



# Predictive Role of Attachment Styles and Emotion Regulation on Forgiveness in Married People

*Evli Bireylerde Bağlanma Stilleri ile Duygu Düzenlemenin Affetme Üzerindeki Yordayıcı Rolü*

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## ABSTRACT

Marriage is one of the important steps that spouses tend to be happy together and raise future generations. However, in the marriage life made with hope, there may be hurt and resentment as well as happy moments. After the negative situations where resentment occurs between spouses, they sometimes decide to get through relationship and sometimes they can choose to forgive each other by resolving their conflicts. For this reason, it is important to research forgiveness in marriage, taking into account the conflicts between spouses. The purpose of this research is investigating the predictive role of attachment styles and emotion regulation skills on forgiveness in married individuals. The study group consisted of 236 individuals, between the ages of 18-65, who were married for at least 1 year. In this study, "Experiences in Close Relationships- Revised", "Marriage Forgiveness Scale-Event" and "Interpersonal Emotion Regulation Questionnaire: Co-Brooding and Co-Reappraisal" scales were used to collect data. According to the results of the research, as the avoidant attachment and brooding scores increase, the benevolence dimension score of the forgiveness scale decreases; as the anxious attachment, avoidant attachment and co-brooding scores increase, the avoidance dimension score of forgiveness increases, that is, the tendency to forgive decreases; while only anxious attachment predicted the retaliation dimension of forgiveness, co-reappraisal did not predict dimensions of the forgiveness scale.

**Keywords:** Forgiveness, Attachment Styles, Emotion Regulation, Married Individual

## ÖZ

Evlilik, eşlerin birlikte mutlu olmak ve gelecek nesiller yetiştirmek için attıkları önemli adımlardan biridir. Ancak umutlarla yapılan evlilik yaşantısında mutlu anların yanında incinmeler ve kırgınlıklar da olabilmektedir. Eşlerin arasında kırgınlıkların oluştuğu olumsuz durumlardan sonra eşler bazen ilişkilerini bitirme kararı alırken bazen de çatışmalarını çözerek birbirlerini affetme yoluna gidebilmektedir. Bu nedenle eşler arasındaki çatışmalar göz önünde bulundurularak evlilikte bağışlamanın araştırılması önemlidir. Bu araştırmanın amacı, evli bireylerin bağlanma stilleri ve duygu düzenleme becerilerinin affetme eğilimleri üzerindeki etkisini incelemektir. Araştırmanın çalışma grubunu araştırmaya katılmaya gönüllü, en az 1 yıldır evli olan 18-65 yaşları arasında 139 kadın ve 97 erkek olmak üzere toplam 236 birey oluşturmuştur. Bu araştırmanın verileri toplama kısmında "Yakın İlişkilerde Yaşantılar Envanteri-II", "Evlilikte Bağışlama Ölçeği-Olay" ve "Kişilerarası Duygu Düzenleme Anketi: Birlikte Kara Kara Düşünme ve Birlikte Yeniden Değerlendirme" ölçekleri kullanılmıştır. Araştırma sonuçlarına göre evli bireylerin kaçınan bağlanma ve birlikte kara kara düşünme puanları arttıkça affetme ölçeğinin yardımseverlik boyutu puanı düşmektedir; kaygılı bağlanma, kaçınan bağlanma ve birlikte kara kara düşünme puanları arttıkça affetmenin uzaklaşma boyutu puanı artmaktadır yani affetme eğilimi düşmektedir; yalnızca kaygılı bağlanma bağışlamanın misilleme boyutunu yordarken, birlikte yeniden değerlendirme affetme ölçeğinin boyutlarını yordamamaktadır.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Affetme, Bağlanma Stilleri, Duygu Düzenleme, Evli Bireyler

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## Introduction

Marriage was explained as the contract between two people to establish a life together, for shared decision making, to share the life and to meet their specific needs (Ceyhan 2018) and for upbringing the next generations (Larson and Holman 1994). Alpay (2009) expressed that marriage can contain happy, harmonious moments, as well as injuries, incompatibility processes, discussions and much more negative events. Fincham (2000) asserted that there are very few people who have not suffered from injustice, disappointment or betrayal by their partners. For this reason, with considering the conflicts between spouses, it is significant to investigate forgiveness in marriage.

Gable and Heith (2005) defended that forgiveness has been the subject of many research in recent years, because it is seen as term of positive psychology. Although the term of forgiveness has been widely studied, forgiveness has not been defined conceptually (Macaskill 2005), therefore it can be seen that some concepts in philosophical and theological fields are used instead of the concept of forgiveness (Alpay 2009). For this reason, it is important to understand what forgiveness is not before identifying the term of forgiveness. Forgiveness differs from excuse (Kartal-Sağırılı 2019), justification (Murphy and Hampton 1988), forgetting (Fincham et al. 2006), mercy (Murphy and Hampton 1988, Taysi 2007), condoning (Scobie and Scobie 1998) and reconciliation (Enright 1994, Fincham et al. 2006).

Fitzgibbon (1986) referred to forgiveness as an influential therapeutic intervention that provide people with an opportunity to release their anger and guilt which is often the result of unconscious anger. According to North (1987), forgiveness is to overcome judgments without denying the correctness of the negative effects and judgments on the offender and to accept him/her by trying to show compassion, kindness and love. Moreover, McCullough et al. (1997) explained forgiveness as a decrease in the desire to take revenge against the offender, a decrease in the desire to stay away from his/her; an increase to show goodwill and in the desire to make peace with him/her despite the offender's harmful actions. Based on these definitions, Worthington (1998) expressed that it has to be a wound situation for forgiveness and this wound situation damages relationships physically, culturally and psychologically. Moreover, de Waal and Pokorny advocated that individuals can more easily forgive negative behaviors of their relatives in order to maintain the sense of belonging (2005). As a result, it can be thought that people can forgive their spouses easier.

Although there are many predictors of forgiveness, attachment styles are focused to understand forgiveness in marriage deeply in this research. Attachment Theory was developed by John Bowlby considering the bond between the baby and the caregiver. Bowlby's theory describes the mother-child relationship as the primary point of interpersonal functioning in later childhood and adulthood (Bowlby 1969). According to Mikulincer and Shaver (2014), a wide variety of relationship mates can serve as

attachment figures, including siblings, other relatives, colleagues, teachers, and close friends in later childhood, adolescence and adulthood. However, many studies have concluded that the most important attachment figure in adulthood is the romantic partner (Hazan and Shaver 1987, Mikulincer and Shaver 2014). One of the important studies on attachment in romantic relationships was conducted by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991). They examined attachment styles in four patterns which are defined using combinations of a person's self-image (positive or negative) and the image (positive or negative) attributed to others. These four attachment styles are secure (positive model of self and others), preoccupied (negative model of self and positive model of others), fearful (negative model of self and others) and dismissing (positive model of self and negative model of others).

Another important variable thought to be related to forgiveness is emotion regulation which is defined as the process by that people are aware of which emotions they feel, when they feel and how they identify these emotions (Gross 1998). According to Thompson (1994), emotion regulation includes intrinsic (emotion regulation in self) and extrinsic (emotion regulation in other) processes that have some duties such as monitoring, evaluating and regulating emotional expressions, which occur intensely. This definition proves that emotional regulation is not only includes self-regulation but also includes interpersonal processes (Malkoç et al. 2018). Similarly, it has been stated that as emotion regulation processes develop in a social context and contributes to the continuity of relationships, interpersonal factors have an important effect on emotion regulation (Hofmann et al. 2016). Also, Keltner and Haidt (1999) defended that emotion regulation in dyadic relationship provides an individual with an opportunity to understand other person's emotions, thoughts and form similar and complementary feelings with others. Especially in romantic relationships, Fredrickson (2016) considered that a partner regulates his/her partner's emotions as well as his/her own emotions. It can ensure romantic partners to link up and synchronize with each other or vice versa (Stephens et al. 2020). Correlatively, Schodt (2019) proposed that each romantic partner is affected due to his/her emotional experience and this situation can help partners to regulate each other's emotional experiences. Moreover, Clark et al. (1987) stated that partners should regulate their emotions when they have a conflict by increasing positive emotions and decreasing negative ones (Stephens et al. 2020).

As a result, it is known that meeting needs of the individual by primary caregiver during infancy affects his/her attachment styles and accordingly attachment in infancy continues into adulthood and affects close relationships, especially marriage (Bowlby 1969/1982) People encounter many problems in their marriages. They can be hurt, despaired by their spouses (Fincham 2000) and for their need of belonging they need to forgive (de Waal and Pokorny 2005) which means a transition from negative emotions to positive ones (Burnette et al. 2007). According to the literature about the relationship of attachment styles, emotion regulation and forgiveness, unlike previous studies, this study aims to examine separately how attachment

styles and emotion regulation variables affect married people's tendency to forgive their spouses after an event. Also, there is no study conducted by considering these three variables together in Turkey. In this respect, it can be said that the research is original and will contribute theoretically to married people's forgiveness tendencies. This research is also very important in terms of determining the factors that should be taken into account in the studies about explaining and increasing the tendency of married individuals to forgive. Thus, the purpose of this research is investigating the predictive role of attachment styles and emotion regulation skills on forgiveness in married individuals.

## Method

### Sample

This research was designed according to the relational screening model using the simple random sampling method. In simple random sampling, data is collected from the population in the easiest, fastest and most economical way (Malhotra 2004). The criteria for inclusion in the study are that the participant is a volunteer to participate in the study, is over 18 years old, has been married for at least 1 year, uses social media and gives informed consent online; the exclusion criterion of the study was determined as the participant's refusal to participate in the study. The data consisted of a total of 241 married individuals for at least one year, 144 female and 97 male, aged between 18-65, who were volunteered to participate in the study. In this study, 5 people who accepted to participate were excluded because they did not answer all of the questions in scales. That's why the study was carried out with 236 participants.

### Procedure

Before the study, Ethics Committee approval was obtained from Burdur Mehmet Akif Ersoy University (Date: 07.04.2021 No: 2021/148). All individuals participating in the study read and approved the online informed consent form. For this study demographic information form, Experiences in Close Relationship-Revised (ECR-R), Marital Forgiveness Scale- Event and Interpersonal Emotion Regulation Questionnaire: Co-Brooding and Co-Reappraisal were applied to individuals who were married for at least 1 year. These forms have been converted into online forms through "Google Forms". Data collection tools, demographic information form; 11 questions, Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised; 36 questions, Marital Forgiveness Scale-Event; 11 questions, Interpersonal Emotion Regulation Questionnaire: Co-Brooding and Co-Reappraisal Scale consisted of 9 questions, a total of 67 questions and 5 web pages. Data collection was carried out by the obtained link on the platforms with the target participant groups (Whatsapp groups, Facebook etc.). The informed consent form was added to the first page of the online forms, and the participants were informed that they "have the right not to participate in the study or to withdraw from the study at any time after participation". Also, in the informed consent form, information was given about the purpose of the study, its duration, researchers' identity and contact information.

During the application process of the scales, the identities of the participants were not asked. In addition, it was stated that the data will only be used for scientific purposes and anonymity will be protected. In link sharing, the "edit answer" and "limit to 1 answer" features are set on the system. In order to prevent data loss, it is mandatory to fill in only one option for each question. The application of the scales was calculated as an average of 15-20 minutes.

## Measurements

### *Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R)*

The inventory was used in order to determine the attachment styles of the participants. The ECR-R was developed by Fraley, Waller and Brennan in 2000 and it was adapted to Turkish by Selçuk et al. (2005). The internal consistency coefficients of ECR-R in Turkish form were 0.90 on the avoidant subscale and 0.86 on the anxious subscale (Selçuk et al. 2005). The inventory consists of 36 items. The 18 items measure avoidant attachment styles and other 18 items measure anxious attachment styles. Questions 4, 8, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 24, 26, 30, 32, 34, 36 on the scale are reverse questions and were evaluated considering this situation.

Participants were assessed with a 7 likert-type scale ("1-Strongly disagree", "7-Strongly agree"). Avoidant Attachment Dimension is calculated by taking the average of even numbered items and Anxious Attachment Dimension is calculated by taking the average of the odd number of items for each participant. There is no cut-off point in the scoring of the test and it was defended that an increase in the scores of the subscales indicates an increase of attachment anxiety or avoidance of attachment, respectively. The avoidant attachment scale is the average score of the following items like: "I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on romantic partners", "I get uncomfortable when a romantic partner wants to be very close" and the anxious attachment scale is the average score of the following items: "It makes me mad that I don't get the affection and support I need from my partner", "I worry a lot about my relationships" (Fraley et al. 2000). In order to use ECR-R in the married people sample within the scope of this study, firstly reliability studies were conducted. The scores obtained from the overall scale and each sub-dimension Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient was calculated to determine its reliability. The general internal consistency coefficient of the scale was .76, the sub-dimension of avoidant attachment was .55 and the sub-dimension of anxious attachment was .83 in the present study.

### *Marital Forgiveness Scale-Event*

Marriage Forgiveness Scale-Event was used to measure the couples' state of forgiveness after an event. The scale was developed by Fincham, Beach and Davila in 2004 and the scale was adapted to Turkish in 2018 by Durmuş and Manap. Brief information about a disappointed event is requested for the participants. The items in the scale are required to be answered regarding this event. There is a total of 9 items composing of 3 sub-dimensions (benevolence, avoidance and retaliation). In addition to this, as in the original form, the answer to the question "How much hurt

or upset did you experience when this event happened?” in the Turkish form was asked from the participants with a rating of 1-9 (1 = very little hurt; 9 = Most hurt ever felt). Whereas the original form is a 6-Likert type scale, in the Turkish form, it is scored with a 5-point Likert-type (“1-Strongly disagree”, “5-Strongly agree”). The score range of each sub-dimension ranges from 3 to 15. As the original form, the total score is not obtained in the Turkish form. The sub-dimensions are evaluated independently from each other. High scores for each sub-dimension indicate higher levels of benevolence, retaliation or avoidance, respectively. In the Turkish version of the scale, the Cronbach’s alpha coefficients of the benevolence sub-scale is .76, avoidance sub-scale is .81 and retaliation sub-scale is .63. The benevolence forgiveness scale is the average score of the following item like: “It was easy to feel warmly again toward my partner”, the avoidance forgiveness scale is the average score of the following item: “I didn’t want to have anything to do with her/him” and the retaliation forgiveness scale is the average score of the following item “I did something to even the score” (Fincham et al. 2004). To conduct the reliability of this scale, the Cronbach’s alpha internal consistency coefficient was calculated. It was found that the sub-dimension of benevolence was .78, the sub-dimension of avoidance was .82 and the sub-dimension of retaliation was .79 in this study.

### **Interpersonal Emotion Regulation Questionnaire: Co-Brooding and Co-Reappraisal**

The questionnaire was developed by Horn and Maercker (2016) in order to evaluate the emotion regulation processes that occur with the mutual interactions of people in a romantic relationship or marital relationship. It was adapted to Turkish by Ata and Alkar (2018). The original questionnaire includes 10 items and two sub-scale that are co-brooding and co-reappraisal. The Cronbach alpha coefficients of the 10-item questionnaire were found .82 for women and .76 for men. However, in Turkish version of the questionnaire includes 9 items and two sub-scales. While co-reappraisal sub-scale has four items as in the original form, an item including co-brooding sub-scale was removed from the questionnaire because it disrupted the fit of the model. Therefore, the questionnaire has 9 items and two sub-scales. It is scored with a 5-point Likert-type (“1-Applies completely”, “5-Applies not at all”). The Cronbach’s alfa coefficients of the co-brooding sub-scale and co-reappraisal sub-scale was respectively found .88 and .76. The co-reappraisal scale is the average score of the following item like: “When I am in bad mood, I talk with my partner to get a new perspective on things” and the co-brooding scale is the average score of the following item like: “When I am in bad mood, we get stuck and circle around the reasons for my mood and I do not feel understood by my partner” (Horn and Maercker 2016). In the present study, the Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient was found to be .92 for the sub-dimension of co-reappraisal and .80 for the sub-dimension of co-brooding.

### **Statistical Analysis**

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 18.0) package program was used for the analysis of the data obtained in the

study. The dependent variable of the research is forgiveness, the independent variables of the research are attachment styles and emotion regulation. Before statistical analysis, normality test was conducted to determine whether the data were normally distributed or not. In addition, the equality of variances was tested and the value obtained was found above 0.05, which is the critical value, and the assumption was provided. Durbin Watson value for forgiveness- benevolence sub-scale is confirmed as 1.73, for forgiveness-avoidance is confirmed as 1.57 and for forgiveness- retaliation sub-scale is confirmed as 1.88. These values are between 1.5 and 2.5, thus it is determined that they are at the acceptable level (Kalaycı 2006). The relationship between the variables of the study was examined with the Pearson Correlation coefficient, and then a standard multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the predictive role of emotion regulation and attachment styles on forgiveness. Standard multiple regression was used to address a question how much does each independent (predictor) variable uniquely contributed to that relationship. In standard multiple regression all predictor variables are entered into the regression equation at once. In the study, the level of significance was set as 0.05.

**Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants**

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Female	139	58.9
Male	97	41.1
Total	236	
Age		
18-24	8	3.4
25-34	148	62.7
35-49	59	25
50-64	21	8.9
Total	236	
Marriage duration		
1-2 year	58	24,6
2-5 year	65	27,5
5-10 year	46	19,5
10-15 year	25	10,6
15-20 year	14	5,9
20+ year	28	11,9
Total	236	
Number of children		
No child	85	36,0
1	79	33,5
2	65	27,5
3	7	3,0
Total	236	

**Results**

As can be seen in Table 1, 58.9% of the married individuals participating in the research are female and 41.1% are male. 3.4% of the participants are in the 18-24 age range, 62.7% in the 25-34 age range, 25% in the 35-49 age range and 8.9% in the 50-64 age range. The marriage period of most of the participants (27.5%) is between 2-5 years. Considering the number of children of the participants; it is seen that 36% have no children, 33.5% have only one child, 27.5% have two children and 3% have three children. Descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients of the scores of forgiveness, emotion regulation and attachment styles of the individuals participating in the study are given in Table 2.

As seen in Table 2, the independent variables have correlations between each other and the dependent variable changing between .11 and .54. Regression analysis was continued as there was no multicollinearity problem. The results of the standard multiple regression analysis conducted to determine whether attachment

styles and emotion regulation predicted the forgiveness of married individuals are presented in Table 3, Table 4 and Table 5.

As shown in Table 3, anxious attachment, avoidant attachment, co-reappraisal and co-brooding explained about 20% of the total variance in benevolence of forgiveness ( $R = .449 R^2 = .202 F_{(4-231)} = 14.609 p < .05$ ). The t-test results regarding the significance of the regression coefficients showed that avoidant attachment ( $t = -4.220, p < .05$ ) and co-brooding ( $t = -3.551, p < .05$ ) negatively predicted benevolence dimension of forgiveness. Also, anxious attachment ( $t = .574, p > .05$ ) and co-reappraisal ( $t = 1.700, p > .05$ ) did not predict benevolence dimension of forgiveness. According to the standardized regression coefficients, the significant predictors of benevolence dimension of forgiveness in order of importance are avoidant attachment ( $\beta = -.298$ ) and co-brooding ( $\beta = -.235$ ).

According to Table 4, all independent variables constituted about 17% of the variable in avoidance dimension of forgiveness ( $R = .414, R^2 = .172, F_{(4-231)} = 11.973 p < .05$ ). The analysis results

**Table 2. Pearson Correlation Coefficients Among Study Variables**

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.Forgiveness-Benevolence							
2.Forgiveness- Avoidance	-.22**						
3.Forgiveness- Retaliation	-.11	,37**					
4.Anxious Attachment	-.19**	,30**	,31**				
5.Avoidant Attachment	-.34**	,30**	,14*	,54**			
6.Co-reappraisal	,28**	-.25**	-.14*	-.21**	-.23**		
7.Co-brooding	-.33**	,28**	,14*	,17**	,15*	-.45**	

\*\*p<0,01 \*p<0,05

**Table 3. Results of Multiple Regression Analysis for Attachment Styles and Emotion Regulation Predicting the Forgiveness-Benevolence in Married Individuals**

Variables	B	Sh	β	t	P
Forgiveness-Benevolence					
Anxious Attachment	.007	.012	.040	.574	.566
Avoidant Attachment	-.058	.014	-.298	-4.220	.000*
Co-reappraisal	.067	.040	.114	1.700	.090
Co-brooding	-.155	.044	-.235	-3.551	.000*

$R = .449 R^2 = .202 F_{(4-231)} = 14.609$

**Table 4. Results of Multiple Regression Analysis for Attachment Styles and Emotion Regulation Predicting the Forgiveness-Avoidance in Married Individuals**

Variables	B	Sh	β	t	P
Forgiveness-Avoidance					
Anxious Attachment	.034	.015	.166	2.315	.022*
Avoidant Attachment	.036	.016	.158	2.197	.029*
Co-reappraisal	-.066	.047	-.096	-1.403	.162
Co-brooding	.138	.052	.181	2.684	.008*

$R = .414 R^2 = .172 F_{(4-231)} = 11.973$

regarding the significance of the regression coefficients showed that co-brooding ( $t= 2.684$ ,  $\beta=.181$ ,  $p<.05$ ), anxious attachment ( $t = 2.315$ ,  $\beta=.166$ ,  $p <.05$ ) and avoidant attachment ( $t=2.197$ ,  $\beta= .158$ ,  $p<.05$ ) positively predicted avoidance dimension of forgiveness respectively in terms of significance.

As seen in Table 5, all independent variables explained about 11% of the variance in retaliation dimension of forgiveness ( $R = .326$ ,  $R^2= .106$ ,  $F_{(4,231)} = 6.875$   $p <.05$ ). Analysis results regarding the significance of the regression coefficients showed that anxious attachment ( $t = 4.249$ ,  $p <.05$ ) positively predicted retaliation dimension of forgiveness. According to results of multiple regression analysis avoidant attachment ( $t= -.769$ ,  $p<.05$ ), co-reappraisal ( $t= -.805$ ,  $p>.05$ ) and co-brooding ( $t=.900$ ,  $p>.05$ ) did not predict retaliation dimension of forgiveness.

To summarize the findings obtained from the standard multiple regression analysis, avoidant attachment and brooding predict the benevolence dimension of forgiveness negatively; anxious attachment, avoidant attachment and co-brooding predict the avoidance dimension of forgiveness in the positive direction and only anxious attachment predict the retaliation dimension of forgiveness whereas co-reappraisal does not predict the dimensions of forgiveness.

## Discussion

According to literature about forgiveness, it contributes to the improvement in relationships, removes individuals from their feelings of anger and helps them to give up negative emotions (McCullough et al. 1997). Enright et al. (1996) defend that forgiveness is not a state, but a process that contributes to individuals' coping with emotions such as anger, disappointment, and revenge. However, forgiveness should not be perceived only as a state is not taking retaliation. Apart from retaliation, it is also related to avoidance-not avoidance and positive approach-benevolence (Fincham et al. 2004). After an offending event, individuals may avoid, resentful or have a rigid attitude (Enright and Coyle 1998). According to Fincham et al. (2004) state that individuals are mostly disappointed and got a raw deal by their loved ones. Considering the point of view, married people may mostly disappoint and lacerate their spouses. Many married couples experience unresolved anger and sadness and these hurt their core beliefs. Even though it's been years since this hurt, couples may still have negative feelings and feel that they are not

accepted by their partner (Greenberg et al. 2010). In this context, forgiveness in marriage plays the role of a potential mediator between spouses (Fincham et al. 2004). Considering what has been said about forgiveness in the literature, the aim of this study is to examine whether attachment styles and emotion regulation skills of married individuals predict their forgiveness levels.

When the results of the study are examined, it is seen that avoidant attachment predicts the benevolence dimension of forgiveness significantly in the negative direction. According to this result, married individuals with an avoidant attachment style are less likely to forgive their spouses. There are also researches in the literature that support the present study. As a result of a research conducted by Tirtashi et al. (2012), a significant negative relationship was found between avoidant attachment style and forgiveness. Mikulincer et al. (2006) found that avoidant attachment is inversely associated with disposition to forgiveness. McCullough (2008) asserted that people with attachment avoidance have a difficulty to forgive because their empathy skills are low and they perceive the offender as worthless (Burnette et al. 2009). Although there are many studies supporting our research in the literature, in some studies it has not been found association between avoidant attachment and forgiveness (Blount-Matthews 2005, Ceyhan and Özteke-Kozan 2019). Cooper et al. (1998) stated that adults with an anxious-avoidant attachment style avoid close relationships, behave coldly in their relationships, are uncomfortable with revealing themselves, and are socially suppressed. This situation may cause individuals who stay away from intimacy and are afraid of abandonment to not want to establish relationships or to continue their existing relationships, which can make it difficult for them to forgive others. In addition to these, individuals with attachment avoidance have lack of empathy and they perceive offenders to be less worthy of care, this situation may cause that they struggle to forgive. Additionally, co-brooding ( $t=-3.551$ ,  $p<.05$ ) affects negatively on the benevolence dimension of forgiveness in this study. Worthington and Wade (1999) defended that people who have difficulty in regulating their emotions have low levels of forgiveness. According to Gordon and Baucom (2003), the need to punish their partners, cognitive confusion, and inability to realize emotional regulation are seen in individuals who state that they cannot forgive their partners. In order for people to forgive someone, they must accept their feelings of anger and retaliation, control them and turn into positive emotions. However, people who think deeply without a

**Table 5. Results of Multiple Regression Analysis for Attachment Styles and Emotion Regulation Predicting the Forgiveness-Retaliation in Married Individuals**

Variables	B	Sh	$\beta$	t	P
Forgiveness-Retaliation					
Anxious Attachment	.048	.011	.317	4.249	.000*
Avoidant Attachment	-.010	.013	-.057	-.769	.443
Co-reappraisal	-.029	.036	-.057	-.805	.422
Co-brooding	.036	.040	.063	.900	.369

$R= .326$   $R^2= .106$   $F_{(4,231)} = 6.875$

solution may tend to feel negative emotions. For this reason, it may be difficult for people who cannot control their emotions to forgive their spouses after an offending event.

According to another finding of the research, it can be said that anxious attachment and avoidant attachment positively predicted the avoidance dimension of forgiveness. That is, as the anxious attachment and avoidant attachment scores increase, people's tendency to forgive decreases. In the literature, Christensen (2017) stated that avoidant attachment and anxious attachment inversely linked with forgiveness in middle-aged adults. In the other study, as the anxious attachment scores of the individuals increase, the scores of forgiving others decrease (Ceyhan 2018). Mikulincer et al. (2006) also defended that people with insecure attachment show little forgiveness even on days that they think their spouses as attentive and supportive. People with anxious and avoidant attachment may be reluctant to continue their relationships, thus after experiencing an upsetting event, they may choose to get offended and move away from the person who upset them. Also, participants' co-brooding scores increase, the scores of avoidance sub-scale of forgiveness increase. Özteke-Kozan et al. (2017) state that there is a positive relationship between unforgiveness and maladaptive emotion regulation strategies. Hodgson and Wertheim (2007) concluded that people with better emotion regulation skills have a higher tendency to forgive. Considering the results in this study, it may be said that broody married people constantly think about the situation after experiencing a sad state of affairs and cannot turn their negative feelings into positive ones, so they have a difficulty in forgiving spouses.

According to another finding of the study, anxious attachment positively affects the retaliation dimension of forgiveness. In other words, as the anxious attachment scores of married individuals increase, their tendency to forgive decreases and their desire to take revenge on their spouses increases. In a study that was conducted by Sezer and Murat, anxious attachment was found to be a negative predictor of forgiveness (2020). Finkel et al. (2007) experimentally increased attachment anxiety or measured weekly fluctuations in attachment anxiety over 6 months and found that increased attachment anxiety decreased forgiveness of a spouse's mistakes. In another study, it was found that anxiously attached individuals think that they cannot be there for their spouses when they need them, and this may make it difficult for individuals to forgive their spouses (Hazan and Shaver 1987).

As seen in other studies given, it can be said that attachment styles and emotion regulation skills of married individuals predict individuals' tendency to forgive. It can be stated that anxious attachment and avoidant attachment generally reduce the willingness of married individuals to forgive their spouses. In addition to this, the behavior of thinking the same thing over and over again, called co-brooding, can trigger the distancing behavior of spouses and reduce their tendency to forgive.

In this study, it can be mentioned that there is a negative relationship between attachment styles, emotion regulation

and forgiveness. In other words, as the anxious and avoidant attachment scores of married individuals increase, their forgiveness scores decrease. Individuals with an avoidant attachment style avoid close relationships, have difficulty maintaining their relationships, and tend to distance themselves from their spouses when they experience insecurity in their relationships. These types of people are not inclined to make an effort to maintain their relationship anyway, so they may prefer to avoid themselves from their partners instead of forgiving them after a hurtful event. Anxiety-attached individuals are anxious in their relationships, have difficulty believing their spouse's sincerity, and are afraid of being abandoned by their spouses. After the hurtful event, these people may fear that they may experience this hurtful event again because they do not believe in the sincerity of their spouse and are worried about the relationship. For this reason, they may tend to avoid themselves from their spouses or they may retaliate by showing the same behavior to their spouses due to their anxious mood. Likewise, as the brooding score increases, spouses stay away from each other and the tendency to forgive decreases. It is thought that the decrease in the tendency to forgive will prevent people to get away from their negative emotions. However, in this study, the relationship between co-reappraisal, which is a sub-dimension of the emotion regulation scale, and forgiveness was not found to be significant and this situation also suggests the existence of other factors that affect forgiveness, such as gender, age, number of children, marital status and duration of marriage etc.

As in any research, there are some limitations in the conduct of this research. First of all, the most important limitation of this study is that the participants were only married individuals. Because of that, the results could only be generalized to married individuals. Also, individuals who could participate in the research were reached through online platforms. This resulted in the inability to communicate with them face to face and not being able to observe the mood they were in while answering the scales. In addition, sending the form via online platforms has caused it to be inaccessible to people of all socioeconomic levels and all ages. For this reason, since poorer and less educated people and old people have limited access to the Internet compared to wealthier, more educated people and young people, this situation can be thought to cause sampling bias. It should be noted that forgiving a spouse is more mandatory for lower socio-economic groups of the population without economic freedom; therefore results may be limited to the current socio-economic group. Similarly, considering that forgiving a spouse is more tolerable for older couples who have lived for many years and adhere to their traditions, the results may be limited to the current age range.

## Conclusion

Many studies have suggested that attachment styles and emotion regulation skills will affect the tendency to forgive in married individuals. However, in this study, emotion regulation did not show the expected effect on forgiveness. This may be due to the fact that the emotion regulation questionnaire did not work

adequately on the participants. For this reason, it is thought that applying the scale to a more heterogeneous participant group or conducting an experimental study in future studies will help to obtain more reliable data. As a result, avoidant attachment and brooding predict the benevolence dimension of forgiveness negatively; anxious attachment, avoidant attachment and co-brooding predict the avoidance dimension of forgiveness in the positive direction and only anxious attachment predict the retaliation dimension of forgiveness whereas co-reappraisal does not predict the dimensions of forgiveness. According to attachment theorists, empathy is needed for forgiveness instead of protecting self and showing aggressive behaviors to others (Burnette et al. 2007). Empathy is related to secure attachment which is without being overwhelmed by emotional distress. Thus, secure relational experiences stem in part from previously internalized experiences of secure, empathetic relationships or from reparation following conflict; this provides internal resources for emotional regulation and forgiveness after hurtful events. Additionally, reassurance of forgiveness by key attachment figures can result in a capacity for emotion regulation and forgiveness towards offenders. For this reason, it has been seen that it is important for family counselors to work on individuals' attachment styles and emotion regulation skills so that individuals can show forgiving behaviors towards their spouses. Finally, it can be suggested that experts working in the field of mental health on marital problems should work on forgiveness and increase the researches in this field.

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