

## Investigation the Relationship between Anxiety Attachment Style, Anger Rumination, Spouse Forgiveness, and Marital Quality

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** The quality of the marital relationship has received more attention from family researchers in recent years; as many factors can affect and be affected by it. Therefore, this study made an attempt to investigate the structural relationships between anxiety attachment style, anger rumination, spouse forgiveness and the quality of marital relationship in married people.

**Methods:** The study population consisted of all married people in Shiraz. Among them, 204 married people (168 females and 36 males) were selected using the convenience sampling method and filling out Revised Adult Attachment Scale; Collins and Reid, Anger rumination scale; Sukhodol sky, Golub, Cromwell, Family Forgiveness Scale; Pollard, Anderson, Anderson, and Jennings, and Revision of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale Busby, Christensen, Crane, Larson. The method of research was correlation using path analysis. Then AMOS24 and SPSS24 were used for analyzing the data.

**Results:** Data analysis indicated that the path between anxiety attachment style to anger rumination, ( $p < 0.000$ ,  $\beta = 0.56$ ), spouse forgiveness, ( $p < 0.009$ ,  $\beta = -0.19$ ), anger rumination to spouse forgiveness, ( $p < 0.002$ ,  $\beta = -0.36$ ) marital quality ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $\beta = -0.16$ ), spouse forgiveness to marital quality, ( $p < 0.000$ ,  $\beta = -0.68$ ) were significant. All the coefficients were significant in 0.01 level. Also fit model indicators were: GFI=0.99, CFI=0.99, TLI=0.98, RFI=0.97 and  $\chi^2/df = 1.57$ . The structural relationships of the anxiety attachment style, anger rumination, spouse forgiveness and the marital quality as proposed in the conceptual model were significant.

**Conclusion:** Based on the results, it can be said that that married people with anxious attachment style regarding the challenges of marital life, ruminate more anger in relation to their spouse, which can reduce the amount of forgiveness and, ultimately marital quality.

**Keywords:** Marriage, Family Conflict, Forgiveness, Marital Quality, Anger Rumination

## Introduction

Even though marriage and being in a long-term relationship is one of the most sacred events in the lives of most adults, quality and circumstances of this relationship are effective in its durability. Karney and Bradbury<sup>1</sup> (1995, quoted by Rahaju, Hartini, and Hendriani<sup>2</sup>, 2018) believe that marital quality has a big effect on the success of marriage and is an important factor in marriage durability. Considering the importance of this matter, more attention has, therefore, been paid to studying marital quality factors in the past few years. Marital quality includes mental and overall assessment of the relationship and the communicating behaviors (Fincham<sup>3</sup> and Bradbury, 1978, quoted by Robles<sup>4</sup>, 2014). Although some researchers acknowledge marital quality is a one-dimensional structure, others believe it is multi-dimensional (quoted by Delatorre and Wagner<sup>5</sup>, 2020); but it is a common belief that numerous factors can be involved in shaping it which will be explored one by one in the following.

Attachment styles in people are one of the variables that can affect the quality of marital relationship (Hazan and Shaver<sup>6</sup>, 1987). Bowlby (1982, quoted by Gillath<sup>7</sup>, Shaver, Baek and Chun<sup>8</sup>, 2008) considers attachment relationships as a natural factor created in childhood through interaction between the child and the caretaker which induces feeling of security, and will greatly affect future interactions between people throughout their lives. Meanwhile, anxiety attachment style is considered one of the attachment styles which has been discovered in the last few decades (Ainsworth<sup>9</sup>, 1979), and has also been used by Hazan and Shaver (1989) in studies about love relationship in adulthood.

This style refers to the person worrying that the other party might not be available at the time of need. Based on the evidence, people with this attachment style are anxiously looking for reassurance through others' love and care (Mikulincer<sup>1</sup> and shaver, 2015). According to some other studies, anxiety attachment style is related to

low quality marital life (Scheeren, Vieira, Goulart and Wagner<sup>2</sup>, 2014, Hollist and Miller<sup>3</sup>, 2005).

People with anxiety attachment style are not sure about their spouse's availability and support, are doubtful about their self-value and are after their partner's acceptance (Lee, Thompson<sup>4</sup>, 2011, quoted by Taylor<sup>5</sup>, 2014). Also it is determined that anxiety attachment style is accompanied by increasing of stimulation, low level of emotion adjustment, as well as extreme sensitivity to social and emotional indicators (Fraleay, Niedenthal, Marks, Brumbaugh and Vicary<sup>6</sup>, 2006, quote by Yip, Ehrhardt, Black and Walker<sup>7</sup>, 2018). Also based on studies conducted, people with anxiety attachment style, experience high degrees of menace, agitation, rumination and negative emotions in times of conflict (Mikulincer and Shiver, 2008, Lanciano, Curci, Kafetsios, Elia and Zammuner<sup>8</sup>, 2012, Reynolds, Searight and Ratwik<sup>9</sup>, 2014).

During the past few years, researchers started studying the structure of anger and rumination side by side, which supported the existence of an independent and complicated structure called anger rumination (Miller, Jenkins, Kaplan and Salonen<sup>10</sup>, 1995). Therefore, anger is an emotion and anger rumination is thoughts about this emotion (Faller<sup>11</sup>, 2010). In other words, thought rumination can affect the time of anger and create a mental space in which imaging and planning for revenge occurs (Contreras, Kosiak, Hardin and Novaco<sup>12</sup>, 2021).

In addition, by decreasing self-control and having a negative effect on executive performance, anger increases the danger of aggressive behavior (Denson, White, Warburton<sup>1</sup>, 2009, quote by Beames, O'Dean, Grisham, Moulds<sup>2</sup> and Denson, 2019). As evidenced by some studies, this type of rumination reduces the base for toned answers such as reevaluation and problem solving (quoted by Camacho, Ortega-Ruiz and Romera<sup>3</sup>, 2021). Sukhodolsky, Golub and Cromwell<sup>4</sup> (2001) presented a four-factor model with post-thoughts of anger, including repetitive thoughts about mental review of anger-provoking events, thoughts



of revenge such as dreaming about retaliating the guilty person's actions, memories of anger including steady thoughts about injustices that happened to them, and acknowledging reasons for analyzing the events which happened. According to some other studies, anger rumination is in connection with marital satisfaction between couples, which is one of the factors for marital relationship quality (Damankeshan and Sheikh aleslami, 1398), meaning that couples who can better control their anger rumination in facing challenges, and solving problems, face less damage and experience higher satisfaction level.

In addition, some studies show that anger rumination can be one of the important factors for marital quality. The question that comes to mind is whether anger rumination happens indirectly or affects marital quality through other variables? Most researchers define forgiveness as a voluntary action made intentionally to forgive the guilty person (Worthington<sup>5</sup>, 2005, Sandilya and Shanawaz<sup>6</sup>, 2014). Above all, Berry, Worthington, Parrot<sup>7</sup>, O'Connor and Wade<sup>8</sup> (2001) believe that cases like fury and anger reduce the tendency to forgiveness. On the other hand, it is inevitable for family members to live together without occasional tensions. In family relationships, being hurt or annoyed is inevitable and what separates difficult family relationship from non-difficult ones is lack of forgiveness (Worthington, 1998, quoted by Mansuri, Sarajkhrami and Heidari, 1393).

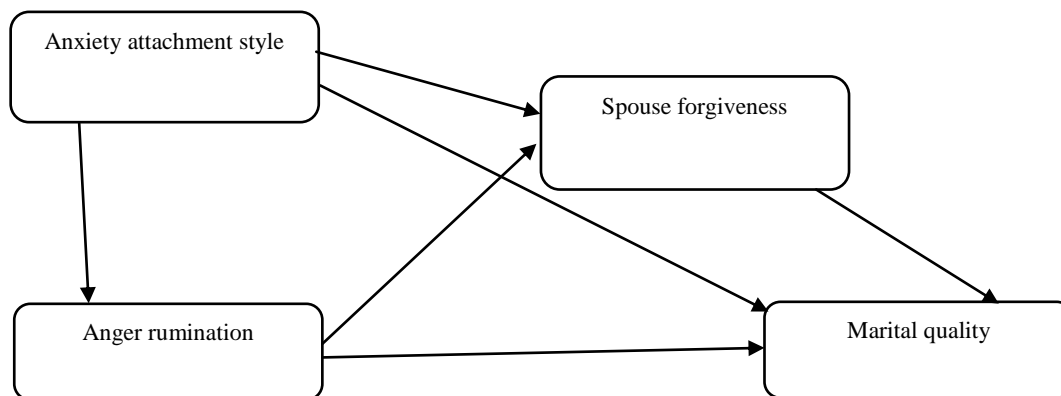
Moreover, based on Fincham's theory (2000, quoted by Tsang<sup>1</sup>, Maccolugh, and Fincham, 2006), considering the inevitability of conflicts among people, forgiveness can be an important tool to preserve intimacy and sincerity in relationships, and people often report that they are

more inclined to forgive people closer to them. On this matter, some different studies demonstrated that forgiving the spouse can result in restoring the relationship's sincerity and forming positive interactions between them after the wrong doing, therefore, increasing the marital quality (Braithwaite, Selby<sup>2</sup> and Fincham, 2011, Stafford, David, & McPherson<sup>3</sup>, 2014, Fincham, Palrri and Regalia, 2002, Bell, Kamble<sup>4</sup> and Fincham, 2018).

Based on the findings of Maccolugh et al. (2007), reducing thought rumination overtime increases the tendency toward forgiveness. These researchers believe that even though the connection between forgiveness and anger rumination is mutual, anger rumination is a stronger predictor for forgiveness which can help ease cognitive decision for forgiveness (Kong, Zhang, Xia, Huang, Qin, Zhang and colleagues<sup>5</sup>, 2020).

Considering the aforementioned results and the studies in the field of marital quality, to date, the relation between variables in the statistical population of married people has not been investigated in this way.

Researchers are addressing the question about the relation between the structure of anxiety attachment style, anger rumination, forgiving spouse, and marital quality, and the way it is shown in conceptual model is significant or not? In other words, questions as such are asked: Can anxiety attachment style by affecting spouse forgiveness and anger rumination indirectly, influence marital quality? Is it possible that impacting anger rumination and spouse forgiveness change the marital quality? And finally, can anxiety attachment style affect spouse forgiveness by affecting anger rumination?



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Model of Relationship Structure between Anxiety Attachment styles, Anger rumination, Spouse Forgiveness and Marital quality

## Methods

Current study is based on correlation, path analysis method, and the study population includes married people of Shiraz in 1400. For collecting the study sample, some of the schools in one of the areas in Shiraz were selected using accessibility method. The sample was chosen from parents and teachers interested in participating, and then based on the entry criteria (being married and not being under any psychological medication) they were asked to fill out the questionnaire sent to them by link. Also based on Loughlin (2004), in order to form the sample, it was best for the study sample to be above 200, and considering the possibility of falsified data, 213 cases were chosen. 9 questionnaires were put aside because of being unfinished; therefore, the data of 204 cases (36 men and 168 women) were analyzed. In the end, the data were analyzed using AMOS24 software.

## Tools

### Marital quality questionnaire

Basby, Crane, Larsen, and Christensen (1995) created a questionnaire in order to evaluate the quality of marital relationship. It included 14 items and 3 sub-items: sympathy and agreement (1,2,3,4,5,6), satisfaction (7,8,9,10), solidarity (11,12,13,14). Items of this questionnaire were put in a 6-point Likert Scale, from 0 to 5. In this questionnaire, the standard deviation higher than

average showed the quality of marital relationship. Yusefi (1390) stated that the Cronbach's alpha for this test was 0.92, and the convergent validity of this test with Olsen's marital satisfaction questionnaire (1983, quote by Yusefi, 1390) was 0.39. In this project, Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the overall grade of questionnaire was 0.86, for subscales of sympathy and agreement, 0.83, satisfaction, 0.84 and for solidarity, it was 0.73.

### Anger rumination scale

Anger rumination scale is made by Sokhodolsky et al. (2001). This questionnaire includes 19 questions with a 4-point Likert scale, from 1 meaning very little, to 4 meaning very much. High grade in this scale means anger rumination. This scale was designed in order to assess the tendency to think about anger-provoking events and also remembering past experiences which trigger anger. It has 4 subscales: angry afterthoughts (7,8,9,14,18,19), thoughts of revenge (4,6,13,16), angry memories (1,2,3,5,15) and understanding of causes (10,11,12,17).

In Iran, Mahmudi, Basaknezhad and Mehrabizadehonarmand (1399) reported the synchronous validity of this test with the aggression questionnaire of Buss and Perry as 0.49, and stability of test with Cronbach's alpha method as 0.90. In the current study, Cronbach's alpha for



the entire scale was 0.93, and for sub scales of angry afterthoughts, 0.88, thoughts of revenge, 0.57, angry memories, 0.84 and understanding of causes, 0.79.

### Insecure-anxiety attachment style

For assessing insecure-anxiety attachment style, adults' attachment scale by Collins and Read (1990) was used. This scale included 18 questions and a 5-point Likert from "doesn't apply to me at all" to "completely applies to me". It is also necessary to mention that this scale was made based on Hazen and Shaver's attachment questionnaire which evaluated 3 attachment styles: secure, unsecure-anxious and unsecure-avoidant. Sub scales include; closeness: amount of peace and calm regarding sincerity and emotional closeness attachment: the amount of trust in others and expressing how much one can trust others to be there in the times of need and them being available and anxiety: a person's fears about matters such as abandonment in relationships will be assessed.

Collins (1996) reported Cronbach's alpha for this scale as 0.85, and Faller reported it as 0.93, also, in the current study, Cronbach's alpha for anxious attachment style was 0.74.

### Spouse forgiveness questionnaire

For evaluating spouse forgiveness in this project, the forgiveness in family questionnaire by

Pollard, Anderson, Anderson and Jennings (1998) was used. This scale included 40 items with a 5-point Likert Scale from 1 as never, to 5 as almost always. Also, this scale is made of 2 parts: 20 items about main family relationships, and 20 items about current marital relationships. Therefore, in this study, the 20-question form of marital relationship was used. High grade in this test shows high rate of forgiveness. Pollard et al. (1998) reported Cronbach's alpha for this questionnaire as 0.93 and for subscales, between 0.55 and 0.86. In Iran, Seif and Bahari (1383) reported reliability of the entire test by Cronbach's alpha as 0.85. Also in the current study, Cronbach's alpha for subscale of spouse forgiveness was 0.84.

It should also be mentioned that the current project was evaluated in moral committee of Yazd University and the Ethical code is: IR.YAZD.REC.1400.044.

### Results

It should be mentioned that the average age of the participants was 36.22 years old. 67 (%31.4) people had bachelor's degree, and 85 people (%39.9) had diploma.

In the following table, mean and standard deviation of study variables and their correlation are mentioned.

**Table 1.** mean and standard deviation and correlation matrix of project variables

Variables	mean	standard deviation	1	2	3	4
1-marital quality	36.83	10.30	1			
2- anxious attachment style	14.60	4.76	-0.40**	1		
3- anger rumination	36.60	11.48	-0.49**	0.55**	1	
4- spouse forgiveness	75.50	12.20	0.75**	-0.39**	-0.47**	1

As shown in table 1, anxious attachment style (-0.40), anger rumination (-0.49), and spouse forgiveness (0.75), have a significant relationship with marital quality. In the same manner, anxiety attachment style has a significant relation with anger rumination (0.55) and spouse forgiveness (-0.39). Relationship between anger rumination and spouse forgiveness (-0.47) was significant. It

should also be mentioned that all correlation coefficients are significant on the level of  $p < 0.001$ .

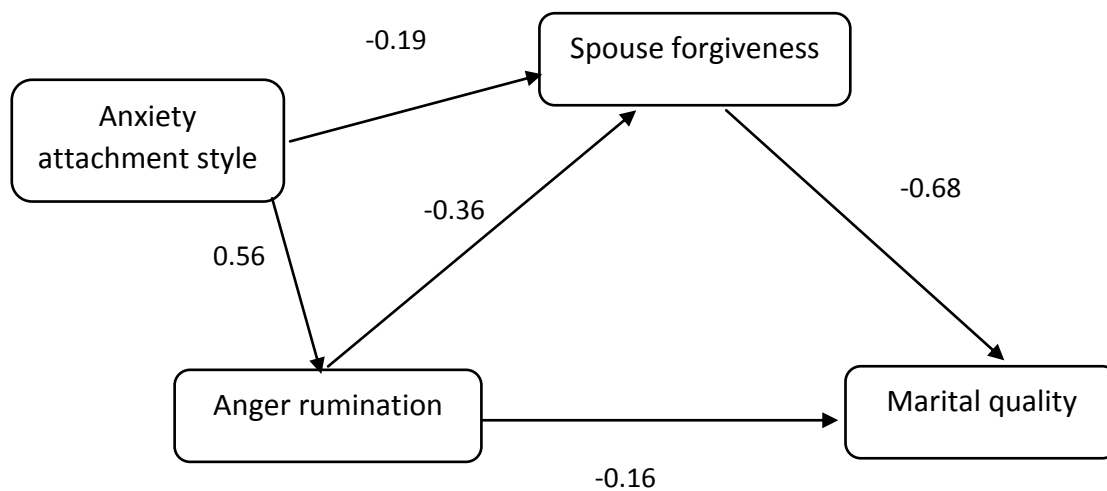
To have a better fitting to the conceptual model, before the final fitting of the model and through the correction process, the path from anxiety attachment style to marital quality was removed for not being significant, then final fit model was evaluated again.

Considering that the number of the aforementioned fit indices in the table number 2 is more than 0.90, and RMSEA is equal to 0.05 and

less than 0.08, it can be presumed that the model will have a proper fitting, as the table below shows the standard path coefficient.

**Table 2.** fit indices of the corrected model

Index	$\chi^2/df$	RMSEA	GFI	CFI	TLI	RFI	PARSIMONY
Project's tested model	1.57	0.05	0.99	0.99	0.98	0.97	0.17



**Figure 2.** The final model of the study with standard paths coefficient

Figure number 2 shows that the path from anxiety attachment style to anger rumination, ( $p < 0.000$ ,  $\beta = 0.56$ ), to spouse forgiveness, ( $p < 0.009$ ,  $\beta = 0.19$ ), anger rumination to spouse forgiveness, ( $p < 0.000$ ,  $\beta = -0.36$ ), spouse forgiveness to marital quality, ( $p < 0.000$ ,  $\beta = 0.68$ ), and anger rumination to marital quality, ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $\beta = -0.16$ ) are significant.

**Discussion**

The main purpose of this study was to evaluate structural relationship between anxiety attachment style, anger rumination, spouse forgiveness and marital quality. At first, the relationship between variables was evaluated. Results showed that variables have significant relationship with each other. Also after the first correction, evaluating the main hypothesis of the

study showed that the structural study of the relationship between the variables of anxiety attachment style, anger rumination, spouse forgiveness and marital relationship quality are significant, except for the path from anxiety attachment style to spouse forgiveness in the way that was presented in conceptual model

The results showed that anger rumination can have a mediator effect on the connection between anxiety attachment style and spouse forgiveness. These results are in line with studies such as, Burnette<sup>1</sup>, Worthington, Taylor and Forsyth<sup>2</sup> (2007), and with the findings of Chung<sup>3</sup> (2014) about rumination having mediating effect on the connection between anxiety attachment style and marital satisfaction.



The results with regard to some other studies like (Garison and colleagues, 2014) showed that there was a connection between anxiety attachment style and anger rumination. It can be said that people with anxiety attachment style, when facing an anger-provoking event, experience anger rumination which acts as an obstacle against forgiveness. In other words, some thoughts leading to anger can cause reduction in forgiveness, therefore anger rumination works against spouse forgiveness. As some people can have thoughts of revenge about the conflicts that happened long ago, having these types of thoughts and imaginations leads to the lack of forgiveness (Kanteruss and colleagues, 2021) and this can affect the marital quality. Overall, researchers like Bowlby (1982, quoted by Burnette, 2007) believe that personal differences in attachment can be shown that how in different disturbing situations people manage their emotions.

Also regarding the spouse forgiveness mediator in the connection between anxiety attachment style and marital quality, it can be pointed out that, researches in the field of anxiety attachment style and forgiveness have been faced with ambiguities. As an example the results of some researches (like Faller, 2010) showed that there is a coextensive relation between attachment style and forgiveness. On the other hand, a study by Mikulincer, Shaver and Sluv<sup>1</sup> (2006) showed that even though having anxiety attachment style doesn't stop forgiveness; it can mix forgiveness with contradictory emotions. In general, it can be said that people with anxiety attachment style show less forgiveness in life events because of feeling insecure. Naturally, this lack of forgiveness can affect marital quality over time.

On the other hand, results show that anger rumination can have a mediating effect on the connection between anxiety attachment style and marital quality. This finding is consistent with the results of Chung's (2014) study on mediating effects of anger rumination. Some researchers believe that uncontrollable and frequent anger in aggressive people have destructive effects on

relationships between family members, friends, love partners, colleagues and strangers (Baron, Smith, Butner, Nealey-Moore, Hawkins, Uchino<sup>2</sup>, 2007, Kuppens<sup>3</sup>, 2005, Beams and colleagues, 2019). Also, there is a lower possibility that with frequent thought rumination, sincere relationships last overtime (Reynolds and colleagues, 2014), especially if these thoughts are with negative emotions like anger, then, they can affect variables like spouse forgiveness in marital conflicts.

Other results indicated that spouse forgiveness can have mediating effect between anger rumination and marital life quality. This finding was in line with the results of the study by Paleari, Regalia and Fincham (2005) which suggested rumination can be a mediator between forgiveness and marital quality.

It can be said that because spouse is an important person in everyone's life, forgiving him/her can have positive effects on durability of marital relationship. But when a person in a relationship experiences disturbing events, he/she is drowned in negative emotions and thoughts which results in less forgiveness (Wu, Chi, Zeng, Du<sup>1</sup>, 2019, quoted by de la Fuente, González, Ortega, Ordóñez and Pizarro<sup>2</sup>, 2021). Barber, Maltby and Macaskill<sup>3</sup> (2005) found out that anger-provoking events, by avoiding spouse and thinking about revenge as signs of anger rumination, negatively affect the marital quality.

### Conclusion

Overall, it can be said that in the same way that marriage can cause happiness for some, it can also bring about problems which are caused by the other party's faults. Forgiving the other party has an important role in solving life challenges in the best way. At the same time, some variables can affect spouse forgiveness; therefore, affects marital quality directly or indirectly. People with anxiety attachment style, especially at times of aggression, experience the increase of anger rumination and this can affect people's tendency to forgive, naturally with high anger rumination and low



tendency to forgive, marital quality would decrease over time.

After taking these results into consideration, it is suggested that following the effect of gender difference in some areas like anger rumination, modulating the role of gender be evaluated in future studies. Planning on skills such as anger control from young age can help build a better society. Based on this, it is suggested that this information be taken into consideration in pre marriage courses. One of limitations of current study was convenience sampling and also using questionnaires for gathering data. Doing a qualitative study on effects of anger rumination can be effective in clarifying results of anger rumination in at risk groups.

### Conflict of interest

Authors declare no conflict of interest.

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### Author's contribution

Conceptualization: Z.N.N. and K.H.S.;  
Methodology: Z.N.N and K.H.S.;

Investigation: Z.N.N, K.H.S and P.Y; Formal analysis: Z.N.N and P.Y; Data Curation: Z.N.N.;

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