

*Original Research Article*

# The multiple relationships among forgiveness, and family communication with rumination in pregnant women

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**Abstract**

**This study investigated the relationships between forgiveness and family communication with rumination in pregnant women. The sample consisted of 225 pregnant women who were selected through random sampling method. The instruments were rumination, forgiveness, and family communication questioners. Data were analyzed by statistical methods including Pearson correlation and multiple regression. The results indicated that rumination was significantly and meaningfully associated with forgiveness, husband communication, self-family communication and husband -family communication.**

**Keyword:** Rumination, Forgiveness, Family communication

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## INTRODUCTION

Pregnancy is supposed to be happy time but for many women this is a time of fear and stress. The stresses and strains of pregnancy can leave women particularly vulnerable to rumination and depression.

Rumination involves sustained thoughts or feelings about a particular event or person, after the event has passed or the person has left.

Response styles theory (RST) initially defined rumination as passively and repetitively focusing on one's symptoms of depression and the possible causes and consequences of these symptoms (Nolen-Hoeksema, Wisco, Lyubomirsky, 2008; Papageorgiou and Wells, 2004).

Although rumination is generally unhealthy and associated with depression, thinking and talking about one's feelings can be beneficial under the right conditions. According to Pennebaker, healthy self-disclosure can reduce distress and rumination when it leads to greater insight and understanding about the source of one's problems (Pennebaker, 1989). Thus, when people share their feelings with others in the context of supportive relationships, they are likely to

experience growth. In contrast, when people repetitively ruminate and dwell on the same problem without making progress, they are likely to experience depression.

Rumination is a major component of depression. According to the response styles theory (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991), rumination exacerbates and prolongs distress, particularly depression, through several mechanisms. First, rumination enhances the effects of depressed mood on thinking, making it more likely that people will use the negative thoughts and memories activated by their depressed mood to understand their current circumstances. Second, rumination interferes with effective problem solving, in part by making thinking more pessimistic and fatalistic. Third, rumination interferes with instrumental behavior, leading to increases in stressful circumstances.

Nolen-Hoeksema and Davis (1999) argued that people who chronically ruminate will lose social support, which in turn will fuel their depression. These consequences of rumination then make it more likely that the initial symptoms of depression will become more severe and evolve into episodes of major depression. In

addition, they could prolong current depressive episodes. Rumination has been shown to be negatively associated with forgiveness (McCullough, Bellah, Kilpatrick, and Johnson, 2001). Puterman, Delongisand, Pomaki (2010) suggest that those high in trait rumination are more likely to respond to daily Stressors with increases in daily rumination , they found that this effect too was attenuated among those with higher social support.

We know very little about the development of rumination, the tendency to passively brood about negative feelings. Because rumination is a risk factor for many forms of psychopathology, especially depression, such knowledge could be important for preventing the negative effects of rumination in pregnant women. The aim of this study is to investigate the relationships between forgiveness and family communication with rumination in pregnant women.

### Family communication

Family communication refers to the way verbal and non-verbal information is exchanged between family members (Epstein, Bishop, Ryan, Miller, and Keitner, 1993). Communication involves the ability to pay attention to what others are thinking and feeling. Communication within the family is extremely important because it enables members to express their needs, wants, and concerns to each other. Open and honest communication creates an atmosphere that allows family members to express their differences as well as love and admiration for one another. It is through communication that family members are able to resolve the unavoidable problems that arise in all families.

Communication can be divided into two different areas: instrumental and affective. Instrumental communication is the exchange of factual information that enables individuals to fulfill common family functions (e.g., telling a child that he/she will be picked up from school at a specific time and location). Affective communication is the way individual family members share their emotions (e.g., sadness, anger, joy) with one another (Peterson and Green, 2009).

Research has shown that strong social support systems, including family closeness and connectedness, direct communication, and problem-focused family skills, are interconnected with overall health and wellness.

Pennebaker (1989) suggested that emotional disclosure can reduce rumination. In a long line of impressive research, Pennebaker and colleagues (see reviews by Frattaroli, 2006; Niederhoffer and Pennebaker, 2002) have shown that people prompted to express distressing emotions about difficult or traumatic events through writing about them or talking to others experience more positive physical and psychological health outcomes. Wenzlaff and Luxton (2003) suggest that suppression and avoidance can also fuel rumination.

Suppression often backfires, increasing the availability of unwanted thoughts (Wegner, 1994).

Austenfeld and Stanton (2004) and Pennebaker (1989) suggest that the interpersonal context may be important in determining whether emotional expression and processing are helpful or unhelpful. When others are supportive of emotional expression and help individuals understand their distressing situations in new ways, rumination may decline.

Because of the importance of family communication and its relationship to emotional disclosure and rumination, this study was conducted. It is hypothesized that high quality family communications will be negatively related to rumination.

### Forgiveness

There is no consensus definition of forgiveness. McCullough has emphasized reductions of motivations of revenge and avoidance over time and increase of conciliation over time (McCullough, Fincham, and Tsang, 2003).

Forgivingness can be construed as a human strength or personality trait with positive consequences for individuals and social relationships. Specifically, forgiveness is the change process by which an individual becomes more positively disposed and less negatively disposed toward an individual who has harmed him or her at some point in the past.

More recent studies have found significant positive effects of forgiveness training for a variety of psychosocial factors. These effects include less anger, fewer feelings of hurt, malice, and estrangement, reduced hypertension, and reduced physical symptoms of stress. These studies suggest that skills-based forgiveness training may prove effective in reducing anger as a coping style and in reducing perceived stress and physical symptoms.

When an interpersonal transgression occurs, the victim can perceive the transgression as hurtful, offensive, or some mixture of both. These perceptions are often accompanied by immediate emotional reactions of anger (to the extent that the transgression is perceived as an offense; Thoresen, Luskin, and Harris, 1998) or of fear (to the extent that the transgression is perceived as hurtful; Worthington and Wade, 1999).

According to the continuous deleterious effects of rumination on psychological well-being and interpersonal behavior, it seems likely that rumination is negatively associated with forgiveness. Indeed, self-report measures of forgiveness as a personality trait are negatively associated with rumination as a personality trait (Berry, Worthington, O'Connor, Parrott, and Wade, 2005; Berry, Worthington, Parrott, O'Connor, and Wade, 2001). Thompson et al. (2005) found Forgiveness correlated positively with cognitive flexibility, positive

affect, and distraction; it correlated negatively with rumination, vengeance, and hostility. Research suggests that people who are more forgiving of others ruminate less (Berry et al., 2001; McCullough et al., 2001; Yamhure-Thompson and Snyder, 2003). McCullough et al. (1998) report that teaching individuals to ruminate less results in them becoming more forgiving.

## METHOD

### Participants

Participants were 225 pregnant women who were selected randomly from four pregnancy care centers in Isfahan.

### Instrument

**Rumination.** The rumination scale (Yousefi, 2009) consists of 39 items and five subscales (Brooding = 12 items, Self-blame = 10 items, Rumination symptom-based = 7 items, Introspection = 5 items, Rumination about possible causes of depressed mood = 5 items). Each item is rated on a five-point scale from 1 = not at all to 5 = very high. The rumination scale has demonstrated a high level of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .93) as well as a high level of test retest reliability (0.78) in a sample of university students (Yousefi, 2009). In the present study, internal consistency was assessed. Cronbach's alpha for the present sample was .95.

### Family Communication Scales (FCS)

The Family Communication Scale (FCS) (Olson, Gorall, and Tiesel, 2004) consists of 10 items that assesses positive and negative characteristics of parent and child interaction on a five point scale. The FCS has demonstrated a high level of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .90) as well as a high level of test retest reliability (0.86) in a national sample of 2,465 participants (Olson et al. 2004).

We adapted the FCS to assess the wife-husband communication, the self-family communication and the husband-family communication. The wife-husband communication scale assessed the relationship between the woman and her husband (for example, "I am not satisfied with how my husband communicates with me."). The self-family communication assessed the relationships between woman with her members' family (for example, "I am not satisfied with how my family communicates with me"), and husband family communication assessed the relationships between woman with her husband's family (for example, "I am not

satisfied with how my husband's family communicate with me").

In the present study, internal consistency was assessed for all scales: for wife-husband communication,  $\alpha = .094$ ; wife-family communication,  $\alpha = .91$ ; for wife-in law communication,  $\alpha = .95$ .

### The Heartland Forgiveness Scale

The Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS) is a self-report measure consists of 18 items that examines dispositional forgiveness of self (Items 1 to 6), others (Items 7 to 12), and situations (Items 13 to 18) (Thompson et al., 2005). Participants rate each item on a 7 point Likert scale ranging from 1 = 'almost always false of me' to 7 = 'almost always true of me'. Higher scores indicate higher levels of forgiveness, and lower scores indicate lower levels of forgiveness. The scale overall was found to have good internal reliability with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .87 and good validity being positively correlated with measures of hope, cognitive flexibility, relationship satisfaction, and social desirability (Thompson and Snyder, 2003). In the present study, internal consistency was assessed. Cronbach's alpha for the present sample was .83.

## RESULTS

To response to research questions, data was examined in two steps. The first step was to examine the inter correlations matrix between dependent and independent variables. The results showed rumination was significantly and meaningfully associated with forgiveness ( $r = .423$ ,  $p = .0001$ ), husband communication ( $r = -.499$ ,  $p = .0001$ ), self-family communication ( $r = -.465$ ,  $p = .0001$ ) and husband-family communication ( $r = -.407$ ,  $p = .0001$ ).

The multiple relationships among forgiveness, and family communication with rumination among pregnant women. (Table 1)

### Predicting Rumination

Multiple regression analyses was conducted to responses research questions in relation to predicting rumination. Rumination was entered as the dependent variable, and forgiveness, self-family communication and husband communication were entered as the independent variables. Summary data are presented in Table 2.

The results indicated a significant model fit, for each models, for model 1,  $F = 54.010$ ,  $p = .0001$ , and that the independent variable (forgiveness) included in the model was able to account for 25.6% of the variance ( $R^2 =$

**Table 1.** Means, Standard Deviations and Pearson correlations for dependent and independent variables. N =130

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
rumination	38.647	12.954	1.000	.506	-.450	-.422	-.359
forgiveness	62.069	17.680		1.000	-.399	-.290	-.346
Husband communication	43.779	8.282			1.000	.592	.499
Self-family communication	42.836	7.957				1.000	.432
Husband -family communication	39.893	10.823					1.000

Note.  $p = .0000$ ,  $N=130$

**Table 2.** Stepwise multiple regression of rumination based on career adaptability and occupational personality

Dependent variables	Model	Variables	B	SEB	$\beta$	T	sig
rumination	1	Forgiveness	.371	.050	.506	7.349	.000
	2	Forgiveness	.307	.050	.419	6.155	.000
	3	Self-family communication	-.489	.111	-.300	-4.411	.000
		Forgiveness	.275	.052	.375	5.321	.000
		Self-family communication	-.339	.130	-.208	-2.598	.010
		Husband communication	-.277	.131	-.177	-2.118	.036

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations		
	B	Std. Error				Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Partia I	Part
<b>1 (Constant)</b>	15.639	3.255		4.805	.000	9.210	22.067			
<b>forgiveness</b>	.371	.050	.506	7.349	.000	.271	.470	.506	.506	.506
<b>2 (Constant)</b>	40.529	6.428		6.305	.000	27.832	53.227			
<b>forgiveness</b>	.307	.050	.419	6.155	.000	.208	.405	.506	.442	.401
<b>Self-family communication</b>	-.489	.111	-.300	-4.411	.000	-.707	-.270	-.422	-.333	-.287
<b>3 (Constant)</b>	48.243	7.327		6.584	.000	33.769	62.716			
<b>forgiveness</b>	.275	.052	.375	5.321	.000	.173	.377	.506	.393	.343
<b>Self-family communication</b>	-.339	.130	-.208	-2.598	.010	-.596	-.081	-.422	-.204	-.167
<b>Husband communication</b>	-.277	.131	-.177	-2.118	.036	-.535	-.019	-.450	-.168	-.136

Note: a = Dependent Variable: rumination

.256), for model 2,  $F= 39.907$ ,  $p = .0001$ , and that the independent variables (forgiveness and self-family communication) included in the model were able to account for 33.8% of the variance ( $R^2 = .338$ ) and for model 3,  $F=28.695$ ,  $p = .0001$ , and that the independent variable (forgiveness, self-family communication and husband communication) included in the model were able to account for 35.7% of the variance ( $R^2 = .357$ ).

## DISCUSSION

The results showed rumination was significantly and meaningfully associated with forgiveness, husband

communication, self-family communication and husband - family communication.

In explanation of this result could say that rumination most often occurs in women as a reaction to sadness. When woman share her problems with her husband and her family in the context of supportive relationships, she is likely to resolve her problems. In contrast, when she repetitively ruminates and dwell on the same problem without making progress, she is likely to experience depression.

Open and honest communication creates an atmosphere that allows family members to express their needs and feeling for one another. Being able to talk about one's feelings and thoughts with others may help to

prevent rumination from occurring, or alternatively, to help get closure once rumination has begun. Without someone to talk to about one's thoughts and feelings, there may be more of a tendency to engage in "wheel-spinning" without moving forward in processing stressful events. These protective effects of social support appear to be all the more important among those who have a tendency to remain in a rumination-negative mood cycle (Nolen-Hoeksema and Davis, 1999; Rimé, 1995). Women typically rely on close relationships for social support to help reduce stress. However, stress levels can be elevated when women engage in co-rumination (Byrd-Craven and Massey, 2013).

The second hypothesis that forgiveness would be negatively associated with rumination is broadly supported. This is consistent with previous findings (Berry et al., 2001; Berry et al., 2005; Thompson et al., 2005; McCullough et al., 2001; McCullough, Bono, and Root, 2007; Yamhure-Thompson and Snyder, 2003; McCullough et al. 1998).

Holding on to an angry memory is an important part of not being able to forgive oneself. It seems that individuals who find it hard to forgive themselves will continue to hold angry memories and ruminate about events from a long time ago.

Similarly, thoughts of revenge are dominant when people do not want to forgive others. Continuing to hold angry memories and thoughts of revenge lead to ruminate in them. In contrast, forgiving others, can lead to a reduction in stress and rumination.

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