgiveness is defined in Eastern and Western cultures. McCullough et al. (2000) have defined forgiveness as a prosocial shift of behaviour towards the transgressor. It includes changes in cognitive and emotional aspects such as a deduction of negative emotions and an increase in positive emotions (Everett et al., 2019). Drawing a great distinction between the individualistic approach which highlights person over society and prioritises personal identity and authority. This approach allows for the better well-being of an individual. The Western culture in the USA and Canada has an understanding that forgiveness is individualistic and emphasises personal well-being, health and the self as independent from other individuals (Hofstede et al., 2010; Flicker & T Bui, 2018). Forgiveness is viewed as an intrapersonal process that allows the victim to forsake negative emotions such as revenge and anger and establish inner peace and compassion (Flicker & T Bui, 2018). The process of forgiveness can be independent of reconciliation with the transgressor and may be meant to terminate the

relationship once the victim abandons negative emotion towards the transgressor (Flicker & T Bui, 2018).

However, in eastern cultures or collectivistic cultures, forgiveness refers to the restoration and maintenance of social harmony (Hook et al., 2009; Everett et al., 2019). Japanese culture has prioritised relationship harmony and maintenance which influences the likelihood of forgiving (Joo et al., 2019). An ancient Chinese belief system viewed forgiveness as a significant practice and teaching of every individual. Confucian culture would emphasise others and prioritise others' needs before their own (Everett et al., 2019). The collectivistic approach to understanding forgiveness in Eastern/ Asian culture integrates reconciliation into the forgiving process. It views forgiveness as social responsibility with the intention of maintaining harmony amongst individuals and society (Sandage & Williamson, 2005; Flicker & T Bui, 2018).

Through the above distinctions of definitions, forgiveness is portrayed and understood differently in Eastern and Western cultures. Western cultures hold the individualistic perspective in high regard as there is an emphasis placed on the individual's needs, wants and cost-benefit of social relationships (Everett et al., 2019). Forgiveness in the individualistic perspective highlights the possible individual goals or interests of circumstances. Whereby, forgiveness allows the individual to let go of any guilt caused by a transgression rather than an intention of restoration of relationships (Everett et al., 2019). However, in Eastern cultures, tolerance, compassion and harmony are significant factors in Korea, Japan, Indonesia and Taiwan (Everett et al., 2019; Joo et al., 2019). Karremans, Regalia, Paleari, Fincham, Cui, Takada, & Uskul (2011) have mentioned that Chinese culture has an increased likelihood of forgiving due to the maintenance of social harmony and peace.

2.3. Gender influences on forgiving

According to Kaleta and Mroz (2021), the above personality traits may vary depending on gender. Markus and Kitayama (1991) proposed the differentiation between emotional, cognitional and motivational elements through variation of self-constructs of each gender. Male self-constructs are predominantly characterised by self-reliance, autonomy and segregation from others, whilst female self-constructs are characterised by interdependence, and association are seen as less segregated from others (Kaleta & Mroz,

2021). These characterizations impact the likelihood of forgiveness as females who emphasise the need to be connected to each other are more likely to forgive to maintain that relationship. Neto and Mullet (2004) stated that there was a strong correlation between interdependence and forgiveness in women rather than men. However, it is significant to note stress and disengagement after transgressions in females and may need an individual to assist them in coping. To combat loneliness, women are more likely to forgive. Although there is a strong correlation between loneliness and the likelihood of forgiving in women, men are negatively correlated with this construct (Neto & Mullet, 2004; Kaleta & Mroz, 2021).

Gender constructs have a significant influence on how an individual processes forgiveness. There are differences in how one experiences and conceals positive and negative emotions in women and men. An interdependent outlook displays an increased degree of anger that is highly related to forgiving. Recent research studies have stated a higher correlation between depression and anxiety in women (Parker & Brotchie, 2010). Studies were created by Finkel, Rusbul, Kumashiro and Hannon. (2002) and Miller and Worthington (2010) have presented evidence that male partners are more likely to forgive female partners. However, Kaleta and Mroz (2021) provided evidence that females are less capable of conquering unforgiveness regarding circumstances and themselves. An interdependent outlook of women creates a need to constantly be more associated with a social context and view their failures as aspects that will damage their positive social outlook (Fincham et al., 2006). Negative and positive effects were found in both men and women. Dispositional factors were found to have stronger associations with a certain gender than the other. Empathy was seen strongly correlated with forgiving in men rather than women (Toussaint & Webb, 2005; Kaleta & Mroz, 2021). Responsibility attributes in marital forgiveness had proven stronger for female partners (Fincham et al., 2006; Kaleta & Mroz, 2021). Retaliation and lack of conflict resolution were more predominant amongst male partners (Kaleta & Mroz, 2021).

Kaleta and Mroz (2021) have found negative correlations between anxiety, controlling of emotion, anger, anxiety and inclination to forgive are stronger for women than men. Secure control of emotion proves forgiving demand for women and controlling of anxiety was positively correlated to forgiving in males. According to Fincham et al. (2006), the conversion of negative characteristics to positive characteristics is particularly significant

for females rather than men as responsibility characteristics are seen as predictive to the willingness of forgiving for the wives than their husbands (Fincham et al., 2006). There was evidence that underpins the link between characteristics and behaviour amongst females. However, gender plays a significant role in influencing forgiveness and the process of forgiveness (Kaleta & Mroz, 2021).

2.4. Marital structure and institution

Marriage refers to a legal or custom binding contract between two individuals. It is a relationship that is traditionally formed through a sexual relationship and is seen as permanent (Griffiths, Keirns, Strayer, Sadler, Cody-Rydzewski, Scaramuzzo, Vyain & Jones, 2012). Jhamb and Singh (2018) propose that marriages or marital relationships are steady, long term-commitments between two individuals. It constitutes two individuals who hold a variety of interests, needs and desires that creates a distinct association that is governed by society's laws and rules. Ersanli and Kalkan (2008) indicate that these crucially affect these individuals' development and self-realisation. It enables the regulation of human behaviour between two individuals (Jain, 2019). The characteristics that promote marriage as ubiquitous and critical for societies are the interdependent need for love and encouraging the need to fulfil each other's social, psychological and biological needs. According to Canel (2012), and Jhamb and Singh (2018), marriage enables one to protect, cooperate and equip individuals with confidence about their future and of each other.

Throughout the years, the dimension and institution of marriage are seen to have altered, however, they remain an integral part of society (Ozguven, 2001; Jhamb & Singh, 2018). A dominant type of marriage that is considered acceptable in society has been monogamy. This involves the marriage between a male and female (Ozyigit, 2017). There are various other types of marriages that involve more than one spouse, this refers to a polygamy marriage that allows a man to have more than two wives. This type of marriage is popular in Islam (Jhamb & Singh, 2018). Other forms of marriage include individuals of the same sex. Psychologists refer to the relationship between spouses as a spousal system. A spousal system refers to dealing with marital issues through specific interactional rules for collaboration, transgressions and conflict resolutions (Griffiths et al., 2012; Jhamb & Singh, 2018). Through the social announcement, a marital commitment is essential in societies to produce newer generations which is referred to as a family system (Jain,

2019). According to Jain (2019), marriage is seen as the key realm of the kinsmen. A kinship system includes families and other relatives through blood (Jhamb & Singh, 2018). Therefore, sociologists and psychologists pay attention to the relationship between marriage and family. However, there are specific status roles that are established and authorised by society for both a marital institution and family system to function (Jhamb & Singh, 2018). A significant traditional expectation of marriage is to create a family (Griffiths et al., 2012).

2.4.1. The importance of marriage in Indian culture

Jain (2019) emphasised that marriage is considered as a religious tradition and is culturally seen as a responsible act performed by adults. The institution of marriage was referred to as the nucleus and integral part of society. Marriage prompted social obligations, traditional values, kinship alliances and economic means (Jain, 2019). Through the commitment of marriage, one is only allowed to have sexual relations that will lead to procreation and parenthood (Jain, 2019). Therefore, religion and Indian culture both signify celibacy. However, when procreation occurs without marriage it is seen as a loathed act. Furthermore, a man is considered incomplete without a woman and vice versa (Jain, 2019). According to Jain (2019) marriage does not simply affect only the two individuals involved but the families as well.

In a study by Javanmard and Garegozlo (2013), a correlation was found between the consistent practice of religion, cherishing religiosity degree and consistent practice of religion with improved marital stability, marital satisfaction and a higher tendency to get married. Spouses that were able to recognise their divine purpose in marriage were more likely to correlate to preserve a higher level of marital adjustment (Madanion, Mansoor & Omar, 2013; Aman, Abbas, Nurunnabi, & Bano, 2019). Therefore, forgiveness is seen to play a significant role in marital commitment, longevity and adjustment. In Islam, marriage refers to a physical and spiritual bond that continues into the afterlife. It places a high significance on marriage as it assists in spiritual fulfilment. In Hinduism, it views marriage as a sacred responsibility that involves both religious and social commitments. Thus, it places a high value on inseparable ‘partners in life’ (Jain, 2019. Pg.17). The three patriarchal establishments of the family, society and nation are considered interlinked as an interaction between family and society is vital (Millet, 1971). Therefore, society refers to interrelated relations between individuals. Indian culture proposes that family plays a vital role in society

as it extends from the spouses included in marriage to children to grandparents. It, furthermore, states that when a couple divorces, a family deteriorates.

2.4.2. The significant influence of family on Indian marriages

When family conflict is caused by maladjustment between male and female spouses, it results in the coercion of influence from elders, relatives, social customs, and traditions (Jhamb & Singh, 2018; Jain, 2019). Although this influence may result in a positive effect in preventing a disintegration or divorce, it co-exists with the loss of social control between husband and wife and loss of power. Jain (2019) states that the institution of family faces rapid changes similar to the institution of marriage. However, marriage is seen as a fundamental foundation of a family. The degenerating of marital ties prompts the degeneration of family ties. According to Chadda and Deb (2013), joint families follow patriarchal rules and ideology. Authority is primarily governed by a patriarchal law, which is seen to significantly influence and maintain family harmony and decisions that govern nearly all aspects of life, spouse selection, career choices and marriage. Arranged marriages are a result of this law (Chadda & Deb, 2013).

In patriarchal families and marriages, the male spouse is considered superior (Jhamb & Singh, 2018). The female spouses are expected to conform to expected roles and duties. Sivakumar and Manimekalai (2021), indicate that if female spouses are unable to perform their duties it threatens the male spouse's masculinity. Female duties included the ability to bear, raise children and be a 'good wife' (Rathor, 2011). Jain (2019) mentions that women are viewed as a mother and protectors of their families. Indian culture promotes masculinity and views females as a gender to protect and control. The duties of a male spouse were to be protectors, and providers for their families and their parents (Sivakumar & Manimekalai, 2021). According to Sivakumar and Manimekalai (2021), society had, directly and indirectly, demanded males be strong, and powerful and limit emotions.

2.4.3. Causes of marital transgressions

Marital conflict/transgressions have been researched extensively. According to Tasew and Getahun (2021) and Fincham et al. (2006), conflict in marriage is unavoidable. Healthy relationships involve spouses accepting and resolving these transgressions through forgiveness. Marital conflict or transgressions refers to the establishment of stress

or tension that creates a level of maladjustment between spouses (Pathan, 2015; Tasew & Getahun, 2021). Transgressions may arise through disruptions in a spouse's role performance, role expectations, family conflict, sexual expectations, spousal abuse, differences in beliefs and values, and infidelity (Tasew & Getahun, 2021; Obeleniene & Gabseviciene, 2015). Obeleniene and Gabseviciene (2015) propose to acknowledge, understand and assimilate control over transgressions as it is vital to evaluate and understand the reasons behind these transgressions. Ineffective or a lack of communication is a fundamental source of marital transgressions. Obeleniene and Gabseviciene (2015) indicate that strong and positive communication assists conflict in effective ways. However, there is dependability on the ways of interaction with one another.

Faith-related transgressions. Due to the inability to get to know each other well in Asian and African cultures, this creates a fabricated ideal image of a spouse. Once a couple is married and living together, the spouse's expectations are seen to be aggravated and when these expectations are not met, transgression arises (Obeleniene & Gabseviciene, 2015).

Dominance/ difference in gender roles. The difference in gender roles in couples is a significant cause of marital transgressions. In Asian and African cultures, each spouse is assigned a particular role. According to Tasew and Getahun (2021), when a male spouse is unemployed and the female spouse is employed, it creates tension in the spousal system. Jain (2019), states that in older generations, females depended on their husbands. Through modernisation and education, female spouses are able to work and are financially independent. Females have acknowledged their equality with men and now, demand similar rights and fidelity to men. However, Jain (2019) indicates that transgressions arise through to the equal footing that results in the disorganisation of the family. Females are seen to have a particular role that includes the maintenance of the household and their children. Dominance may exist through the inability to surrender one's principles or simply to lend an attentive ear to their spouse. When a spouse's needs, opinions or interests are ignored, it leads to a degree of marital transgressions (Jhamb & Singh, 2018; Jain, 2019).

Child-rearing and the inability to communicate. Transgressions may arise within a spousal system when there is a miscommunication in terms of childbearing (Obeleniene & Gabseviciene, 2015). Once a family is created, there are various other

issues that arise such as the inability to properly discipline children or meet their requests, an increase in domestic issues, the issue of fatigue and the economic situation once a family is established. In studies conducted by Obeleniene and Gabseviciene (2015), transgressions in this field arise due to the inability to effectively communicate with a spouse when needed. In this case, spouses exhibit behaviour such as shouting, insulting and criticising (Obeleniene & Gabseviciene, 2015).

Domestic and financial transgressions. When financial difficulty arises so do transgressions within a marriage. Issues may arise due to the various and ineffective ways money may be spent. Obeleniene and Gabseviciene (2015) indicate that male spouses spend more money without the consent of their wives. Another source of transgressions involves the working hours and stress at work. This directly impacts the required time expected and the inability to meet one's needs and wants by a spouse (Obeleniene & Gabseviciene, 2015).

Marital infidelity. It is the most feared and exhibits negative effects on a marital relationship (Pittman, 1994; Scheeren, Apellaniz & Wagner, 2018). Infidelity refers to an emotional or sexual act with another individual outside a spousal system. Infidelity in a marriage involves a violation of trust, vows and rules acceptable in a marriage (Moller & Vossler, 2015; Scheeren et al., 2018). According to a study by Guadagno and Sagarin (2010), there is a distinction between how a male and female respond to emotional and sexual infidelity. Females associate infidelity as a significant emotional relationship with another outside the spousal system, whilst males focus on sexual physical contact with an absence of emotional association as infidelity (Thornton & Nagurney, 2011; Scheeren et al., 2018). According to Scheeren et al. (2018), infidelity is seen caused by sexual curiosity with various other sexual partners, seeking affection, love and passion, attempting to gain a degree of emotional connection/intimacy, revenge and/or an attempt to advance in one's career.

Spousal abuse. This may occur in a marital relationship that includes physical, verbal, psychological, sexual or social abuse of a spouse. Whereby, a spouse can cause harm to another spouse such as physical, sexual or mental injuries in a spousal system (Dutta & Sharma, 2019).

Lack of sexual intimacy. Mbwirire (2017) pointed out that a lack of sexual intimacy forms the basis of marital conflict. Couples who opt for marriage counselling have reported having sexual issues in around 45% of them (Arnold, 2002; Mbwirire, 2017).

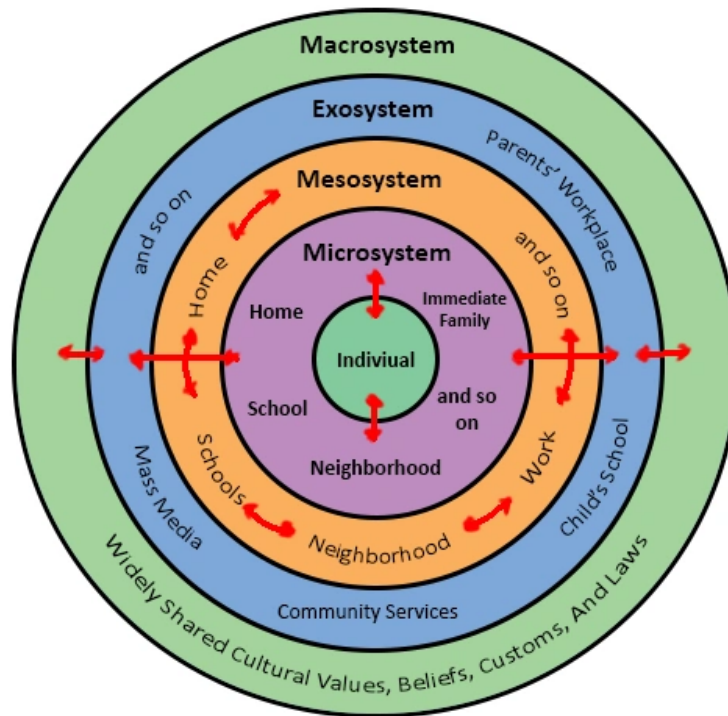
In-law transgressions. In a collectivistic culture, extended families play a significant role in marriages. A male spouse is seen to have duties towards his parents, family and the community (Jhamb & Singh, 2018; Jain, 2019). These roles may disrupt or create issues within a marriage. Mbwirire (2017) proposed that in-law demands may be too exorbitant and may interfere with the spousal system needs.

2.5. A theoretical framework to explain the experience of forgiving

The framework utilised in this study is the ecological systems theory in human development. This framework model states that human development is governed by interconnected environmental systems that have progressive effects on the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 2009; Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017). Urie Bronfenbrenner (2009) proposed the four systems involved which are, Micro (person/ individual), Meso (family), Exo and macro systems (socio-cultural level). These levels of systems influence an individual's choices and how they perceive others and the world (Bronfenbrenner, 2009). Below presented is figure 2.7, this image portrays how these systems connect.

Figure 2.7

Understanding multi-level influences on the individual (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994)



2.5.1. The microsystem

The micro-level system is the smallest level and involves the individual or person. This level includes the interaction between the individual and the family he/she is born into. It refers to how the family system/ environment has influenced how the individual views and perceives the world (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). According to Dalla (2006), due to the interrelations experienced within a family. It proposes that if an individual experiences a phenomenon that is good or bad, it influences the whole family system. Intergenerational transmissions are introduced in this theory, that is patterns that may occur in the family system can be repeated (Bronfenbrenner, 2009; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). An example of this, is a boy that grows up in a high conflict environment, whereby his parents are always fighting, will view relationships as high conflict environments and respond to conflict the way his parents approached conflict. This intergenerational transmission of values, beliefs and behaviour impacts an individual's choices in forgiving in a marriage or not and how to experience the forgiveness process (Dalla, 2006). The family-system theory is a functional sub-theory existing within the ecosystem theory. It assists in contextualising forgiveness and understanding how the family may influence their behaviour in relationships.

2.5.2. The mesosystem

The mesosystem is the second layer that exists after the microsystem. It consists of two or more microsystems that influence each other. A proximal causal effect is created (Bronfenbrenner, 1995; Bronfenbrenner, 2009). Whereby, if a young boy sees his parents fight and it leads to no form of reconciliation, it can lead to a negative perception of relationships or marriage, when a conflict situation is presented, the boy is unable to navigate transgressions healthily and may lead to unforgiveness in his own marriage. This can negatively affect other layers in the system such as community, places of worship and work.

2.5.3. The exosystem

The exosystem refers to the larger social system in which the individual may not be directly influenced but can be impacted by what occurs in that environment. This refers to a distal-causal effect (Bronfenbrenner, 1995; Bronfenbrenner, 2009). An example of this is inflation or unemployment, which may influence an individual's lifestyle and financial position. This can create conflict explicitly in a marriage and can affect the willingness to forgive or not.

2.5.4. The macrosystem

The macrosystem refers to the outer layer of the system, it integrates all the systems that were discussed previously (Dalla, 2006). The macrosystem refers to culture, subculture, values, beliefs and laws. According to Bronfenbrenner (1995), it involves the various structural factors that impact an individual's life and life outcomes. This layer comprises values such as marriage, forgiveness and building a healthy spousal and family life that can be influenced by various factors in the four-system theory. A belief in the cultural system is that individuals are held responsible in terms of their marriage, it should be maintained, and divorces are not acceptable. When these individuals are unable to maintain these marriages through the difficulty of forgiving, it can affect the structure in which a spouse, parent or child may operate. Thus, understanding how an individual understands forgiveness and how they experience forgiveness requires the understanding of all these systems in an individual's life.

The ecological systems theory is significant in the understanding of an individual and the context in which they were born and exist (Dalla, 2006). It produces a comprehensive approach to understanding forgiveness in an Indian marriage, and the factors that influence the willingness to forgive or not. Utilising this theory cements the ideology that no one chosen element can be employed to explain forgiveness or the experience of forgiving in an Indian marriage. The ecological systems theory identifies the complexity that is involved in the study of forgiveness in Indian marriages. This theory is seen as collectivistic and outlines the factors that may be missed in individualistic theories (Bricker, 2009)

2.6. Summary

This literature review has discussed the concept of forgiveness. It considers the variations of definitions and how this affects research studies. Lay definitions and agreed definitions by researchers are significant in understanding forgiveness research. Despite the late exploration of forgiveness in the 1990s, forgiveness and its importance has been distinctively explained in the various religions and has been earmarked for its need. Understanding the concept of forgiveness is easier when understanding and noting what forgiveness is not and its various constructs. It draws focus on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the country's attempt at forgiveness studies. Ubuntu is highlighted in its forgiveness studies and explains its effect on South African culture.

A comparison between Western culture and Eastern culture on forgiveness has been explored. The difference in culture emphasises an individualistic and collectivistic approach to understanding forgiveness. The individualistic approach in Western culture highlights the 'self' in contrast to the collectivistic culture found in Eastern cultures that highlights maintaining harmony in society and others. It was suggested that South African culture has a mixture of individualistic and collectivistic approaches. However, despite this combination, Ubuntu places a high value on society and the notion of 'I am because we are'. There is a gender difference that is found by Kaleta & Mroz (2021) that has been explained.

The literature review includes the distinctive structure of marriage and the institution of marriage. It highlights the association between marriage and family systems. It highlights the importance of marriage in Indian culture and emphasises the importance

of an authoritative figure in Indian families. Whereby, the elders in the family play a significant role in decision-making for their children. Family is seen to play a vital role and the maintenance of a family is placed in high regard. However, there are factors that contribute to the causation of marital transgressions, these are discussed in detail.

Despite the forgiveness studies conducted in South Africa, there is a dearth of research that has been conducted on forgiveness in marriage. Although there is evidence of research being conducted on an international level between Western and Eastern cultures and countries, it has proved a distinction of understanding in the concept of forgiveness. This study aims to understand the experience of forgiving in Indian marriages.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

This chapter entails the methodology and procedures that were utilised in the data collection process and analysis in the study. Gounder (2012) defined research as a systematic and logical exploration of new and useful information on a specific phenomenon. Research assists in discovering solutions to a social and scientific phenomenon through systematic analysis. It enables a researcher to create newer contributions to existing knowledge through defining and redefining research problems, producing hypotheses, gathering, arranging and assessing information and data that leads to research conclusions (Kothari, 2004; Mntambo, 2018; Patel & Patel, 2019).

The study has adopted methods and procedures that are established on the research topic, aims and objectives. This study's fundamental aim was to acquire an in-depth understanding of the experience of forgiving in Indian marriages; explore the participant's understanding of forgiveness, explore the psychosocial and cultural experiences and lastly explore their views on ways to strengthen forgiveness in their marriages.

3.2. Research design

3.2.1. The qualitative nature

This study follows a qualitative design. A qualitative design is inductive in nature as explained by Levitt Motulsky, Wertz, Morrow and Ponterotto (2017), it allows researchers to investigate meanings and how people make sense of a particular phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 2008; Levitt et al., 2017). In this instance, the qualitative nature of this study focuses on developing an in-depth, detailed understanding of the experience of forgiving in Indian marriages in Durban, KwaZulu Natal. Qualitative research allows the understanding of an individual's perception as every individual is the expert on their own reality. Qualitative research had enabled the researcher to understand these experiences and how individuals interpret and attach meanings to their experiences of forgiveness and how they understand the concept of forgiveness (Maxwell, 2017). This research design argues that individuals construct meaning through the interactions of

others and from within broader social systems. Through these interactions, individuals create their world, and how they see and interpret the world (Furlong, 2013). Therefore, enabling the researcher to gain a better understanding of their world, perception and experiences.

3.2.2. Study setting

Durban is one of South Africa's popular and leading cities after Johannesburg and Cape Town. Durban, KwaZulu Natal is most saturated with Indians, other than any other city or province in South Africa. It hosts the majority of Indian fairs, inter-faith talks and cultural festivals. The province boasts of Indian culture and traditionally rich communities (Sahistory.org, 2016). Therefore, rendering the area lucrative to conduct a research study on understanding the experience of forgiveness in Indian marriages. The study takes place in an urban setting of Durban, KwaZulu Natal. The sample will include 8 Indian participants who belong to the middle-class socioeconomic status.

3.2.3. Sampling strategy and participant selection

This study aimed to recruit Indian married individuals in Durban, KwaZulu Natal. The researcher had chosen a non-probability sampling strategy, which allowed the exclusion of any form of a random selection of participants and focus on a particular group of individuals. Interpretive phenomenological analysis researchers aim to find a reasonably homogeneous sample (Smith & Eatough 2007). Whereby, if one had to interview eight participants via a random sampling method, it will not be helpful. The interpretive phenomenological analysis aims at selecting a sampling method that will allow for a more defined group in which information gathered will be significant in the study (Smith & Eatough 2007). Therefore, the snowball sampling technique will be used. This type of non-probability sampling allows the researcher to gain in-depth and detailed information and data about the phenomenon which the study wishes to investigate and is most effective with limited resources. The snowball sampling technique was created by Coleman (1958) and Goodman (1961) with the aim of examining social networks (Heckathorn, 2011).

The snowball sampling method consists of the referral and networking characteristics. Due to the flexibility of this technique, it creates an easier means to seek a difficult-to-reach population and participants in the Covid-19 pandemic. In the snowball

sampling technique, participants that fit the criteria of being over the age of 18, married and Indian were chosen. The researcher then asked the participants to refer individuals who fit into the sampling selection that the research requires. This led to a further 7 participants being selected.

The sample selection included 8 Indian individuals living in Durban, KwaZulu Natal. The researcher further divided this sample into 4 married males and 4 married females. This sample group was chosen to understand the experience of forgiveness from both a male and female perspective as it is seen as an intrapersonal influence on forgiveness in marriage (Parker, Scott & Geddes, 2019) and the gender dispositional element mentioned by Kaleta & Mroz (2021).

3.2.4. Research Instruments and Data Collection

A semi-structured interview guide was created from the literature review conducted which allowed the researcher to identify the information gaps in forgiveness studies produced in South Africa, internationally, forgiveness in Indian marriages and the IPA approach utilised in the research study. The purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to understand the participants' understanding of the concept of forgiveness and their experiences of forgiving in their marriages. A composed set of questions on the interview schedule was created (Appendix B). It was an interview that will be steered by the schedule rather than being controlled by it. Socio-demographic information was asked first, and the key research questions will be used to guide the interview such as their history with forgiveness prior to marriage, understanding their cultural influence on the concept and how it has influenced their marriages. The interview schedule aligned with the objectives of the study to understand lived experiences of forgiving and forgiveness in an Indian marriage. It also explored the various psychosocial and cultural influences of forgiveness and investigated ways to promote forgiveness in Indian marriages.

Through the snowball technique, the researcher initiated the first contact with these participants via emails inviting participants to be involved in the study. Through networking and referral, the researcher selected participants that fit the sampling criteria that were required by the research study. The interested participant then contacted me for further information about the study, where an email was then sent, attached with an information sheet and informed consent form (Appendix A). The email contained information pertaining to the aim and objectives of the study, the purpose of the interview

as well as the ethical procedures. This informed consent document was emailed to participants and signed by all participants.

A step-to-step guide on how to use the Zoom app had been emailed with all the above necessary information. Older participants had found it difficult to use the app, however, this had assisted them in utilising the app on their phones. All interviews and documents had been in English to be understood easily by all. The participants had been given time to complete the form and consider participation. These completed forms were then emailed back to the researcher with confirmed dates and times of interviews. The current Covid-19 pandemic had been discussed as well as the need to utilise an online platform to assist in the interview process. The interviewing process had taken place on Zoom video calls. The researcher provided all participants with a step-to-step guide on how to download the Zoom app on either their phone or laptop and how to utilise the Zoom app to create an easier experience for participants. The fluctuating threat and risks of the global pandemic that is currently going on were considered. Participants that could not make their interview session slots were given another available slot. However, one participant was affected by the pandemic and was given ample time before continuing with their interview.

Online interviews were conducted after 17h00 as the majority of the participants were employed. Once the interview had begun, the researcher greeted and thanked every participant for their time and began reiterating their rights during the interview process. All participants should know the facts and reasons for the research (Gupta, 2013). The participants were informed that they may withdraw or refuse participation in the research study without any negative consequences. The recording of all interviews was discussed again with the participant where permission was needed to be agreed to before going into the interview.

The researcher then discussed the research study's aims and objectives with each participant at the beginning of the interview. Every interview was recorded on a Huawei phone and named with the respected participants' pseudonyms. These pseudonyms were encouraged for confidentiality purposes. During every session, the researcher then facilitated and took down notes, allowing me to probe when needed. Each interview lasted at least 50 minutes. The recording of interviews allows for data analysis purposes and the safekeeping of information in a safe and secure area. Data and audio recordings were

secured and accessed only by the researcher. All data were collected in March, April and later, in August 2022.

3.2.5. Data analysis

The recordings were all transcribed manually. These transcripts will hold word-for-word dialogue as it has allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding of the responses and the experiences. By noting every word spoken by both the participant and researcher, it strengthened the data collection process. Thus, making it simpler to start the data analysis process. Each participant has a file with the transcribed interviews, labelled with important information such as time, dates and names or pseudonyms of participants.

The data that was collected from the interview process had been thoroughly analysed. Every word of the participants that were recorded and transcribed by the researcher was to familiarise, analyse and understand the data. The researcher utilised an inductive approach to thematic analysis as the data analysis method in this study. It is defined as, a “method used for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data. It organises and describes data in detail and interprets various aspects of the research topic” (Braun & Clark, 2006 pg. 79). It had enabled the documentation of all experiences, reality and meanings of the participants involved. This interpretative approach is flexible, well-suited and qualitative which allows the tracking of rich and detailed information. The thematic analysis involves the use of themes and codes to uncover patterns within data recorded (Braun & Clark, 2006).

The aim of thematic analysis rests on the need to recognise and identify themes. Themes are defined as an idea that consists of a significant factor relating to the data in connection to the research topic. It indicates the extent of patterned feedback within the data recorded (Braun & Clark, 2006). A good quality thematic analysis understands the summarised data and explains it. “Typically, this reflects the fact that the data have been summarised and organised, rather than analysed.” (Aishe, 2017 pg.3353). There are two distinct levels of themes, which are semantic and latent. The semantic theme is seen “within the explicit or surface meanings of the data and the analyst is not looking for anything beyond what a participant has said or what has been written.” (Braun & Clark, 2006 pg.84).

A latent theme goes beyond what is said and develops the identifying and examining process, where fundamental assumptions, ideas, ideologies and conceptualisations are speculated to shape semantic-themed data (Braun & Clark, 2006). This is seen as a swift and simple method to grasp and accessible to researchers with limited experience in qualitative research. The outcomes gathered are attainable to the educated public. This allowed the researcher to summarise necessary pieces of information to supply rich comprehensive descriptions of the data set. It also enabled the development of unexpected factors and enabled the social and psychological interpretations of data.

The thematic analysis includes a six-phase guide that must be observed. However, it does not have to be observed in a sequential method, it is set as a guide to aid researchers through the process of thematic analysis (Aishe, 2017). During thematic analysis, the researcher acquainted herself with data by reading, examining, and then rereading transcripts that were initially recorded. The researcher produced preliminary codes that organised all information collected in a structured and relevant order. A code differentiates an attribute of data that is seen as significant to the researcher (Braun & Clark, 2006).

During the third step of thematic analysis, the researcher began searching for themes. A theme is defined as a pattern that covers a phenomenon that is important to the data or a research question (Aishe, 2017). Nonetheless, there is no regulation of what constitutes the making of the theme (Braun & Clark, 2006). A theme is categorised by significance, some codes may contradict others and some may overlap other codes in smaller data sets. These smaller themes were not ignored and had been further investigated and examined thus, leading to a code. Towards the end of this step, the codes were then arranged into wider themes that show relevance to the research question. This allowed the researcher to find connections between these codes, themes and sub-themes (Braun & Clark, 2006).

In the fourth step, the reviewing of the themes and sub-themes began. It allowed the researcher to construct a collection of themes and assume where the sub-themes would fit under. It was then determined whether the theme should be submerged with another or left on its own. When the development of themes along with the reliability and validity of themes are constructed, the meanings were examined (Braun & Clark, 2006). In the fifth step, the researcher provided the definitions of these themes. The themes were now named

and defined. The endmost refinement of themes involves the “aim is to ‘identify the essence’ of what each theme is about”, (Braun & Clark, 2006, p.92).

The researcher identified the essential concept of each of them and determined which characteristic of data the theme represents. Every theme was then explained in detail solitarily as this would allow for an explanation of its relation to other themes, data sets and research questions. The final and sixth step accounts for the final report or write-up. The researcher was accountable to present a final report that includes finalised themes with my analysis. It is necessary that this final report is precise, non-repetitive, and logical and should produce a thorough explanation of the data retrieved and examined by the researcher (Braun & Clark, 2006).

3.3. Verifying of data

To combat issues of data reliability and data validity in the interpretivist paradigm, qualitative researchers have developed their distinct criteria and terminology. Determining trustworthiness is significant in the qualitative nature of research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Firstly, the researcher must evaluate if the observations are repeated and lie in contextual considerations and if the collected data produce homogeneous results. This ultimately validates that data is consistent and therefore reliable. Another factor that validates reliability is if other researchers yield similar interpretations from specific data sets (Stiles, 1993). Reliability refers to good quality research. Reliability is a notion of evaluating quality, a good qualitative study enables one to understand a phenomenon that is confusing or “generating understanding” (Stenbacka, 2001, pg. 551). However, since qualitative researchers do not use instruments with established metrics, they must prove how their research’s findings are credible and dependable, (Gupta, 2013).

The term validity is argued among some qualitative researchers but had recognized the need for a qualifying measure for research. According to Creswell & Miller (2000), validity is impacted by the perception of validity and the choice of paradigm assumption by the researcher. Due to this, researchers have developed more suitable terms such as quality, rigour and trustworthiness in validity (Davis & Dodd. 2002). When validity or trustworthiness can be capitalised then the result is further credible and defensible thus producing high-quality qualitative research (Johnson, 1997).

However, four distinctive criteria should be met which are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Wagner, Kawulich & Garner, 2012). Credibility is defined as the degree to which credible findings are acquired from data. Extended engagement through the desktop researcher allowed me to familiarise myself and understand the various facets and complexities of forgiveness. With thematic analysis, the results derived from the analysis of data that had been produced by participants through the interview process further prove credibility.

Transferability is defined as the degree to which the researcher exhibits the findings relevant to other conditions (Smith, 2007). It is through maintaining every version of the data in their primary forms and by the presentation of thick descriptions (Wagner et al, 2012). Keeping all original transcripts, recordings, coding, themes and other materials that were used, allowed the production of an “audit” to ensure data results create homogeneous conclusions. It is also seen as protection for researchers if they face accusations of falsifying results or projection of personal feelings and ideas into the study.

The term dependability is closely associated with reliability in qualitative research. There is an emphasis placed on "inquiry audit" as a measure that may increase the dependability in research as it is utilised to investigate the process and product of the research for consistency as well (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 pg. 317). The primary external auditor for this research study was my supervisor. From an outside perspective, she has scrutinised and challenged the themes that were developed. Dependability utilises different data-gathering processes to produce credible results and an audit to prove the accuracy of translating various data sources. Dependability was also ensured by the research design, data collection process and implementation (Shenton, 2004). According to Campbell (1996), consistency of data is successfully achieved when the researcher verifies steps of research through the investigation of primary data (raw data, data reduction products and process notes).

Lastly, confirmability verifies that the results of the research are constructed from collected data. Confirmability also refers to the level of neutrality as the results of the research are shown to be derived from participant interviews and responses. This prevents the researcher from any form of biasness or personal motives to be injected into research (Smith & Eatough 2007). Along with this, the researcher must understand the limitations of the study and provide a clear rationale for the data collection methods, and other

methodology used. In this study, an explanation for each methodology that was used had been provided. When research produces credibility, dependability and transferability, it enhances the level of trustworthiness (Smith & Eatough 2007). Every participant's own ideas and experiences were used in the findings through quotations to demonstrate that the researcher was only reflecting and interpreting her participants' experiences.

3.4. Ethical considerations

This research study has obtained ethical permission from the Humanities and Social Sciences Ethics Committee of the University of KwaZulu Natal (protocol reference number HSSREC/00003788/2022). This study has been conducted in Durban, KwaZulu Natal amongst six middle-class socioeconomic, Indian and married individuals. It has fulfilled ethical principles and considerations such as informed consent, voluntary participation and confidentiality of information. Ethical approval from the HSSREC has been attached as Appendix C.

3.5. Summary

In this chapter, a detailed explanation of all methods utilised in this study was provided. This included a description of the research design and paradigm, the preparation of research that was conducted, sampling technique and criteria. The data collection procedures and analysis were discussed in steps and how they had been executed by the researcher. The aim of this chapter is to enable the reader to understand how the research process was implemented and performed. Lastly, verifying data was discussed as well as the significance of validity, reliability and trustworthiness to ensure a good quality research study. In the next chapter, the findings of the research study will be discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction

The study utilises the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis framework to analyse data. The interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a qualitative perspective that allows the researcher to gather a thorough examination of the participants' lived experiences about a phenomenon (Smith & Osburn, 2015). The IPA produces rich descriptions of participants' lived experiences in their own versions rather than a pre-existing theoretical assumption. It highlights the interpretative nature of IPA as individuals are viewed as organisms that create their own realities and understandings. It has an idiographic nature that captures and examines participants' detailed experiences. It is particularly beneficial in this study as it will enable the researcher to record the complexities and emotional aspects linked to forgiveness (Smith & Osburn, 2015). The chapter also depicts the demographic background of the participants and includes the qualitative findings that are derived from themes, sub-themes and codes that have been identified from the data collected.

4.1.1. Process of arriving at final results

This chapter focuses on five themes that were derived from the data. The first theme refers to understanding forgiveness. This theme has a further three sub-themes which are interpersonal/and intrapersonal forgiveness, the severity of transgression and theological/cultural understanding of forgiveness. Theme two discusses the experience of forgiving which has three sub-themes namely, the establishing and re-establishing of trust, allowing for harmony and the power of the reconciliation process. The last sub-theme of reconciliation is further sub-sub themed into feelings or acts of positivity and helplessness/hopelessness. The third theme discusses the psycho-social influence of forgiving in marriage. This theme is further sub-themed into three, which are, the correlation between personality and forgiveness, the implicit and explicit social sway and the theological reign of forgiving. The theological reign of forgiving is sub-sub themed as an act of God and the importance of maintaining a marriage. The forth theme is titled as dominant cultural influence and includes a sub-theme of the authoritative influence between male and female spouses. The fifth theme discusses the idea of improvement with forgiving in Indian

marriages. The last theme is further sub-themed into working together. Table 4.2.2 depicts the themes, sub-themes and sub-sub themes that will be discussed and integrated into this study

4.2. Demographic characteristics

Prior to the discussion of the findings, the chapter will focus on the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants involved in the study (see Table, 4.2.1).

The study consisted of (n=8) participants, 4 male and 4 female. The study presented an even representation of gender and attempted to present a fair representation of culture and religion. All participants belong to Indian culture and are married for more than 10 years. The majority of participants are between the ages of 50- 81.

Table 4.2.1

Demographic characteristics of participants

Age	Years Married	Gender
52	27	Female
75	55	Female
81	50	Male
51	31	Female
68	40	Male
54	12	Male
59	24	Male
63	45	Female

Below is the figure discussed in 4.1.1. This table depicts the themes, sub-themes and sub-sub-themes created.

Figure 4.1.1

Themes and sub-themes identified from data collected

Themes	Sub-themes/ *<i>Sub-sub-theme</i>
1. Understanding forgiveness	Interpersonal/ Intrapersonal forgiveness Severity of transgression Theological and cultural understanding
2. Experience of forgiving	The establishing and re-establishing of trust Allowing for harmony Power of the reconciliation process <i>*Acts/feelings of positivity</i> <i>*Hopelessness/Helplessness</i>
3. The psycho-social influence of forgiving	The correlation between disposition and forgiveness The implicit and explicit social sway The theological reign of forgiving <i>*An act of God</i> <i>*Importance of maintaining marriage</i>
4. Dominant cultural influence	Authoritative influence between male and female spouses
5. Improvement of forgiveness in Indian marriages	Working together

4.3. Understanding forgiveness

This theme explores the participant's understanding and their idea of forgiveness. Participants discussed their idea of forgiveness in three distinct themes. The first theme is further sub-themed into the interpersonal/intrapersonal process of forgiveness, the second titled the severity of transgression and thirdly, the theological and cultural understanding of forgiveness.

4.3.1. Interpersonal/intrapersonal forgiveness

Participants included in the study described their understanding of forgiveness and the fundamental process of how to forgive their spouses. According to most participants, forgiveness is viewed as an unambiguous and interpersonal process with intrapersonal elements. They believed that forgiveness requires the spouse firstly, to identify a transgression or maltreatment that they are exposed to.

“The concept relates to the experience of difficult times when husband and wife start fighting over the household and personal matters as they cannot agree on these matters.” (Participant E)

“Forgiveness leads to understanding, leads to rectify errors and know what is right from wrong.” (Participant G)

“It is a process of forgiving someone who has earned and made you very very bitter.” (Participant A)

“It is knowing when your husband has made you feel hurt to an extent that your mood changes. Do you know that anger? My whole mood changes until he apologises and tries making me feel better.” (Participant H)

“The process of finally forgiving a person for an aspect that they have done to hurt me, betray me and make me feel unsafe and bitter.” (Participant C)

The above statements were made by some participants that portrayed their transgressions as difficult times and understood the feelings and consequences that come along with these transgressions. Participant A discusses the bitterness, betrayal and a feeling of being unsafe when transgressions occur. In order to forgive another, spouses had stated forgiveness to them meant the ability to dispel these negative feelings created by a transgression. This refers to the intrapersonal process of forgiving.

“They then need to take a deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance towards each other.” (Participant E)

“Forgiveness in a marital relationship is accepting that you are wrong and intending not to do it again.” (Participant G)

“So that if one forgives, there will be no ill feelings, no hatred, no bitterness and it gives you a sense of apologising, apologising to make things right.” (Participant A)

“That process is that I have to myself, inwardly assimilate... everything and all the negativity and whatever that I have felt when that person has hurt my feelings and forgive to assimilate.” (Participant C)

“When he makes me feel better, all those previous feelings and emotions just disappear.” (Participant H)

However, in addition to dispelling these negative emotions, there are actions that are necessary to allow the process of forgiveness to occur. Most participants stressed the importance of apology, understanding their mistakes, and changing transgressing behaviour into satisfying behaviour in order to earn their forgiveness and completely forgive each other. It rests on the spouse or transgressor to initiate forgiveness in occurring. This exchange involves an interpersonal element that occurs between spouses.

“My spouse has realised the mistakes and it makes me proud that she acknowledges it, it makes me understand her better. Without that acknowledgement, how do we go forward if she doesn't accept what's been done wrong? It's honestly a whole process you have to go through with them to be normal again. With no anger and resentment.” (Participant D)

“You need to know where you went wrong before you get forgiven.” (Participant A)

“By forgiving each other we become more involved, we have a better understanding towards each other and the love grows as we refrain from making same mistakes again and again.” (Participant G)

“I think I would forgive them faster if they admitted where they went wrong and made an attempt to rectify the mistake where they were wrong.” (Participant A)

“That's my understanding of forgiveness. So that if one forgives, there will be no ill feelings, no hatred, no bitterness and it gives you a sense of apologising, apologising to make things right” (Participant A)

“You understand their right from wrong, you understand them as a person and how they feel about certain things which they seek forgiveness on. You also get to see that they mature enough to realise they have wronged.” (Participant G)

“When we start speaking again after a fight and he apologises, I tell him why I was upset, that is when he listens and tries to understand me. I think we do that for each other whenever anyone is upset.” (Participant H)

A participant had also mentioned through acceptance and acknowledgement of transgressing behaviour or transgressions, will yield further difficulties in the future. He mentions that forgiveness is a process one needs to partake in to establish a sense of normalcy. Therefore, acknowledging the interpersonal process between spouses in a marriage. Other participants had mentioned the concept of forgiveness meant that having to forgive others had benefitted them in allowing them to feel no resentment towards the other unapologetic spouse. It was seen as an intrapersonal process and releasing them of negative emotions that weighed down on their mental health, personally.

4.3.2. Severity of transgression

Other participants in the study had understood forgiveness in terms of how severe or mild a transgression was. Their definition of transgressions was also seen to have differed. They believed mild or minor transgressions did not need to be forgiven and may be overlooked instead. Older participants that were a part of arranged marriages had stated that forgiveness to them and their partners were overlooking their mistakes. They believed that if one does not label a situation as upsetting or feel any negative emotion to them, there was no need to forgive. Whereby according to these participants only severe forms of transgressions such as physical or sexual abuse, disrespect to spouse or in-laws and inappropriate dressing required an interpersonal component of a verbal proposal of apology and reconciliation. Milder transgressions were considered to be dealt in an intrapersonal and forgivable without any apology.

“You overlook the small petty mistakes and don’t need ask for forgiveness or find a need to forgive or bring it up. But, that depends what was done, if it was hitting you or having other women then yes, then there’s to ask for forgiveness and start making it’s up to me with changing that faulty behaviour.” (Participant F)

“It depends on what the spouse did, if it is something that is minor, it is forgivable but if it is something that is major, then that is unforgivable.” (Participant B)

“My parents and grandparents before marriage always told my brother and I that we should not pay heed to small mistakes and shift our focus to those. You pick your battles and the smaller ones are not worth a marriage being broken for.” (Participant H)

However, participants that were involved in arranged marriages had stated that their relationships had provided little to no conflict as their processing of upsetting events created by their spouses was overlooked or ignored.

“There was nothing to forgive because he did not do any harm to me nor did I do any harm to him” (Participant C).

“I have had no problem with my wife.” (Participant B).

“When and if my husband does wrong, he will be easily forgiven. We are married for 41 years. (Participant E).

“I wish I had known how much it means to seek forgiveness and ask for it as it makes a big difference.” (Participant G)

4.3.3. Theological/ Cultural understanding of forgiveness

Other participants had associated their understanding of forgiveness with their theological and cultural foundations. The teachings and foundation of their religion had characterised their process of forgiving and understanding forgiveness.

“As Christians, we have to bring in all of the traits in which Jesus would have loved and forgiven us into our marriage.” (Participant D)

“When families are spiritually inclined and culturally, forgiveness is seen as a must.” (Participant F)

“As a Muslim, forgiveness is important in our lives.” (Participant G)

The upbringing of all participants was brought up in strict cultural and religious backgrounds. Participants had mentioned their idea of forgiveness in their upbringing that had led to their marriage. This influenced their process of forgiveness as well.

“It all starts with how your parents brought you up. If your parents have brought you up in a very religiously and culturally, cultural in a sense that you are very cultural and religious. You are kind of motivated in a way to forgive a person because of what your parents have taught you and how they brought you up or they constantly keep on telling if someone has made you unhappy, forgive them and move on and don't hold it against them. If that way, yes. Probably that's what I would think.” (Participant A)

“When you grow up in an Islamic schooling background, forgiveness is instilled in you. To be Muslim, means forgiving and forgetting like the stories of our Prophet.” (Participant H)

As far as understanding how religion and culture influence their understanding of forgiveness. This study had shown that both factors significantly influence their willingness to forgive or not in their marriage. This will be further discussed in theme four.

4.4. Experience of forgiving

This theme looks at the participant's lived experiences of forgiveness in their marriages. This second theme is further divided into three sub themes namely, (1) the establishing and re-establishing of trust, (2) allowing for harmony and, (3) power of the reconciliation process. The third sub-theme, power of the reconciliation process is further divided into two other sub-sub-themes that are, acts and feelings of positivity and hopelessness/helplessness.

4.4.1. The establishing and re-establishing of trust

Most participants in the study had reported with experience of prior transgressions, it had allowed spouses to establish or reestablish trust in their marriage. When transgressions occurred, it resulted in trust being broken. Spouses had utilised forgiveness as a means to repair broken trust and build further.

"If one does not forgive then trust is lost." (Participant A)

"When we begin to forgive, I feel like I can trust that he will do better." (Participant H)

The above quotes implies, that if one is unable to forgive then trust is lost or broken. For a marriage to truly work, trust is needed. Another participant states that by accepting her husband's apology she feels that she can trust the transgression will not be repeated due to the negative impact it had on her. Along with that statement, it shows that the spouse feels a degree of guilt for hurting the spouse. Therefore, there is a level of trust in understanding what is not acceptable in the future.

"When he hurts me and asks for forgiveness because he sees that I feel miserable and upset, that's when I feel okay, he knows what he's done wrong, I can trust that he would not do it again. Likewise, when I hurt him, I know I have done wrong, I know what not to do in the future." (Participant F)

"It makes me understand her better." (Participant D)

*“Forgiveness strengthens the bond and trust and level of understanding.”
(Participant G)*

“That he will not hurt me the same way before because he understands how it had impacted our marriage and me.” (Participant H)

It was evident that repairing a transgression and communicating with the spouse, it established a means to understand them better to prevent the situation from reoccurring. It allowed vulnerability in speaking about their pain and anger. Trust was reformed or reformed in a positive light.

“We sit and openly talk about our mistake so that we cannot make those mistakes again. Therefore, growing as a couple.” (Participant D)

“We will then have a clear understanding of each other.” (Participant F)

*“We speak about what happened after fighting and we just talk it out. What went wrong, how I wish he could have done things instead of making the mistake.”
(Participant H)*

“By forgiving each other we become more involved, we have a better understanding towards each other and the love grows as we refrain from making same mistakes again and again.” (Participant G)

However, despite the positive experience of forgiveness. A participant experienced the opposite and began stating that for the sake of moving on from the transgression, she believed that the trust in her relationship could not be rebuilt.

“Either way, whether you forgive or you don’t forgive. But, but, it is avoidable. If your spouse has done something very very painful, your trust is broken completely. Even, if you just only forgive the person for the sake of it but the trust is not restored.” (Participant A)

She had also found it difficult to repair trust as there were no means of communicating with her husband positively. The vulnerability was not an option. She had experienced that despite forgiving, the transgression had reoccurred and her trust in her husband had diminished.

“I kept on forgiving and forgiving but there was nothing that made it better. Forgiving the person made the person do more, betray you more financially, emotionally and psychologically, in every way, holistically speaking with all the negatives.” (Participant A)

“It doesn’t make a difference if you forgive the person or not because a person is still going to redo everything.” (Participant A)

4.4.2. Allowing for harmony

Participants agreed that there was an unspoken rule of maintaining harmony between the spousal system and the offspring system in Indian marriages. One of the more dominant themes to resurface from forgiveness was the experience of harmony. Participants had believed that in order to create or maintain harmony, there was a need to forgive the spouse. When asked about the advantages of forgiving in their marriages, many of the participants highlighted the happy environment that it will create for their offspring and spouses. In the interim, it was rewarding for them as well.

“Keeping them intact and keeping kids happy and fed.” (Participant B)

“Keeping yourself happy and your family.” (Participant B)

“It was all for my kids, so that they will grow up in a good environment instead of a toxic one.” (Participant A)

“Where there are children involved, you got to mend your marriage and make your marriage work.” (Participant E)

“A huge advantage of forgiveness in an Indian household is maintaining a peaceful environment for your kids and inlaws.” (Participant H)

A participant believed that she had the ability to merely forgive her spouse and found herself incapable of reconciling in a way that was satisfactory to her. Yet, there was an obligation or duty to forgive because of her offspring. There had been an emphasis on creating harmony for their family despite feeling unhappy with the forgiving and reconciliation process.

“It wasn't a reconciliation. It was bottom line because of the kids.” (Participant A)

The harmony that was created allowed for a peaceful and happy environment. When peace and harmony are maintained, there is a lesser desire to see the negativity from the other. It allows the spouse to forsake all kinds of resentment towards the spouse that will create an unstable, unhealthy environment.

“It's because of peace. Peace in a sense that, in a sense that, everytime we look at the person we don't look at them in a negative light or negative form. It is like doing away of a certain hatred, bitterness.” (Participant A)

Forgiveness was also seen as a way of achieving normalcy in their day after a transgression,

as transgressions present anger, resentment and a sense of abnormalcy. It had allowed the release of grudges and tension in the family and between spouses.

“We look forward to the new day without the hindrance of a previous argument.” (Participant D)

“One can’t hold grudges, it causes tension to the whole family. When you forgive, there is no tension and life is normal.” (Participant E)

“If you don’t forgive people will notice how the couple are in public because unintentionally they bring up the wrongs of their spouse amongst other people thus making the situation worst than it initially was.” (Participant G)

“I am the type to stop talking to someone who has hurt me. I prefer it that way because sometimes, but when that happens, it is an uneasy space. Whenever we stop fighting, that’s when everything goes back to normal and I miss normal.” (Participant H)

4.4.3. Power of the reconciliation process

The need to reconcile was evident from the findings. Participants highlighted that reconciliation played a significant role in their marriage. This sub-theme discusses forgiveness with and without reconciliation. Participants experienced forgiveness with and/or without reconciliation had either allowed them to exhibit feelings and acts of positivity towards their spouse or hopelessness in unforgiving or forgiving for the sake of forgiving. In this theme, participants discussed the hopelessness experienced by unforgiving partners and feelings of positivity toward participants who had exhibited the willingness to forgive and forgiveness in future transgressions.

4.4.3.1. Feelings or acts of positivity

Participants stated that when their spouses were forgiven, this allowed the reconciliation process is occurring. Participants allowed themselves to present feelings of positivity toward their spouse. Participants had also stated positive actions of the transgressing spouse. This has created a compassionate and empathetic approach when dealing with future transgressions. Some participants had highlighted the process of reconciliation that would enable the spouse to forgive them in the future. They had believed if a positive act was produced towards their spouses, it would influence them to forgive.

“Very simple. Always buy the best chocolates. Bribe with a box of chocolates. Box of chocolates are the biggest influence. Knowing your partner’s favourite items and

remembering the small things when you need to make things better. My spouse's favourite is whole nut Cadbury chocolate.” (Participant B)

“Always give your husband the best of food if he's misbehaving. The way to the man's heart is to his stomach.” (Participant C)

“When my husband is upset with me, I do give him an affectionate hug and ask for forgiveness.” (Participant H)

In establishing forgiveness with reconciliation, spouses had mentioned their relationship security increases and closeness. It has allowed both spouses to understand what their spouse needs in a particular situation.

“We grew closer together and became more conscious of the other person's needs.” (Participant D)

“To reconcile, it helps to strengthen our understanding and to accept right from wrong.” (Participant G)

“After a fight, I do feel closer to my spouse. I feel she understands me more and is trying.” (Participant H)

Participants pointed out that the mere act of apologising genuinely would have increased their chances of forgiving their transgressing spouses. It was also evident that couples with a history of fewer transgressions were more likely to forgive their spouses despite the type of transgression. This had created their empathetic and understanding stance toward their spouses in future transgressions.

“In general, if I had to forgive a person, that person will have to apologise to me. So in retrospect, my husband would have to apologise to me if he had done something wrong but he has never. I would forgive anything or any shortcoming.” (Participant C)

“When he apologises, yes, that makes a huge difference otherwise everything is still inside me. It makes me feel that he does not care enough to see the wrong or try to make it right.” (Participant H)

Participants mentioned that a history of forgiveness and reconciliation created an environment that was beneficial to them and allowed them to eliminate negative emotions. These benefits allowed participants to experience a positive impact on future transgressions.

"I found that forgiving lead to healthier relationships, improvement in mental health for both, less anxiety, stress and hostility, and improved health and self esteem."
(Participant E)

"Therefore, growing us as a couple." (Participant D)

"There is no tension." (Participant F)

" If we cannot reconcile we won't know where the hole is in marriage thus will be unable to patch it to make the marriage stronger and last longer." (Participant G)

"I know we can get through difficult situations together." (Participant H)

However, participants had mentioned during their reconciliation process, they experience a need for the transgressor to eliminate the same mistake from occurring again. If they could trust that their transgressing spouse was to prevent the mistake from happening again, it would provide them with the stability and security that is needed in their marriage.

"It probably will give some sort of stability and security. Maybe you have good feelings after you forgive the person for their mistake, if they are not going to do it and that you can not see if they going to do it or not, God knows that. Yeah, basically that's what we need actually. Somebody that can learn from their mistakes."
(Participant A)

"We sit and openly talk about our mistakes so that in the future we cannot make the mistake again." (Participant D)

"Analysing what was done and putting yourself in the position of your spouse that has been hurt." (Participant G)

"Future transgressions I know we can work through. It is not impossible. I know how he might feel in a particular situation" (Participant H)

4.4.3.2. Hopelessness/helplessness

Forgiveness without the process of reconciliation between spouses was seen to have presented negative feelings. Participants that have described forgiveness without reconciliation in their marriage as complex have shown a degree of helplessness and hopelessness. They had pointed out that despite their willingness to forgive at first, there had been no change in their spouse's behaviour.

"Right, forgiving in my marital relationship was extremely hard. I have forgiven for the last 27 years. I kept on forgiving and forgiving but there was nothing that made it better." (Participant A)

"We spoke about it at length and according to my belief, it was a waste of time. Because at the end of it, I was blamed for everything that I supposedly done which was incorrect, which was not true so I ... the process of reconciliation wasn't such a great thing anyway because it still brought up all the remorse and all the hatred and all the pain... all the bitterness throughout my marriage. It never ever made a difference to me in any possible way because my husband always won and always the one that was right and I was the one that was wrong. I did not do anything right so... reconciliation wasn't a good thing." (Participant A)

A feeling of helplessness had evolved. The participant had communicated with her husband without any change from him. She believed that the blame was put on her. Despite any action, the transgression had occurred. Without a satisfying reconciliation process, the participant believed she had no good experience of forgiving in her marriage. A superior-inferior stance had been developed, whereby, she believed herself inferior with the amount of forgiveness she produced.

"Forgiving made me feel as if I had sunk to a lesser level and (pause) saying that I forgive you never the person step back and think what did I do for my wife to tell me that she forgave me? What can I not do to change that or change my character so that my wife doesn't have to tell me that I forgive you so often because it is very hard for me to forgive. Im talking about 27 years of marriage, that is a quite a long time." (Participant A)

The participant mentioned that due to the obligation to forgive her spouse. She experienced low self-esteem and increased levels of helplessness and hopelessness in the marriage. She believed that forgiveness does not play a role in her marriage without reconciliation. She associated the inability to prevent similar transgressions with her reconciliation process.

"I still don't understand why I had to forgive him. I still don't reconcile myself that I had to forgive him. That makes me feel very low." (Participant A)

"Actually, in my marriage, forgiveness doesn't play any role. It doesn't make a difference if you forgive the person or not because a person is still going to redo everything." (Participant A)

A sense of hopelessness had stemmed as the spouse was not able to learn from the previous transgression. This had created a generalised idea of their difficulty to forgive.

"The only time I would have a desire to forgive a person, if a person does not make a mistake again." (Participant A)

“I do feel if my husband and I can not reconcile and forgive from our hearts, it will be difficult to stay in a marriage like that. I do have family that has been through that. It is not a good situation to be apart of.” (Participant H)

The participant had mentioned the inability to create a satisfying reconciliation process and an inability to rewrite the wrongs and prevent the same transgression from reoccurring had created the perception of their spouse as selfish and undeserving. However, the participant experienced hopelessness and helplessness that were intertwined with their obligation to stay in a marriage.

“Making their world the centre of their attention and not yours. They don’t worry about you. They worry about themselves all the time. Whatever they do is for themselves and not for anybody else and a person that cannot learn from their mistakes and if you try to teach them certain things, they just don’t get it. A person that can not understand what you are saying, understand what you meaning, understand what you mean. A person who is not on the same wavelength as what you are.” (Participant A)

4.5. The psycho-social influence of forgiving

This theme discusses the psychological and social influences of the willingness to forgive or not. There were three sub-themes found which are namely, the correlation between personality and forgiveness, the implicit and explicit social sway and thirdly, the theological reign of forgiving. The last sub-theme is further divided into two sub-sub themes. Which are, (1) An act of God and (2) the importance of maintaining marriage.

4.5.1. The correlation between personality and forgiveness

When asked about the influence of forgiveness or not, most participants highlighted their personalities. Participants had presented their personalities as driving factors in forgiving their spouse or not and understanding forgiveness. Some participants had presented themselves as individuals with a difficulty forgiving and had generalised their marriages as difficult and stressful. The disadvantages to this personality had rendered themselves helpless due to the accumulation of unresolved transgressions.

“It is one very very hard thing to do. It is very difficult to forgive. That is my opinion because of my personality” (Participant A)

“I do have some difficulty in forgiving if a person does not apologise or feel guilty for what he or she has done.” (Participant H)

“My personality is that I do not forgive, I don’t like people to betray me. I can’t stand betrayal and to forgive that is extremely difficult.” (Participant A)

Some participants had described their partners with personalities that were defensive and insistent on proving themselves right. They had believed their spouses were egotistical. It had resulted in more anger, resentment and bitterness which has affected future transgressions and how they viewed their spouse. The participant believed that her spouse's difficult personality had impacted her personality and her view of herself.

“My husband always thought that he was right and I was wrong. So... as the years progressed I always felt that whatever he said was right and whatever I did was wrong. So it comes, becomes a part of your personality that you will always be wrong and whatever your husband does is right. Whatever he thinks, is correct and whatever he does financially, emotionally and whatever is correct.” (Participant A)

“I find it very hard to forgive him if he keeps making up excuses and trying to defend himself. It’s like everything I am to blame for.” (Participant E)

“Sometimes I do feel my husband has an ego issue, but because this marriage is important to him, it takes him a while to apologise or takes a lot from him but he does. In the earlier stages in our marriage when I didn't know about this, I felt like it was all my fault, that I have done something wrong or I am not enough in some way for him to come and apologise.” (Participant H)

Participants that had described their spouses as cool, calm, empathic and understanding had displayed more forgiveness. They had lesser to no conflict in their marriages because of their personalities. This finding was evident in the two participants involved in arranged marriages

“He was so wonderful. He is cool and calm and understanding.” (Participant C)

“Everytime I told him I was upset, he would look at me and say ok, I understand. So I had no reason to continue fighting with him or be upset. Everything was ok ok, I understand, don’t worry. He isn’t quick to jump the gun or raise his voice at anyone.” (Participant C)

“Overlook faults, be calm. It's in the culture to forgive and keep quiet. Even if you are wrong, you need to keep quiet. Respect is a big thing in culture.” (Participant B)

Participants who described themselves as understanding and forgiving were able to display more forgiveness in their marriages.

“I am a very compassionate and understanding person so I understand forgiveness as something that isn’t difficult.” (Participant F)

"I'm a very soft personal with a good heart and always forgive but not forget because I remember to avoid things happening again and being hurt again. But I forgive woke heartedly." (Participant G)

"My spouse and I are forgiving people." (Participant D)

"Strong-minded yet soft-hearted." (Participant D)

"I do think I am understanding, I try seeing it from his perspective but I am also an overthinker. I am quick to ask for forgiveness though. That is what I feel" (Participant H)

4.5.2. The implicit and explicit social sway

In this sub-theme, participants had identified an explicit and implicit social influence on their forgiveness. The majority of participants had mentioned that there was little to no explicit influence of society on their willingness to forgive their spouse or not.

"Society has not influenced my idea of forgiveness." (Participant C)

"All this society. Actually, I don't bother about society and they don't have any influence on my concept of forgiveness. I, I think what I think I need to do. I don't care about society, about what they even think." (Participant A)

"Society as a whole is not able to influence my views of forgiving. The only time, when society can influence my views of forgiveness will be when there are learnings from e.g different religions that I can use to influence forgiving in my marriage" (Participant A)

"Society does not influence my idea of forgiveness because I was brought up by my parents in this way." (Participant D)

"I'm not really influenced by society to forgive or not I based this entirely on my own." (Participant G)

"No, Society does not influence my forgiveness process." (Participant H)

Participants believed that society had no knowledge of their experiences in marriage. Therefore, there was no influence from society.

"See. Society as a whole would not know what is going on in my marriage, where they can say do this and do that. Right, so they don't know what's happening in your house. Some people will tell you no, forgive the man and move on but they don't know the intensity of what they do in your house, in your household in your family. How, how, how they regulate the way you think, the way you speak, everything. So society doesn't know what's happening in your household. They are outside, they are not inside to know what's happening." (Participant A)

However, some participants who had mentioned a social influence had implied that the advice of friends and colleagues has had an influence on their willingness to forgive. One participant mentioned the direct influence of society.

“Advice of friends, advice of colleagues. Gossips of friends affect your marriage.” (Participant B).

“Yes, culture does influence forgiving, the forgiving process in one’s marriage.” (Participant E)

Although most participants mentioned little explicit influence of forgiveness, an implicit influence had been found. Participants had also stated that one of their drivers of forgiveness in their marriage was to prevent the family from breaking apart. When families break apart or spouses divorce it is seen in a negative light and can be detrimental to how society views them. Forgiveness in marriage prevented dysfunction that was seen as disliked by society. A perfect or liked image had to be created. Divorce is seen as a collapse in upholding an image. Therefore, a significance is placed on forgiveness in a marriage.

“To keep friendship in the family. Not to break up the family and keep it intact. To save the children from divorcing and that. That's the main driver that influences my forgiveness.” (Participant B)

“What will people say?” (Participant F)

When one fails to uphold their positive image in society, the society begins to gossip about the individual. A participant had stated that he views an advantage of forgiving in his marriage as preventing the community from gossiping about his family.

“Keeping your neighbours from gossiping because everyone's in your business. Keeping yourself happy and your family.” (Participant B)

“It is important that society looks up to the in-laws and their families.” (Participant E)

“Keeping your neighbours from gossiping because everyone's in your business.” (Participant B)

“Unintentionally they bring up the wrongs of their spouse amongst other people thus making the situation worst than it initially was.” (Participant G)

“Divorce is disliked in the community and people do speak bad and make up rumours about how the marriage went wrong. My friend had went through that and the girl is

usually to blame. I try not to think about that word, it is not an option with my husband and I” (Participant H)

The above statement mentioned the need to prevent society from gossiping or talking ill about one’s family due to unsolved transgressions.

4.5.3. The theological reign of forgiving

Forgiveness is seen highlighted in various religions and religious scriptures. All participants emphasised the significant influence of religion on their forgiveness. This sub-theme is further divided into two other sub-sub themes namely, (1) an act of God and, (2) the importance of maintaining a marriage.

4.5.3.1. An act of God

Participants belonged to the Muslim, Christian and Hindu faith, each participant had described forgiveness as a requirement in their scriptures. It is seen as an act loved by God. Participants had also mentioned that forgiveness is an act loved by God and in forgiving, in performing a similar action that was liked, they had benefitted religiously. Participants highlighted forgiveness as a teaching of their religion that must be followed.

“In Christianity, forgiveness, according to the Bible, is correctly understood as God’s promise not to count our sins against us.” (Participant F)

“Forgiving and reconciliations are fundamental teachings and learnings that are routed within the Hindu families.” (Participant F)

“We grew up learning about it and thought in our religious school the importance of forgiveness hence I believe in it.” (Participant G)

“Forgiveness is taught to us by our parents, in Islamic school, at religious functions. To forgive means to bring peace and Islam is about peace.” (Participant H)

“Some people will see you as a weak individual and that would mean you were not rescued in the teachings of God or the word of God.” (Participant D)

The last quote above proves that if an individual does not practice forgiveness, society will view one as weak in the eyes of God. Participants believed forgiving was an act of God, however, to some forgiveness despite any transgression was seen as an obligation.

“According to our religion, if someone makes a mistake and if somebody hurts your feeling and who does anything to you. You instantly forgive... being a Muslim, and we culturally aware and religiously aware of certain things. You have to forgive a person. Even if they hurt you the most.” (Participant A)

“Religion plays a part because of the fact that we should forgive and seek forgiveness so if we expect to be forgiven then we ourselves should also forgive.” (Participant G)

“According to Islam we are forced to forgive. You have to forgive the spouse.” (Participant B)

“We forgive because Jesus forgave us.” (Participant D)

“Yes, religion plays a very big role in forgiveness. The Prophet's stories all mention that even if a person has physically hurt you, you must forgive. You must be peaceful about it. There is no such thing as revenge here. (Participant H)

When a participant was asked about what her religion had stated about forgiveness, she stated that there is a need to forgive the individual and forget about the transgression. She had also mentioned the need to forgive your spouse as a significant act in her religion of Islam.

“Forgive and forget whatever happens you must always forgive. There is no difference in forgiving your siblings your friends, your husband you must always forgive and forget.” (Participant C)

“You have to forgive the spouse.” (Participant B)

“As an individual, religion has more of an influence due to it being an essential part of our religion to forgive and seek forgiveness.” (Participant G)

A participant had mentioned the obligation to forgive originated through the notion that if she did not forgive, she believed it was an unlikely act by God and seen as a sin.

“Now, if you don't forgive somebody won't that hurt their feelings? Islamically speaking and that would be a sin? And because it being a sin, that influenced me to forgive a person.” (Participant A)

“However, if it was very very bad, I would forgive and ignore the person. I am a Muslim.” (Participant C).

“I believe if someone sincerely asks for forgiveness and you reject it, it is a sin. A person feels guilty and who knows if they had asked for forgiveness from Allah?” (Participant H)

Unforgiving was seen to result in sin. Some participants had seen it as a mere influence of gaining good deeds and preparing for their afterlife and others had seen it as an obligation that one had to fulfil.

“When it comes to religion... it did play a part in marriage because knowing that if you don't forgive somebody, then it's not going to be a good for you... meaning that we do believe in the life after death.” (Participant C)

“Forgiveness is so important in life that one should understand if you forgive someone or ask for forgiveness first you will be the first to enter into paradise between the two people.” (Participant G)

“In Islam, they say if you forgive someone in this world, you do not have to face them in the afterlife. I would forgive a person so I can enter Jannah, but also, I would not like to face a person that hurt me in this world and the year after.” (Participant H)

4.5.3.2. Importance of maintaining a marriage

Each religion mentions the importance of marriages and maintaining these marriages to keep the family together. All participants had pointed out the role forgiveness plays in maintaining a marriage and had ruled it as significant in marriage longevity.

“Marriage is very important in Islam. You have to forgive your husband for your marriage to work out. You have to work on your marriage and stay in the marriage. You have to overlook their faults.” (Participant A)

“When we get married, we have a Hindu wedding, where a priest goes through the rituals and we take the vows to love, be good, respectful and faithful to each other in difficult and joyful times.” (Participant F)

“Marriage vows are sacred.” (Participant E)

“Marriage implies a deep spiritual relationship between man, wife and Christ. This is important as it is something that is bound by God. Yes, I am influenced because my wife is a blessing.” (Participant D)

“My religion teaches us that marriage is half of our Deen and to respect every aspect of marriage.” (Participant G)

“Marriage means completing your Iman, It is sunnah which is what Muslims aim to do. Sunnah is the teachings and ways of the Prophet.” (Participant H)

Another participant had quoted from her scriptures about how God dislikes broken marriages. She stated that divorce or the inability to maintain a marriage would lead to sin and a hard, difficult afterlife.

“Say if anyone in Islam divorces, our scholars from a young age had always said to us. Divorce should never be brought up between a couple. Divorce is makrooh, which means it is disliked by God. When a couple divorces, it shakes the throne of Allah. Tell me, would you like to anger your lord? This life is nothing and short, I prepare for the afterlife that lasts forever. I want to go to heaven.” (Participant A)

“Divorce is disliked by our Lord. A beautiful marriage in accordance to Islam will result in a good life in this world and the hereafter.” (Participant G)

4.6. Dominant cultural influence

A dominant theme of forgiveness in Indian marriages is the influence of culture as all participants belong to culturally strict backgrounds. This sub-theme covers how culture influences the willingness to forgive or not. They regarded marriage as highly important in Indian culture. The elders in a family are regarded as significant influences on the lives of their offspring and are made to make life-changing decisions for them including assisting them with major transgressions and forgiveness. Their duty is to listen to some degree to their elders as they are seen to have more experience. However, in the findings, there has been a generalised difference between the advice and influence of these elders on female and male spouses.

4.6.1. Authoritative influence between male and female spouses

The majority of the participants placed a significant amount of influence of culture on forgiveness in their marriages. Indian women are trained to act and react with all respect when it comes to elders and their spouses. All-female participants had stated when they are approached with a transgression from their spouse, they were told to have respect, simply keep quiet and not say anything back. They were advised to overlook all transgressions.

“They said that I must accept and I must not say anything back. If they're wrong I must not back answer them. I must keep cool.” (Participant C)

Female participants were advised by their elders to become positive despite conflict, and not react in a way that may worsen a transgression by becoming disrespectful towards their spouse.

“My elders always said that no matter what your spouse is, no matter how big or small, forgive. Even if that means that they were wrong, and they accept it that they were wrong, but forgive them. Reconciling, always show them that you have forgiven

them in your acts, the way you talk, the way you treat them, the way you feed them. That is what reconciliation was according to my elders. No matter what they do, treat them normal.” (Participant A)

“Mainly your family, friends and relatives will ask you to forgive your partner.” (Participant E)

“Elders always say to keep quiet, do not argue. The wise are silent.” (Participant H)

A participant believed Indian culture had forced her to forgive her spouse. She felt obligated by a culturally strict family.

“If you talk about culture, it was my husband’s family that literally forced me to forgive him... forgive him for what? Because of that leaving me and not to him... I still don’t understand why I had to forgive him” (Participant A)

“Culture on its own says, dictates that if a person does something wrong you forgive almost instantaneously. That is what culture means to me when it comes to forgiveness. But as I told you previously, that’s not the way I do it.” (Participant A)

Female participants stated the need to respect their in-laws in this process. These transgressions were seen to be discussed between male spouses and their families. Which in turn would give their own advice that will influence the likelihood of forgiveness in the couple. Participants had further explained the need for “family meetings” to aid couples in forgiving so that divorce is not an option.

“My father told me that now that I’m getting married that’s my in-laws are like my parents and whatever that they say and do I must accept and I must not say anything back.” (Participant C)

“When a woman is accused of doing something wrong, she is referred to as an outcast and when a man does something wrong he is forgiven and welcomed back into the family.” (Participant E)

“Respecting your in-laws is a must with both sides. I feel Indian culture places a big role on just the male spouse’s parents. In the initial stages of my marriage, both the parents would speak to figure out the issues and help us.” (Participant H)

According to another female participant, during these family meetings, she often felt like she was the wrongful one. As females were easily blamed for mistakes and males were not. The above statement justifies this finding.

“Because the concept being that my husband always thought that he was right and I was wrong. So... as the years progressed I always felt that whatever he said was right and whatever I did was wrong.” (Participant A)

“These family meetings can be exhausting because people pick sides.” (Participant H)

Female participants were asked about how their elders had advised them during transgressions they believed as severe, the advice that was given was to forgive, overlook or make changes irrespective. They believed the male spouse no matter how severe the transgression was not allowed to result in divorce.

“When my husband left me at my mother's house after we fought, I did know he was looking at other women. My elders' advice to that was no beta which means child, forgive him, you know how men are. Having another baby it will bring you two closer to the relationship. But, how do you bring a child into the world saying it'll help your marriage?” (Participant A)

“My mother had always said, you have to make this work.” (Participant H)

Despite forgiving, participant A believed her spouse just continued doing wrong because she was incapable of asking for a divorce. Participants felt that they were always at fault and their responsibility as Indian women is to make their marriage and families' work. Elders had reiterated their need to make it work.

“When I told my elders about my suspicions, they said oh you can't leave the marriage. What will people say? You could not control your husband that's why he is going around looking and seeing other women?” (Participant E)

“Forgiving the person made the person do more, betray you more financially, emotionally and psychologically, in every way, holistically speaking with all the negatives. They knew you can't ask for a divorce.” (Participant A)

“It is embarrassing to have a divorced daughter sitting at home after her husband does not want her. Which is not advice I would give my own daughter.” (Participant H)

When male participants were asked about the difference in their advice during transgressions. They believed that a severe transgression in a marriage is when the wife displays high levels of disrespect to their in-laws and husband, has extra-marital affairs or if was dressed inappropriately. The male participant's elders were quick to advise a need for divorce and saw these transgressions as unforgivable.

“In my previous marriage, my wife was selfish. You know with Indians, we prefer our women to dress covered their bodies, any revealing clothes or short clothes is a no no. I tried to tell her, she listened. But, after that she just became so disrespectful to

my parents and I. I could not handle it, so I spoke to my parents and they said I should leave the marriage and find someone who would listen and understand their responsibilities and duties of being a daughter in law.” (Participant D)

“Males give more hard-core to the point advice and women give more emotional reasons.” (Participant G)

The above statement was made by a male participant who experienced his elders' advice on whether to forgive or not in their marriage. Another male participant mentioned that his marriage was an arranged marriage. The elders in his family had chosen a spouse for him that would fit into the family and practice all traditions. He had found that there were very few transgressions that had occurred in his marriage due to his spouse being chosen for him.

“I have had no problem with my wife. When the marriage is arranged they are no problems but love marriage have lots of divorces.” (Participant B)

“If we look at the divorce rates in today's time you can say arranged marriage is more successful as love marriage seldom fall apart when couples lack maturity n understanding they fall in love before marriage where as arrange the fall in love daily after marriage.” (Participant G)

The participant went on to say that in arranged marriages, their outlook had differed to those exposed to love marriages. Elders would frame their outlook to see the good in their spouses as they were handpicked for them.

“We knew they can't have problems because you are trained to believe and see the good in your spouse. It's like a mindset which they create so you can't see a way out of marriage or think about divorce.” (Participant B)

4.7. The idea of improvement with forgiving in Indian marriages

This theme aims to explore the participants' idea of improvement in forgiveness in their marriage. It captures how individuals may view their need for improvements and their idea of how forgiveness may be improved.

4.7.1. Working together

All participants had mentioned that there is always a need to improve forgiveness in a marriage. In Indian marriages, they felt a need to be able to sit down and confide with their spouses. This will enable collaborative decision-making rather than a one-sided effort.

“How people should sit together and discuss things, you weigh the pros and cons and then we probably that will make a difference in the future.” (Participant A)

“If two minds can sit and make any decisions. I must be... voluntary thing not something that can be pushed or manipulated to side with your husband and agree with your spouse for anything... for any aspect. It must be something you must sit at the table and you discuss and you make up a decision together.” (Participant A)

“Always ask for forgiveness with sincerely n not just to please the person you have hurt if things aren't done with sincerity the mistake n hurt will continue to occur thus resulting in meaningless repentance.” (Participant G)

“I personally feel that it is better to work together to figure a situation out then introducing and telling other people about your issues. I would not want to pick a side and I would not want to feel like my husband does not have my side.” (Participant H)

Participants had believed that it is significant to understand what your partner needs in order to assist the forgiving process in marriage. This would enable an improvement in forgiveness.

“Knowing your partner's favourite items and remembering the small things when you need to make things better.” (Participant B)

“Best way is by being open and sharing issues or problems experienced. Then there must be an amicable solution to the problem agreed by both husband and wife.” (Participant E)

“Forgiveness can be improved by analysing what was done and putting yourself in the position of your spouse that has been hurt. You then realise how it impacts your spouse and will seek forgiveness.” (Participant G)

Other spouses mentioned a need to compromise and communicate effectively. They believed that forgiveness is incomplete without these two fundamental factors.

“Communication is key and forgiveness is nothing without communication and compromise.” (Participant D)

“It's always important to act and think with a clear mind, not to prove your right and there's no need to apologise.” (Participant G)

“We have to talk everything out, get it all out and remind each other how important we are to each other.” (Participant H)

Despite the common misconception of counselling being seen as a taboo in Indian culture, participants had stated a need for therapy and counselling to help aid their marriages and forgiveness. They had proposed that severe transgressions should be dealt with in marriage

counselling rather than with family members. It can be difficult to overcome anger or transgression easily.

“They should try seeking counselling, I do know, if you tell someone oh I am going for counselling. The first thought that comes is, this person is mad, can hurt the spouse and not good to themselves and their spouses. I also think this is the orthodox people who think this, nowadays, Indians are more open to going for counselling and is becoming the norm.” (Participant G)

“Psychologists help, you do not have to tell people that you are going because a common thought about counselling is you are sick mentally and there's this stereotype passed around.” (Participant H)

The above quote acknowledges that there is a stereotype that is drawn to individuals that seek out therapy or counselling in the Indian community. However, this is slowly diminishing as people are seeing a trend in seeking for help.

“Some spouses are compassionate and forgiving while others are not, the wrong doing's will still linger on in one's heart. The couple should go for marriage counselling.” (Participant E)

A participant stated that if her spouse were to agree to go for counselling in order to help the recurrence of similar transgressions it would help ease her into forgiving him because he would understand the repercussions of the act and how it affects others.

“And they can learn from it, and probably teach somebody about it. Or maybe if they have a problem and I do want to forgive them if they seek therapy if their issues are big.” (Participant A)

4.8. Summary

In summary, the experience of forgiving in Indian marriages were classified through their understanding of forgiveness, the severity of transgression and the theological/cultural understanding in Indian marriages. The severity of transgression was found to be significant in understanding how these spouses perceived forgiveness. Minor transgressions were seen as overlooked, whilst severe transgressions were categorised through physical/ sexual abuse, inappropriate dressing, lack of respect towards spouse and in-laws and infidelity. However, there had been a theological and cultural element added to understanding forgiveness. These

participants were found to be brought up in strict cultural and religious backgrounds that had embedded their understanding and experience of forgiving.

The experience of forgiveness in Indian marriages had been themed into three major findings which are, establishing and re-establishing trust, allowing for harmony and power of reconciliation. The majority of spouses present had expressed that experiencing forgiveness, it allowed the establishment of trust after a transgression that had affected both spouses in the marriage by exposing spouses to communicate their hurt and understand their partner better. Spouses believed that understanding their hurt, it will prompt the transgressing spouse to prevent the reoccurrence of a similar transgression. However, transgressing spouses that were unable to communicate were found to repeat transgressions which led to the inability of repairing trust in their relationship. Forgiveness of a spouse had led couples to experience harmony and peace in their spousal and family systems.

Reconciliation played a vital role in Indian marriages. Forgiveness with and without reconciliation had both positive and negative effects. Individuals who had forgiven their transgressing spouses without a reconciliation process and the transgressing spouses' inability to change their disruptive behaviour had resulted in lower self-worth and lower self-esteem. Spouses mentioned feeling helpless and hopeless in transgressions. Therefore, ruling their transgressing spouses as selfish and displaying difficulty in transforming negative emotions into positive emotions in order to find harmony and peace in one's self. However, spouses that were able to forgive and engage in the reconciliation process were able to rebuild trust in their marriage and enabled harmony between spouses and offspring. They had reported a higher likelihood of forgiving their spouse in the future.

There had been a strong correlation found between personality and forgiveness. A psychological influence was mentioned to influence the likelihood of forgiveness in a marriage. Individuals with warm, empathetic and understanding personalities were more likely to engage in the forgiving and reconciliation process with their transgressing spouses. However, individuals with a difficulty in forgiving their spouses were more likely to forgive without the reconciliation process due to perceived obligation. Individuals had mentioned that the ability to forgive a spouse had enabled one to feel less anxiety, stress and low self-esteem. They were seen as more likely to engage in forgiveness in future transgressions. The majority of spouses had mentioned little to no influence of society on their willingness to forgive.

However, an implicit influence was found in means of maintaining a positive social image. A collapse of this liked social image meant society had a negative view of the family which results in gossiping in communities. A theological/ religious influence was seen as vital in all spouses included in the study. Forgiveness was seen as an act of God. The inability to provide forgiveness was seen as an act disliked by God and on grounds to have sinned. They emphasised that forgiveness can affect their afterlife. Individuals had also mentioned an obligation to forgive in their religion. Individuals had interlinked the importance of forgiveness in order to maintain their marriage. The importance of marriage in every religion is mentioned in their religious books and scriptures. Failure to maintain a marriage can result in sinning.

Cultural families had reiterated the importance of elders through their need to make life decisions for their offspring. When an Indian couple was faced with a severe transgression, the family played an important part in reconciling the spouses and nudging them into the forgiveness process. Although these meetings had taken place, there had been downfalls to this collective and cultural solution. Individuals had also experienced the injustice created through the obligation to forgive and had generated a negative view of forgiveness and their transgressing spouse. Male spouses were influenced to separate from their wives if a major transgression had occurred and brought disgrace or disrespect to their parents and family. The inability of a wife to perform her duty had also led to elders discouraging their sons to forgive their spouses. However, female spouses were advised to keep quiet and overlook all transgressions for the sake of their family and offspring. Female spouses mentioned their inability to divorce their spouse and were told to overlook all transgressions and try harder. Female spouses in this regard believed that they were held accountable even when they were not at fault due to cultural views.

Lastly, spouses believed that working together as a couple will assist in improving forgiveness in Indian marriages. Working together will create healthier communication channels that will create ease in navigating future transgressions. They highlighted the need to come together and enable collaborative decision-making. Marriage counselling and therapy were seen as a way to assist major transgressions in marriage. Spouses that experienced forgiveness without reconciliation and a satisfied changed behaviour from a transgressing spouse encouraged the other to get treatment from a psychologist or counsellor to aid forgiveness in the marriage.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

5.1. Introduction

This section will discuss the understanding of forgiveness in a marital relationship, the psychological and cultural aspects that influence an individual's willingness to forgive or not and how forgiveness in marital relationships can be improved in association with the broader literature and coexistence with Bronfenbrenner's (1995) ecological systems theory as the theoretical framework. The aim of this research study was to explore the lived experiences of forgiveness in Indian marital relationships. This chapter will therefore discuss findings in relation to literature and theoretical framework. The following themes that were found; (1) understanding forgiveness, (2) experience of forgiving, (3) the psycho-social influence of forgiveness, (4) dominant cultural influence, and (5) improvement of forgiveness in Indian marriages will be discussed.

5.2. Understanding forgiveness

This study found participants' conceptualisation and understanding of forgiveness similar. Uniformly, it is seen that the understanding of forgiveness is influenced through the bi-directional nature of the microsystem, where family, peers and religious organisations impact their understanding and view of forgiving in relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 2009). This system paves the way to a holistic understanding of how participants understand forgiveness in their marriage. Whereby, their experience of their parent's forgiving may influence their own family system and create a pattern that is repetitive (Bronfenbrenner, 2009). According to Fincham et al., (2006), an individual's understanding of forgiveness is vital in interpreting their facilitation of forgiveness. Generally, when facilitating forgiveness, it is necessary to consider the implications for understanding forgiveness in marital behaviour and clinical tasks (Fincham et al., 2006). According to participants involved in this study, forgiveness was viewed as a process between both spouses which resulted in abandoning all forms of resentment, bitterness and anger through the transgressing spouse's proposed apology, to the victim spouse's acceptance or rejection of the apology, which then contributes to the changed or bettered behaviour of the transgressing spouse (Fincham, 2006; Saunders, 2011; Campbell, 2017). This is seen as an overall dominant understanding of forgiveness that

is interpreted as both an interpersonal and intrapersonal process proposed by other researchers (Saunders, 2011; Tucker et al., 2015).

The study found it necessary for marital forgiveness to identify a transgression, maltreatment one is exposed to or betrayal created by the transgressing spouse. Fincham et al. (2006) proposed when a standard of marriage is breached, forgiveness is necessary. The intergenerational transmission of an individual's values, interaction, experience, beliefs and behaviour create this particular standard in an individuals' microsystem. Especially in Indian culture, where respect for societal duties and norms must be adhered to (Jain, 2019). The ability to eliminate negative emotions internally was viewed as an intrapersonal process (Souders, 2021). However, there had been little evidence found in Indian marriages that had viewed forgiveness as only an intrapersonal process which allowed for the release of anger, bitterness and resentment for their own personal gain without reconciliation. An interpersonal element of the process was characterised significantly by apologising, taking responsibility and accountability for the transgression and lastly, repairing the relationship through changed and satisfied behaviour (Fehr et al., 2010).

The dominant theme of understanding forgiveness as an interpersonal process had a collectivist nature seen in Asian cultures. This highlights the importance of cultural upbringing and influence seen through the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). These findings were compatible with Hofstede et al. (2010) and Chan (2018), as a collectivistic culture viewed forgiveness as more of an interpersonal phenomenon in Asian cultures rather than an intrapersonal phenomenon consistent with Western and individualistic cultures. The need for interpersonal forgiveness contributed to a sense of normalcy and unity necessary for spouses in their marriage. In forgiving a spouse, resentment and anger were released, allowing for a sense of normalcy between spouses without the need to continue a fight or hold in emotions that influenced them to behave negatively toward their spouse. This feature is evident in the collectivist nature which advocates a need to maintain a relationship (Everett et al., 2019; Joo et al., 2019).

Some spouses interlinked their understanding of forgiveness to the severity of the transgression. Significantly, transgression severity had influenced their willingness to forgive or not. Thus, causing the victim spouse to create a negative impression of the transgression in a cognitive sense (Fehr et al., 2010). According to Fehr et al. (2010) and McCullough et al.

(2003), it leads to the victim's increased likelihood of eluding or executing revenge to lower the likelihood of similar transgressions or harm in the future. The study results mentioned transgression severity from mild to severe particularly in Indian marriages. Whereas, mild transgressions in Indian marriages were ignored, overlooked or forgivable without any proposed apology or change in post-transgression behaviour. Severe transgressions included domestic abuse, disrespect to in-laws or spouses, inappropriate dressing of females and infidelity. Indian culture highlights the importance of family, respect and marriage. These acts were seen as difficult to forgive and influenced by society and culture in the macrosystem. It had been viewed as negligence of care, respect and love in both marital and family systems (Sivakumar and Manimekalai, 2021). With an emphasis on unity and respect in Indian culture, violations created against spouses and spousal families were seen as more difficult to forgive or perceived as unforgivable than other transgressions (Sivakumar and Manimekalai, 2021). Morse and Metts (2011) stated in their study a high correlation between severe transgressions and less probability of forgiveness. Severe transgressions required the transgressing spouse to engage in a higher level of repair and changing behaviour. According to Merolla (2008), severe transgressions had required comprehensive forgiveness tactics to result in forgiveness by the victim spouse. Every individual's understanding of transgression severity had affected their forgiveness experience. Whereas, a participant had established divorce on grounds of this disrespect.

The study found a correlation between understanding forgiveness and theological and cultural foundations. Some participants had directly linked their understanding of forgiveness to the teachings and scriptures of their religion (Tucker et al., 2015). Religion and culture are seen as a system rooted in the macrosystem that influences through all other levels in the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2009). Belonging to strict religious and cultural backgrounds, the teachings of both had embedded the understanding of forgiveness in these participants. Islam and Christianity encourage forgiveness despite interpersonal elements such as an apology and advocate the need for forgiveness despite transgression, degree of repentance or consequences of transgressions (Rye et al., 2000; Tucker et al., 2015). The findings in the first theme had allowed the researcher to create a holistic understanding and fulfilled the first objective of this research study by exploring the participants' understanding of forgiveness in their marital relationship. A foundation of understanding forgiveness was constructed through the participant's immediate environment (microsystem), the bifacial

interaction between microsystem and mesosystem level and the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1995).

5.3. Experience of forgiving

Forgiveness has a prosocial nature that allows an individual to forsake all negative emotions and display positive emotions as discussed prior to this theme. The objective to better understand the participant's lived experiences of their marital relationship was achieved through the discussion created in this theme. The findings are deeply rooted and influenced through the microsystem, mesosystem, the exosystem and macrosystem in an individual's development. According to Fehr et al. (2010) forgiveness is produced through the victim's perception that the transgressor and the transgression are disengaged, perceiving that the transgression occurred through circumstance. Whereby, situational attributions are linked to intent and responsibility that encourage forgiveness. These transgressions were viewed as a violation of trust. The influence of mesosystems can be exhibited through development or breaking down of interpersonal relationships between the individual and spouse or family (Bronfenbrenner, 2009). The study found that through forgiveness, individuals experienced the establishment and re-establishment of trust in their relationship. Spouses had to examine the level of transgression created by the transgressor. Individuals found that the negative emotions that were created through their transgressions caused a spouse to have negative emotions and reactions that established a ground between spouse and transgressing spouse to realise the consequences of their actions. Thus, prompting an apology.

As stated by Fehr et al. (2010), participants believed that an apology leads to the repair of the relationship and contributes to restoring a positive image of the transgressor. Through admission of guilt in their actions, apologising creates a perception of the transgression as worthy of forgiveness. The findings displayed that the negative emotions experienced by both spouses and a hostile environment were released. The spouses in the marriage had the ability to engage in a process of re-establishing trust. According to a study by McCullough et al. (2003) and Fehr et al. (2010), when an individual experiences guilt for their wrongdoing, they are more likely to forgive, understand and recognise other transgressions. The transgressing spouse understood the consequences of particular actions, which most spouses reported as transgressions that were not repeated (Fehr et al., 2010). A

notion of perspective-taking was noted in this exchange which focuses on the bifacial interaction of the mesosystem and the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 2009). The transgressing spouse was mentioned to recognise the other's point of view by placing a focus on marital goals. This encouraged acts of negotiation such as changed post-transgression behaviour. Spouses' stated that through communication, it allowed vulnerability in speaking about their pain, anger and needs which contributed to a level of marital adjustment (Fehr et al., (2010).

However, despite the positive experience of rebuilding trust through forgiving. A participant partakes in forgiveness for the “sake of forgiving”, which refers to decisional forgiveness. Decisional forgiveness includes the mere intention of forgiveness without consequential changes in their motivational, emotional and cognitive factors (Worthington & Scherer, 2004; Holeman, Dean, DeShea & Duba, 2011). Specifically, under these circumstances, the intentional decision to forgive a spouse did not yield a complete decrease in negative emotion toward the transgressor and led to a level of helplessness or hopelessness (Tucker et al., 2015). Therefore, justifying the dissociation between emotional and cognitive processes found by Tucker et al. (2015). Decisional forgiveness is created through the influence of forgiveness due to obligations of religion, culture, family and society seen by the macrosystem (Tucker et al., 2015; Bronfenbrenner, 2009). However, the participant mentioned their inability to repair trust in the marriage. She had recalled her experience of decisional forgiveness as means for her spouse to continue betraying her through the recurrence of similar transgressions. The participant mentioned feeling helpless and exhausting her options to make the situation better. However, ruminating about past transgressions triggered negative emotions experienced previously which creates an individual to relive the psychological consequences and transgressions caused rendering them hopeless in the future transgressions (Fehr et al., 2010).

All participants in the study had revealed experiencing a degree of harmony when forgiving one's spouse. According to these participants, the achievement of harmony was established between both spousal and family systems in Indian marriages. Experiencing forgiveness, it allowed one to create a sense of normalcy, happiness, peace, and harmony and maintain a well-functioning household. However, in this instance, the fourth level of Bronfenbrenner's ecological system of the macrosystem comes into play as it focuses on culture. Culture is seen as a fundamental element of society that is further divided into

ideologies, values and laws that govern an individual's thought process and influences their actions and interactions (Bronfenbrenner, 2009). In Eastern and collectivistic cultures, forgiveness relates to the maintenance and restoration of social harmony (Hook et al., 2012; Everett et al., 2019). In contrast to Western studies conducted on forgiveness, there is an emphasis placed on individualism and 'self' (Hofstede et al., 2010; Flicker & Bui, 2018), Eastern and African studies and cultures have highlighted interdependence, collectivism and family. Indian culture determines a particular standard of specifying boundaries, rules of interaction, appropriate communication patterns, discipline, practices and hierarchy in a family system (Chadda & Deb, 2013). According to participants, forgiveness played a significant role in maintaining appropriate rules of interactions by disengaging them from negative emotions that create a hostile environment affecting communication and interactions between both family and spousal systems. This impact of a larger social system is seen as an influence by an exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 2009). Adequately infiltrating communication patterns, practices and discipline to prevent a sense of normalcy. A disruption in the mentioned elements could create dysfunction in their system and may lead to community gossiping. Participants also displayed concern and fear about unresolved transgressions and gossiping societies creating toxic and dysfunctional environments for their upbringing. As much as social harmony is seen as an experience of forgiving, it may contribute to one of the many influences of forgiveness in Indian marriages.

Spouses in this study that were able to forgive their transgressing spouses without experiencing a sense of satisfying harmony and peace in their own spousal system, had inadvertently experienced them through their family system. In this experience, an intrapersonal level of processing was necessary in maintaining peace and harmony in both spousal and family systems. Practising decisional forgiveness, allowed the shift of negative emotion to create a functional sense of normalcy in these systems. This individualistic perspective emphasised the dominant goal of allowing oneself in maintaining a marriage and family which is vital in Indian culture. Creating and maintaining peace and harmony was also seen as an obligation or need for her offspring/ family system (Everett et al., 2019). In Eastern studies conducted on forgiveness in Korea, Japan, Indonesia and Taiwan, tolerance, compassion and harmony are significant factors in maintaining relationships and social harmony (Everett et al., 2019; Joo et al., 2019; Karremans et al., 2011). Thus, a sense of collectivism was displayed through acknowledgement of their actions affecting others and interdependence. These spouses had prioritised harmony and peace rather than addressing a

transgression that may end up in a hostile, unhealthy environment for the benefit of both spousal and family systems. The study also proposed that in doing this, there was a lesser desire in pointing out or finding transgressions. A notion of individualism is portrayed by experiencing forgiveness in a more intrapersonal way that benefits the individual. Forgiveness in the individualistic perspective highlights the possible individual goals or interests of circumstances. Whereby, forgiveness allows the individual to let go of any guilt caused by a transgression with the intention of restoration of relationships (Everett et al., 2019).

The study found that the interrelated presence of reconciliation is crucial in Indian culture and marriages. As opposed to Western culture and studies, reconciliation is seen as a segregated aspect that does not need to occur in forgiveness (Everett et al., 2019). Participants who had experienced forgiveness with and without the reconciliation of spouses presented negative and positive effects on their well-being and marital satisfaction. Through literature, it is understood that Eastern Asian culture portrays a collectivistic approach to understanding the integration of forgiveness and reconciliation (Flicker & T Bui, 2018). Spouses accepted their emotional injury and began healing through letting go of negative emotions, re-building trust and reconnecting with their spouses by engaging in a reconciling environment (Mokhtar, 2000; Malcolm & Greenberg, 2000; Hasan & Tiwari, 2019).

Reconciliation occurs when the transgressing spouse accepts responsibility for the transgression, displays sorrow/guilt, apologies and makes an attempt to restore relationships (Fehr et al., 2010). The study established spouses experienced reconciliation through portrayal and received a degree of positive action/ feeling toward the spouse. Spouses mentioned that remembering their partner's favourite items and engaging in acts of behaviour that he/she needs at that moment aids the reconciliation process that helps the relationship and increases the likelihood of forgiving in the future. Transgressing spouses mentioned creating an empathetic, loving and compassionate environment to achieve being forgiven. Worthington and Wade (1999) proposed emotional variance can be resolved through cognitive, somatic and environmental positivity. This encourages positive emotions to resurface (Exline et al., 2003; Kaleta & Mroz, 2021). Therefore, influencing the recreation of a likeable relationship between spouses.

According to Worthington and Cowden (2017), emotional forgiveness, reconciliation and the willingness to forgive can occur concurrently. Participants stated reconciliation led to

an increase in relationship satisfaction, security and closeness. They mentioned the ability to become conscious of one's needs and understanding each other's emotions and behaviour led to relationship closeness. Rusbult et al. (1991) mentioned that understanding a partner's behaviour and emotions is crucial in the maintenance of relationships. It allows a spouse to engage in 'positive illusion', where one may cognitively transform one's negative actions and portray them positively (Donovan & Priester, 2020). This finding was congruent with the experience of reconciliation in this study, participant's explained that reconciliation established a beneficial environment that eliminates negative emotions and resulted positively in other and future transgressions. According to Donovan and Priester (2020), the influence of relationship closeness on forgiveness is negotiated by a spouse's desire to maintain their relationship. Participants stated that they experienced forgiveness and reconciliation as a means to enable healthier relationships, improved mental health for both spouses, lesser anxiety, stress and hostility, and improved health and self-esteem due to their need to maintain their marriage. Consistent with the study by Karremans, Van Lange, Ouwerkerk and Kluwer (2003), marriages with strong interpersonal commitment were linked with positive emotions and high self-esteem. In another study by Hasan and Tiwari (2019), forgiveness was highly correlated to overall better well-being.

Spouses that displayed decisional forgiveness without any form of reconciliation experienced negative emotions that affected their well-being. The study found such spouses experienced hopelessness and helplessness in their marriage when met with unchanged post-transgression behaviour. In contrast to being met with a positive environment or change from both transgressing spouse and victim spouse was engaged in interactions with the transgressor in form of blaming the victim, refusing to take accountability and responsibility for action, inability to ask for forgiveness and creating additional transgressions (Worthington & Cowden, 2017). Inherently, affecting relationship closeness and satisfaction. The negative emotions experienced in unresolved transgressions had infiltrated their perception and behavioural responses to future transgressions (Fincham et al., (2006). According to Fincham et al. (2006), this results in constraining conflict resolution in marriage.

Fincham et al. (2006) stated conflict resolution as a framework that interlinked relationship satisfaction and forgiveness. The experience of forgiveness without reconciliation was seen to have a negative psychological impact on the individual's marriage and oneself. A sense of superior-inferior complex had been experienced. The spouse had

experienced low self-esteem and suffered from an inferiority complex with multiple situations forgiven without changing positive behaviour from the transgressing spouse. Thus, giving a sense of powerlessness between spouses that creates difficulty in dealing with challenges (Schnabel & Nadler, 2008; Zheng et al., 2014). However, these negative effects displayed were similar to the results of emotional ramifications of unforgiveness. According to a study by Tucker et al. (2015), unforgiveness has a negative effect that is linked to psychosomatic complaints, poor health and morality.

5.4. The psycho-social influence of forgiveness

Individuals presented their personality or their spouse's personality as factors that influenced their willingness to forgive. According to Fehr et al. (2010) and Souders (2021), particular dispositional/personality attributes influence an individual to forgive or not. This refers to trait forgiveness. Along with these personality traits, cultural beliefs, values and religion play a role in forgiveness. Drawing an interconnection between the microsystem and macrosystem in the ecological systems theory. According to (Leary, 2019) personality may be governed by the immediate environment that an individual is in. Participants who displayed difficulty forgiving, describe their personality as difficult to handle betrayal, therefore do not forgive. According to Souders (2021), individuals who have a grudgeful personality may react passively or bitterly. There may be no active retaliation or confrontation with the spouse. However, these personalities often ruminate about portraying a victim and exhibit hostility and resentment. In addition to this, these spouses state that they experienced defensiveness and egotistical behaviour from their transgressors which made it difficult to forsake all resentment. They had mentioned this affected future transgressions. These participants displayed lower self-esteem. According to Fehr et al. (2010), these individuals are strongly correlated to extreme mood shifts and negative affective reactions to conflict situations. Spouses that were seen as defensive and egotistical had presented difficulty in achieving and understanding forgiveness in their marriage.

The study found that participants and participant spouses who displayed a calm, empathetic and understanding personality had reported a higher likelihood to forgive. Individuals with an empathic personality displayed the ability to forgive easier than individuals without. Studies have presented the impact of empathy on the forgiving process (Tucker et al., 2015). However, when an individual proposes forgiveness to the victim's

spouse, it can create an increase in empathy and higher levels of willingness to forgive (Tucker et al. 2015). Souders (2021) mentioned the association of the Big Five personalities with forgiveness. Agreeableness is seen as a frequently linked personality to forgiving. Participants who displayed agreeableness highlighted connection, cooperative and integrative approaches towards transgressions. In these situations, empathy and understanding were emphasised and promoted (Fehr et al., 2010). According to Fehr et al. (2010), these individuals portray a trusting and altruistic persona which was associated with forgiving behaviour. Participants reported a degree of perspective-taking, this allowed a cognitive capability of understanding another's perspective, intentions and goals that assisted them to present acts of negotiation and marital adjustment that have been discussed in reconciliation (Galinsky et al., 2008; Fehr et al., 2010). Perspective-taking allowed spouses to strengthen the quality of exchanges, which will assist future transgressions. Participants believed that perspective-taking enables spouses to understand the reason behind a transgression and reduces the level of degrading comparisons that will result in a negative perception of the transgression spouse (Exline et al., 2008; Fehr et al., 2010). Older couples that were involved in arranged marriages, emphasised respect and trust in their relationship through socio-moral responsibilities. However, these participants' personality traits were seen to display trait forgiveness. These spouses displayed the ability to forgive despite any situation and time (Berry et al., 2001; Brown, 2003; Fehr et al., 2010). Spouses who display high levels of trait forgiveness had presented transgressions as worthy of forgiveness.

Furthermore, when participants were asked about any influence of society on forgiveness, the majority had stated little to no influence. However, some of the participants stated an explicit influence of society on their forgiveness. Accomplishing another objective that the study stated in understanding the social influences in forgiving or not in Indian marriages. Humans are seen as social beings and exist through relationships with others, that fit part of society (Aristotle (350 BCE); Aronson & Aronson, 2018; Donovan & Priester, 2020). Spouses that have reported an influence have so through the advice and gossip through colleagues and friends in either motivating each to forgive or not. However, spouses who believed society did not influence forgiveness mentioned the inability of the outside world knowledge of the issues faced behind closed doors or the emotional or physical intensity of a transgression created. A concept of autonomy as organisational closure was noted as the system may determine viable interactions with the environment (Villalobos & Ward, 2015). In understanding the unity in their family/spousal system in the state that they exist, the

spouse may decide on the information or allowance of societal influence into their system (Varela, 1991; Thompson, 2007; Villalobos & Ward, 2015).

Forgiveness is seen as a preventative measure against the breaking up of a marriage or divorce. In society, divorce is seen in a negative light and as a breakdown of a positive social image. The findings of this theme had resulted in achieving the objective in determining the psychological aspects that influenced the willingness to forgive in an Indian marriage. A dysfunctional family system can be created from a divorce is disliked, which is detrimental to how society views them as part of the society (Jain, 2019). In this study, there was evidence of a need for a perfect or liked image to be created. Divorce is seen as a collapse in upholding an image. Therefore, a significance is placed on forgiveness in a marriage. When one fails to uphold their positive image in society, society begins to gossip about the individual (Jain, 2019). A participant stated that he views an advantage of forgiving in his marriage as preventing the community from gossiping about his family.

Spouses mentioned a significant religious influence on their willingness to forgive. Forgiveness was seen to have a crucial role in existential beings. This is viewed as an influence from an individual's macrosystem. According to Tucker et al. (2015), forgiveness, philosophy and existential beings are interconnected. Philosophy is a fundamental foundation for one to achieve wholeness through human fulfilment, spirituality, hope and commitment (Koenig, 2009). A familiar ground of spiritual experience is shared between philosophy and faith. Spouses that had belonged to the Christian, Muslim and Hindu faith were able to create their meaning for existence through forgiveness. These faiths were seen to produce existential guidance and establish a belief system that may encourage well-being (Tucker et al., 2015). Forgiveness was seen embedded in every religious scripture and teaching. Participants mentioned that forgiveness was seen as an act of God and an act loved by God, which they had benefited religiously. This influenced individuals to adopt forgiving behaviour that was deemed likeable and acceptable. God as divine power is viewed as the root of purpose, meaning and humane power. God was seen as merciful and forgiving. God's ability to forgive is seen as a motivation, strength and a model of virtue (Tucker et al., 2015; Islamic Awareness, 2013).

When spouses show the inability to forgive in their marriage or in general, it is seen as incapacity in their teaching or their devotion to their God. Christians and Muslims are

highly encouraged and obligated to forgive due to this (Tucker et al., 2015; Islamic Awareness, 2013). A clear goal that was found in this study was the idea of forgiving in order to determine their afterlife. The behaviour and intention toward forgiving and forgetting are favoured in scriptures with the significant religious benefit of a promised afterlife. However, in the same breath, spouses also viewed forgiveness as an obligation of religion (Islamic Awareness, 2013). Where the afterlife is viewed as a final destination and all acts and behaviour accumulate towards a great or unpleasant afterlife. A sense of responsibility is shared as forgiveness. Nevertheless, spouses had seen the inability of forgiving as behaviour or action that would endanger their relationship with God. Thus, harming their afterlife as unforgiveness is viewed as a sin.

Another key influence on the willingness to forgive is the religious importance of maintaining a marriage. Spouses had stated their key motivation for forgiving their transgressing spouse is the ability to maintain a marriage, which is seen as important in all faiths and religions. Their scriptures emphasised this importance. In a study by Javanmard & Garegozlo (2013), a correlation was found between the consistent practice of religion, cherishing religiosity degree and consistent practice of religion with improved marital stability, marital satisfaction and a higher tendency to get married. Spouses that were able to recognise their divine purpose in marriage were more likely to correlate to preserve a higher level of marital adjustment (Aman et al., 2019). Forgiveness is seen to play a significant role in marital commitment, longevity and adjustment. In another study by He, Zhong, Tong, Lan, Li, Ju & Fang (2018), emotional and decisional forgiveness were positively correlated with a simultaneous degree of marital stability. The study was linked to finding evidence in previous research by Fincham et al. (2006) and Tucker et al. (2015) by stipulating forgiveness as necessary for a relationship repair after a transgression. However, spouses believed that their scriptures held that the inability of maintaining a marriage and resulting in divorce is an unlikely action redeemable by punishment by God. Thus, also affecting their afterlife goal (Jain, 2019). This theme's discussion had enabled the understanding of psychological and social factors that influenced the desire of forgiving or not in Indian marriages. The findings of this theme had resulted in achieving the objective in determining the psychological aspects that influenced the willingness to forgive in an Indian marriage.

5.5. Dominant cultural influence

The experience of Indian marriages and their cultural influences on forgiveness in marriages across literature remain a group that has not been sufficiently distinguished, except for forgiveness studies carried out post-Apartheid (Worthington & Cowden, 2017). However, international studies have yielded a distinct comparison between Western and Eastern Cultures. Spouses in this study have noted a remarkable influence of Indian culture on their idea and willingness to forgive that is embedded in the macrosystem of the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). The collectivistic nature found in South African Indians was discussed. Participants did not mention any influence of South African culture or ubuntu in their experience nor as an influence of forgiveness in their marriage. The study established that spouses were brought up in a strict Indian cultural background, highlighting the ability to forgive without apology or need for reconciliation with severe unhealthy transgressions. In the same breath, reconciliation was emphasised to maintain and rebuild relationships. Forgiveness was highlighted through the fundamental goal of social harmony and peace in communities (Sandage & Williamson, 2005; Flicker & T Bui, 2018; Everette et al., 2019). This study's findings are congruent with the collectivistic culture of the Southeast Asian study by Flicker & T Bui (2018) and the Congolese study of Kadiangandu, Gauche, Vinsonneau & Mullet (2007). Most participants in this study had viewed a sense of strong interpersonal forgiveness. Culture and religion seemed to be interrelated and the teachings of both were interconnected in the upbringing of these participants as discussed in the macrosystem. The idea of forgiveness and its importance was emphasised in their upbringing and later brought into their marriages (Lamb, 2002; Paz et al., 2008; Flicker & T Bui, 2018).

However, in Indian culture, it was found that an elder which may be grandparents, siblings of grandparents or parents who have the authority to make decisions for their offspring. Displaying a bi-directional influence of family and extended family seen in a microsystem and mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 2009). Arranging a marriage requires experience and wisdom that proposes hierarchy (Jain, 2019; Sivakumar & Manimekalai, 2021). Hierarchy is born through the necessities of a social bond and is influenced by culture and society in a mesosystem and macrosystem. A component of respect and trust is highlighted (Jain, 2019; Sivakumar & Manimekalai, 2021). Thus, arranged marriages or the ability to agree to love marriage is allowed or disallowed by the authoritative figure in that family. Older spouses married for at least 40 years were seen as more likely to be in arranged

marriages. Spouses had categorised these marriages built on trust and respect and mentioned little to no transgressions with their spouse. These spouses mentioned no need for forgiveness in their marriage through the lack of transgressions created by the other spouse. When these participants were asked about their experience of transgressions, they stated their inability of knowing their spouse had resulted in a lack of transgressions. Nevertheless, the advice that the participants had received from their elders was adhered to (Jain, 2019). Elders had stressed the importance of maintaining the marriage, overlooking conflict and displaying understanding towards their spouse. They were seen as more understanding and empathetic toward their spouse with the key objective of maintaining a healthy family dynamic for their offspring to prosper in their future.

As per the distinction and hierarchical role of elders, spouses held their elders' advice in high regard (Jain, 2019). Their altruism, sacrifice, security, loyalty, community and duty were eminent in their actions and were encouraged to impart such values to their offspring (Jain, 2019). Despite their knowledge and advice, this study found a variation of advice imparted to female and male spouses. Paleari, Regalia and Fincham (2009) stated that wives are seen as more likely to forgive than their husbands. Congruent to the study by Jain (2019), females are viewed as a vital component of relationships with others. Female spouses are viewed as interdependent, highlighting their need to be connected, maintain relationships and be less segregated from others (Kaleta & Mroz, 2021). However, in a study by Neto & Mullet (2004), a strong correlation between interdependence and forgiveness was found in females rather than males.

Indian culture regards marriage and family as dominant feature in a female's life. Their fundamental duty is to be loyal to their spouse, spouses family and children (Jain, 2019 Sivakumar & Manimekalai, 2021). Female participants were encouraged to keep quiet whenever faced with a transgression. They were influenced to keep their cool and maintain respect toward their spouse or inlaws. In doing so, they were told it would prevent the transgression from worsening and getting out of control. Female spouses were encouraged to forgive despite transgression severity and coerced to reconcile with their spouses. Now, with male spouses, this study found elder's advice was quick to encourage divorce or separation when there's an inability to uphold an Indian women's duties towards family. Male participants specified their idea of transgression and their idea of the severity by stating that infidelity, inappropriate dressing that sparked disrespect or the attention of other males, and

disrespect shown to the male spouse or his family were seen as damaging and severe to the marriage. Patriarchy and masculinity are seen in this notion. Masculinity is moulded by socio-cultural elements such as class, family and other environmental factors. Whereby, gender discrimination is developed in a family system via socialisation (Sivakumar & Manimekalai, 2021).

These patriarchal societies hold gender discrimination against powerful and controlling males and submissive and naive females. According to Sivakumar and Manimekalai (2021), men are seen as beakers of control and are encouraged to control the women in their family system to guarantee the fulfilment of women's predicted roles. When there's an inability to fulfil these duties, it endangers the man's masculinity, often resulting in a reaction to remove the source of disrespect. Indian culture views males as protectors and providers of their family systems (Sivakumar & Manimekalai, 2021). Therefore in this study, it was found that elders advise male spouses toward an action that eliminates disrespect and encourages the willingness to not forgive their spouse. Kaleta & Mroz (2021) found that male self-constructs were highly characterised by self-reliance, autonomy and segregation from others.

5.6. Improvement of forgiveness in Indian marriages

As reported in this study and various other forgiveness studies in relationships, participants had found a neverending need to improve on their forgiveness in their marriage. The findings assisted in achieving the objective of understanding participants views on fostering forgiveness in their marriage. The ability to forgive is a crucial factor in increasing marriage satisfaction and duration (Fincham et al., 2006; Tucker et al, 2015; Souders, 2021). This study found a link between well-being, marital satisfaction and forgiveness. However, an issue arises when there is forgiveness without reconciliation in marriage. The findings of this study yielded negative effects on spouses and their marriage when there was an absence of a satisfying reconciliation and an obligation to forgive their spouse. A significant influence of forgiveness was through the macrosystem and mesosystem in sustaining healthy family dynamics, Indian culture and religion. It was found that in Indian culture, forgiveness was seen as a collectivistic decision that is facilitated by the elders of the family. Spouses felt that forgiveness needs to occur between the spouses, whereby they would sit and talk about their issues in a calm and understanding manner. A spouse believed it was best to weigh out the

pros and cons of a situation to assist in the forgiving process and how one has been hurt. This would allow a sense of control, better communication and an improvement in their conflict resolution skills (Wagner et al., 2019). Other studies have found that finding the time to discuss conflict and interpersonal differences, and finding solutions that are beneficial to both spouses contribute to marital quality (Askari, Noah, Hassan & Baba, 2012; Wagner et al., 2019).

Spouses in the study further mentioned the need to understand your partners will allow a better foundation when dealing with future transgressions, forgiveness and the reconciliation process. The communication channels between spouse and family need to be direct, open, congruent and clear, which can be influenced on both a micro and macro level found in the ecological systems theory (Lavner, Karney & Bradbury., 2016; Bronfenbrenner, 2009). Spouses involved in the study had mentioned improving forgiveness in marriages, both spouses must be open and willing to communicate. Through the proper verbalisation of each spouse's feelings, thoughts and experiences, it will allow the necessary information to be transferred between spouses that will enable the spouses to accomplish and harmonise their goals, interests, responsibilities and marital obligations.

According to a study by Askari et al. (2012) and Lavner et al. (2016), to equip couples with necessary communication styles, distinct programmes and workshops need to be established to assist in bettering communication in Indian couples in South Africa and increasing consciousness of harmful and helpful communication styles. Imago Relationship Therapy enables couples to display a higher level of communication and empathy (Gehlert, Schmidt, Giegerich & Luquet., 2017). However, Indian culture highlights the significance of respect and notions of a patriarchal and masculine nature which is more likely seen in arranged marriages and older couples. It is important to understand these cultural distinctions and implement a workshop that will enable this. Many participants in this study also encouraged marriage counselling as a means for effective forgiveness and a better marriage. A common misconception and public stigma about counselling and therapy in Indian and Asian cultures are only needed by mentally ill, aggressive and dangerous individuals. Counselling and therapy are multicultural and have become a trend in combatting marriage and family transgressions.

5.7. Summary

This chapter includes the main findings of the study that contributes to the lived experiences of forgiveness in Indian marriages, the socio-cultural influences on the willingness to forgive or not, the psychological benefits of forgiveness in marriage and further improvements that could be made in the field of forgiveness in Indian marriage. Through this discussion, the literature was utilised to produce a justification of the study findings, along with exhibiting newer knowledge that has surfaced from this research. It also produces a rich understanding of the experience of forgiving in Indian marriages.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Conclusion

This study has characterised forgiveness in Indian marriages in Durban, KwaZulu Natal by distinctly outlining their understanding of forgiveness, their lived experiences in an Indian marriage, their experience of the psychological impact that forgiveness has in marriage, the socio-cultural influences of forgiving or not and their perception of the improvements that may be made in forgiveness in Indian marriages in the future. The study was embedded in the ecological systems theory and utilised the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to understand the lived experiences of this phenomenon.

Indian spouses in this study had characterised forgiveness as an interpersonal and intrapersonal process between spouses. Through apologising, changing and satisfied behaviour of the transgressing spouse, it allows the abandonment of all resentment, bitterness or/and any negative feelings that were created through a transgression. This enables positive feelings such as empathy, compassion and love to create a sense of normalcy and harmony in their spousal and family system. Culture had been viewed as the fundamental building block of their idea of forgiveness. This created a collectivistic approach when dealing with forgiveness to maintain harmony and relationships between individuals. However, Indian spouses had mentioned the severity of a transgression as means to understand forgiveness or not. This was an important finding for the researcher as it could inherently affect how Indian spouses can respond to marriage counselling, health programmes or forgiveness interventions for fear that there is a lack of understanding of specific transgressions that they see as significant to them and their culture.

Furthermore, the study found that much like in other cultures, minor transgressions were overlooked, and identifying severe transgressions had been categorised as disrespect to a spouse, in-laws, inappropriate dressing and all forms of infidelity. However, these were experienced differently. These were seen as unforgivable or not worthy of forgiveness in Indian culture. However, the difference occurred between gender. With a great influence of authority of elders in Indian culture, female spouses were told to overlook severe

transgressions for the sake of their family whilst male spouses were encouraged to not forgive these transgressions. It had been seen as the notion of upholding respect for their elders and family. Spouses had experienced their severe transgressions in a form of a collectivistic decision made by family and spouses involved. A “family meeting” of such was called to aid the forgiveness process between families and spouses. Spouses experience forgiveness as a factor that will influence harmony between spousal and family systems. Harmony was a distinct experience of forgiving in these marriages despite an unsatisfied forgiveness and reconciliation process. However, despite feeling unsatisfied in this process, females were seen prioritising positive emotions and actions. Female and male spouses highlighted the importance of forgiveness for the sake of their offspring and an environment that will be beneficial to their offspring.

The study found that the reconciliation process is significant in understanding and experiencing forgiveness in Indian culture. As mentioned above, it assisted harmony and normalcy in the family system. It held many psychological benefits that these spouses experienced. Successful forgiveness and reconciliation had led to an increase in relationship commitment, security, closeness and understanding of the spouse's needs in future transgressions. Spouses had also mentioned a low probability of a similar transgression reoccurring. It further resulted in healthier communication channels being created, increased self-esteem, well-being and a decrease in stress, hostility and anxiety. However, spouses that were unable to reconcile stated an inferiority-superiority complex created, lower self-esteem in self, feeling of hopelessness, helplessness and powerlessness.

Social influences were seen as little to nonexistent. However, the researcher found an implicit significant influence of society and social factors in Indian marriages. The willingness to forgive was seen as influenced by a desired social image. In order to maintain a positive social image, strong and healthy family and spousal systems were necessary or at least the perception of the outer world. A collapse of this would result in unwanted gossip by communities. Religion was seen to be another significant influence on the willingness to forgive or not. A philosophical aspect of forgiveness had surfaced giving reference to an individual's existential being. Faith, philosophy and existential being were interconnected. Spouses believed in forgiving was an act by God and loved by God. However, the inability to forgive was seen as an act redeemable of sin. These were said to impact their experience of an afterlife. Throughout the study, culture had been seen to be the leading influence on

forgiveness. Cultural marriages were categorised as arranged and unarranged (love) marriages. Older couples were involved in arranged marriages and had little experience of severe transgressions. Whereby, trust and respect were the leading factors to prevent transgressions from occurring. Younger couples or those seen in love marriages had stated a prevalence of elderly presence in their decision to forgive or not in severe transgressions.. In these meetings, as discussed above, female spouses were told to remain quiet, cool and respectful toward their spouses. Females were seen as a glue in maintaining marriages and families, therefore had to display sacrifice, loyalty, commitment and fulfilment of their duties. Indian culture was found to highlight a sense of patriarchy and masculinity. Male spouses were seen as protectors and enablers of women to make sure their duties were fulfilled. If a female was unable to, this was seen as disrespect and viewed as a severe transgression that may lead to divorce or unforgiveness.

Spouses in the study had highlighted the need to work together in order to improve their forgiveness in their marriage. This notion had dispelled the need for the presence of other family members to determine whether a spouse can or not forgive. Understanding what went wrong, and how one should solve the transgression and the desired post-transgression behaviour, will positively impact future transgressions and assist in quicker and more effective conflict solutions. In order to assist in healthier communication channels, a need for health programmes, forgiveness and marriage interventions were needed. Spouses also mentioned that couple's counselling or marriage counselling will be highly advantageous for struggling couples. The factors that were found in this study were seen as a great means to understand the factors that contribute to a spouse's willingness to forgive or not. This would assist clinicians in addressing and identifying perceived situations as sensitive in marriage counselling and mental health programmes and interventions.

6.2. Limitations

Several limitations were found in the study. The study sample size was limited to 8 participants belonging to Indian culture. This makes it difficult to generalise findings to the Indian culture in South Africa. Thus, we were not able to record a broad range of experiences. The study lacked any influence of the South African culture on Indian culture in the country. Most spouses included in the study were older individuals brought up with a stricter background that highlighted the Indian culture and was seen as an obligation to

follow, however, younger spouses had a moderate influence on the culture with a modern outlook on culture. While the findings of this study yield a qualitative nature, it cannot be generalised to other Indian marriages in other parts of the country. These findings are distinctive and offer an insight into the experience of forgiving in Indian marriages in KwaZulu Natal.

6.3. Recommendations

This study found the experiences of forgiveness as well as the challenges and advantages of the influence of Indian culture on the willingness to forgive or not. However, these may or not be unique to the Indian marriages in Durban, KwaZulu Natal. Indian culture is seen as a dominant and distinct element amongst Indians in Durban and may not be as influential in other parts of the country. Therefore, further studies conducted on a national level may hold reliable and valid generalised results for forgiveness in Indian marriages in South Africa. A future direction may be to gain extensive knowledge in forgiveness studies is to include key elements such as behaviour measures, observer reports and self-reports are necessary. This would allow both spouses to give an extensive report of their experiences that will further assist in understanding both perspectives. As it was realised from this study, Indian cultures hold restrictions and limitations between genders. This can create a cross-sectional study that will assist in understanding the distinct process of forgiving in Indian relationships/marriages.

A second direction can be a longitudinal study that will yield a viable measurement of empathy, relationship commitment, relationship satisfaction and forgiveness at contrasting times that will enable the regulation of effects on forgiveness. However, in doing so, variables that are congruent to the Indian/Asian culture such as social harmony and social image should be added. A third direction can be a comparative study between young Muslim adults and young Hindu adults with a notion of their modern take on Indian cultures and the effects of Ubuntu in their experiences. The study can embark on critically discussing the differences found in their process of forgiving and identify if there is any influence of Ubuntu on the newer generation of Indian youngsters in South Africa. It may track these variables in greater detail that will be beneficial to intervention, health and marriage programmes and counselling in South Africa. An experimental study can also be conducted on forgiveness in Indian marriages by exposing one group to health and forgiveness programmes that assist

them in healthier communicating and forgiveness ways and the other to none. It will be significant to track their experience dealing with transgressions in their marriage with the needed knowledge and the other's experience with transgressions with just cultural and general knowledge and experience with the non-programme group.

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APPENDIX A CONSENT FORM

Good day.

PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH PROJECT: Experience of forgiveness in Indian Marriages: A Qualitative Inquiry

My name is Karshila Essop. I am a student registered for the Master of Social Science in Health Promotion in the Discipline of Psychology, School of Psychology, Howard Campus, the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban. My supervisor is Dr Mthokozisi Hlengwa, within the same discipline.

You are being invited to consider participating in a study that involves research on forgiveness in Indian marriages. The objectives of this research are:

1. To explore the participant's understanding of forgiveness in a marital relationship
2. To better understand the participant's lived experiences of forgiving in a marital relationship.
3. To explore the psychosocial and cultural influences on forgiving in marriage.
4. To explore participant's views on ways to foster forgiveness in Indian marriages.

The study is expected to enrol 8 participants in an interview process. The interviews are preferred to take place on an online platform called Zoom Meetings. A step-by-step guide will be provided to each participant to create an easier experience with the Zoom Meeting App. It will involve the following procedures of semi-structured interviews for each participant. Every participant may choose a date and time that is appropriate. The researcher will require a signed formal consent form before the interview process. The duration of your participation, if you choose to enrol and remain in the study, is expected to begin from the 4th to the 29th of April 2022 and later in August 2022. The interview will last between 50 – 60 minutes.

The study may involve the following discomforts such as participants being exposed to questions that may be experienced as stressful or upsetting which may have unpleasant or harmful effects such as lowered moods from recalling the events that led to forgiveness. We

hope that the study will create the following benefits such as gaining insight into the experience of the forgiving process in Indian marriages, the outcomes of forgiving or not and the influences of forgiving. There will be no direct benefits for participants.

However, to ease such discomforts, the researcher will allow breaks in between the interview session. The researcher will be constantly monitoring her participant's emotional reactions. If the research could potentially involve risk, there is compensation that exists for such risks as counselling available as treatment by the Vita Nova counselling centre (Appendix A). Additional information can be obtained from the researcher if needed.

Participation in this research is voluntary and participants may withdraw participation at any point. In the event of refusal/withdrawal of participation, the participants will not incur a penalty or loss of treatment or another benefit to which they are normally entitled. The procedures that are required from the participants for an orderly withdrawal include information about reason/s for leave which is required for evaluation and reporting purposes. The researcher may terminate a participant in the research study to, (a) protect the participant from increased risk or risk without a demonstrated lack of benefits such as a participant's serious side effects without the anticipated therapeutic effects, (b) to maintain the integrity of information collected such as the participants' inability to follow the study procedures or the giving of false information. There will be no costs that will be incurred by participants as a result of their participation in the research study. There are no incentives or reimbursements for participation in the study. Involvement is purely for academic purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved.

The confidentiality and anonymity of each participant will be upheld and maintained by the researcher during and after the research. Every participant's identity will be hidden and pseudonyms will be used to identify participants and their interviews. The interviews will be recorded by the researcher and then transcribed. This information and electronic data will be stored in a locked facility, where only the researcher and supervisor may only have access. After 5 years, the information obtained will be destroyed. The findings of the study will be posted as a dissertation at the University of KwaZulu Natal. Participants who opt for a debriefing may be emailed with links to the dissertation.

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions, you may contact the researcher telephonically, via email, or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. See the contact details below

My contact details are below:

Karshila Essop (Researcher/Student)

Master of Psychology: Health Promotion

Telephone: 062 1848 437

Email: 215065007@stu.ukzn.ac.za

My supervisor is Dr Mthokozisi Hlengwa from the University of KwaZulu Natal, Discipline of Psychology, School of Humanities, Howard College.

His details are as follows:

Address: Discipline of Psychology

School of Applied Human Sciences

College of Humanities

Howard College

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Email: hlengwam1@ukzn.ac.za

The Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Administration

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Informed Consent Form

I _____ have been informed about the study entitled: Experience of forgiving in Indian marriages: A Qualitative Inquiry by Karshila Essop.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher.

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact the supervisor.

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview / focus group discussion YES / NO

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Witness

(Where applicable)

Date

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

- How do you understand the concept of forgiveness in a marital relationship?
- What do you wish you had known about forgiving before going into a marriage?
- What was some advice that was given by elders regarding forgiving and reconciliation in your marriage?
- What is your experience with forgiving in your marital relationship?
- What are the aspects that influence your willingness to forgive or not?
- What do you think are the benefits of forgiving in your marriage?
- How does society influence your idea of forgiveness?
- How does culture influence your concept of forgiveness?
- Does culture influence forgiving or the forgiving process in your marriage?
- Do you believe culture or religion has the most influence to forgive and reconcile?
- Why do you believe any of the above affects forgiveness?
- How do you believe religion plays a part in forgiveness in your marriage?
- How do you think reconciliation impacts future transgressions in a marital relationship?
- How can forgiveness in marital relationships be improved?
- Would you like to add anything to our discussion on forgiveness?

APPENDIX C ETHICAL CLEARANCE



09 February 2022

Karshila Essop (215065007)
School Of Applied Human Sc
Howard College

Dear K Essop,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00003788/2022

Project title: Experience of Forgiving in Indian Marriages: A Qualitative Inquiry

Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 06 January 2022 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. **PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 09 February 2023.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

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