



Mental Health Prediction Based on Mindfulness and Forgiveness in the Context of Divorce in Divorced Women

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Abstract

Introduction: Divorce represents a complex and often traumatic life event, profoundly impacting various facets of individuals' personal and social lives. Given the significant psychological challenges associated with marital dissolution, identifying factors that bolster mental well-being in divorced women is critical. This study aimed to predict mental health based on mindfulness and forgiveness in the context of divorce among divorced women.

Methods: Conducted as a descriptive-correlational study in 2024, the statistical population comprised all divorced women residing in Qom, Iran. A convenience sampling method was employed to select 209 participants from January to March 2025. Data were collected using Ryff's Psychological Well-being Scale, Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale, and Forgiveness in the Context of Divorce Questionnaire. Data analysis was performed using Pearson correlation coefficients and simultaneous multiple regression.

Results: Findings revealed a significant positive correlation between mindfulness and mental health ($r=0.35$, $P<0.001$). Similarly, forgiveness in the context of divorce demonstrated a significant positive correlation with mental health ($r=0.57$, $P<0.001$). The multiple correlation coefficient between the predictor variables and mental health was $R=0.59$, explaining 35.0% of the variance in mental health. Standardized beta coefficients indicated that both mindfulness ($\beta=0.16$, $p=0.008$) and forgiveness in the context of divorce ($\beta=0.51$, $P<0.001$) were significant positive predictors of mental health.

Conclusions: The results underscore that mindfulness and forgiveness play significant roles in predicting the mental health of divorced women who often face emotional distress, financial instability, social stigma, and single parenthood challenges. These constructs can act as protective factors against the negative psychological consequences of divorce. These findings emphasize the importance of incorporating these variables into psychological interventions aimed at improving the mental health of this group, such as through culturally adapted counseling programs in community settings.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, global societal transformations have presented the family system with unprecedented challenges, placing it under increasing threat [1]. Globally, the crude divorce rate stands at approximately 1.8 per 1,000 population, with countries like Maldives reporting rates as high as 5.52 per 1,000. In Iran, divorce rates have escalated dramatically, reaching one divorce for every 2.4 marriages in 2023, reflecting a nearly sixfold increase since 1979 [2]. The gradual erosion of marital functions, defined as biological (e.g., reproduction and child-rearing), social (e.g., emotional support and companionship), cognitive (e.g., shared decision-making), and emotional (e.g., intimacy and affection) aspects, frequently culminates in a severe reduction of marital satisfaction. This progressive decline in satisfaction often initiates emotional detachment

between spouses, ultimately leading to a legal event formally recognized as divorce [3]. In recent years, the escalating divorce rate has transformed this issue into a significant social concern. Official and unofficial statistics, coupled with reports from family courts, indicate that approximately one in every four or five marriages in Iran ends in divorce [4].

Divorce undeniably constitutes a profound and often traumatic life experience, exerting deep and multifaceted impacts on various dimensions of individuals' personal and social lives [5]. Studies have documented a range of consequences, including personal effects such as heightened anxiety and depression; social disruptions like strained family relationships and social isolation; cultural repercussions involving stigma and loss of community standing,

particularly in conservative societies; and economic hardships such as financial dependency and employment barriers for women [6, 7]. For women, in particular, the post-divorce period is frequently characterized by a unique set of stressors, including emotional distress, financial instability, social stigma, and the complexities of single parenthood. These challenges can significantly compromise mental well-being, leading to increased vulnerability to psychological disorders such as anxiety and depression [8, 9]. Given the pervasive psychological ramifications of marital dissolution for this demographic, it becomes imperative to identify and understand the psychological resources and protective factors that can foster adaptation, resilience, and ultimately, improved mental health outcomes among divorced women. Understanding these predictors is particularly important for healthcare professionals, including nurses in community health settings, who often provide initial psychosocial support and can integrate screening for mindfulness and forgiveness into routine care to facilitate early interventions and referrals to specialized psychological services.

In this context, mindfulness has emerged as a crucial psychological skill, encompassing the capacity to focus on the present moment and accept experiences without judgment. This skill empowers individuals to more effectively manage their emotions and thoughts, thereby leading to a reduction in stress and anxiety [9]. Research consistently demonstrates that mindfulness can significantly enhance mental health and overall quality of life, particularly during the challenging period following divorce [10]. Individuals exhibiting higher levels of mindfulness possess a greater ability for emotional regulation and are better equipped to cope with divorce-related stressors [11]. From a mechanistic perspective, mindfulness fosters mental well-being through several pathways. Firstly, it mitigates ruminative thinking and disrupts cycles of negative thoughts about the past, thereby preventing the exacerbation of psychological distress. Secondly, by enhancing emotional self-regulation, it enables women to exhibit more adaptive responses when confronting post-divorce challenges [12]. Furthermore, mindfulness, through the cultivation of self-awareness and self-compassion, facilitates the acceptance of the changed realities of life after divorce [13]. The efficacy of mindfulness in improving mental health has been corroborated by numerous studies. For instance, Feng et al. [14] employed machine learning and structural equation modeling to demonstrate associations between mindfulness, psychological flexibility, and reduced rumination in university students, and Enkema et al. [15] conducted a systematic review of ecological momentary assessment studies showing consistent links between mindfulness and lower mental health symptoms. Moreover, Jaurequi [16] highlighted its role

in systematic research synthesis on adult attachment and mental health. These findings underscore mindfulness's potential as a key component in psychological interventions for divorced women, offering a valuable tool for navigating emotional complexities and fostering psychological well-being.

Forgiveness, as a profound psychological process, also plays a pivotal role in promoting mental health [17]. Extensive research indicates that individuals capable of forgiveness experience fewer negative emotions and reduced symptoms of depression, consequently enjoying superior mental health [18]. In the specific context of divorce, forgiveness can significantly alleviate the psychological burden associated with separation, enabling individuals to progress towards adaptation and recovery. For divorced women, forgiveness can liberate them from the emotional weight of past bitterness and trauma, paving the way for healing and improved well-being. Women who are able to forgive tend to experience lower levels of depression and anxiety, empowering them to cope more effectively with the challenges of post-divorce life [19]. The impact of forgiveness on mental health can be analyzed at multiple levels. Cognitively, forgiveness transforms an individual's narrative of the divorce experience, shifting personal interpretations from threatening to understandable and manageable. Emotionally, forgiveness leads to a reduction in depressive and anxious symptoms, which commonly intensify after divorce. Interpersonally, forgiveness, even in the absence of reconciliation, helps individuals form new relationships or maintain existing ones with family and friends without the heavy burden of resentment. Collectively, these factors create a foundation for individuals to achieve relative psychological equilibrium after divorce [20]. This interpersonal dimension may also extend to reducing familial tensions, such as those related to child custody, by fostering cooperative co-parenting dynamics, as supported by studies on post-divorce adjustment [8]. Prior research, such as that by Sirotiak et al. [21], supports the positive association between forgiveness and mental health outcomes.

The profound psychosocial challenges stemming from divorce and their impact on the quality of life for women necessitate targeted research to identify protective factors. A comprehensive examination of two key psychological factors, mindfulness and forgiveness, holds significant potential to elucidate their protective roles in enhancing the mental health of divorced women. The findings of such a study can contribute substantively to the design of evidence-based interventions aimed at fostering resilience and mitigating the negative consequences of divorce within the target population. Furthermore, the focus on Qom County, given its unique cultural and religious characteristics, imbues the research findings with enhanced practical applicability for mental health

policymakers and practitioners in the region. Therefore, considering the aforementioned literature and the critical importance of addressing factors influencing mental health, the present study sought to answer the fundamental question: To what extent is mental health predictable based on mindfulness and forgiveness in the context of divorce among divorced women in Qom County?

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design, aiming to investigate the predictive relationships between mindfulness, forgiveness, and mental health. The statistical population for this research comprised all divorced women residing in Qom, Iran, during the year 2025. A total of 209 divorced women were selected as the study sample through a convenience sampling method, involving the recruitment of accessible participants via announcements in local community centers, social media groups for women in Qom, and referrals from family counseling services, ensuring voluntary participation and representation of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds within the locale, leveraging their accessibility and willingness to participate. The sample size was determined based on the guideline of 10-20 participants per predictor variable in multiple regression analyses, recommending a minimum of 20-40 for two predictors; however, to enhance statistical power and account for potential attrition, a larger sample of 209 was recruited, exceeding the threshold for robust detection of medium effect sizes. Inclusion criteria required participants to be legally divorced women, aged between 25 and 55 years to focus on women in active reproductive and career stages, where divorce-related stressors such as child-rearing and financial independence are most pronounced, potentially differing in older cohorts due to life stage variations, and residents of Qom. Exclusion criteria included having a diagnosed severe mental disorder, currently undergoing psychotherapy for a major depressive episode, or having a history of substance abuse, as these factors could confound the results. All participants provided informed consent prior to data collection, and ethical considerations, including anonymity, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any time, were strictly observed throughout the study. Data collection occurred from January to March 2025, primarily through self-administered online questionnaires distributed via secure platforms (Google Forms) to ensure accessibility and minimize in-person contact, with follow-up reminders sent to boost response rates while respecting participant privacy.

Instruments

Ryff's Psychological Well-being Scale (RPWS)

The Ryff's Psychological Well-being Scale, developed by Ryff in 1995 [22], is a widely recognized and comprehensive measure of psychological well-being. It consists of 18 items distributed across six distinct subscales: Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relations with Others, Purpose in Life, and Self-Acceptance. Items are typically rated on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The total score ranges from 18 to 108, with higher scores indicating greater psychological well-being. Higher scores on each subscale and the total score indicate greater levels of psychological well-being. The Persian version of the scale has been validated in Iranian samples, demonstrating good construct validity and reliability [23]. The Persian version of the scale demonstrates robust psychometric properties, with previous studies reporting Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.70 to 0.90 for its subscales and total score [23]. In the present study, the internal consistency for the total scale was found to be excellent, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.88.

Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS)

The Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), developed by Brown and Ryan in 2003 [24], is a 15-item unidimensional measure designed to assess individual differences in the frequency of mindful states and attention to present experience. Participants rate the extent to which they experience certain situations or thoughts on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (almost always) to 6 (almost never), with higher scores indicating higher levels of dispositional mindfulness. The MAAS is widely used in mindfulness research and has demonstrated strong psychometric properties across diverse populations. The Persian version has been validated among Iranian populations, including those with health challenges, confirming its reliability and validity [25]. Previous research has consistently reported good to excellent internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values typically ranging from 0.82 to 0.87 [24]. In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha for the MAAS was 0.85, indicating high internal consistency.

Forgiveness in the Context of Divorce Questionnaire (FCDQ)

The Forgiveness in the Context of Divorce Questionnaire (FCDQ) is a specialized instrument developed by Rivera-Ottenberger et al. [26] to specifically assess forgiveness related to the experience of divorce. This questionnaire comprises 5 items designed to evaluate various facets of forgiveness in the aftermath of marital dissolution, including forgiveness towards the former spouse, oneself, and the overall situation. Items are scored on a 5-point Likert scale, typically ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores reflecting a greater capacity for forgiveness in the divorce context. The

questionnaire was translated into Persian following standard back-translation procedures, though no prior full psychometric validation in Iranian samples was identified; however, its cross-cultural applicability has been established in diverse contexts. In the present study, the FCDQ demonstrated good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS software (Version 27). Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were utilized to characterize the sample. To examine the relationships between the variables, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated. Finally, simultaneous multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the predictive power of mindfulness and forgiveness on mental health, allowing for the examination of both unique and combined contributions of the predictor variables. Prior to analyses, assumptions were verified: normality via skewness and kurtosis values within -2 to +2; linearity and homoscedasticity through scatterplots and residual plots; and multicollinearity via variance inflation factors

(VIF < 2 for both predictors, indicating no substantial issues).

RESULTS

The demographic analysis of the participants revealed that among the 209 divorced women, 97 individuals were under 39 years old, while 112 were over 39 years old. Regarding educational attainment, 153 participants held a bachelor's degree or less, and 56 participants possessed a master's or doctoral degree. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for all research variables, including means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis. The mean score for Mental Health was 53.69 with a standard deviation of 18.91, indicating a moderate level of mental health in the sample. Mindfulness had a mean of 52.14 (SD=9.28), while Forgiveness in the Context of Divorce had a mean of 15.48 (SD=7.78). Skewness and kurtosis values for all variables fell within acceptable ranges (typically between -2 and +2), suggesting that the data distribution was approximately normal and suitable for parametric statistical analyses.

Table 1. Mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis of research variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Mental Health	53.69	18.91	0.47	0.05
Autonomy	8.72	3.91	-0.89	0.19
Environmental mastery	8.97	4.02	-1.07	0.14
Personal growth	9.29	3.91	-0.94	0.54
Positive relations	8.97	3.94	-0.96	-0.10
Purpose in life	8.86	3.93	-0.98	0.20
Self-acceptance	8.88	3.85	-0.93	0.10
Mindfulness	52.14	9.28	-0.35	-0.10
Forgiveness in divorce	15.48	7.78	-1.41	-0.28

Table 2. Correlation coefficients of mental health with mindfulness and forgiveness in the context of divorce

Variables	Mental health	P	95% CI
Mindfulness	0.35	0.001	[0.22, 0.46]
Forgiveness in divorce	0.57	0.001	[0.47, 0.66]

Table 3. Summary of simultaneous multiple regression analysis

Predictor variable(s)	F	P	R	R ²	B	SE	β	t	P
Mindfulness	54.69	0.001	0.59	0.35	0.30	0.11	0.16	2.69	0.008
Forgiveness in divorce					1.24	0.15	0.51	8.43	0.001

Table 2 displays the Pearson correlation coefficients between the predictor variables (mindfulness and forgiveness in the context of divorce) and the criterion variable (mental health). The results indicate a significant positive correlation between mindfulness and mental health ($r = 0.35$, $P < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.22, 0.46]). This suggests that as mindfulness levels increase, mental health tends to improve. Similarly, forgiveness in the context of divorce showed a significant positive correlation with mental health ($r = 0.57$, $P < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.47, 0.66]). This stronger correlation implies that the capacity to forgive after divorce is particularly relevant to psychological well-being.

Table 3 presents the results of the simultaneous multiple regression analysis, examining the predictive power of

mindfulness and forgiveness in the context of divorce on mental health. The multiple correlation coefficient (R) between the predictor variables and mental health was 0.59, indicating a strong combined relationship. The model explained 35.0% of the variance in mental health ($R^2 = 0.35$), which is a substantial proportion. The regression model was statistically significant ($F = 54.69$, $P < 0.001$), confirming its overall predictive utility with no evidence of multicollinearity (VIF = 1.12 for mindfulness and 1.12 for forgiveness). Both mindfulness ($\beta = 0.16$, $P = 0.008$) and forgiveness in the context of divorce ($\beta = 0.51$, $P < 0.001$) emerged as significant positive predictors of mental health. The standardized beta coefficients highlight that forgiveness in the context of divorce has a notably stronger unique

contribution to predicting mental health compared to mindfulness in this sample.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study shed light on the significant roles of mindfulness and forgiveness in predicting the mental health of divorced women. These results underscore the importance of psychological factors in navigating the complex aftermath of marital dissolution, offering valuable insights for intervention strategies. The discussion will elaborate on each significant relationship, contextualizing them within existing literature and exploring potential mechanisms. The first key finding indicates a significant positive relationship between mindfulness and mental health in divorced women. This outcome aligns consistently with previous research [15, 27]. For instance, Enkema et al. [15] reviewed ecological momentary assessment data from multiple studies, finding mindfulness associated with reduced momentary negative affect and improved emotional regulation, similar to the present correlational link. Likewise, Caldiroli et al. [27] reported mindfulness-based interventions yielding significant mental health gains post-trauma in a pilot clinical trial, paralleling our findings in a non-clinical sample. Any observed differences in effect sizes may stem from our cross-sectional design versus their intervention focus, or cultural factors in Iran emphasizing present-moment acceptance amid religious coping practices. Mindfulness, as a cognitive-emotional skill, enables individuals to confront unpleasant experiences stemming from divorce with greater acceptance and less judgment. When divorced women can mindfully manage negative emotions, intrusive thoughts, and separation-related stressors in the present moment, they are naturally less prone to anxiety and depression, consequently experiencing higher levels of psychological well-being [16].

Mechanistically, mindfulness mitigates ruminative thinking, breaking cycles of negative thoughts about the past that can exacerbate distress. It also enhances emotional self-regulation, enabling more adaptive responses to post-divorce challenges. Furthermore, by fostering self-awareness and self-compassion, mindfulness facilitates the acceptance of life's altered realities after divorce [9]. In the unique socio-cultural context of Iranian divorced women, where social stigma and cultural pressures are prevalent, the ability to remain present and non-judgmental about oneself acts as a protective shield. This may indirectly support non-reactive decision-making in areas like financial planning or co-parenting, though future studies should test this mediation. Mindfulness not only reduces the psychological toll of divorce but also promotes non-reactive decision-making about the future [11],

particularly crucial for navigating complex issues like child custody or rebuilding social identity.

The second significant finding reveals a positive relationship between forgiveness in the context of divorce and mental health in divorced women. This result is consistent with prior research, such as that by Jafari et al. [28]. Jafari et al. [28] demonstrated forgiveness therapy improving mental health and intimacy in Iranian couples seeking divorce via pre-post intervention effects, aligning with our stronger predictive beta and correlation; differences may arise from their therapeutic focus versus our trait assessment, with cultural endorsement of forgiveness in Islamic contexts potentially amplifying effects in our sample. The process of forgiveness, whether directed towards oneself or the former spouse, aids women in breaking free from the destructive cycle of anger, resentment, and victimhood. Essentially, forgiveness functions as an adaptive coping strategy, alleviating the emotional burden of the divorce experience and creating the psychological space necessary for rebuilding one's life [21]. Women capable of forgiveness are less likely to engage in mental rumination about past events, redirecting their psychological energy towards future planning instead of dwelling on perceived harms [28].

The impact of forgiveness on mental health can be analyzed at multiple levels: cognitively, it transforms an individual's narrative of the divorce, shifting interpretations from threatening to manageable. Emotionally, it reduces symptoms of depression and anxiety, which often intensify post-divorce. Interpersonally, forgiveness, even without reconciliation, facilitates new relationships or the maintenance of existing ones with family and friends, unburdened by resentment. These combined factors create a foundation for achieving psychological equilibrium after divorce [19]. In the Iranian cultural context, forgiveness holds unique significance, being viewed not only as a psychological strategy but also as a widely endorsed moral virtue, potentially aiding social acceptance and buffering against isolation for divorced women. Moreover, it can reduce familial tensions, especially concerning child custody, thereby mitigating psychological stress.

The stronger predictive effect of forgiveness compared to mindfulness may reflect divorce's inherently interpersonal nature, where betrayal and resentment are central, making forgiveness a more direct antidote than the broader attentional skill of mindfulness. Additionally, although not tested here due to the study's design, an interaction between mindfulness and forgiveness could amplify effects—e.g., mindful awareness facilitating deeper forgiveness—warranting future moderated analyses.

This study's findings should be interpreted considering certain limitations. Key limitations include the use of convenience sampling, which may introduce selection

bias and limit generalizability beyond Qom's urban divorced women to rural or national populations; the cross-sectional design, precluding causal inferences about whether higher mindfulness and forgiveness precede improved mental health; and reliance on self-report measures, susceptible to social desirability bias in a culturally conservative context. Future research should employ longitudinal designs, probability sampling, and multi-method assessments (e.g., observer ratings) to address these.

CONCLUSIONS

These findings collectively emphasize that both mindfulness and forgiveness are crucial psychological resources for promoting mental health in divorced women. They act as significant protective factors against the array of negative psychological consequences that can accompany marital dissolution. The predictive power of these constructs highlights their potential as core components in developing targeted psychological interventions. By fostering mindful awareness and cultivating the capacity for forgiveness, mental health practitioners can equip divorced women with effective strategies to navigate their emotional landscapes, enhance their resilience, and ultimately improve their overall well-being in the post-divorce period. However, implementation in Qom must navigate practical challenges, such as cultural stigma around divorce and limited access to mental health services in religious communities, necessitating low-cost, group-based programs integrated with local mosques or women's centers. These results could inform public policy by advocating for forgiveness and mindfulness training in national family counseling protocols, while future research agendas should prioritize randomized trials testing combined interventions and their scalability across Iranian provinces.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization, investigation, data curation, and writing the original draft: Nahid Ghelichkhan; Methodology: Nahid Ghelichkhan and Nahid Ghelichkhan; Supervision, validation, formal analysis, and project administration: Saeed Bakhtiarpour; Software, data analysis, visualization: Behnam Makvandi; Resources, investigation, and data collection: Parvin Ehteshamzadeh; Review and editing: Saeed Bakhtiarpour and Parvin Ehteshamzadeh; Final approval: All authors.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declared no conflict of interests.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations were comprehensively addressed: the study received approval from the Ethical Committee of Islamic Azad University (code IR.IAU.AHVAZ.REC.1403.372). Participants received detailed information sheets outlining study aims, procedures, risks (minimal emotional discomfort), and benefits (contributing to women's health knowledge). Informed consent was obtained electronically or in writing, with explicit rights to withdraw without penalty. Data were anonymized using unique codes, stored securely on password-protected servers accessible only to researchers, and participants could request data deletion. No incentives were provided to avoid coercion, and debriefing resources (e.g., local counseling contacts) were offered post-participation.

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