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HURTFUL EVENTS AND FORGIVENESS AMONG GHANAIAN COUPLES

BY

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DECLARATION

I, Rhoda Aforkor Quaye, hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own original research effort and that it has not been submitted in whole or in part for any academic award at this university or any other institution. All references to other works have also been properly acknowledged and cited.

29th November, 2024

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This thesis was supervised and submitted for examination with the approval of:

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29th November, 2024

……. ……

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DEDICATION

(Psalm 121:1 and 2) I will lift up my eyes to the hills— From whence comes my help? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

To God

We discussed, and you agreed, and you exceeded my expectations.

To my family

Mom: You and the people who have experienced hurt in their relationships inspired me to do this study. How we longed for this day, Dad. But you left right before I set out on this adventure. I can still picture your radiant eyes and grins upon my accomplishments as your favorite.

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Lastly, I'd like to say "smile" to my hubby because you have always supported and believed in me. We succeeded!

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You have come far despite your challenges in your relationships. I'm proud of you all.

You are all cherished.

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ABSTRACT

Hurt is an inevitable aspect of couples' relationships that can pose perceived threats, influencing appraisal processes and forgiveness. This dyadic, cross-sectional study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design to investigate the types of hurtful events couples encounter and the impact of hurt and negative appraisals on forgiveness among 102 couples within the Tema Metropolitan Assembly, aged 24 to 73 (M = 38.79, SD = 9.35). In the first part, participants described hurtful events experienced in their relationships using a prompt, which were analyzed using qualitative content analysis**.** Results revealed ten (10) typologies of hurtful events: (1) active disassociation; (2) passive disassociation; (3) infidelity, (4) disrespect, (5) violence, (6) humiliation, (7) criticism, (8) deception, (9) neglect of duty, and (10) insecurity. In the second part, participants completed questionnaires measuring the impact of hurt, negative affect, and forgiveness. Quantitative analyses using Pearson correlations, MANOVA, Multilevel Analysis (Actor Partner Intercept Model- APIM), and Hierarchical regression analysis tested hypotheses regarding the influence of demographic factors such as age and relationship length on the impact of hurt, religious differences in forgiveness, and associations between hurt impact, negative appraisals, and forgiveness. Results indicated that age and relationship length showed non-significant trends toward reducing the impact of hurt and negative appraisals, while religious affiliation did not significantly affect decisional or emotional forgiveness. Importantly, higher levels of hurt impact were significantly associated with increased negative appraisals and decreased forgiveness within couples. Religious homogamy moderated the relationship between negative appraisals and forgiveness, highlighting the cultural distinctiveness of forgiveness processes among Ghanaian couples.

Keywords: Hurtful events, hurt impacts, couples, negative appraisals, forgiveness

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Hurt is an inevitable component of relationships and has been linked to unfavorable outcomes due to its ability to establish a division between partners, momentarily decreasing their sense of belonging and connection to each other (Fehr et al., 2014; Tabassi et al., 2024). These events of hurt are interpersonal experiences of a person's behavior perceived as causing psychological, emotional, or physical hurt (Peatee, 2018). "Hurt feelings" denotes an emotional state characterized by a sense of being wronged, wounded, insulted, or injured (Hardecker, 2019; Mann et al., 2017). Several scholars have argued that experiencing emotional pain is a distinct and recognizable experience (Hall, 2015; Leary, 2015; Neoh et al., 2022). Hence, how a person interprets a hurtful situation affects one's response, and a single situation can lead to multiple subjective emotional experiences (Kelley et al., 2018).

The intensity of hurt feelings is influenced by the victim's relationship with the offender, and in romantic relationships (Anderson et al., 2012), it can reveal underlying goals, desires, or beliefs, potentially undermining security and trust within the partnership (Murray et al., 2006). In the United States, the extent of such hurt is extremely depressing, with almost half of all women (48.4%) and men (48.8%) indicating that they experienced hurtful behavior by an intimate partner at one time in their lives (Black et al., 2011). According to a recent report, 38.14 percent of people in Sub-Saharan Africa and 35.34 percent in West Africa have been hurt in their relationships, which is quite high in comparison with the global average of 31 (Ahinkorah et al., 2018; Kifle et al., 2024; Nakie et al., 2025). This statistic explains the widespread nature of relational hurt and its potential to disrupt personal well-being and relationship dynamics. Hence, there is a need to

investigate the underlying causes of hurt in relationships and the potential remedies that can mitigate the effects of these experiences.

Recent studies show that forgiveness is one of the key characteristics for reducing the intensity of injury and improving the quality of healing in relationships, especially when the evaluation of damage is high (Kim et al., 2022; McCauley et al., 2022). It is also indicated that forgiveness can help prevent continuous resentment and enhance better conflict resolution or strengthen long-term intimacy (Aalgaard et al., 2015). Infidelity, disrespect, deceit, and duty neglect are all examples of hurtful events that are common in relationships in Ghana and other African societies; in Ghana, forgiveness is commonly promoted through religious and cultural practices (Malm et al., 2022; Osei-Tutu et al., 2019). However, there is limited empirical evidence on how Ghanaian couples experience these hurts and how forgiveness operates in this cultural setting.

Conceptualization of Hurtful Events, Negative Appraisals and Forgiveness

Hurtful events comprise the sense of personal injury caused by threats to one's positive views of self and others (Hulley et al., 2022; VanderWeele et al., 2025). These could be a result of life traumas, abuses, losses, and stresses, causing emotional responses in relationships and negatively impacting well-being, security, and positive self-perception (Downey & Crummy, 2021; Riggs, 2010). Researchers have presented several definitions for the causes of hurt feelings (Hardecker & Haun, 2020; Spytska, 2024; Vangelisti, 2009). The term "hurt" feelings denotes a sense of emotional injury or hurt caused by close partners (Lemay et al., 2012; Vangelisti, 2009). Others also perceive hurt as a feeling of rejection or relational devaluation and transgression or when an event violates established relational norms or rules (Feeney, 2005; Vangelisti et al., 2005). Research on relational devaluation and transgression perspectives suggests that romantic partners

cause more hurt than less intimate ones (Leary et al., 2015). In the context of interpersonal interactions, these can be said to be a result of how hurt is appraised by individuals in relationships.

Appraisal theorists argue that emotions are the result of the subjective evaluation and interpretation of hurtful events in interpersonal relationships as hurtful (Lazarus, 2005; Leary, 2009). In particular, the development of emotional responses to these hurts is largely influenced by the role of appraisals. Indicatively, negative appraisals represent divergent views of hurt which results in diverse cognitive, behavioral and emotional reactions (Denham et al., 2005). Vangelisti et al. (2005) note that negative emotional responses that accompany hurt, including sadness, anger, humiliation and anxiety, are often related to a common source of negative appraisals (Barrett et al., 2001; Feeney, 2005; Leary et al., 1998). The significant influence that appraisals have on the degree and fluctuation of hurt feelings has also been highlighted by Leary and Springer (2001), showing that traditional scales of negative emotions may fail to represent the complexity of being hurt. It is therefore evident that specific interpretations of hurt influence the types of emotions that emerge, depending on how threatening the hurtful event is perceived (Lemay et al., 2012).

The degree of threat that a hurtful event presents to the individual plays a key role in determining the emotional responses to hurt (Bradshaw et al., 2016). When individuals perceive actions as flirtations, they may experience insecurity and jealousy, while feelings of unfair treatment or disrespect can trigger anger (Leary, 2015). Hurt appraisals involve evaluating factors such as intent, blame, severity, and unmet expectations within the relationship (Richman & Leary, 2009). When partners perceive high intent or severity, or when relational expectations are violated, the resulting emotions often include sadness, anger, or anxiety (Bippus & Young, 2012; Leary & Springer, 2001).

The evaluations of hurt are dynamic and alter with time. Couples might re-appraise their first judgments depending on new information or events (Baxter et al., 2022; Goldring & Bolger, 2021; Yeo & Ong, 2024). Studies show that men and women react differently to interpersonal hurt, which shapes their coping mechanisms and emotional reactions (Luong et al., 2020; Rudolph, 2002). While males may endure some hurts, a distinction usually ascribed to socialization norms, women are typically more prone to disclose their emotional reactions to hurt, influencing their willingness to forgive (Miller et al., 2008). Men, however, tend to prioritize restoring a sense of justice and often employ problem-focused coping strategies (Sinha & Latha, 2018). According to Wessells and Kostelny (2022), women often experience a greater emotional impact from relational violations, viewing these incidents as more significant and damaging. In contrast, men may downplay the seriousness of these events, attributing them to external factors, which can lessen their emotional response. This heightened perception can lead them to focus more on forgiveness and reconciliation (Feeney, 2004).

Recent studies have highlighted a range of effective strategies to cope with hurtful events in relationships, which have been conceptualized as a multidimensional process that leads to a reduction of negative reactions and an increase in positive motivation towards the offender (Aalgaard et al., 2015; Fincham et al., 2016). Forgiveness transforms vengeful emotions into restored positivity, nurtures regard between partners, and enables the resolution of both major and minor interpersonal injuries, ultimately strengthening couple functioning (Fincham et al., 2004; Gordon et al., 2005; Martinez-Diaz et al., 2021; Worthington et al., 2005). Further, research has shown that forgiveness, when practiced quickly, is associated with improved relationship quality and stability through the reduction of negative emotions, restoration of positive sentiments, and fostering of constructive conflict resolution (Braithwaite et al., 2011; Feeney, 2005; Fehr et al.,

2010; Kim et al., 2004). Constructive paths to this process include straightforward forms of communication, genuine expressions of apology, recognition of hurt, abstaining from hurtful behavior, and the renewal of trust and intimacy (Bachman & Guerrero, 2006; Leary & Springer, 2001). According to Osei-Tutu et al. (2019), the act of letting go of negative emotions, restoring relationships, and avoiding revenge, motivated largely by marital stability, harmony, and personal well-being, with cultural and gendered expressions shaping how forgiveness is enacted.

Studies have argued the role of age and gender in the forgiveness of interpersonal hurts. According to research, older adults generally show a more forgiving attitude (Charzyńska & Heszen-Celińska, 2019). Ghaemmaghami et al. (2011) also argued that avoidance is more commonly seen in middle-aged adults and revenge is more likely to be seen in younger adults. Future research should identify the factors that underlie the development of forgiveness throughout adulthood and examine how forgiveness functions in various stages of life and across different populations. Researchers have also found age differences of forgiveness; older adults tend to have a more forgiving attitude (Charzynska & Heszen-Celinska, 2019). Tao et al. (2021) emphasize the need for more research to help explain the developmental pathways of forgiveness during adulthood and to offer valuable insights into the functioning of forgiveness across the life stages and across different populations.

Forgiveness has been studied on multiple levels, with some scholars concentrating on an episodic state in reaction to interpersonal hurts (Berry et al., 2005; Worthington & Scherer, 2004). According to researchers, forgiveness in intimate relationships has three dimensions: trait forgiveness, emotional forgiveness, and decisional forgiveness. Trait forgiveness reflects an individual's general tendency to forgive across situations and over time, whereas emotional forgiveness involves the transformation of negative feelings into more positive emotions, such as

empathy, compassion, and love (Berry et al., 2005; Gordon & Baucom, 1998; Worthington, 2006). In contrast, decisional forgiveness refers to a deliberate and intentional choice to release the offender from blame and to forgo negative responses (Worthington, 2001; Worthington & Scherer, 2004). All three dimensions of forgiveness are assessed when examining interpersonal forgiveness among couples (Fehr et al., 2010; Worthington et al., 2007). This assessment determines whether both parties are generally forgiving, have experienced an emotional adjustment, and have consciously decided to forgive. Forgiveness is essential in maintaining successful relationships because it allows the relationship to progress, restores trust, and reduces feelings of hurt, anger, resentment, and retaliation (Braithwaite et al., 2011; Karremans & Van Lange, 2004). Compared to unforgiving couples, forgiving couples report higher relationship satisfaction, closeness, and better conflict resolution (Aalgaard et al., 2016; Mirzadeh & Fallahchay, 2012).

Problem Statement

Feeling hurt in a romantic relationship is natural and highly influenced by individual subjective appraisals and interpretations. However, unresolved hurts are a major source of relationship dissatisfaction, withdrawal, and eventual dissolution (Osafo et al., 2021; Osei-Tutu et al., 2019). In the Ghanaian context, the most severe transgressions in couples' relationships are associated with in-law involvement, spousal roles, religion, abuse, and infidelity (Komesuor et al., 2023; Osei-Tutu et al., 2019). Conflict is inevitable across all human relationships, but the interpretation of behaviors as hurtful is shaped by cultural context, making relational hurts deeply embedded in societal norms (Dei, 2019; Malm et al., et al., 2022).

Couples' experiences of hurtful events often have significant and far-reaching effects on relationship quality. Perceptions of these events are subjective, shaped by attributions of intent and blame and may lead either to reconciliation and growth or to resentment and detachment (Leary &

Springer, 2001). Appraisals of hurt are further influenced by personality, past experiences, and relational dynamics (Fincham et al., 2004; Vangelisti et al., 2005).

Marital expectations in collectivist cultural settings, such as in Ghana, are based on harmony, unity, and forgiveness. Those values influence the understanding of hurts and the degree of forgiveness (Komesuor et al., 2023; Osei-Tutu et al., 2019). Forgiveness has also been cited as one of the processes that restore balance, lessen the intensity of negative emotions, and offer closure upon transgression (Malm et al., 2022; Sahan, 2019). Not only does it help to reduce conflict but, in reality, it transforms anger and resentment into empathy and compassion, thereby protecting relationships and preventing their destruction and, in the long run, healing them (Kim et al., 2022).

Nonetheless, despite the increasing literature, several issues remain unaddressed. To begin, the majority of the research on hurt and forgiveness has been carried out in the Western setting, which restricts the scope of knowledge about how cultural norms are impacting the processes in sub-Saharan Africa (Fincham & Beach, 2010; Osei-Tutu et al., 2019). Although less is known about the appraisal of such hurts and the role of forgiveness in daily marital relationships, some studies in Ghana demonstrate transgressions, such as neglect of duty and disrespect. Once again, the evidence on gender discrepancy in hurt and forgiveness is not uniform, and the role of cultural gender expectations in forgiveness willingness is questionable (Charzynska & Heszen-Celinska, 2019; Tao et al., 2021). Moreover, existing research often isolates either hurt or forgiveness, without integrating the dynamic relationship between hurt intensity, appraisal, and forgiveness.

This study therefore seeks to address these problems by examining hurtful events and forgiveness among Ghanaian couples through a mixed-methods design, which remains relatively novel in this area of research (Creswell, 2021). By integrating qualitative narratives with

quantitative analyses, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how couples experience, interpret, and respond to hurt, and how forgiveness mediates these processes. The aim is to uncover the types of hurt unique to Ghanaian couples, the role of demographic and cultural factors in shaping appraisals, and the ways forgiveness alleviates the impact of hurt, thereby contributing to both global and context-specific knowledge.

Aims and objectives

The aim of the study is to investigate hurtful events and the role of forgiveness in couples' relationships in the Tema Metropolis, Greater Accra Region, Ghana. Specific objectives would be:

1. Explore the different types of hurt experienced by Ghanaian couples in their relationships.
2. Analyze the relationships between hurt impact, negative appraisals, and forgiveness in couples' relationships.
3. Assess the uniqueness of gender and age differences in hurtful events and forgiveness among couples.

Relevance of the study

The above studies have highlighted the nature of hurtful events in relationships, how individuals appraise them, and the process of forgiveness. Some studies viewed hurtful events as distress signaling both relational devaluation and threat to positive mental models, while others viewed them as undermining of self-concept (Feeney, 2005; Vangelisti et al., 2005). This is in line with the theory of hurt by Feeney, reflecting a complex set of perceptions about the value of the self, partner, and relationship, predicting individual differences in emotional reactions depending on the type of hurtful event (Feeney, 2004). These feelings can lead to negative emotions such as

sadness, anger, shame, and fear, as a result of how individuals evaluate these hurtful events (Feeney, 2005).

When evaluated as threat, hurt or loss, individuals struggle to cope and are likely report significantly levels of depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress symptoms (Peatee, 2018). However, when viewed as a challenge, individuals are more willing to work through their hurt and forgive, thereby minimizing stress. The role of forgiveness, therefore, is to facilitate the removal of these negative emotions that lead to revenge, punishment, or avoidance and restore relationship stability (David & Stafford, 2013; McCullough et al., 2008; McNulty, 2008; Osei-Tutu et al., 2019). Findings suggest that there is a link between hurt feelings and forgiveness, and there is a need to explore how couples reconstruct the narrative of hurtful events and how forgiveness impacts the course and direction of relationships.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The theories that underpin this study are the Theory of Hurt, Stress Appraisal Theory and the Stress-Coping Model of Forgiveness (Feeney, 2004; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Strelan & Covic, 2006).

Theory of Hurt (Feeney, 2004)

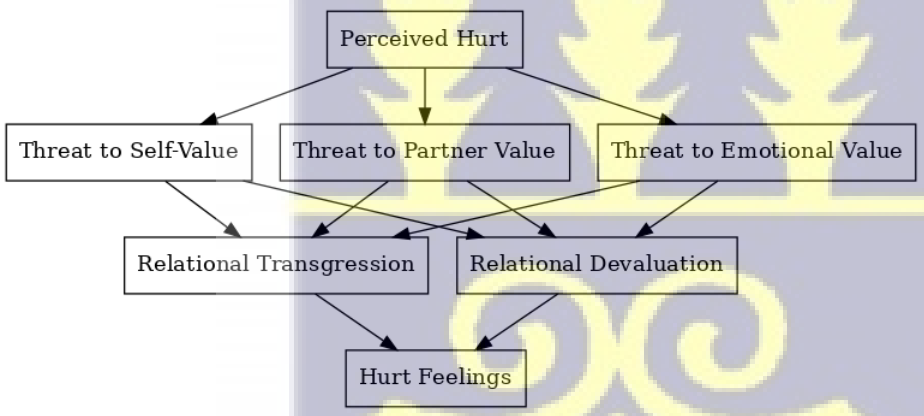
Feeney (2004) theory of hurt proposes that hurt feelings in romantic relationships reflect a complex mix of perceptions, centered on three key areas: self-value, partner value, and relationship value. Each of these is linked to unique emotional reactions that vary depending on the nature of the hurtful event. Hurt feelings, according to Feeney, arise from relational transgressions that threaten positive attachment models and suggest a lack of value in the relationship. When perceptions of devaluation occur in any of these areas, hurt reactions are intensified. Forgiveness, on the other hand, is facilitated when positive perceptions are restored across self, partner, and relationship.

The theory points out that hurt is influenced not only by the objective facts of hurtful events but also by subjective interpretations of such events and by the context of the relationship. Individuals might interpret the same phenomenon according to their own sensitivities, past life, and the way their relationships work. The intimacy of the relationship, common understanding, trust and commitment may all affect the intensity of the experienced hurt. For example, according to Grøntvedt et al. (2020), perceived threats to relationship value strongly predicts emotional hurt and lowered forgiveness in couples, supporting Feeney's emphasis on relational worth.

How couples communicate about hurtful events is also important. Empathic and open communication can help reduce feelings of hurt, while dismissive or hostile responses can deepen the pain. Feeney's theory emphasizes the importance of addressing hurt to support emotional and relational health. Unresolved hurt can lead to resentment, reduced trust, and a decline in overall relationship quality, whereas openly addressing and healing hurt through understanding can strengthen relationship bonds. However, the theory focuses heavily on attachment-related processes, which limits its ability to explain cultural or situational variations in hurt responses.

Figure 1

Theory of perceived hurt



Stress Appraisal Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)

Lazarus & Folkman (1984) Stress Appraisal Theory proposes that unpleasant relationship events are subjectively evaluated, resulting in related emotions and elevated stress levels. It consists of two parts: primary appraisal and secondary appraisal. Primary appraisal is the initial assessment of an event to identify its significance. During this stage, an individual determines if an incident is unimportant, benign, pleasant, or stressful. If the incident is judged stressful, it is further assessed to determine whether it is a danger, a challenge, or a loss/hurt. A

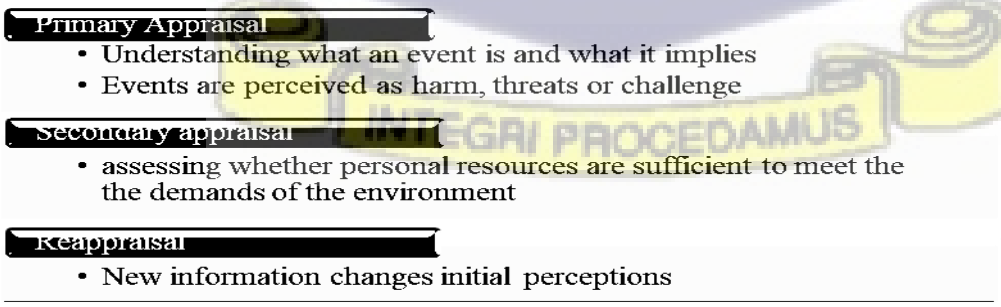
danger denotes possible future injury, a challenge represents a possibility for development or benefit, and hurt/loss shows existing damage.

Secondary appraisal follows, in which the individual assesses their ability to cope with the situation. This includes focusing at available resources and stress management strategies, based around questions like "do I have the strength for this?" and: What can I do to cope with this situation? The result of this evaluation affects how the person emotionally and behaviorally reacts to the stressor. When new information changes initial impressions, that is called reappraisal.

The Stress Appraisal Theory acknowledges the extent to which individual perceptions and responses to stress differ, showing why couples process the same event in very different ways in terms of the potential for danger and the resources available to cope with that danger, thereby producing different behaviors. For example, Lahousen et al. (2019) have demonstrated that securely attached people tend to construe conflict as a challenge rather than a threat, buffering the intensity of hurt and allowing for healthier responses. This theory values cognitive assessment above all other influences, however, and draws short on relational and cultural antecedents. In relationships, appraisals are influenced not merely by internal mental processes, but also by past patterns of conflict, societal rules and norms, and by partner behaviors.

Figure 2

Stress Appraisal Theory



The Stress-Coping Model of Forgiveness (Strelan & Covic, 2006)

The stress-coping model of forgiveness developed by Strelan and Covic (2006) offers a comprehensive understanding of forgiveness as a reaction to personal offenses. The model emphasizes the forgiving process, focusing on emotional processing, coping, and evaluation. Forgiveness is seen as a coping strategy in reaction to the stress generated by transgressions. The degree of the transgression, the connection between the transgressor and the victim, and the victim's assessment of the incident determine the degree of stress the victim goes through. Negative assessments, such as those regarding high intent or damage, increase tension; conversely, appraisals stressing comprehension help to lower tension.

Forgiveness is a coping technique in which one deliberately releases bitterness and seeks to avoid revenge. This decision generates cognitive and emotional changes, including the shift from negative to neutral or favorable ideas about the offender. Although outside elements such as cultural standards and social support also shape this journey, forgiveness can lower stress, improve well-being, and, over time, foster healthier connections. With an emphasis on three paths to forgiveness: trait forgiveness, decisional forgiveness, and emotional forgiveness, the model highlights forgiveness as both a choice and a deeper emotional transformation (Berry et al., 2005; Worthington, 2006; Worthington & Scherer, 2004). Recent studies have applied this model to relational hurts. Worthington and Wade (2020) showed that forgiveness interventions based on stress-coping principles significantly reduced stress and improved relationship satisfaction.

Integrating the Theories

Taken together, these three theories form an interconnected lens for making sense of hurt and forgiveness in relationships. The Theory of Hurt describes the cause of hurt feelings and

shows how they occur when people experience threats to their own value, their partner's value, and the value of the relationship in general. Stress Appraisal Theory further describes how individuals appraise these hurts as threats, challenges, or losses, and how that appraisal appears to be influenced by cultural norms, religious values, and individual coping resources. These appraisals not only influence the intensity of emotional reactions, but they also influence the relational pathways couples take. Finally, the Stress-Coping Model of Forgiveness conceptualizes forgiveness as an adaptive coping strategy, which is particularly important within a Ghanaian marital context where forgiveness is prescribed as a moral and cultural value. By practicing forgiveness, couples can reduce the stress associated with transgressions, turn negative emotions into something more positive, and open up the possibility of reconciliation and long-term stability. In this way, the theories form a sequential chain: hurt → appraisal → coping/forgiveness → relational outcome.

Review of Related Studies

Typologies of Hurt

Hurtful events in romantic relationships are common and can have lasting impacts on individuals involved. Various typologies of hurtful events have been proposed. Feeney (2005) studied 224 couples who retrospectively reported experiences of being hurt by their romantic partners. Most hurtful events involved relational transgressions that signaled both relational devaluation and threats to positive mental models. One dominant theme that explained victims' emotional reactions to hurtful events was "a sense of injury," that is, damage to the victim's view of the self as worthy of love.

Leary et al. (1998) examined 164 participants who recounted situations in which their feelings were hurt and identified seven categories of hurtful events: active disassociation, passive

disassociation, criticism, betrayal, teasing, feeling unappreciated, and being taken for granted. Every category reflected actual or perceived relationship devaluation, in which case couples believed their worth was less than they would like.

Feeney (2004), through a retrospective account of 224 couples, expanded this understanding by outlining five types of hurtful events: active disassociation, passive disassociation, criticism, sexual infidelity, and deception. These categories drew attention to the recurring view among people that their partners did not regard them as anticipated, a view fundamental to the feeling of hurt in relationships.

Additional research has pointed out the psychological processes behind reactions to hurtful experiences. Vangelisti et al. (2005) examined the causes people associate with their hurt feelings and identified eight underlying factors, using data from undergraduate participants. The study focused on rejection and betrayal as fundamental categories of hurt, finding that rejection contributed to feelings of isolation, while betrayal undermined trust. Often, the sense of injury resulted from challenges to self-concept, implying that how people saw these occurrences might affect their emotional reactions as well as their future relationships.

Fitness (2012) examined the causes people associate with hurt feelings among couples and found that individuals' explanations influenced the intensity of their hurt and their responses, including withdrawal or distancing from the partner. The study highlighted that individuals' interpretations of these events influenced their feelings and reactions.

Dillow (2015) explored four major transgressions in romantic relationships: infidelity, jealousy, deception, and hurtful communication, including their predictors and consequences.

Although generally aversive, such violations can also have positive effects, such as growth opportunities, renegotiation of relationship boundaries, or increased commitment.

The cognitive appraisals associated with hurtful events and the typologies into which they fall are very useful. They support the view of emotions as being determined by both personal appraisals and perceived threats, which have consequences for the intensity and content of emotional responses. Research on these dynamics can help researchers and practitioners design more successful interventions to help people process the emotional effects of hurtful episodes and build resilience in relationships.

Hurtful Events and Forgiveness

Hurtful events in interpersonal relationships, particularly in romantic contexts, often manifest as betrayals or traumas that can significantly impact on individuals' emotional and psychological well-being. Forgiveness has emerged as a crucial mechanism for healing from such events, serving as a vital tool to navigate feelings of resentment, anger, and a desire for revenge. Research emphasizes the importance of forgiveness in fostering relationship satisfaction and preventing future conflicts. For instance, Bono et al. (2008) conducted a longitudinal survey of married couples to examine apology and forgiveness processes. Their sample consisted of 185 couples in the United States. Findings revealed that sincere apologies expressing care and commitment significantly increased forgiveness and improved relational satisfaction. Bono et al. (2008) demonstrate the centrality of apology in forgiveness but do not account for how cultural or religious expectations, as in Ghanaian marriages, shape forgiveness thresholds. The act of forgiving not only restores closeness and satisfaction in relationships but is also linked to enhanced relationship quality.

Furthermore, Mirzadeh and Fallahchai (2012) carried out a cross-sectional study using questionnaires with 180 Iranian married couples. Their findings showed a positive association between forgiveness and marital satisfaction, with forgiveness accounting for a significant variance in perceived marriage quality. However, the complexity of forgiveness is, as identified by Sandilya and Shahnawaz (2014), who employed a survey design with a mixed sample of 250 married men and women in India, investigating predictors of forgiveness. Findings revealed that forgiveness is less likely to occur in the face of severe or repeated offenses, particularly among men who may perceive forgiveness as a weakness unless reparative actions are taken.

In addition to relational benefits, forgiveness has been linked to improvements in mental health and overall well-being. Toussaint and Friedman (2008) used a population-based survey of over 1,500 adults in the U.S. to assess the health implications of forgiveness. Their findings indicated that forgiveness was associated with lower psychological distress and reduced risk of cardiovascular disease. Their work highlights intrapersonal benefits of forgiveness but does not consider how cultural norms influence whether forgiveness is granted in the first place. while Worthington (2006) noted its role in enhancing self-worth, self-compassion, and personal empowerment. By regulating negative emotions and breaking cycles of rumination, forgiveness fosters both interpersonal healing and intrapersonal growth, thereby promoting resilience in the face of relational challenges.

Collectively, these studies establish forgiveness as a key predictor of relational quality and personal well-being. However, they predominantly reflect Western or Asian contexts, overlooking African cultural norms that define what is forgivable. This study addresses that gap by situating forgiveness within the Ghanaian marital context, where duty, respect, and religion strongly shape forgiveness processes.

Hurt Intensity and Negative Appraisals in Forgiveness

The interplay between hurt intensity, negative appraisals, and forgiveness reveals a complex landscape where emotional responses significantly influence relational dynamics. Research indicates that higher hurt intensity typically results in negative appraisals of the transgressor's intent and the impact of their actions, leading to a cycle of resentment that complicates forgiveness. Conversely, lower hurt intensity may facilitate more empathic appraisals, which in turn may facilitate the forgiveness process. For example, in a study focusing on the six components of grudge holding, Van Monsjou et al. (2021) conducted a series of 20 semi-structured interviews with mainly college-aged participants and identified (1) validation, (2) moral superiority, (3) feeling unable to let go, (4) latency, (5) severing ties, and (6) future expectations. We also found that grudges exist as a cyclical process of negative affect that decreases over time but can be easily reactivated.

Similarly, Prieto-Ursua et al. (2012) reviewed key concepts in the psychology of forgiveness and described its definitions, dimensions, and classifications. They note that forgiveness is a healthy and beneficial attitude and has been positively linked to health and well-being, especially in the ability to resolve offenses and improve couple relationships. These strong emotional responses can cause individuals to shut themselves off from the perpetrator altogether, which makes reconciliation even more difficult.

Negative appraisals of hurtful events are also critical in shaping emotional responses and the likelihood of forgiveness. Fehr et al. (2010) conducted a meta-analysis of 175 studies, examining interpersonal forgiveness and introducing a three-part model comprising cognitive, affective, and constraint-related dimensions. Findings revealed that situational factors, such as intent, empathy, apology, and anger, had stronger associations with forgiveness compared to

dispositional traits. Moreover, study characteristics like gender and age showed little influence, while methodology (e.g., scenario vs. recall) produced some differences in outcomes.

Ysseldyk et al. (2008) explored how forgiveness reduces depressive symptoms in intimate relationship conflicts. Women experiencing dating abuse were less likely to forgive, which was linked to greater distress. Across both abusive and non-abusive contexts, forgiveness lessened depressive symptoms by shaping conflict appraisals and reducing reliance on emotion-focused coping.

Davis et al. (2013) showed that while spirituality often encouraged forgiveness, it could also act as a barrier. Negative spiritual appraisals, such as anger toward God, seeing the offense as a desecration, or perceiving the offender as evil, were found to hinder forgiveness. Viewing the offender as evil emerged as a particularly strong predictor of unforgiveness, even after controlling for other factors, and this effect was partly explained by reduced empathy.

Moreover, Merolla (2008), argued that the ongoing presence of negative affect following a transgression can hinder the motivation to forgive. The relationship between the severity of an offense and the desire for forgiveness is widely recognized but often taken for granted (Fincham, 2000).

Quinney et al. (2024) showed that forgiveness after wrongdoing was not always genuine; offenders often had to infer its authenticity. Evidence indicated that when forgiveness was preceded by co-reflection, a reflective dialogue with the victim, offenders were more likely to perceive it as genuine, as they believed a shared value consensus had been reached.

Hurtful Events and Emotional Well-Being

Hurtful events in intimate relationships can cause lasting trauma and emotional distress, ranging from abuse to physical violence. These events significantly impact an individual's mental and emotional well-being, leading to feelings of instability. Emotional well-being is crucial for overall health and happiness, involving healthy emotion control, optimism, perseverance, and forming rewarding relationships.

Múzquiz et al. (2022) investigated the effects of direct and relational bullying on emotional well-being and examined whether self-compassion could buffer these effects. Results from 433 adolescents showed that both forms of bullying were linked to lower emotional well-being, with direct bullying specifically tied to higher negative affect. Importantly, self-compassion predicted greater well-being and partially mediated the relationship between bullying and negative affect, suggesting its value in prevention and intervention programs.

Brewin et al. (2000) meta-analysis of trauma survivors found that hurtful events could lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a debilitating condition marked by intrusive memories, avoidance behaviors, and mood changes. The study showed that although pre-existing factors such as childhood adversity or psychiatric history contributed to vulnerability, factors during and after the trauma, such as offense severity, lack of support, and ongoing stress, were stronger predictors, as they reinforced negative appraisals and prolonged emotional distress.

Also, Fincham and Beach (2010), through a review of empirical studies on marital conflict, highlighted that betrayal and infidelity in romantic relationships can cause emotional distress, psychological trauma, depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem, as individuals struggle to cope with the event's impact on their self-worth and future relationships.

Again, Goldsmith and Freyd (2005) examined the link between emotional abuse and emotional awareness. Results showed that emotional abuse and neglect were associated with difficulty identifying feelings, even after controlling for depression, anxiety, dissociation, and lifetime trauma. Few participants self-identified as having been abused, despite reporting abusive experiences. This highlighted how emotional abuse undermined awareness of emotions and often went unrecognized.

Peatee (2018) examined the unique impact of psychological abuse in romantic relationships, independent of physical or sexual abuse. Among 331 college students, those who experienced psychological abuse alone reported significantly higher levels of depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress compared to those without abuse histories, while those experiencing multiple forms of abuse showed the greatest mental health impact. Labeling one's relationship as "psychologically abusive" moderated the link between abuse and mental health outcomes.

Follingstad et al. (2012) explored relationship satisfaction, investment, and commitment among 81 women in conflictual relationships who experienced high levels of psychological maltreatment. Findings showed that these relationship markers were predicted by factors such as reactions to abuse, mental health, personality traits, perceived harm, and relationship schemas. Cluster analysis revealed three distinct groups, with one group reporting relatively higher satisfaction, investment, and commitment despite experiencing abuse.

Park et al. (2022) developed a provisional framework for understanding Emotional Well-Being (EWB) by reviewing related concepts, consulting experts, and mapping key definitions across disciplines. Findings highlighted both strengths and gaps in existing perspectives, offering a foundation for evaluating how EWB is assessed, identifying its causes and consequences, and guiding interventions to promote it. In the context of relational hurt, EWB is critical because

individuals with higher emotional well-being are more likely to regulate negative appraisals, cope adaptively with hurtful events, and move toward forgiveness, thereby mitigating the long-term psychological impact of relational transgressions.

Finally, Lawrence and Bradbury (2001), in a longitudinal study of 56 newlywed couples, found that physical aggression was a strong predictor of marital dysfunction and instability over four years, with dysfunction rates significantly higher among aggressive than nonaggressive couples. Even after controlling for stress and negative communication, aggression reliably predicted poor marital outcomes, underscoring its role in relational hurt and the progression of marital distress.

Hurtful Events and Forgiveness among Ghanaian Couples

Marital offences in Ghanaian culture are influenced by traditional norms and expectations, which can have a negative impact on couples' well-being and stability. A growing body of literature has examined the types, origins, and outcomes of these relational offenses. Osei-Tutu et al. (2019), in a qualitative study with 40 married couples, identified seven major transgression types: active disassociation, passive disassociation, criticism, sexual infidelity, deception, neglect of duty, and disrespect. These findings provide a cross-cultural perspective on the specific causes of marital conflict in Ghana. Building on this, Malm et al. (2022) surveyed 231 Ghanaian couples and classified neglect of duty and disrespect as "gross offenses." Positive relational predictors included affection, companionship, family commitment, and financial support, whereas negative behaviors, including beatings, annoying habits, selfishness, and disrespect, were linked to insecure and anxious attachment styles. This study shows how cultural beliefs about conjugal behaviors influence relationship satisfaction.

Gender norms also contribute to the way in which relational transgressions are perceived. Osei-Tutu et al. (2019) reviewed in-law transgressions among 37 married couples. key themes: role failure (e.g., unmet childbearing or financial responsibilities) and resistance to relational change (e.g., poor conflict management, privacy violations, or usurpation of domestic roles). Such failures were interpreted as indicative of relational breakdown. Similarly, Udofia (2021) examined the interaction of intimacy, locus of control, and self-esteem on marital satisfaction in a sample of 720 married couples in the Greater Accra Region. Results indicated that intimacy was a significant predictor of marital satisfaction, and self-esteem and locus of control were not, clearly suggesting that emotional deficits can function as relational stressors.

Migration and economic pressures also contribute to relational hurt. Darkwah et al. (2019) addressed the issue of male migration abroad in Ghana by conducting qualitative interviews and focus groups as well as ethnographic studies. Although parents tended to support migration as a means to gain economic power, wives saw the separation between them and their husbands as emotionally damaging, a sign of the conflict between material wealth and personal intimacy.

Dei (2019) investigated the effects of the Traditional Marital Counseling Model (TMCM) on marital distress in 50 Ghanaian couples. The study concluded that TMCM significantly alleviated marital distress, particularly in cases of severe relational strain, highlighting how structured interventions can mitigate the impact of hurtful experiences.

Osafo et al. (2021) interviewed 30 divorcees in Ghana over the course of 10 years (11 men and 19 women; ages 29-71) to determine causes of marital breakdown. Six main factors were identified: infidelity, abuse, financial support, lack of intimacy, intrusion of a third person, and gender-role ideology. Gender differences in motivations for divorce highlighted the culturally specific nature of hurtful events and how they are perceived and acted upon, explaining the importance of culturally sensitive interventions in the prevention of relationship breakdown.

Collectively, these studies emphasize that in Ghanaian marriages, offenses such as neglect of duty, disrespect, and role failure carry significant consequences. Cultural norms and gender expectations shape both the perception and impact of these transgressions, demonstrating that relational hurt cannot be understood outside its cultural and social context.

In Ghanaian marriages, forgiveness is a complex tapestry woven with threads of cultural expectations, marital norms, and gender dynamics. Osei-Tutu et al. (2018) explored marital forgiveness among 40 individuals in southern Ghana, identifying multiple conceptualizations of forgiveness: removal of negative emotions, relationship restoration, forgetting, avoiding retaliation, refraining from future references to offenses, and minimizing the offense. Forgiveness was motivated by marital stability, harmony, and personal well-being, and was enacted through culturally specific practices, including bodily gestures such as kneeling. Women were more likely than men to demand pacification, emphasizing the gendered nature of forgiveness.

Adam (2021) tested the impact of forgiveness education with married couples in Adentan Municipality using a quasi-experimental design with a sample of 104. Employing the Marital Offense Forgiveness Scale and Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale, the study found that structured forgiveness education significantly enhanced both forgiveness and psychological well-being. Interestingly, sex, age, and duration of marriage did not significantly influence outcomes, indicating that interventions can be universally beneficial for married couples regardless of demographic factors.

Not all offenses, however, are easily forgiven. Osei-Tutu et al. (2019) state that physical abuse, sexually transmitted infections, infertility, and false accusations are most of the offences that are regarded as irreparable violations of the conjugal culture. Similarly, Sahan (2021) found that unforgivable experiences, such as neglect, abuse, infidelity, financial problems,

communication problems, etc., were related to weak marital relationships, and through regression analyses, it was found that unforgivable experiences predicted low marital satisfaction.

These studies demonstrate that while forgiveness is highly valued in Ghanaian marriages, its implementation is influenced by cultural norms, gender expectations, and the severity of the offense. Culturally informed approaches to conflict resolution, along with structured interventions such as forgiveness education or marital counseling, are necessary for restoring harmony and promoting well-being among couples.

Gender differences in hurt and forgiveness

Studies show that males and females can have different strategies in responding to hurt and forgiveness depending on their socialization, cultural practices, and biological orientation. Tsirigotis et al. (2013) studied the response of men and women to hurtful events in relationships and the behaviors that hurt themselves or the relationships indirectly, including avoidance of communication, emotional withdrawal, or not performing duties. Among young adults (399 women and 159 men) aged 19-25, men were more likely to give such responses, and women were less likely to give such responses. These behaviors were associated with masculinity-related traits and encouraged constructive coping strategies, which were associated with femininity-related traits. The results highlight the relevance of gender and personality to hurtful experience management among couples.

Ghaemmaghami et al. (2011) explored gender differences in forgiveness of real-life transgressions across emerging, young, middle-aged, and older adults. Participants recalled their most recent serious interpersonal offense and completed the TRIM-18 inventory assessing avoidance, revenge, and benevolence toward the offender. Forgiveness was more prominent in everyday life for middle-aged adults and women. Similarly, Valor-Segura et al. (2010) found

that women experience both negative and positive emotions more intensely than men, feeling greater hurt and anger after transgressions, which may influence their willingness to forgive. Schumman and Ross (2010) suggested that men's stronger tolerance for physical and emotional suffering may explain why they perceive breaches as less severe.

Gender differences in forgiveness have also been investigated in larger syntheses. Miller et al. (2008), in a meta-analysis of 53 articles (70 studies), found that women were slightly more forgiving than men (mean d = 0.28), with the most significant differences in vengeance, where women displayed less desire for revenge. These differences may stem from dispositional qualities, functional differences in processing forgiveness, and situational cues.

Kaleta and Mróz (2021) examined dispositional forgiveness and emotional correlates in 625 adults (478 women, 147 men), finding that men showed higher overall forgiveness and willingness to overcome unforgiveness than women, while both genders were similar in positive facets of forgiveness. Negative emotions, anxiety, and poor emotional control were negatively associated with forgiveness for both genders, but controlling anxiety was negatively related to forgiveness in women and positively in men.

Finkel et al. (2002) reported that male partners tended to forgive female partners more quickly, favoring pragmatic stability and conditional forgiveness. Root and Exline (2011) found that men and women respond differently to experimental forgiveness prompts. In one study, undergraduate men and women (106 women, 79 men) were assigned to control or forgiveness conditions emphasizing personal benefit, moral obligation, or goodwill. All conditions increased forgiveness in men, particularly the goodwill condition, whereas women's responses remained consistent. A second study (106 men, 112 women) showed that women generally invested more effort into forgiveness beforehand and viewed it as a gradual, healing process. Together, these

findings suggest men respond more to external prompts, whereas women engage in ongoing, self-directed forgiveness.

Toussaint and Webb (2005) examined the role of empathy in forgiveness among 127 community participants, finding that women were more empathic than men, although overall forgiveness did not differ by gender. Interestingly, empathy predicted forgiveness for men but not for women, highlighting that empathy may facilitate forgiveness more strongly in men. Cabras et al. (2020) explored gender and age differences in forgiveness in Polish and Italian samples (N = 1,957, 61% women, 39% men) using the Heartland Forgiveness Scale. No cross-country differences in overall forgivingness were found, but gender differences emerged in the full sample and Italian subsample, with men more forgiving than women. However, this contrasts with Miller et al. (2008), suggesting that factors such as personality, relational values, and dispositional traits like agreeableness and empathy may modulate gender effects on forgiveness.

Kato and Okubo (2023) examined responses to sexual and emotional infidelity in 1,572 participants (660 men, 912 women). They found that being in a committed relationship, rather than sex or 2D:4D ratio, predicted greater distress over infidelity, supporting the sexual imagination hypothesis. This suggests that men and women respond similarly to infidelity when relationship context is considered. Garrido-Macías and Arriaga (2020) investigated women's perceptions of sexual coercion in 498 college women, showing verbal coercion was judged less negatively than physical, and that dependence on a partner or prior coercion increased tolerance. The results showed that victims of current intimate partner sexual coercion took longer to recognize risk and respond, and were less likely to leave abusive situations, with commitment predicting slower responses in past victims.

Put together, these studies reveal complex gendered patterns in hurt and forgiveness: men may show more direct forgiveness or respond more to external prompts, women tend to experience and process emotions more intensely, invest effort in self-directed forgiveness, and exhibit nuanced responses to relational hurts such as sexual coercion. Age and relationship context further modulate these gendered responses, emphasizing the importance of considering both gender and situational factors when studying forgiveness and relational coping.

Age differences in hurt and forgiveness

Research indicates that age differences influence how individuals perceive and react to hurtful or negative events in relationships. Baumeister et al. (2001) demonstrated that negative events have stronger emotional and cognitive effects than positive events, suggesting that younger adults may experience and remember negative events more intensely, making them more susceptible to hurtful situations. Coats and Blanchard-Fields (2013) found that older adults reported less anger and used more passive and fewer proactive emotion-regulation strategies in interpersonal situations compared to younger age groups, indicating that decreased negative emotional reactivity influences how older adults cope with interpersonal challenges. Similarly, Charles et al. (2010) observed that older women experienced fewer daily stressors and less frequent negative affect, suggesting that reduced exposure to stressors contributes to diminished negative emotional experiences with age. These findings collectively suggest that older adults are generally less emotionally reactive and better able to regulate responses to hurtful or challenging interpersonal events than younger adults.

Allemand (2008) investigated age differences in forgivingness, considering the influence of social proximity and future time perspective. Results showed that older adults were generally more willing to forgive than younger adults. For older adults, social proximity (friend versus acquaintance) did not affect forgivingness, whereas younger adults were more forgiving toward

friends than acquaintances. Additionally, perceptions of future time moderated forgivingness, with limited future time perspective having a smaller effect on older adults compared to younger adults.

Toussaint et al. (2001) study examined age differences in forgiveness and its association with religiousness/spirituality and health outcomes using national probability data. The results showed that middle-aged and older adults reported higher levels of forgiving others and feeling forgiven by God compared to young adults. Additionally, the link between forgiveness of others and self-reported mental and physical health was stronger for middle-aged and older adults than for young adults.

Ghaemmaghami et al. (2011) conducted a study examining forgiveness of real-life transgressions across different age groups, including emerging, young, middle-aged, and older adults. Participants recalled their most recent serious interpersonal offense and completed the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM-18), which measures avoidance, revenge, and benevolence motivations toward the offender. The results indicated that middle-aged adults expressed more avoidance than younger adults, and forgiveness was a more prominent subject in everyday life for middle-aged adults. Young men exhibited a greater motivation to seek revenge than middle-aged and older men, whereas no age differences were observed for women.

Also, Charles and Almeida (2009), in a daily diary study with 151 middle-aged adults, observed that older adults view daily stressors as less severe and are less affected by interpersonal conflicts than younger adults. Blanchard-Fields and Coats (2008), in a survey of 220 adults aged 20–80, similarly found that as people age, life experiences often lead them to handle relational hurts with less intensity, often choosing to avoid conflict or respond passively.

Cabras et al. (2020) examined gender and age differences in forgivingness across Polish and Italian samples (N = 1,957, aged 18–80). Participants completed the Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS), and a 3-way ANOVA tested the effects of country, age, and gender. The findings revealed that older adults were more forgiving than younger respondents, a trend observed in the overall sample, the Polish subsample, and among Italian males.

Miller et al. (2008), in a meta-analysis of 53 articles (70 studies), also noted that forgiveness generally increases with age, suggesting that developmental factors and accumulated life experience contribute to greater forgivingness among older adults.

Steiner et al. (2011) examined age differences in the disposition to forgive, considering the role of interpersonal transgression frequency and intensity. A representative cross-sectional sample of Swiss adults (N = 451, aged 20–83) completed self-report measures on forgivingness and reported the frequency and intensity of transgressions experienced over the past 12 months. The results revealed that older adults were, on average, more willing to forgive others than younger adults. Additionally, both the frequency and intensity of transgressions decreased with age, and these factors partially explained the observed age differences in forgivingness.

Research Question

1. What are the types of hurtful events couples encounter in their relationships?

Statement of Hypothesis

H1: Demographic characteristics such as Age and length of relationship will negatively influence the impact of hurtful events.

H1a: There will be a significant decrease in the impact of hurtful events with age.

H1b: Impact of hurtful events will decrease over time in longer relationships.

H2: Negative appraisals of hurtful events will significantly decrease when length of relationship increases.

H3: Decisional and emotional forgiveness among spouses will differ significantly based on religion.

H4- Higher levels of impact of hurt among couples will be associated with high levels of negative appraisals for both partners

H5- Higher levels of impact of hurt and negative appraisals among couples will be associated with lower levels of forgiveness for both partners.

H5a - Higher impacts of hurt within a dyad will be associated with lower levels of forgiveness for both partners.

H5b - Higher levels of negative appraisals within a dyad will be associated with lower levels of forgiveness for both partners.

H6- Factors like religion and length of relationship will moderate the relationship between negative appraisals, the impact of hurt, and decisional forgiveness.

H6a - Religious homogamy will moderate the relationship between negative appraisal and decisional forgiveness.

H6b- Length of relationship will moderate the relationship between the Impact of hurt and decisional forgiveness.

Operational Definitions of Terms

- **Hurtful Events**: Specific relational transgressions (e.g., criticism, infidelity, neglect) reported by couples in this study.
- **Impact of Hurt**: Participants' subjective appraisal of the intensity of emotional pain of the hurtful event.

- **Negative Appraisals**: Cognitive evaluations of the offender's intent and harm caused by the transgression.
- **Forgiveness**: The reduction of negative feelings and motivation for revenge, and desire to cultivate other-oriented emotions (e.g., empathy) towards the offender, operationalized as decisional and emotional forgiveness.
- **Decisional Forgiveness**: A behavioral intention to act positively toward the offender despite the transgression.
- **Emotional Forgiveness**: The replacement of negative emotions with empathy and compassion toward the offender.
- **Religious Homogamy**: A situation in which partners within a couple share the same religious faith tradition or belong to the same religious denomination or church.

Rationale of the study

Hurts among couples significantly impact the outcomes of marriage. As revealed by Martinez-Diaz et al. (2021), how couples handle these hurts in their committed relationships significantly influences the overall success of their marriages. Unforgiven betrayals and acts of deception increase the likelihood of eventual separation or divorce (Martinez-Diaz et al., 2021), while lingering grudges corrode bonds. Marriages, where serious hurts go unaddressed, tend to decline in satisfaction and stability over time (Fincham & May, 2016). Engaging in open and vulnerable communication about hurtful experiences promotes intimacy and reconciliation, strengthens marital bonds, facilitates forgiveness, and reduces the risk of relationship breakdown (Quek & Fitzpatrick, 2013; Waldron & Kelley, 2008).

Forgiveness is an important part of married life, positively impacting the happiness of both parties involved (Worthington, 2005). Couples who overlook and forgive their

transgressions have successful marriages (Jensen et al., 2021). Acknowledging and working through forgiveness goes a long way to creating marital satisfaction (Mirzadeh & Fallahchai, 2012). The body of evidence demonstrates that how well couples navigate through inevitable hurtful events is highly predictive of marital outcomes, highlighting the importance of handling conflict as an essential relational skill.

Across cultures, findings consistently show that hurtful events undermine relational stability, but there is no consensus on whether forgiveness differs more by gender or by cultural expectations. This unresolved debate provides the basis for exploring how Ghanaian couples uniquely negotiate hurt and forgiveness. This study aims to examine the types of hurts couples encounter in their relationships, how these hurts are appraised, and how forgiveness impacts the course and direction of relationships. It will also influence focus areas for psychologists in mediation and couples' therapy.

Conceptual framework

Conceptual frameworks are graphical explanations of key variables, constructs, and concepts and the relationships presumed to exist between them (Maxwell, 2005). As proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), the conceptual framework can be descriptive or causal, theory-driven, elaborate, or rudimentary. As such, Rocco and Plakhotnik (2009) suggest that the conceptual framework is aimed at describing and classifying significant study concepts, mapping the connections between them.

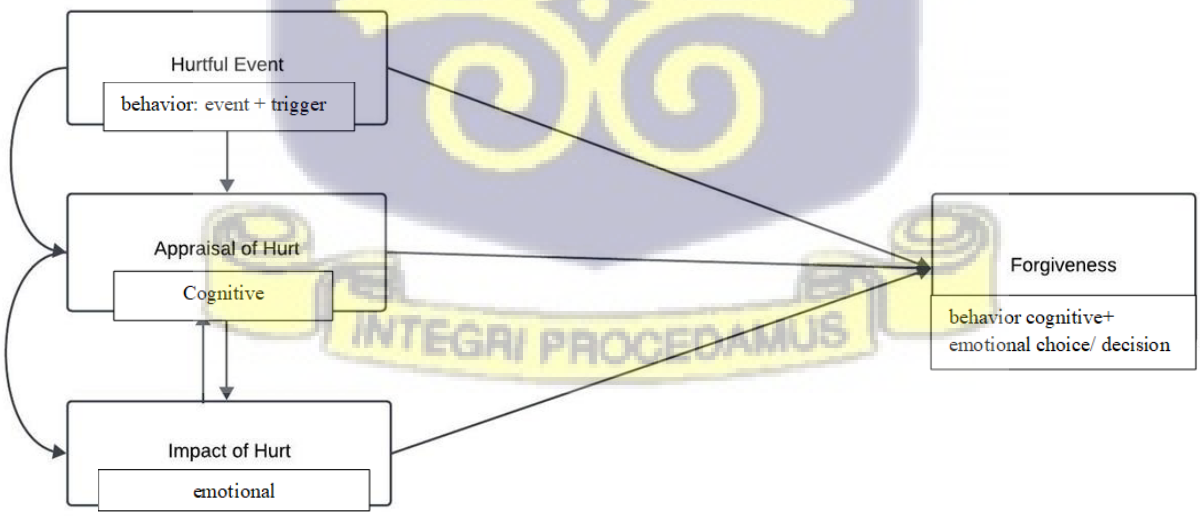
When couples encounter hurts in their relationship, the immediate emotional reactions impact the intensity of hurt. Severe hurts may lead to negative appraisals, producing feelings of betrayal, anger, or guilt. These appraisals also influence the motives behind forgiveness or unforgiveness. Negative appraisals can result in unforgiveness, characterized by lingering

resentment or emotional withdrawal. The process of appraisal thus acts as a mediating factor between the experience of hurt and the subsequent emotional and behavioral responses.

In this study, the impact of hurt plays a central role in the model. As shown in the diagram, hurtful events directly influence both the appraisal of hurt and the emotional impact they generate. The model further illustrates a reciprocal relationship between appraisal and impact, suggesting that the way an event is evaluated can intensify or lessen its emotional consequences, while the intensity of hurt can also shape subsequent appraisals. High-impact hurts are more likely to trigger negative appraisals, such as betrayal, anger, or resentment, which in turn reduce the tendency to forgive. By contrast, low-impact hurts allow more equalizing appraisals and therefore make forgiveness and relational resilience easier to achieve. In mapping these pathways, the framework emphasizes that forgiveness is not the product of the hurtful event itself, but the result of the interplay between two factors: the impact of hurt, and the appraisal process.

Figure 3

Proposed Conceptual Framework



CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A convergent parallel design was employed for the study (Creswell, 2021; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). This approach combined both quantitative and qualitative methods to examine hurtful events and forgiveness at a single point in time, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under investigation. The study was conducted in two parts simultaneously: the qualitative part explored the types of hurtful events married couples encounter, while the quantitative part assessed the impact of hurtful events and negative appraisals on forgiveness. This type of design was chosen due to the possibility of collecting different perspectives of the participants regarding the issues being studied, as well as making generalizations and inferences based on the responses of the participants to the population (Adhikary et al., 2022).

Population

The study population consisted of couples who were married or cohabiting in the Tema Metropolitan Assembly. The Tema Metropolitan Assembly is located east of the capital city, in the Greater Accra Region. It is one of the two metropolises in the Region (Greater Accra Region – Local Government Service, 2015) and the ninth most populous settlement in Ghana with about 392,177 inhabitants (Ghana Statistical Services, 2021) from different social classes. It was built on the site of a small fishing village by Ghana's first president and consists of 25 communities, including Spintex, Tema Newtown, and Dawhenya, with each having easy access to basic amenities. These were homes and religious organizations that provided convenient places for couples to meet. Locating couples through their homes and religious congregations is a common practice in Ghana, as in many parts of the world.

Inclusion criteria

To qualify for the study, couples had to be either married or cohabiting residents of the Tema Metropolis who have been in their relationship for at least one year and whose partners are both aged 18 years or older.

Exclusion criteria

Couples were excluded if they were separated or undergoing divorce during data collection, or if either partner was unwilling to provide informed consent..

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample consisted of married and cohabiting couples in Ghana who had been in their relationships for at least one year. Participants were recruited without regard to religion, ethnicity, age, or gender to minimize selection bias and ensure inclusion across demographic groups. This wide sampling method helped ensure a more representative sample because it included a range of experiences within Ghanaian couples who may have experienced hurtful experiences within their relationships. This inclusive sampling was also oriented to reflect the heterogeneity of romantic unions in Ghana, where long-term commitment is often accompanied by either formal marriage or living together.

Convenience and purposive sampling methods were applied when choosing the participants (Etikan, 2016). Purposive sampling involves the deliberate selection of individuals based on specific features, expertise, experiences, or other criteria (Rai & Thapa, 2015), while convenience sampling entails selecting persons primarily based on their availability, willingness, or ease of access (Golzar et al., 2022). These non-random techniques do not require underlying

theories or a predetermined number of informants. The researcher identified those who had knowledge or experience of the phenomenon of interest who were willing to participate (Bernard, 2002; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Lewis & Sheppard, 2006).

For this research, one hundred and two (102) couples were sampled from the population using the combined purposive and convenience techniques. The sample size was guided by the rule of thumb suggested by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007), who recommend $N > 50 + 8m$, where N = sample size and m = number of independent variables (2 IVs in this study). Thus, a minimum sample of 66 participants was required; the final sample of 102 couples exceeded this threshold, ensuring adequate statistical power. This also aligns with Dillman's (2000) assertion that a sample greater than 100 provides a trustworthy representation of a study population.

The prospective participants initially consisted of 120 couples; however, out of these, a total of 204 responses (102 couples) were used for the study. Although 240 questionnaires were distributed, 208 were retrieved, representing a response rate of 87%. Four (4) questionnaires were excluded after further examination because a couple had separated during the course of the study. Consequently, 204 valid questionnaires (102 couples, 85%) were used for analysis. All couples were heterogeneous, ensuring an even representation of males and females.

All 204 participants (102 couples) contributed to both the quantitative and qualitative phases. The qualitative data were collected using a prompt (an open-text box included in the questionnaire), where participants briefly described or gave phrases about the hurtful events they experienced in their relationships. No interviews were conducted; thus, every participant provided qualitative data alongside their quantitative responses. This approach ensured that the same individuals' experiences were represented in both strands of the mixed-methods design.

Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected in two parts to reflect the mixed-methods design: qualitative and quantitative.

Qualitative data

Hurtful Events Narrative. Following Feeney (2004), Participants responded to a retrospective narrative of hurtful events using a prompt (an open-text box) included in the questionnaire. Participants were asked to briefly describe or provide phrases about hurtful events encountered in their relationships. No interviews were conducted; all 204 participants (102 couples) contributed qualitative data**.**

Quantitative data

Multiple validated scales were used to measure participants' emotional responses and forgiveness levels:

Impact of Event Scale. The Impact of Event Scale (IES) by Horowitz et al. (1979) is one of the most commonly used scales for measuring the subjective distress experienced by people in response to traumatic events. The IES measures the frequency of intrusive thoughts and avoidant behaviors that the participants report they have experienced over the past week. It contains 15 items that represent two major dimensions of post-traumatic stress response, namely intrusion and avoidance. Each item is rated on a 4-point Likert scale with high scores translating to higher levels of distress and a greater number of symptoms. The scale has a high internal consistency (a = 0.96).

The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS). Watson et al.'s (1988) Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) is the most widely used rating scale for the complexity of human emotions. It is made up of 20 words, each of which stands for a specific emotional state of both positive and negative nature. To this point, the NA scale, which includes items such as

"distressed", "upset", "guilty", "scared", and "hostile", among others, was utilized in this study to measure the emotional states of the participants in response to hurtful events they experienced from their partners. Each item on the PANAS is scored on a five-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 (very slightly or not at all) to 5 (extremely). The internal consistency (Cronbach's α) of the NA of the PANAS scale is high (α = 0.84-0.87). It also has good test-retest reliability, with correlations for NA ranging from 0.39 to 0.71 from test to retest over interval times.

Trait Forgiveness Scale. The Trait Forgiveness Scale (TFS) developed by Berry et al. (2005) is a psychological measurement instrument that attempts to assess an individual's disposition to forgive across situations and contexts. It contains 10 items that subjects respond to on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). It contains items such as: I am a forgiving person, I find it hard to forgive other people (reverse scored), I get over it quickly when someone hurts my feelings. The TFS has also been found to have good internal cohesion, with a Cronbach alpha of 0.75-0.85.

Decision to Forgive Scale (DTFS; Davis D. et al., 2015). The DTFS is the psychological assessment tool used to evaluate the conscious and voluntary decision that an individual made to forgive persons who have wronged them in certain circumstances. Items in the scale will be rated on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 (strongly disagree) at one end, and 5 (strongly agree) at the other end. These items measure how far a person has gone in deciding whether to forgive an offender. I have resolved to forgive the person who offended me. The internal consistency of the DTFS is very high with a Cronbach alpha value between 0.85 and 0.90.

The Emotional Forgiveness Scale. The Emotional Forgiveness Scale: Worthington et al. (2007a) developed a psychological assessment tool that helps determine the emotional component of forgiveness, i.e., the diminution of negative emotions and replenishment of

positive ones towards an offender. The scale is made up of a sequence of items that the participants rate on a Likert scale in response to questions such as "I no longer feel upset when I think of him or her," "I care about him or her," or "I love him or her". The internal consistency of the EFS is good, and Cronbach's alpha values are generally between 0.69 and 0.83.

Procedure

The research started with the researcher seeking ethical approval from the Ethics Committee for Humanities (ECH) of the University of Ghana. Once approval was given (ECH 252/2-23), data collection took place from October to December 2023. Data were collected by the researcher together with three assistants. The main job of the assistants was to help with the distribution of questionnaires to expedite the data collection. The researcher thoroughly explained the purpose of the research and clarified their roles. The involvement of these individuals helped the researcher gain acceptance within the community.

Questionnaires were administered to individual couples separately at different times to record their responses to hurtful events. To provide convenience for couples who were distant or uncomfortable with face-to-face participation, the researcher created a digital version of the questionnaires using Google Forms. Due to the dyadic nature of the study, participants were required to include identifiable features to allow pairing of their information with their spouses. For those who chose the traditional method, 150 printed questionnaires were distributed in sealed envelopes with pens for use.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants. The purpose of the study, procedures, the voluntary nature of participation, and the right to withdraw at any time were explained. Participants provided consent by signing or marking the consent section of the questionnaire. Anonymity was ensured by advising participants not to write their names on the

printed questionnaires, and online participants were assigned unique codes for matching with their spouses while maintaining privacy. Confidentiality was guaranteed by storing physical questionnaires under key and restricting digital access to the researcher and assistants only. Participants were verbally and in writing assured that their responses would not be shared with anyone outside the research team.

After providing consent, participants completed the questionnaires, which required self-reporting. The appointed assistant followed up after one to two weeks to collect completed questionnaires and provide clarification on misunderstood items. For example, words like grudge, jittery, resentment and irritable were explained easy understanding. Participants were not financially compensated; however, they were thanked for their voluntary participation. The filled-out questionnaires were then returned to researcher for analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was sought from the Ethics Committee for Humanities (ECH 252/ 2-23) of the University of Ghana before data collection began. Informed consent, which is an ethical consideration in research, requires that participants be fully informed about the procedures and risks involved in research and must give their consent to participate. Informed consent was employed in the study to explain and give participants detailed information about the purpose of the study. Participants were made aware that the study would involve no risk and then signed to confirm their voluntary participation. The researcher guaranteed the participant's confidentiality with a verbal statement as well as the written form to put in strict privacy. They were assured that provided information would not be made available to anyone who is not directly involved in the study and this was achieved because the data collected was locked under key. The principle of anonymity which essentially means that the participant's identity will not

be revealed throughout the study even to the researchers themselves, was employed. This was done because names were not required or needed to be stated on the questionnaires, thus guaranteeing privacy.

Analysis of Data

The data for this study were analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative methods, reflecting the mixed-methods design. The two strands of analysis were conducted independently and later integrated during interpretation to provide a comprehensive understanding of hurtful events and forgiveness among Ghanaian couples. The convergent parallel design made it necessary to use analyses that directly addressed the research objectives. The qualitative strand (content analysis) explored the descriptive question of what forms of hurt couples' experience and how participants phrased them, whereas the quantitative strand tested hypothesized relationships among hurt impact, appraisals, and forgiveness to provide estimates of effect size and generalizability. Analytical techniques were therefore chosen to align with these purposes: Pearson correlations for bivariate associations, MANOVA for multivariate group comparisons while controlling Type I error, Actor–Partner Interdependence Models (APIM) through multilevel modeling to account for dyadic non-independence, and hierarchical regression to assess incremental contributions of demographic and relational variables. The combination of these approaches provided triangulation, strengthened construct validity, and allowed for a coherent translation from narratives to measurable relationships.

Qualitative Analysis

The first part of the study involved the qualitative analysis of hurts narrated by participants, performed using Qualitative Content Analysis (Schreier, 2012). This method systematically analyzes text data through coding to identify repeated patterns or themes, thereby developing a

deeper understanding of meaning (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). It is particularly helpful in interpreting interpersonal relationships and social phenomena, as it reveals the evolution of concepts into relationships beyond word frequency. It is also a suitable instrument for investigating hurtful events between couples, opening the opportunity to explore subjective narrative realities and the meanings given to them. In this study, qualitative content analysis provided a nuanced understanding of the complexities of hurtful events, including emotional responses, communication patterns, and coping strategies.

Unlike thematic analysis, which emphasizes latent or semantic patterns across interview data, or grounded theory, which requires iterative theoretical sampling aimed at generating new theory, conventional content analysis was appropriate here because the qualitative data were brief, retrospective narratives embedded in a questionnaire (N = 204) (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This approach allowed systematic classification of manifest content, efficient handling of a large sample size, and quantification of categories that could be compared to the quantitative strand.

The process involved defining typologies, developing a coding scheme informed by existing literature, training coders, coding the content, ensuring reliability and validity, and analyzing and presenting results. Typologies of hurtful events were defined based on frameworks by Feeney (2004) and Osei-Tutu et al. (2019), categorizing events into types such as deception, criticism, neglect, and disrespect. Using this method, the study identified the types of hurtful events couples encounter in their relationships, such as neglect of duty, disrespect, and infidelity. Although existing typologies provided an initial frame, an inductive approach was applied to ensure participants' voices shaped the categories.

Two distinct clusters emerged that were not adequately captured by existing categories: humiliation, which described experiences of public shaming and loss of dignity, and insecurity, which referred to doubts about partner commitment and fears regarding relational stability. These were retained as separate categories because they represent theoretically distinct forms of threat: humiliation as a social-value threat and insecurity as an attachment-related threat (Bowlby, 1969). Their inclusion increased explanatory precision when linking hurt typologies to appraisal and forgiveness patterns. The researcher then explored how these typologies connected to relational consequences of hurtful events within the larger context of relationship dynamics and individual characteristics.

Coding

Following Luo et al.'s (2018) coding process in the qualitative content analysis framework, codes generated explicitly by other researchers on hurtful events were matched with the responses of participants from this study. The approach began with data preparation, followed by defining the Unit of analysis and coding all texts. Using qualitative content analysis, the data were analyzed deductively, examining the relationship between keywords under each code. The goal was to address the first and fourth objectives of the study: 1) Explore the different types of hurt experienced by Ghanaian couples in their relationships and 2) assess the uniqueness of gender and age differences in hurtful events among couples. To achieve this goal, the following analysis was done to: a) identify the types of hurtful events couples have encountered, b) the age differences in hurtful events, and c) the gender differences in hurtful events.

First, the researcher acquainted herself with the content of the dataset by reading the text several times to get an idea of the overall themes and patterns in the text. A codebook listing definitions and examples was used to develop a detailed coding scheme that multiple coders could

apply in a consistent manner. The researcher went through the codebook and tested herself on a portion of the data.

This was done using the codes, which were independently applied to the same subset by two peers. The coding was done by carefully applying the scheme to the data, disaggregating the data into units that could be interpreted, and assigning the correct typologies. This process was repeated, with tests of intercoder reliability carried out periodically. The coding scheme was then modified based on the feedback. After coding, the data was analyzed to determine the frequency of each type and to identify patterns and trends.

The purpose of this was to identify words, phrases, or ideas that recurred often enough that they could serve as categories of coding. The researcher then came up with a coding scheme. This included developing a set of categories derived from pre-existing categories devised by Feeney (2004) and Ose-Tutu et al. (2019) that would be used for analysis of the data. They were based on clear and defined typologies of hurtful events available from existing studies that could be reliably applied to the dataset. Codes were subsequently defined below according to similarities and meanings reported by other researchers, as well as based on the dataset. The data was then divided into subsections based on similarity of words or phrases (e.g., words such as care and affection were placed under the same subsection) so that the data could be coded efficiently. Subsequently, the researcher applied the code systematically to the text according to the predefined categories using the meaning of words and the relationship between words, as well as the similarity of their contents as a criterion for coding. Finally, the researcher interpreted the coded content through an exploration of relationships between codes, determining patterns and trends within the data and drawing conclusions from the analysis.

Reflexivity and Trustworthiness

Reflexivity is a continuous, collaborative, and diverse range of activities that serves to help researchers critically, self-reflectively, and reflexively examine, appraise, and evaluate how their subjectivity and context inform research practices (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). The researcher, in order to maintain integrity and credibility throughout the research, has kept the reflexivity intact and has shed light on her biases and preconceptions.

Maintaining trustworthiness is necessary for ensuring the legitimacy and dependability of qualitative findings. The characteristics evaluated are credibility, transferability, reliability, and confirmability (Ahmed, 2024). Approaches such as member verification, peer debriefing, and extensive recording of the study process strengthened trustworthiness to ensure transparency and reliability.

To assess coding consistency, the participants' responses were organized and classified into a reliability matrix. The data, reviewed by multiple coders, was analyzed for agreement levels. Marginal distributions were used to estimate chance agreement, and Cohen's kappa (κ) was calculated from the 204 coded responses (into 10 types of hurtful events) to determine coding reliability (McHugh, 2012). Cohen's kappa (κ) is a statistical measure used to assess inter-rater reliability, indicating how much agreement exists between different raters when classifying observations (McHugh, 2012). A high kappa score (0.6 – 0.8) suggests substantial reliability in categorizing events, while a score above 0.8 indicates near-perfect agreement. The table below gives a summary of the kappa ratings:

Table 1

Inter-rater reliability for typologies of hurt

Types of Hurt	K
Active Disassociation	0.77
Passive Disassociation	0.79
Sexual Infidelity	0.81
Disrespect	0.72
Violence	0.83
Deception	0.88
Criticism	0.81
Insecurity	0.76
Humiliation	0.67
Neglect of Duty	0.75

Quantitative Analysis

Part two involved the quantitative analysis of survey responses. This strand examined the hypothesized relationships between the impact of hurt, appraisals, and forgiveness. A series of statistical techniques was employed to test the study's hypotheses. Specifically:

Pearson correlations were conducted to test Hypotheses 1a, 1b, and 2, which examined associations among age, relationship length, hurt impact, and forgiveness. Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was used to assess group differences across multiple dependent variables in Hypothesis 3.

Actor–Partner Interdependence Models (APIM) using multilevel modeling were employed for Hypotheses 4 and 5, capturing dyadic interdependence and gender differences in the relationship between appraisals and forgiveness.

Hierarchical regression analysis was employed to test Hypothesis 6, evaluating the incremental contribution of demographic and relational factors in predicting forgiveness.

Given the dyadic nature of the study, multilevel modeling was essential to account for the non-independence of data from partners in the same couple. This ensured that both actor effects (the influence of one's own variables on outcomes) and partner effects (the influence of a partner's variables) were adequately modeled.

For ease of presentation, the qualitative findings are reported in Chapter 4, accompanied by a discussion specific to those results. Chapter 5 presents the quantitative findings, together with their respective discussion. Chapter 6 provides a general discussion, which synthesizes and integrates findings from both strands of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

This section presents the qualitative analysis and findings from participants' responses, conducted using content analysis. This approach was applied to categorize the data and identify patterns within the narratives systematically.

Participants

A total of 102 couples (N = 204; M = 1.50, SD = 0.501) took part in the study. 81.4% (n = 166) were married and 18.6% (n = 38) were cohabiting. 71.1% (n = 145) of couples had been married for less than 10 years, 16.2% (n = 33) had been married for 10 to 20 years, and 12.7% (n = 26) had been married for more than 21 years (M = 1.42, SD = 0.049).

Thematic Results

The analysis of the hurtful events encountered by individuals' responses, using content analysis, identified ten (10) hurt categories couples encounter in their relationships: 1) Active disassociation, 2) Passive disassociation, 3) Infidelity, 4) Disrespect, 5) Abuse, 6) Deception, 7) Neglect of duty, and 8) insecurity 9) Humiliation 10) Criticism. In the following paragraphs, we define the various types of hurtful events with illustrations from participants' responses. The summary is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Summary of typologies of hurt and examples

Typology	Codes in the present study	Examples
Active Disassociation	Unaffectionate	*[spouse] not being affectionate*
	Neglect	*He abandoned me for 2 years*
	Lack of support	
	Avoidance	
Passive Disassociation	Ignoring partner	*Making decisions without informing [spouse]*
	Including 3rd parties	*involving others instead of one's partner in decision-making*
	Poor communication	*not answering [spouse] call*
Infidelity	Cheating	*Cheating on [spouse]*
	Extramarital affairs	*She slept with her work colleague*
	Flirting	*Flirting with his boss*
Disrespect	Feeling devalued	*She disrespected and undermined me*
	Disregard	*Negative attitude towards a friend*
	Public criticism	*He snubbed me in public*
	Raising voices	*Spoken over when discussing issues*
Abusive Behavior	Verbal abuse	*Using abusive words*
	Physical abuse	*He maltreated me and destroyed me to people*
	Controlling behaviors	*She is over-controlling as a female*
Deception	Lying	*He lied*
	Complaining to others	*Discussing our personal issues with outsiders…*
	Hiding vital information	*He kept a secret from me*
Neglect of duty	giving excuses	*Always giving one excuse …*
	Mistaken priorities	*Majority of her time is spent on church activities.*
	Unsupportive Behavior	*She is unsupportive*
Insecurity	Insecure behaviors	*She overly demands for attention…because of her insecurities*
	Trust issues	*I don't think she trusts me*
criticism	Nagging	
	Over-talking	*She likes nagging*
	Complaining	*She complains a lot about everything…*
Humiliations	Public humiliation	*He humiliated me at a family gathering*
	Embarrassment	

Typologies of Hurtful Events

Active Disassociation. As defined by Feeney (2004), active disassociation was defined as "denying or retracting feelings of love and commitment". A majority (n = 32) of the participants indicated that they had experienced some form of hurt related to active disassociation in the course of their relationships. The offenses under active disassociation depicted one of the spouses actively disassociating themselves from their partners by engaging in actions and behaviors that took them out of the picture when it came to their relationships. Some of the recorded offenses categorized under this theme were:

Some participants held the perception that their partners lacked sufficient affection in the course of their relationships. A lack of affection among couples could include loneliness, neglect, a feeling unloved, perceiving one's partner as distant, and an interest solely in others other than one's partner. For example:

"His not being affectionate" (F300, 27-year-old female,)

"Not paying attention to my emotional needs" (F308, 28-year-old female).

"*I was very sick she did not care."* (t F356, 51-year-old female).

Some participants also expressed dissatisfaction with being neglected, deliberately avoided, or completely abandoned within their romantic partnerships, all of which were classified within the overarching framework of active disassociation. For example:

"He's out of the scene when a sudden event happens and this takes some weeks till he's back when it's has been resolved" (F328, 38-year-old female).

"She moved out of the house because she was angry with me, without we resolving the issue" (M331, 53-year-old male).

Passive Disassociation. Passive disassociation was defined as being ignored or excluded from the other's plans, activities, conversations, or important disclosures. Some participants (n=16) also recorded offenses under passive disassociation. The offenses under passive disassociation took the opposite of active disassociation. Hurts depicted one of the spouses including third parties in decisions instead of one's partner was a major offense under passive disassociation. For example,

"Listening to his family to change our already planned programmed date" (F329, 35-year-old female).

Again, poor communication marked as ignoring one's partner due to one's own personal reasons also fell under passive disassociation; especially when one partner refused or failed to communicate with the other:

"Not returning my missed calls and not picking up an unknown number" (M317, 36-year-old male).

These are confirmations that poor communication according to participants are an offense under passive disassociation.

Infidelity. Another dominant theme under hurtful events recorded by couples (n=27) was infidelity. Infidelity encompasses a spectrum of behaviors from emotional betrayals to physical affairs. Infidelity occurs when one partner engages in emotional or sexual activities with someone outside of that relationship without the consent of the partner. One term used to describe Infidelity was cheating. For example:

"She cheated on me several times" (M300, 33-year-old male).

"I saw text messages of her cheating on me" (M346, 38-year-old male).

"Cheating with our neighbor" (F382, 31-year-old female).

Having an affair with someone other than one's partner was also an offense that fell under infidelity:

"Having an affair with a friend she claimed to be her relative" (M371, 37-year-old male).

"He had a baby outside of our marriage" (F349, 38-year-old female).

"I caught him red-handed with our neighbor's daughter" (F397, 32-year-old female).

Another dominant offense under infidelity was flirting with others outside one's relationship. For instance:

"Flirting with the house help" (F374, 35-year-old female).

"Flirting with his boss" (F391, 39-year-old female).

Some couples also termed their spouses engaging sexual relations even before marriage or cohabiting is seen as an offense among couples' relationships. For example, some participants recorded the following:

"Had a child before marriage which I knew nothing about" (F357, 39-year-old female).

"She cheated on me while we were dating and repeated the same action in the early months of our marriage. With evidence, I believe she is still doing it" (F325, 32-year-old male).

Infidelity was also described with phrases which depicted one's partner's unfaithfulness. Some other forms of behaviors which fell under Infidelity are as follows:

"I noticed one of his undies was missing. I asked him and he ignored. Later, he came home one from work and I realized he had changed his undies to the one I asked about. It's obvious what he has been up to" (F366, 31-year-old female).

"Ineffective communication on his relationship with my friend" (F353, 29-year-old female).

Disrespect. Disrespect refers to behavior or actions that show a lack of consideration, regard, or courtesy towards others**.** Disrespect is regarded as a hurt among couples, especially when they feel devalued, disregarded, or treated unfairly, as indicated by participants. Most offenses (n=42) recorded by participants, that fell under disrespect, can be categorized as offenses that make one's partner feel belittled or embarrassed.

"She borrowed from her friend and a relative without letting me know anything about it. ..." (M307, 44-year-old male).

"She disrespected and undermined me" (M342, 33-year-old male).

In addition, some couples considered it disrespectful when their thoughts or gestures were not taken into consideration.

"Imagine given your 'opinion' on something that both of us wanted to embark on, only for her to come back and say, because a friend suggested same thing, we should do it. Or imagine living with someone for more than six years then she tells you this is the best opinion I have ever given since we married. Her words are something else" (M315, 40-year-old male).

The following are some instances of behaviors that fall under the category of disrespectful behavior: talking over or raising one's voice during conversations and fights; using harsh words on one's spouse; both of these behaviors are examples from participants:

"Spoken over when discussing issues" (M307, 31-year-old male)

"He yelled at me" (F314, 29-year-old female)

Violence. Violence encompasses a range of abusive behaviors used by one partner to gain power and control over one's partner. Some couples (n=19) faced some form of violence in their relationships including harsh treatments, abuse among others. One dominant type of violence faced

by couples in marriage were verbal abuse which involves using words, threats, intimidation, or manipulation to control, demean, or degrade the other partner, which were described as using harsh/bad words on one's partner:

"Verbal abuse" (M312, 42-year-old male)

"Use of hash words" (M326, 50-year-old male)

"He told me my sister is more hardworking than I am" (F337, 35-year-old female)

"Using abusive words" (M373, 32-year-old male)

"Uses abusive words whenever there is misunderstanding" (M397, 36-year-old male).

Physical abuse was also a dominant word used to describe hurt among couples. Physical abuse is the intentional use of force or physical aggression to cause harm or injury to another person. Most couples mentioned that their partners had physically abused them which was a form of hurtful event to them. For instance,

"He maltreated me and destroyed me to people" (F313, 52-year-old female).

"Physical abuse" (F378, 38-year-old female).

Domineering and controlling behaviors could not be overlooked. Domineering and controlling behaviors are patterns of behavior characterized by an individual exerting power, authority, or influence over another person in a relationship in a way that is manipulative, coercive, or restrictive. Some participant felt hurt when their partners exhibited such behaviors.

"He is authoritative" (F359, 30-year-old female).

"He is intolerant" (F332, 31-year-old female).

"She is over controlling as a woman" (F349, 40-year-old male).

"He is quick tempered" (F334, 31-year-old female).

Deception. Deception in romantic relationships can involve vague statements, half-truthfulness, minimizing facts, withholding information, or outright lies. Research shows that deception in romantic partners is more motivated by concern for the relationship and partner than other types of relationships, according to Metts (1989). Some couples (n=25) described deception as a hurtful event faced in their relationships. Some offenses described under deception by couples was lying to one's spouse:

"She lied to me about her inability to give me a child while she already has a child" (M313, 58-year-old male).

*"Telling me lies when I already know the truth" (*M316, 30-year-old male).

It was also a problem for some couples because their spouses complain to other people, which violated the confidentiality agreement that they had made with each other. This was an example of deception:

"Gossip about me to friends" (M355, 64-year-old male).

"Discussing our personal issues for second opinion with others" (M378, 47-year-old male).

Keeping secrets or hiding information from one's partner and giving half-truth information also falls under the hurt deception in couples' relationships. Secrets often lead to resentment among couples and this could include withholding vital information from one's partner, confiding in another person instead of one's partner, among others. Some responses from couples that depicted that their spouses kept secrets from them are as follows:

"He kept a secret from me" (F307, 29-year-old female).

"Had a child before marriage which I knew nothing about" (M357, 24-year-old male).

Exhibiting strange attitudes and behaviors that were never known to one's partner at the early stages of their relationship were also seen as deception hence a hurtful event by participants. For example:

"He is pretentious" (F388, 38-year-old female).

Neglect of duty. Neglecting one's duty was also seen as a hurtful event amongst couples (n=6). Hurts under this category were associated with culturally prescribed gender roles. Neglect of duty is mostly seen as the refusal or failure to execute one's duties or responsibilities reasonably and appropriately. hurts under this category were gender specific as culturally described. Some ways couples described neglect of duty are as follows:

"Always giving one excuse from the other whenever I try to get closer as a male" (F311, 32-year-old female).

"My partner did not allow our children to do their house chores" (M321, 73-year-old male).

"Forgetfulness during the performance of her house duties" (F338, 34-year-old female).

One of the offenses that participants described as falling under the category of Neglect of Duty was the practice of giving priority to activities that were not among their required responsibilities in the relationship. For instance:

"Majority of her time is spent on church activities" (M358, 39-year-old male).

"Misplaced priorities" (M341, 34-year-old male).

Insecurity. In addition, insecurity (n=18) is perceived as a hurtful experience for couples. Insecurity can be characterized as emotions of uncertainty, self-doubt, or inadequacy experienced by one or both partners, especially when one of the partners thinks they are not trusted or doubted for reasons that are mainly contradictory to facts about them. Relationship insecurity can manifest

as uncertainty and mistrust, excessive demands for attention, an unwillingness to move on from the past, and mood swings.

One of the most common types of insecurity is characterized by a lack of trust and doubt. In the event when one partner in a relationship challenges the other's actions or intentions without providing sufficient evidence, it can result in emotions of betrayal and hurt.

"She doubted me even when I was innocent." (M312, 39-year-old male)

"She doesn't know how to let go of the past; always holding on to past issues and referring me to them." (M320, 42-year-old male)

Another type of insecurity is excessive demands for attention and loss of trust, in which one spouse continuously wants validation and reassurance, frequently at the expense of the other partner's needs and responsibilities.

"She overly demands for attention even when I'm busy just because of her insecurities." (M330, 54-year-old male)

"Lack of trust." (M368, 31-year-old male)

"I don't think she trusts me." (M363, 53-year-old male)

Among couples, mood swings, and emotional instability are also prevalent forms of insecurity. These variations can lead to erratic and frequently hurtful interactions.

"She has mood swings." (M401, 45-year-old male)

"She complains a lot about everything. We cannot have a decent conversation without she complaining about something" (M334, 46-year-old male)

Humiliation. Humiliation in relationships (n=8) commonly emerges in a variety of negative ways, including public embarrassment personal attacks, and actions that negatively impact one's reputation or relationship status. Public humiliation happens when people are made

to feel insignificant or demeaned in front of others, which can have a negative influence on their self-esteem and mental health. This sort of humiliation is most painful when it involves being humiliated or ignored in public situations when the sensation of exposure is increased.

"He snubbed me in public" (F306, 30-year-old female)

"He snubbed me in front of his family" (F311, 29-year-old female)

Humiliation in relationships can also take the form of personal attacks that target an individual's core identity or intrinsic characteristics. This can cause profound emotional and personal hurt. These attacks can lead to feelings of alienation, devaluation, and insecurity, affecting self-esteem and interpersonal relationships. Cultural or ethnic identity is often intertwined with a person's sense of self and belonging, and attacks on these aspects can erode an individual's sense of dignity and worth. The long-lasting effects on self-esteem and interpersonal relationships highlight the deep emotional pain that arises from assaults on one's fundamental identity and heritage. For example,

"He said I didn't know how to speak because I was an Ashanti and naturally Ashantis are rude." (F360, 52-year-old female)

Actions that are believed to harm one's reputation or image can be a major source of humiliation. When people perceive that their social status or personal reputation has been compromised by gossip, public criticism, or misrepresentation they often experience a profound sense of humiliation. This sensation stems from the sense that their social group perceives them harshly or unjustly.

"She is borrowing from her friend and a relative without letting me know anything about it. And I think it tarnishes my image." (M306, 44-year-old male)

Hidden some issues from me that is borrowing money from a friend on her mother's funeral whiles I had given her money on that…" (M315, 45-year-old male)

Criticism. In relationships, criticism (n=12) frequently consists of personal criticism, false allegations, repeated nagging, and a critical attitude. Personal criticism focuses on an individual's behavior, decisions, or character, leading to feelings of inadequacy and misunderstanding.

"Accusing me of prioritizing my work above my family" (F313, 34-year-old female)

"Derogatory statements due to a fault and misunderstanding." (F304, 33-year-old female)

"In the process of making a point, she ends up using intemperate and inappropriate words that hurt a lot" (M308, 38-year-old male)

False accusations were another type of criticism show how being wrongly accused and denied the opportunity to defend oneself may create tremendous emotional distress, which can be highly painful and hurtful to relationships.

"She accused me falsely without listening to my side of the story before jumping to conclusions" (M398, 50-year-old male)

"He denied his son, accusing me of having an extramarital affair" (F401, 35year-old female)

Repetitive nagging and judgmental attitudes can make individuals feel constantly criticized and unappreciated, leading to frustration and resentment. This can be said to be so when one is constantly feeling evaluated and criticized by their partner.

"She nags a lot" (M380, 58-year-old male)

"Judgmental" (M387, 43-year-old male)

Gender Differences in Hurtful Events

Gender differences in transgressions among couples were also identified. Six offenses were dominated by males and four other offenses dominated by females, of which one offense was unique to only females.

Offenses Predominantly Committed by Males

Male partners were seen to engage more in offenses like active disassociation, passive disassociation, deception, infidelity, and criticism.

Active Disassociation. Active disassociation, primarily among male spouses, is a significant source of emotional distress for women. A majority of men in the study (n=35) were reported to engage in various forms of disassociation, including neglect, abandonment, and lack of affection. Viewed as a male-dominated offense, active disassociation highlights a pattern of behavior where male partners intentionally withdraw emotionally or physically, resulting in feelings of neglect, abandonment, and emotional distress for the female partner. These behaviors exacerbate the power imbalance and the emotional toll on the woman, leading to a disruption of intimacy, trust, and relational stability.

"Not being affectionate" (F300, 27-year-old female)

"He got upset at something trivial which he didn't allow for discussion rather, he reacted inappropriately" (F310, 29-year-old female)

The deliberate act of ignoring a partner, especially for several days, is a classic manifestation of active disassociation. This behavior communicates that the male partner is withholding attention, care, and emotional connection, further deepening the emotional divide in the relationship. Ignoring someone can be seen as a passive-aggressive tactic, where the male partner withdraws his presence to elicit a response, often forcing the female partner to confront her feelings of rejection and abandonment.

"Ignoring me for days" (F323, 34-year-old female).

Passive Disassociation. Passive disassociation, while related to emotional distance, refers to a more subtle or indirect form of disengagement, where one partner withholds involvement or

support without overtly withdrawing. Passive disassociation was notably prevalent among male spouses, as reported in the study (n=10). Male partners reportedly intentionally stopped lg communication for an extended period represents a stark form of emotional abandonment and isolation. By refusing to engage in communication, the male partner strips away the relational closeness and creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and alienation.

"Not communicating with me for almost a month" (F312, 32-year-old female).

Additionally, male partners' frequent failure to discuss new developments or significant decisions with them was seen as a major offense unique to this gender. This lack of communication leaves their partners feeling excluded from important aspects of their lives together.:

"Listening to his family to change our already planned programmed date" (F329, 35-year-old female).

"He brought in another wife without consulting me first and when I complained, he told me he can do whatever he likes" (F386, 38-year-old female).

Infidelity. infidelity was predominantly reported as an offense committed by male spouses (n=15). behaviors of infidelity committed by men was classified as such as extramarital affairs, flirting, and undefined relationships with the opposite sex.

"Extramarital affairs" (F303, 51-year-old female).

"Flirting with another woman" (F354, 34-year-old female).

"Ineffective communication on his relationship with my friend" (F344, 29-year-old female).

Infidelity, in many cases, was accompanied by male deception, creating a toxic cycle of betrayal and hurt. Male infidelity is framed as a dominant and recurring issue in the data, leading to profound emotional harm for their partners involved.

"He had a baby outside our marriage" (F349, 29-year-old Female)

"He cheated on me several times" (F322, 34-year-old Female)

Violence. Violence, another major offense reported by females (n=10), took various forms of abuse, including controlling behaviors, maltreatment, anger, and physical abuse. These actions encompassed attempts to dominate and restrict their partners' freedom, subjecting them to harsh and unfair treatment, frequent displays of uncontrolled anger, and instances of physical harm:

"He is quick-tempered" (F334, 31-year-old female).

"Physical abuse" (F333, 34-year-old female).

The offenses are not merely isolated acts of aggression but demonstrate broader relational dynamics where the male partner attempts to diminish the autonomy and dignity of the female partner.

"He is authoritative" (F345, 30-year-old female).

"He maltreated me and destroyed me to people" (F313, 52-year-old female).

Criticism. Criticism often manifesting as lies, secrets, and dishonesty, which erode trust in relationships. Men (n=6) were frequently reported to exhibit acts of negative criticisms as unjust accusations and derogatory remarks that undermined their sense of trust and emotional security in the relationship.

"Derogatory statements due to a fault and misunderstanding." (F304, 33-year-old female)

Also, male partners consistently finding fault with their spouses, was seen as an act of criticism which comes off as a way of creating an atmosphere of constant self-doubt, low self-esteem, and emotional distress.

"He has an issue with everything I do." (F365, 35-year-old female)

"When I communicated something and later was accused of keeping a secret. Especially when it was communicated. It affects the trust." (F339, 28-year-old female)

Deception. Males in romantic relationships tend to display higher levels of deception, often manifesting as lies, secrets, and dishonesty, which erode trust in relationships. This was particularly in concealing disappointments and maintaining secrecy as reported by their spouses (n=11). For example:

"He disappointed me" (F335, 46-year-old female).

"Had a child before marriage which I knew nothing about" (F357, 46-year-old female).

Deception was also seen to be a weapon used by male partner to conceal some of their offenses committed.

"He lied about our relationship with my friend" (F340, 30-year-old female).

"He kept a secret from me" (F316, 39-year-old female).

Offenses Predominantly Committed by Females

For female dominated offences, four (4) major offenses were identified: Neglect of duty, Disrespect, Humiliation, insecurity:

Neglect of duty. Unlike other transgressions, offenses in this category were exclusively reported to be committed by female among couples (n=6). These offenses highlighted the neglect of traditional gender roles within the relationship. For instance, one of the participants reported that their wives spent the majority of their time on church activities, which left little time and attention for their home and family responsibilities. This neglect was perceived as problematic by their male counterparts.

"Majority of her time is spent on church activities". (M358, 39-year-old male)

Additionally, this behavior of females was frustrating to their male partners when they often forget or make excuses when it came to fulfilling their expected roles and responsibilities within the relationship. For example:

"Forgetfulness during the performance of her house duties" (M338, 34-year-old male)

"Always giving one excuses from the other whenever I try to get closer as a male." (M311, 58-year-old male)

Disrespect. A notably reported as an offense (n=31) was primarily exhibited by their females. These actions, described as highly detrimental, involved behaviors that not only undermined the partner's abilities but also tarnished their reputations. Such activities included belittling their skills, ultimately affecting their self-esteem and social standing.

"She is borrowing from her friend and ... I think it tarnishes my image." (M301, 44-year-old male).

"Hidden some issues from me that is borrowing money from a friend for her mother's funeral ... the person has confronted me." (M315, 44-year-old male).

Displaying inappropriate behaviors in public was also perceived as a form of disrespect towards male partners. These actions, often occurring in social settings, included making disparaging remarks, engaging in embarrassing conduct, or openly challenging their partner's authority or opinions:

"Inappropriate behavior in front of my friends." (M385, 40-year-old male)

"Her change in attitude most times. She behaves rude." (M386, 44-year-old male)

Insecurity. Insecurity was also identified as an offense specific to females, according to their male spouses (n=15). Female partners exhibited insecurity through behaviors often revolving around accusations of infidelity, doubts about their trustworthiness, and complaints about their

emotional availability. Insecurity often was linked to perceived accusations or demands from their partners, particularly regarding faithfulness and emotional commitment. Examples include:

"She doubted me even when I was innocent." (M302, 39-year-old male)

"She overly demands attention even when I'm busy just because of her insecurities." (M330, 54-year-old male)

Persistent nagging about their partner's behaviors were seen as great offenses as females found faults with almost everything their partners did.

"She complains a lot about everything. We cannot have a decent conversation without she complaining about something" (M334, 46-year-old male)

Humiliation. Humiliation was another offence females committed by causing feelings of shame and embarrassment in their male partners through their public behaviors and belittling their partners financially. This was often seen as a slap to the masculinity of their male partners when it came to societal expectations of and financial responsibility.

"She is borrowing from her friend and a relative without letting me know anything about it. And I think it tarnishes my image" (M301, 44-year-old male)

"...borrowing money from a friend on her mother's funeral whiles I had given her money on that..." (M315, 45-year-old male)

Humiliation in the form of exhibiting offensive public behaviors is another offense females committed, typically when their actions or reputation are perceived to be undermined in a social context.

"She was rude to my mother" (M359, 36-year-old male)

"She behaves anyhow even in front of guests" (M360, 33-year-old male)

Age-Based Differences in Hurtful events

The study also explored the impact of age differences on hurtful events within couples, examining two distinct aspects. First, the analysis focused on couples with significant age gaps, comparing how these differences influenced the occurrence and perception of hurtful events. Second, the study categorized participants into different age groups, analyzing how hurtful events varied across these categories. By exploring both the specific dynamics of large age gaps and the broader context of age differences, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how age influences relationship conflict and emotional experiences.

Hurtful events from couples with significant age differences

This study also investigated the influence of age disparities in romantic dyads, focusing on relational crimes and their psychological implications. It specifically looks at couples (n = 68) with an age difference of more than five years. The aim was to identify the unique ways in which age differences may impact the dynamics of hurtful events and emotional well-being. From couples' responses, there seem to be some form of interconnectedness between hurtful events especially among couples of this category.

Active and Passive Disassociation. Disassociation was more commonly reported in relationships with age gaps of over five years, particularly when the older partner withdrew emotionally. Both active and passive forms of disassociation had a significant impact on the relationship by fostering issues such as deception, criticism, and disrespect. These behaviors hindered conflict resolution and created a cycle of neglect and unresolved problems. Generational differences in conflict management may have contributed, with older partners often resorting to avoidance as a coping strategy.

In age-gap relationships characterized by active disassociation, older partners often used this behavior to assert control or independence, while younger partners perceived it as rejection,

heightening their insecurity. This dynamic was particularly hurtful in relationships with age disparities, where generational differences already made one partner feel vulnerable.

"When he chose a friend over me" (F312, 36-year-old female, Age Difference: 6 years)

"Not talking to me" (F328, 38-year-old female, Age Difference: 7 years)

"Refusal to pick me and my newborn baby after delivery for another purpose" (F312, 34-year-old female, Age Difference: 19 years)

While some participants have this sense of feelings of abandonment, rejection and lack of affection, their spouses perhaps might exhibit these behaviors due to the actions of their partners which depicts some form of hurt as well. For example, in dyad 300, the female describes a hurt of active disassociation, while her spouse describes a hurt depicting infidelity. This clearly gives a link between the sense of lack of affection leading to another person's offense of infidelity and vice-versa.

"She cheated on me several times" (M300, 33-year-old male, Age Difference: 6 years)

"His not being affectionate" (F300, 27-year-old female, Age Difference: 6 years)

Passive disassociation can be harder to identify but equally damaging as it leaves the neglected partner questioning their worth. Especially with communication, and the partner feeling left behind or not included in important decisions might feel both betrayed and confused, compounding other offenses.

"Listening to his family to change our already planned programmed date" (F329, 35-year-old female, age difference 5 years).

"*When he gets home from work, he hardly looks at me but would just watch TV for hours without talking to me. In my own home, I felt I didn't even exist."* (F402, 34-year-old female, age difference 9 years).

In relationships with significant age disparities, such passive behaviors might reflect deeper generational differences in emotional expression, where one partner might feel overwhelmed by the other's indirectness or inability to communicate openly. The older partners often cite 'emotional fatigue' as a reason for passive withdrawal, while younger partners perceived this behavior as an indication of declining love. This discrepancy often escalated into further misunderstandings. For example:

"He brought in another wife without consulting me first and when I complained, he told me he can do whatever he likes" (F386, 38-year-old female, age difference 6 years).

"Her change in attitude most times. She behaves rude" (M386, 44-year-old male, age difference 6 years).

Passive disassociation included an avoidance of direct confrontation and a subtle rejection of partner's presence. For instance, Dyad 334 (Age Difference: 6 years), the defensive attitude upon of signals that the problem is not being addressed but instead avoided, further deepening the emotional gap between the couple:

"When she left the house with our kids for days without telling me. She came back acting all defensive as if I had done something wrong." (M328, 46-year-old male, age difference 15 years).

Violence. Violence appeared in various forms, including verbal and emotional abuse. Abuse was reported across age groups but often with different emphases. The younger partner mostly experiences physical abuse and emotional abuses. The significant age difference could

contribute to an imbalance where the younger partner's autonomy is suppressed, leading to compounded experiences of violence from both the partners:

"He maltreated me and destroyed me to people" (F313, 52-year-old female, age difference 6 years).

"He is quick tempered" (F334, 31-year-old female, age difference 15 years).

"He is abusive" (F336, 35-year-old female, age difference 7 years).

A notable aspect of violence in age-gap relationship that emerged is the dynamic of authority or power within the relationship. Older partners also are seen to exercise their authority or power through controlling behaviors especially among couples whose age-gap difference is over 10 years:

"He is authoritative" (F345, 30-year-old female, age difference 16 years).

Subsequently, older individuals might use violence as a form of discipline, often as a way to justify their feelings of being offended or disrespected by their partner's actions. In many cases, this dynamic can stem from deeply ingrained beliefs about authority, control, and gender roles that are shaped by cultural or personal history. For some, particularly those who grew up in environments where physical punishment or dominance was normalized, violence may be perceived as an acceptable response to feelings of being disrespected, hurt, or threatened in a relationship. This assertion can be seen in offences described by dyad 313 and dyad 369

"She lied to me about her inability to give me a child while she already has a child." (M313, 58-year-old male, age difference 6 years).

"He maltreated me and destroyed me to people" (F313, 52-year-old female, age difference 16 years).

"She embarrassed me before my friends" (F369, 31-year-old male, age difference 5 years).

"...harsh words" (F369, 31-year-old female, age difference 5 years).

Notwithstanding, younger individuals may resort to violence as a defense mechanism when they feel bullied or manipulated by their partners. This reaction often stems from a sense of powerlessness or frustration in situations where they feel their boundaries are being violated or their emotional well-being is being compromised. In these cases, the use of violence is sometimes perceived by the individual as a way to regain control or assert their autonomy in a relationship where they feel undermined or victimized.

"...Verbal abuse." (M312, 42-year-old male, age difference 6 years).

"Very controlling" (M305, 45-year-old male, age difference 7 years).

Disrespect. Disrespect entailed behaviors or comments that undermine the dignity of the partner. It includes belittling remarks, dismissive attitudes, or public embarrassment. In age-gap relationships, some older partners felt that their experiences and contributions were undervalued by their younger spouses. The tone and content of communication often become more critical in age-disparate relationships when one partner perceives a disregard for their opinions. Such interactions, rooted in disrespect.

"Imagine giving your opinion on something that both of us wanted to embark on, only for her to come back and say, because a friend suggested same thing, we should do it."

(M329, 40-year-old male, age difference 5 years)

"Hidden some issues from me that is borrowing money from a friend on her mother's funeral while I had given her money on that... Another one happened and the person has confronted me." (M315, 44-year-old male, age difference 5 years)

Disrespect between age-gap couples where there is a significant age difference often manifests in behaviors that undermine a partner's dignity or social standing, often taking the form

of humiliation. In relationships with notable age gaps, power dynamics can be skewed, with one partner potentially occupying a more dominant or authoritative position, whether due to age, experience, or societal expectations. This imbalance can create a fertile ground for various forms of disrespect, which are frequently expressed through actions or behaviors that belittle, shame, or devalue the younger partner.

"She embarrassed me by paying the bills in a social gathering with friends" (M375, 30-year-old male, age difference 5 years)

"She embarrassed me before my friends" (M369, 36-year-old male, age difference 5 *years)*

"She disrespected and undermined me." (M304, 38-year-old male, age difference 5 years)

Older partners might dismiss the younger partners' opinions or decisions, belittling their judgment and imposing their own perspective as superior. This can occur in both private and public settings, where the younger partner is made to feel that their thoughts, feelings, or desires are not valid or worthy of consideration. Such behavior undermines the younger partner's sense of autonomy and security. Over time, this can lead the younger individual to question their own self-worth.

"Whenever people offend me and I tell him, he takes sides with them." (F359, 30-year-old female, age difference 5 years)

While the dynamics of power and age often place the older partner in a more dominant role, the younger partner may also engage in behaviors that undermine or disrespect the older partner, either consciously or unconsciously. This can be seen in dyad 337.

"Negative attitude towards a friend." (M337, 44-year-old male, age difference 5 years)

"He told me my sister is more hardworking than I am." (F337, 44-year-old male, age difference 5 years)

Deception and Humiliation. Deception between couples took various forms, including hiding significant truths, withholding critical information, or outright lying. Age disparities often compound the consequences of deception due to differing expectations, communication styles, and life experiences. The older partner likely felt betrayed due to a mismatch in foundational expectations about family and honesty.

"Had a child before marriage which I knew nothing about" (F357, 24-year-old female, age difference 5 years)

"Dishonesty" (M314, 34-year-old male, age difference 5 years).

Deception, often intertwined with and amplified other negative behaviors such as under false pretenses. This act of deception did not occur in isolation; it escalated into disrespect and led to further relational strain, marked by accusations and a breakdown in trust.

"She is borrowing from her friend and a relative without letting me know anything about it. And I think it tarnishes my image." (M301, 44-year-old male, age difference-10 years).

Humiliation drew a link from disrespect which involved making a partner feel ashamed, belittled, or inadequate, which often undermines self-esteem and mutual respect. In age-disparate relationships, power dynamics may play an enhanced role, with one partner potentially leveraging age, experience, or societal perceptions to humiliate the other. This behavior may be more

pronounced in cases where the older partner holds financial or social advantages that accentuate dependency.

> *"She embarrassed me by paying the bills in a social gathering with friends."* (M375, 30-year-old male, age difference 5 years)
>
> *"Hidden some issues from me that is borrowing money from a friend .... Upon hearing lied about it. Another one happened and the person has confronted me.*" (M315, 44-year-old male, age difference 5 years)

Humiliation is a deeply impactful offense, often affecting both partners' emotional well-being and the stability of their relationship. In the dataset, age disparity seemed to amplify the sense of power imbalance, leading to actions that undermine the dignity of the younger or older partner.

> *"He always talks down to me in front of his friends, like I'm a child who doesn't know anything. It's embarrassing and makes me feel like I'm not good enough to be his partner."* (F402, 43-year-old female, age difference 9 years)

Criticism. Criticism involved pointing out flaws or mistakes in a manner that diminished the partner's self-esteem. Unlike constructive feedback, criticism was often harsh or persistent. This was often more pronounced in age-disparate relationships where generational differences in expectations led to misunderstandings.

> *"When I communicated something and later was accused of keeping a secret. Especially when it was communicated. It affects the trust."* (F339, 28-year-old female, age difference 5 years).

Criticism often related to how one partner expressed dissatisfaction or attempted to communicate about issues in the relationship. This was pronounced among younger individuals among dyad. Younger couples may lack the communication skills or relational maturity to express concerns constructively, leading to criticism being perceived as harsh or unproductive. One partner might feel like they are constantly being criticized or told what to do, and this can create a sense of frustration or resentment.

"In the process of making a point, she ends up using intemperate and inappropriate words that hurts a lot." (M308, 38-year-old male, age difference 10 years).

"She likes nagging." (M350, 60-year-old male, age difference 7years).

Criticism might serve as a way to seek change but could backfire, creating defensive or hurtful responses. For younger partners, it can foster feelings of inadequacy or resentment, reflecting perceptions of being constantly judged, which may erode their self-esteem and relational satisfaction. This emotional impact of repeated criticism can foster a defensive stance, making reconciliation more challenging.

"He has an issue with everything I do." (F358, 35-year-old female, age difference 5years).

"She accused me falsely without listening to my side of the story before jumping into conclusions." (M398, 50-year-old male, age difference 7years).

The pervasive critical behavior creates an environment where the younger spouse may feel inadequately valued or respected. The imbalance in life experiences often inherent in such relationships can contribute to the older partner's perception of superiority, leading to more frequent expressions of dissatisfaction.

"He said I didn't know how to speak because I was an Ashanti and naturally Ashantis are rude." (M360, 52-year-old-femmale, age difference 6years).

Sexual Infidelity. Among couples with significant age gaps, younger partners may perceive infidelity differently due to varying expectations about commitment and relationship dynamics. Their perspectives often reflect a desire for more emotional connection and stability, which may heighten the impact of infidelity. Additionally, younger individuals may have less experience navigating long-term relationships, leading to a more idealized view of monogamy. This contrast in maturity and life priorities influences how infidelity is understood and addressed within such relationships:

"She slept with her work colleague." (M339, 33-year-old male, age difference 5 years)

"I saw text messages of her cheating on me." (M346, 38-year-old male, age difference 12 years)

Repeated infidelity not only signal betrayal but also implied potential patterns of neglect and emotional manipulation, contributing to feelings of insecurity and disrespect. Younger partners in such relationships may struggle with power imbalances, feeling underappreciated or inadequate due to the perceived maturity or experience of the older partner.

"She cheated on me several times" (M300, 33-year-old male, age difference 5 years)

Some older partners believe that infidelity is not just a personal betrayal but also a trigger for abusive behaviors like asserting control or causing humiliation. This betrayal upsets the balance in the relationship, increases insecurities related to age, and may lead to emotional distancing between partners.

"He brought in another wife without consulting me first and when I complained, he told me he can do whatever he likes." (F386, 38-year-old female, age difference 6 years).

When one partner is significantly younger, the older partner may perceive a mismatch in relationship priorities or goals, leading to feelings of insecurity or doubt about the younger partner's intentions. This disconnect can cause the older partner to withdraw emotionally to safeguard themselves from further pain. For instance, in Dyad 390, the older partner expressed feeling betrayed due to infidelity, while the younger partner highlighted a lack of support, illustrating the mutual dissatisfaction and emotional distance stemming from these perceptions.

"*Cheating on me."* (M390, 40-year-old male, age difference 7 years).

"He isn't supportive." (F390, 33-year-old female, age difference 7 years).

In similar vein, insecure individuals often have heightened fears of abandonment or inadequacy, which can trigger feelings of distrust and dissatisfaction in the relationship. This emotional vulnerability might prompt them to seek reassurance through infidelity, either consciously or unconsciously. It can be deduced that infidelity within Dyad 351 may stem from one partner experiencing insecurity, which could lead to behaviors aimed at seeking validation or attention outside the relationship:

"Infidelity in our marriage." (M351, 44-year-old male, age difference 6 years).

"Causation of unfaithfulness." (F351, 38-year-old female, age difference 6 years).

Insecurity. Insecurity is another significant hurt in relationships with notable age disparities. It can arise from perceived power imbalances or doubts about mutual commitment and compatibility. The perception of insecurity often differs between older and younger partners due

to varying relational dynamics, life experiences, and expectations about communication: Insecurity involved actions or communication that amplified self-doubt or dependence within a relationship, weakening one partner's confidence, especially for young-aged individuals.

"He said I didn't know how to speak because I was an Ashanti and naturally Ashantis are rude" (F360, 52-year-old female, age difference 5 years)

"I don't think she trusts me" (M363, 53-year-old male, age difference 9 years)

Insecurity in relationships often manifests as feelings of self-doubt, fear of rejection, or inadequacy. These feelings can drive behaviors that unintentionally provoke criticism from a partner, creating a cycle that reinforces both the insecurity and the criticism:

"She doubted me even when I was innocent" (M302, 39-year-old male, age difference 5 years)

"She complains a lot about everything. We cannot have a decent conversation without she complaining about something" (M334, 46-year-old male, age difference 5 years).

Neglect of Duty. Neglect of duty, characterized by failing to fulfill roles or responsibilities that, which often results in feelings of abandonment, resentment, and weakened emotional bonds. Age influences perceptions of this neglect: younger partners may interpret it as disinterest or immaturity, while older partners might rationalize it as stemming from career pressures or fatigue. For younger couples, time devoted to external pursuits can limit shared experiences, fostering isolation and disconnection.

"Majority of her time is spent on church activities." (M358, 39-year-old male, age difference 5 years)

Specific gender-based expectations can lead to Disappointment arising when these expectations are unmet, can lead to emotional distance and conflict, especially when communication is judgmental rather than collaborative:

> *"Forgetfulness during performance of her house duties."* (M338, 34-year-old male, age difference 5 years)
>
> *"She is very dirty. Women are not supposed to be dirty and for that, I'm disappointed.*" (M365, 33-year-old male, age difference 5 years).

Age Differences in Hurtful Events

The findings highlighted age differences in hurtful events among couples. Using the study by Steiner et al. (2011) ages were grouped into three: young age (20 to 35), Middle age (36 to 50), and old age (50 to 80). We identified some differences in reported hurt according to the various age groups. The offenses noted differ in frequency and type across age groups. Younger adults face issues related to insecurity, neglect of duties and fidelity more intensely, while middle-aged individuals grapple with respect, violence and passive disassociation in their relationships. Older adults' offenses highlight Active disassociation reflecting the impacts of time and unresolved conflicts. This progression from the data highlights how relational challenges evolve as couples age and their life circumstances shift.

Active Disassociation. Active Disassociation behaviors vary with age, demonstrating the changing dynamics of emotional neglect in relationships. This pattern of behavior was notably prevalent among middle-aged spouses (n=20). These individuals reported numerous instances where their partners engaged in hurtful actions, such as giving the silent treatment, neglecting their emotional and physical needs, and consistently prioritizing others over them. Such behaviors often resulted in feelings of deep isolation, emotional neglect, and frustration. The lack of

communication and emotional support from their partners contributed to a sense of disconnection, making it difficult for the individuals to feel valued or understood within the relationship. For example:

"Not communicating with me for almost a month". (F312, 36-year-old female).

"He doesn't pay attention to me and the children, ..." (F315, 44 years old female)

"... he chose a friend over me" (F320, 36-years old female)

Conversely, behaviors characterized by disregard and a lack of affection were particularly prevalent among young age (n=14) individuals. In relationships involving younger couples, there was a notable tendency for partners to exhibit dismissive attitudes and insufficient displays of emotional warmth. This often manifested as neglect, where one partner failed to acknowledge the other's emotional needs, resulting in feelings of loneliness and disconnection. Such behaviors included not paying attention to or valuing the partner's feelings, being emotionally distant, and prioritizing other interests over the relationship.

"He ignored our date night" (F303, 30-years old female)

"His not being affectionate" (F300, 27-years old female)

Among older couples (n=7), offenses of active disassociation took on unique forms, reflecting the distinct dynamics and challenges of their relationships. One prevalent issue reported by this age group was the tendency of partners to associate with others more than with their spouses, leading to feelings of neglect and being unwanted.

"She turned the minds of our children against me" (M318, 65-year-old male).

"He pays attention to his family more than me" (F321, 50-year-old female).

Passive Disassociation. The exclusion of partners from decision-making processes was found to be more prevalent among middle-aged individuals (n=11) compared to their younger and

older counterparts. Middle-aged individuals reported a higher incidence of feeling excluded from key decisions made by their spouses, which significantly impacted the quality of their relationships. This distinction indicates that middle-aged partners, who are often in a phase of life characterized by significant family and career responsibilities, might be particularly sensitive to feeling excluded from shared decision-making processes.

"When she left the house with our kids for days without telling me. She came back acting all defensive as if I had done something wrong" (M328, 38-year-old male)

"Not discussing before renting a house" (F387, 36-year-old female).

Young-aged couples (n=4) also expressed significant dissatisfaction regarding poor communication with their spouses, a concern that falls under the category of passive disassociation. This issue was a common grievance among younger partners, highlighting the impact of ineffective communication on their relationships.

"Lack of communication" (F309, 34-year-old female).

"Disagreeing on most things" (F389, 35-year-old female).

Infidelity. Infidelity was very common among young aged couples (n=14) and some individuals from this category considered infidelity committed before marriage as a hurt carried onto marriage. for example, one married man bitterly expressed his grievance on this type of offense:

"She cheated on me while we were dating and repeated same action in the early months of our marriage. With evidence, I believe she is still doing it" (M325, 32-year-old male).

Unlike the young-aged couples, however, middle-aged couples (n-10) mostly identified Infidelity with terms and phrases such as flirting, extra marital affairs among others:

"Flirting with the house help" (F374, 35-year-old female).

"Having an affair with a friend she claimed to be her relative" (M371, 37-year-old male).

In the context of older couples (n=3), instances of Infidelity often extended beyond mere extramarital affairs to encompass scenarios where one's spouse was identified or associated with another family:

"He has another family" (F367, 53-year-old female).

Disrespect. disrespect was seen as an offense committed by primarily by young individuals (n=25) by disregarding from their spouses, which fell under the broad category of disrespect. These behaviors included inappropriate behavior towards partners and in-laws. Such actions were seen as dismissive and hurtful, further contributing to a sense of disrespect.

"She disregarded me as her husband" (M307, 35-year-old male).

"She was rude to my mother" (M359, 37-year-old male).

Notwithstanding, expressing negative attitudes in public was also observed among both middle-aged (n=11) and older-aged (n=6) couples. These behaviors included criticizing partner or behaving inappropriately in social settings, which was perceived as highly disrespectful. Such public displays of negativity not only embarrassed the individuals involved but also highlighted disrespect towards one's partner:

"I couldn't attend to his family when I lost my big sister and he showed it among his family" (F356, 45-year-old female).

"She behaves anyhow even in front of guests" (M360, 58-year-old male)

Violence. It was undoubtedly evident that these aggressive actions were prevalent among middle-aged couples (n=12), particularly in expressions of anger, verbal abuse, attempts at

exerting control, and instances of mistreatment. These behaviors significantly influenced the dynamics of their relationships, causing hurt between partners.

"Getting angry over something trivial" (M324, 46-year-old male).

"She is over-controlling as a female" (M349, 40-year-old male).

Verbal abuse was not exclusive to the middle age group; rather, it was also prevalent among young-aged individuals (n=4), who expressed experiencing emotional distress due to such mistreatment:

"Harsh words" (F369, 31-year-old female).

"Using abusive words" (M373, 32-year-old male).

"He spoke to me in a rude manner" (F360, 31-year-old female).

Despite the prevalence of verbal abuse and harsh language in both young and old-aged couples, it was found that older couples (n=2) exhibited a lower frequency of such behaviors compared to their younger counterparts. However, violence among older individuals took the form of maltreatment and anger just as seem among the middle-aged individuals:

"He maltreated me ..." (F313, 52-year-old female).

"Getting angry over something trivial" (F324, 46-year-old female)

Deception. Deceptive behaviors were evident age dynamics. Amongst younger couples (n=10), there was a notable prevalence of deceptive actions, particularly in the form of betraying one's spouse to outsiders and resorting to lies. For example:

"Discussing our personal issues with her family" (M303, 33-year-old male).

"He lied" (F309, 32-year-old female).

While deception was notably prevalent among young-aged couples, it was also present in middle-aged couples (n=7) and old-aged couples (n=4). These older age groups exhibited significant tendencies towards secrecy and pretense within their relationships, indicating that deceptive behaviors are not confined to the younger demographic but persist across various stages of life.

"She lied to me about her inability to give me a child while she already has a child." (M313, 58-year-old male)

"He is pretentious" (F388, 38-year-old female)

Neglect of Duty. This hurtful behavior was also observed among young-aged couples (n=5). In these relationships, females were found to neglect their responsibilities prioritizing other things. For example:

"Misplaced priorities" (M341, 34-year-old male)

"Forgetfulness during the performance of her house duties" (M338, 34-year-old male)

Only two males from the older age group reported their spouses neglecting their marital and motherhood responsibilities. This shows that while neglect of duty was more common among younger couples, it was not absent among older couples.

"My partner did not allow our children to do their house chores." (M321, 73-year-old male)

"Always giving one excuses from the other whenever I try to get closer as a male." (M311, 58-year-old male)

Insecurity. this offense was predominantly observed in the young (n=5) and middle-aged (n=5) groups of couples. In young adults, insecurity often manifests as complaints and accusations, indicating early relational conflicts and communication issues.

"She complains a lot about everything. We cannot have a decent conversation without her complaining about something." (M334, 32-year-old male)

Middle-aged adults report insecurities tied to past experiences and ongoing relational dynamics, highlighting deeper, possibly long-standing issues.

"She doesn't know how to let go of the past; always holding on to past issues and referring me to them." (M400, 40-year-old male)

"He is intolerant." (F332, 39-year-old female)

In older adults, insecurity-related hurtful events often involve demands for attention and pervasive mistrust, reflecting long-term relational strains.

"She overly demands for attention even when I'm busy just because of her insecurities." (M330, 54-year-old male)

Humiliation. younger participants, often reported humiliation in social settings and interactions with peers or family. This form of humiliation is closely related to the need for social acceptance and validation among peers and family members, which is particularly significant during younger adulthood.

"He snubbed me in public" (F341, 30-year-old female)

"He snubbed me in front of his family" (F311, 32-year-old female)

Older participants on the other hand tend to report humiliation in more private, domestic contexts. In these cases, humiliation is often linked to behaviors that undermine one's authority or self-worth within the household. These experiences reflect the deeply personal and long-term impact of domestic dynamics on an individual's sense of dignity.

"Gossip about me to friends" (M355, 45-year-old male)

"I couldn't attend to his family when I lost my big sister and he showed it among his family" (F356, 30-year-old female)

Criticism. Age differences in criticism also emerged, with middle-aged individuals reporting the highest instances of criticism. Significant life changes such as career advancement and raising young children, may experience heightened stress levels, leading to more frequent criticisms and conflicts within relationships.

"In the process of making a point, she ends up using intemperate and inappropriate words that hurt a lot." (M308, 38-year-old male)

"He has an issue with everything I do." (F358, 35-year-old female,)

Middle and Older individuals reported fewer instances of criticism, however, focusing on instances of one's partner being judgmental, overly complaining or raining false accusations on them.

"He accused me falsely without listening to my side of the story before jumping to conclusions." (F398, 42-year-old female)

"She nags a lot." (M380, 58-year-old male)

Summary of Findings

Using qualitative content analysis, we identified the types of hurtful events couples encounter in their relationships, as well as the gender and age differences in these hurtful events. A summary of the results are as follows:

i. The study identified ten distinct categories of hurtful events among couples which includes: active disassociation, passive disassociation, infidelity, disrespect, violence, humiliation, criticism, deception, neglect of duty, and insecurity.

ii. The analysis also revealed significant gender differences in the perception and reporting of hurtful events. Men and women exhibited notable differences in their reactions to specific types of hurt, highlighting the influence of gender-specific expectations and societal norms. Male partners were seen to engage more in offenses like active disassociation, passive disassociation, deception, infidelity, criticism, and the male-dominated nature of violence. Female partners also engaged more in offences such as humiliation, disrespect, insecurity and neglect of duty (which was solely reported as a feminine-based offense).

iii. The study observed age differences in reported hurtful events. Younger couples often reported that they encounter dismissive attitudes and a lack of emotional warmth, leading to dissatisfaction stemming from inadequate communication, as well as issues such as infidelity, insecurity, and verbal abuse. Middle-aged spouses reported silent treatments, neglect, exclusion from decision-making, and infidelity, encountering deeper relational issues and humiliation associated with the demands of their careers and personal lives. Older couples experienced neglect, reduced occurrences of verbal abuse, yet faced increased instances of maltreatment, infidelity linked to other families, insecurity, and private humiliation affecting long-term dignity.

In relations with significant age-gap, age disparities amplified relational challenges by accentuating power dynamics, communication gaps, and differing life priorities, leading to hurt intensity for both partners. Active disassociation, often employed by older partners to assert control, left younger partners feeling abandoned, while passive disassociation reflected generational differences in emotional expression, exacerbating misunderstandings. Violence, both physical and emotional, often stemmed from power imbalances, through older partners' asserting authority and younger partners responding defensively. Criticism and disrespect emerged from differing expectations, with younger

partners feeling undervalued and older ones perceiving a lack of acknowledgment. Finally, infidelity, frequently linked to insecurity and unmet emotional needs, created cycles of distrust and dissatisfaction, while deception and humiliation were perceived as devaluation especially for older partners.

CHAPTER FIVE

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

Introduction

In the second part of our study, we examined the relationship between the impact of hurt, negative appraisals, and forgiveness. Data collected from participants was carefully examined and categorized into three primary sections. The first part examined the demographic features of the 102 couples (204 participants), indicating a comparable proportion of males and females, with 81.4% married and 18.6% cohabiting. Age, religious affiliation, relationship length, education level, and employment status were all described using frequencies, means, and standard deviations.

The second section was dedicated to preliminary analyses, which included four separate procedures. To begin, each scale's means, standard deviations, and minimum and maximum values were computed to offer a basic overview of the data. Second, skewness and kurtosis values were employed to examine the variables' normality, which plays an important role when determining if the data is suitable for parametric testing. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the scales' internal consistency, with values of 0.70 and higher indicating adequate reliability. Finally, bivariate association coefficients were determined between the primary study variables and demographics to investigate their correlations, revealing associations between factors such as the impact of hurt, negative appraisals, and various types of forgiveness.

The third session examined hypothesis testing with Pearson correlation, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), moderation analysis, and multilevel modeling. A Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was done for Hypotheses 1a, 1b, and 2 to investigate the correlations between age, length of relationship, religion, and their impact on hurt, negative appraisals, and forgiveness. For Hypothesis 3, MANOVA was used to explore the impact of

religion on decisional and emotional forgiveness, allowing for the simultaneous assessment of numerous dependent variables while adjusting for intercorrelations.

In Hypotheses 4 and 5, multilevel analysis (APIM) was employed to examine the relationship between the impact of hurt, negative appraisals and forgiveness between dyads, accounting for the nested structure of the data and gender disparities. Multilevel analysis was employed to properly model the dyadic interdependence, account for nested data, explore gender differences, and accurately estimate actor and partner effects. Members of each dyad served as an actor (main participant) and partner (spouse of main participant).

Hypothesis 6 used hierarchical regression analysis to examine the moderating effects of variables such as length of relationship and religion on the relationship between negative appraisals, hurt, and forgiveness. The results were then interpreted and discussed. All analyses were conducted using SPSS version 26.0.

Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Data

The study included 102 heterosexual couples (N = 102 M = 1.50, SD = 0.501) with 81.4% (n = 166) being married and 18.6% (n = 38) cohabiting. 71.1% (n = 145) of couples had been married for less than 10 years, 16.2% (n = 33) had been married for 10 to 20 years, and 12.7% (n = 26) had been married for more than 21 years (M = 1.42, SD = 0.049). Below is the full table for Participants' information in Table 3:

Table 3

Statistical Demographic data of Participants

	Frequency	Percentiles
Marital Status		
Married	166	81.4
Cohabit	38	18.6
Length of Relationship		
Below 10 Years	145	71.1
11 To 20 Years	33	16.2
Above 21 Years	26	12.7
Religion		
Christian	135	66.2
Muslim	39	19.1
Other	30	14.7
Educational Level		
Junior High School	10	4.9
Senior High School	27	13.2
Training Collage	26	12.7
Tertiary	141	69.1
Employment Status		
Full-Time	159	77.9
Part-Time	21	10.3
Retired	6	2.9
Not Employed	18	8.8

Note. Table 3 is the statistical table of participants' demographic details

Preliminary Analysis

The preliminary analysis, conducted in four steps, involved the computation of descriptive statistics of variables, test of normality of the variables, reliability analysis, and bivariate association coefficients among the core study variables and demographics.

Descriptive Statistics of Variables

An analysis of the various scales which involved the computation of the means, Cronbach's alpha, standard deviation, minimum and maximum values obtained was done before the hypothesis

testing, leading to the generation of the descriptive statistics. Given the dyadic nature of the study, variables are differentiated between couples (actors and partners).

Actor's Impact of Hurt and Partner's Impact of Hurt, scores ranged from 7.00 to 28.00, with a mean of (M = 17.79, SD = 5.38). Both variables were not normally distributed. The scores for Actor's Negative Appraisals and Partner's Negative Appraisals ranged from 10.00 to 50.00, with a mean of (M = 20.14, SD = 9.28), indicating a broad range of responses. Actor's Trait Forgiveness and Partner's Trait Forgiveness, scores ranged from 19.00 to 50.00, with a mean of (M = 34.66, SD = 5.80). These distributions were also not normally distributed. The Actor's Decisional Forgiveness and Partner's Decisional Forgiveness scores ranged from 10.00 to 30.00, with a mean of (M = 24.77, SD = 3.76). The distributions were negatively skewed and not normally distributed. Finally, the scores for Actor's Emotional Forgiveness and Partner's Emotional Forgiveness ranged from 9.00 to 35.00, with a mean of (M = 23.65, SD = 5.14). Once again, these distributions were not normally distributed.

To ascertain the reliability of the scales used in the study, Cronbach's alpha was computed before the main study. Cronbach's alpha measures the reliability of a scale, with scores of 0.70 and above indicating a considerable level of internal and external consistency (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The reliability analysis yielded satisfactory levels of internal and external consistency, meeting the requirement of internal consistency as a psychometric property.

As indicated in the table below, about their respective mean(s), the standard deviation(s) observed show small standard deviations about their means. This suggests that the majority of the participants' scores were close to the mean scores, hence, the individual variations as compared to the mean were widely spread. table below:

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics of Variables

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD	*α*	Skew	Kurt
Actor's Age	204	24	73	38.79	9.350		1.087	.942
Partner's Age	204	24	73	38.79	9.350		1.087	.942
Length of Relationship	204	1	47	9.194	8.809		1.836	6.394
Actor's Impact of Hurt	204	7.00	28.00	17.789	5.379	.82	-.173	-.507
Partner's Impact of Hurt	204	7.00	28.00	17.789	5.379	.82	-.173	-.507
Negative Appraisals A	204	10.00	50.00	20.142	9.280	.91	1.047	.931
Negative Appraisals B	204	10.00	50.00	20.142	9.280	.91	1.047	.931
Actor's Trait Forgiveness	204	19.00	50.00	34.661	5.795	.74	.022	-.056
Partner's Trait Forgiveness	204	19.00	50.00	34.661	5.795	.74	.022	-.056
Actor's Decisional Forgiveness	204	10.00	30.00	24.769	3.758	.89	-.719	1.046
Partner's Decisional Forgiveness	204	10.00	30.00	24.769	3.758	.89	-.719	1.046
Actor's Emotional Forgiveness	204	9.00	35.00	23.647	5.135	.79	-.265	.339
Partner's Emotional Forgiveness	204	9.00	35.00	23.647	5.135	.79	-.265	.339
Valid N (listwise)	204							

Note. Table 4 is the summary of the Descriptive Statistics of Variable

Pearson Correlation between Variables

A correlation among relevant variables was computed and the coefficients are reported in Table 5. Firstly, there were significant relationships between hurt and other variables. For example, Partner's Impact of Hurt shows significant positive association with the Actor's Negative Appraisals ($r = .28$, $p < .01$) and the Partner's Negative Appraisals ($r = .651$, $p < .01$), while also being significantly negatively associated with the Actor's Trait Forgiveness ($r = -.175$, $p < .05$), the Partner's Trait Forgiveness ($r = -.388$, $p < .01$), the Actor's Emotional Forgiveness ($r = -.282$, $p < .01$), and the Partner's Emotional Forgiveness ($r = -.482$, $p < .01$). This pattern reinforces the relationship between perceived hurt and negative appraisals and forgiveness, suggesting that hurt impacts both partners' negative appraisals and abilities to forgive.

For Negative appraisals, Actor's Negative Appraisals, significantly was negatively associated with the Actor's Trait Forgiveness ($r = -.306$, $p < .01$), the Actor's Decisional Forgiveness ($r = -.215$, $p < .01$), the Actor's Emotional Forgiveness ($r = -.359$, $p < .01$), and the Partner's Emotional Forgiveness ($r = -.138$, $p < .05$). The Partner's Negative Appraisals were also significantly negatively correlated with the Actor's Trait Forgiveness ($r = -.313$, $p < .01$) and the Partner's Decisional Forgiveness ($r = -.217$, $p < .01$). This suggests that negative appraisals, whether by the actor or the partner, are linked with lower levels of forgiveness traits, emphasizing the negative impact of critical assessments on forgiveness.

The correlations among the forgiveness traits highlight positive relationships. The Actor's Trait Forgiveness is significantly positively correlated with Actor's Decisional Forgiveness ($r = .481$, $p < .01$), and the Actor's Emotional Forgiveness ($r = .510$, $p < .01$). Likewise, Partner's Trait Forgiveness is significantly positively correlated with the Partner's Decisional Forgiveness ($r = .448$, $p < .01$) and the Partner's Emotional Forgiveness ($r = .439$, $p < .01$). The Actor's Decisional Forgiveness is significantly positively correlated with the Actor's Emotional Forgiveness ($r = .516$, $p < .01$), and the Partner's Decisional Forgiveness is significantly positively correlated with the Partner's Emotional Forgiveness ($r = .437$, $p < .01$). These positive correlations among forgiveness

traits suggest that higher levels of one form of Actor's Forgiveness are associated with higher levels of other forms, indicating a general tendency towards forgiveness within individuals and between partners.

Table 5

Correlation matrix of main study variables and demographics

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
(1) Age	--											
(2) Length of relationship	0.846**	--										
(3) Actor's Impact of Hurt	-0.037	-0.064	--									
(4) Partner's Impact of Hurt	0.018	-0.057	0.327**	--								
(5) Actor's Negative Appraisal	-0.094	-0.111	0.653**	0.282**	--							
(6) Partner's Negative Appraisal	-0.055	-0.094	0.283**	0.651**	0.171*	--						
(7) Actor's Trait Forgiveness	0.097	0.081	-0.406**	-0.175*	-0.306**	-0.072	--					
(8) Partner's Trait Forgiveness	0.083	0.046	-0.187*	-0.388**	-0.083	-0.313**	0.007	--				
(9) Actor's Decisional Forgiveness	-0.001	0.051	-0.320**	-0.085	-0.215**	0.001	0.481**	-0.006	--			
(10) Partner's Decisional Forgiveness	0.034	0.036	-0.115	-0.320**	-0.068	-0.217**	-0.048	0.448**	-0.108	--		
(11) Actor's Emotional Forgiveness	-0.033	-0.016	-0.498**	-0.282**	-0.359**	-0.142*	0.510**	0.050	0.516**	-0.075	--	
(12) Partner's Emotional Forgiveness	-0.091	-0.055	-0.269**	-0.482**	-0.138*	-0.337**	0.091	0.439**	-0.045	0.437**	0.077	--

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Testing of Hypotheses

Hypotheses 1- *Demographic characteristics such as Age and length of relationship negatively will influence the impact of hurtful events.*

To test this broad hypothesis, Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was performed to determine the relationship among the sub-hypotheses. Pearson correlation is a statistical method used to measure the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two continuous variables. Below are the results explained:

H1a: *There will be a significant decrease in the impact of hurtful events with age.*

In Hypothesis 1a, Pearson correlation was used to test the relationship between Age (IV) and impact of hurt (DV). According to the results from table 6, the impact of hurt decreases with age ($r = -0.04$, $p>.05$). However, this was not statistically significant hence, the hypothesis was not supported.

Table 6

Correlation matrix of age and impact of hurt

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)
(1) Age	--		
(2) Actor's Impact of Hurt	-0.037	--	
(3) Partner's Impact of Hurt	0.018	-0.057	--

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

H1b: *Impact of hurtful events will decrease over time in longer relationships.*

In Hypothesis 1b, length of relationship (IV) and impact of hurt (DV) were measured for both the actor and partner using Pearson correlation. Results presented in Table 7 above show that,

even though the impact of hurt decreased with the length of the relationship for both actor (r = -.064, p > .01) and partner (r = -.057, p > .01), it was not statistically significant hence, the hypothesis was not supported. This suggests that although there is a slight trend, indicating that individuals in longer relationships may perceive hurtful events as less impactful, this trend was not statistically significant.

Table 7

Correlation matrix of length of relationship and impact of hurt

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)
(1) Length of relationship	--		
(2) Actor's Impact of Hurt	-0.064	--	
(3) Partner's Impact of Hurt	-0.057	0.327**	--

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Hypothesis 2- *Negative appraisals of hurtful events will significantly decrease when length of relationship increases.*

Hypothesis 2 tested the relationship between negative appraisals (DV) and length of relationship (IV) for both actor and partner using Pearson correlation. Results from table 8 show that, length of relationship and negative appraisals of hurtful events was negative but not significant, for both actor ($r = -0.111$, $p > .01$) and partner ($r = -0.094$, $p > .01$). This therefore suggests a slight trend whereby individuals in longer relationships may appraise hurtful events less negatively. However, this was not significant.

Table 8

Correlation matrix of length of relationship and negative appraisals

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)
(1) Length of relationship	--		
(5) Actor's Negative Appraisal	-0.111	--	
(6) Partner's Negative Appraisal	-0.094	0.171*	--

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Hypothesis 3- *Decisional and emotional forgiveness among spouses will differ significantly based on religion.*

Hypothesis 3 tested the influence of religion (IV) on decisional and emotional forgiveness (DV). The results are presented in Table 9 below.

Table 9

Summary of the Influence of Religion on Decisional and Emotional Forgiveness Among Spouses

	Dependent Variable	**F**	**df1**	**Sig.**	**Partial Eta Square**
Religion	Decisional Forgiveness	1.761	201	0.174	0.017
	Emotional Forgiveness	1.737	201	0.179	0.017

Note. Constant: Religion
Dependent Variable: Decisional forgiveness
Emotional forgiveness

A Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was carried out to examine the effect of religion (Christian, Muslim, and Others) on decisional and emotional forgiveness. According to Table 9, the results for both decisional forgiveness (F (2, 201) =1.761, p=0.174, partial eta squared

= 0.017) and emotional forgiveness (F (2, 201) =1.737, p=0.179, partial eta squared = 0.017) were not significant. Therefore, the hypothesis was not supported.

This suggests that religion does not have a significant effect on either form of forgiveness in this sample, as the observed differences in forgiveness scores across religious groups are likely due to chance rather than any meaningful impact.

Hypothesis 4- *Higher levels of impact of hurt among couples will be associated with high levels of negative appraisals for both partners*

To examine the levels of impact of hurt (IV) on negative appraisals (DV) among couples (which addressed the third objective of the study), a multilevel analysis was conducted specifically using the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM). This analysis approach is particularly useful when exploring relational dynamics between partners, as it accounts for the nested structure of the data. That is, each actor's responses may interact with or mirror those of their partner. Through this approach, we gain insight into the individual (within-partner) and relational (cross-partner) impacts of hurt on negative emotions, as well as any gender differences that may exist.

Table 10

Summary of the association of high levels of hurt with negative appraisals among dyads

	Actor's Negative Affect				Partner's Negative Affect			
Parameter	β	SE	t	p-value	β	SE	t	p-value
Intercept	36.898	2.085	17.690	.000	34.350	2.060	16.667	.000
Actor's Impact of Hurt	-29.156	3.8 68	-7.536	.000	-.394	3.624	-.109	.081
Partner's Impact of Hurt	-1.083	3.549	-.305	.197	-26.561	3.948	-6.726	.000
AIC	1133.372				1133.372			

Repeated Measure								
[Male=0]	34.365	6.072	7.094	.000	47.797	8.295	7.107	.000
[Female=1]	45.901	7.843	7.107	.000	35.742	6.417	7.094	.000
CSH rho	-.137	.111	-0.652	0.028	-.167	.110	-0.652	0.028

Note. Dependent Variable: Actor's Negative Affect
Dependent Variable: Partner's Negative Affect

The findings from Table 10 show that the actor's impact of hurt (one partner's experience of hurt) significantly predicted their own negative effect (β = -29.156, SE = 3.868, t = -7.536, $p < .001$). Similarly, the partner's hurt also predicted their own negative effect (β = -26.561, SE = 3.948, t = -6.726, $p < .001$). However, the actor's hurt did not influence the partner's negative emotions (β = -0.394, SE = 3.624, t = -0.109, p = .081). This suggests that each person's hurt has a limited impact on their emotions, rather than causing a spillover effect on their partner.

There were notable gender variations in the findings. For males, the actor effect was significant (β = 34.365, SE = 6.073, t = 7.094, $p < .001$), as was the partner effect (β = 47.798, SE = 8.295, t = 7.107, $p < .001$), with the stronger association observed in the partner effect. For females (coded as 1), both the actor (β = 45.901, SE = 7.843, t = 7.107, $p < .001$) and partner effects (β = 35.743, SE = 6.417, t = 7.094, $p < .001$) were also significant, with the actor effect being stronger. These results indicate that their partner's negative affect more strongly influences men, whereas women are more strongly influenced by their own. Therefore, the hypothesis was supported, with all effects being large and highly significant ($p < .001$).

Hypothesis 5- *Higher levels of hurt impact and negative appraisals among couples will be associated with lower levels of forgiveness for both partners.*

Due to the study including couples and to address the second, third and fourth objectives of the study, the fifth hypothesis was analyzed using the multilevel modeling specifically Actor-

Partner Interdependence Model (APIM), this was a suitable approach for Hypothesis 5 because it captures the interdependent nature of couple relationships by examining both actor and partner effects on forgiveness (composite forgiveness: Trait, decisional, and emotional). This method provides a more complete understanding of how hurt and appraisal might reduce forgiveness between couples (dyads).

H5a - *Higher impacts of hurt within a dyad will be associated with lower levels of forgiveness for both partners.*

Hypothesis 5a tested the influence of impact of hurt (IV) on forgiveness (DV) between dyads. Results are shown below in table 11.

Table 11

Summary of the association of high levels of hurt with Actor's Forgiveness between dyads

	Actor's Forgiveness				Partner's Forgiveness			
Parameter	B	SE	t	p-value	β	SE	t	p-value
Intercept	27.7066	0.2148	128.983	.000	35.1336	-0.0539	-0.3602	.000
Actor's Impact of Hurt	-0.3602	0.0487	-7.39	.000	-0.1161	-0.0539	-1.874	.028
Partner's Impact of Hurt	-0.0539	0.0497	-1.084	.028	-0.3508	-0.3602	-7.39	.000
AIC	1093.182				1093.182			
Repeated Measure								
[Males=0]	13.0110	1.8005	7.111	.000	10.9606	1.5662	7.102	.000
[Females=1]	10.9606	1.5433	7.102	.000	13.0110	1.8298	7.111	.000
CSH rho	-0.2094	0.0954	-2.195	0.028	-0.2094	0.0954	-2.195	0.028

Note. Dependent Variable: Actor's Composite Forgiveness.
Dependent Variable: Partner's Composite Forgiveness.

According to the results shown in Table 11, Actor's impact of hurt was significantly and negatively related to Actor's forgiveness (β = −0.360, SE = 0.048, t =−7.39, p< .001). Similar to the actor's impact of hurt, also showed a significant and negative relationship with Partner's forgiveness (β =−0.116, SE = 0.0539, t = −1.874, p< .001).

Again, the Partner's impact of hurt was negatively associated with Partner's forgiveness (β = −0.3508, SE = 0.3602, t = −7.39, p < .001) as well as Actor's forgiveness (β = −0.0539, SE = 0.0497, t = −1.084, p < .001). These findings suggest that hurt experienced by either partner affects the likelihood of forgiveness within the relationship.

Gender effects also emerged as significant, showing different forgiveness patterns across genders. Male and female forgiveness levels were significantly impacted by hurt (β = 13.0110, SE = 1.8005, t = 7.111, p < .001; β = 10.9606, SE = 1.5662, t = 7.102, t = 7.102, p < .001) respectively, indicating that gender may moderate hurt and forgiveness interactions. Therefore, Hypothesis 3a was supported.

These findings support Hypothesis 5a, suggesting that higher levels of hurt within dyads reduce the likelihood of forgiveness for both partners. The regression results indicate that individual (actor) differences in the level of hurt predict significant variance in forgiveness outcomes (dependent variable), with greater hurt associated with lower forgiveness. The results reinforce the relational aspect of hurt and forgiveness within couples, highlighting that the emotional dynamics between partners significantly influence their ability to forgive.

H5b - *Higher levels of negative appraisals within a dyad will be associated with lower levels of forgiveness for both partners.*

Hypothesis 5b tested the impact of negative appraisals (IV) on forgiveness (DV) between dyads. The results are presented in Table 12 below.

Table 12

Summary of the association of high levels of negative appraisals with Actor's Forgiveness between dyads

	Actor's Forgiveness				Partner's Forgiveness			
Parameter	**B**	**SE**	**t**	**p-value**	**β**	**SE**	**t**	**p-value**
Intercept	31.1842	0.7644	40.797	.000	31.1842	0.7644	40.797	.000
Actor's Negative Affects	-0.1555	0.0288	-5.399	.000	-0.0176	0.029	-0.606	0.545
Partner's Negative Affects	-0.0176	0.029	-0.606	0.545	-0.1555	0.0288	-5.399	.000
AIC	1131.759				1131.759			
Repeated Measure								
[Males=1]	14.422	2.0332	7.093	.000	13.648	1.9248	7.091	.000
[Females=2]	13.648	1.9248	7.091	.000	14.422	2.0332	7.093	.000
CSH rho	-0.0648	0.0993	-0.652	0.514	-0.0648	0.0993	-0.652	0.514

Note. Dependent Variable: Actor's Composite Forgiveness.
Dependent Variable: Partner's Composite Forgiveness.

From Table 12, there is a significant negative association between the actor's negative affect and their forgiveness ($\beta = -0.1555$, SE = 0.0288, $t = -5.399$, $p < .001$), suggesting that higher levels of negative appraisals experienced by the actor are associated with lower levels of forgiveness. Similarly, there is a significant negative association between the partner's negative affect and their forgiveness ($\beta = -0.1555$, SE = 0.0288, $t = -5.399$, $p < .001$), suggesting that higher levels of negative appraisals experienced by the partner are associated with lower levels of forgiveness.

This parameter is not significant ($\beta = -0.0176$, SE = 0.0290, $t = -0.606$, $p = .545$) when it comes to the impact of the Partner's negative affect on the actor's forgiveness. In Actor's Negative Affect on their Partner's forgiveness, this parameter is also not significant ($\beta = -0.0176$, SE =

0.0290, t = -0.606, p = .545), indicating that individuals' negative appraisals of hurtful events do not influence their partner's willingness to forgive.

There were gender differences between both actors and partners in this model. Both male (β = 14.422, SE = 2.0332, t = 7.093, p < .001) and female (β = 13.648, SE = 1.9248, t = 7.091, p < .001) actors show significant differences in forgiveness levels, with males displaying slightly higher forgiveness scores. Similarly, both male (β = 13.648, SE = 1.9248, t = 7.091, p < .001) and female (β = 14.422, SE = 2.0332, t = 7.093, p < .001) partners show significant differences in forgiveness levels, with females displaying slightly higher forgiveness scores.

The findings suggest that higher levels of negative appraisals experienced by either the actor or the partner are associated with lower levels of forgiveness. Gender differences are evident, with males and females showing distinct patterns of forgiveness.

Hypothesis 6- *Factors like religion and length of relationship will moderate the relationship between negative appraisals, the impact of hurt, and decisional forgiveness.*

The sixth hypothesis was examined to address the second objective of the study and to explore whether the effect of negative appraisals on decisional forgiveness would be strengthened or weakened when moderated by religious homogamy or the length of the relationship. Hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to test the moderating effects of religious homogamy and relationship length on variables that were found to significantly correlate with one another, namely, negative appraisals, the impact of hurt, and decisional forgiveness. Results are presented in the tables below.

H6a. *Religious homogamy will moderate the relationship between negative appraisals and decisional forgiveness.*

Hypothesis 6a tested the moderating effect of Religious Homogamy on the relationship between negative appraisals (IV) and forgiveness (DV). Results are shown below in Table 13.

Table 13

Summary of religious homogamy as a moderator between hurt appraisal and decisional forgiveness

Model	*B*	*SE*	*ß*	*t*	*p*
Step 1 Constant	28.514	1.406		20.276	.000
Religious Homogamy	-1.871	1.190	-.108	-1.573	.117
Negative Appraisals	-.088	.028	-.218	-3.188	.002
Step 2 Constant	25.332	1.551		16.336	.000
Religious Homogamy	3.515	1.721	.202	2.042	.042
Negative Appraisals	.007	.035	.017	.191	.848
Negative Appraisals * Religious Homogamy	-.234	.056	-.472	-4.188	.000

Note. Dependent Variable: Decisional Forgiveness.

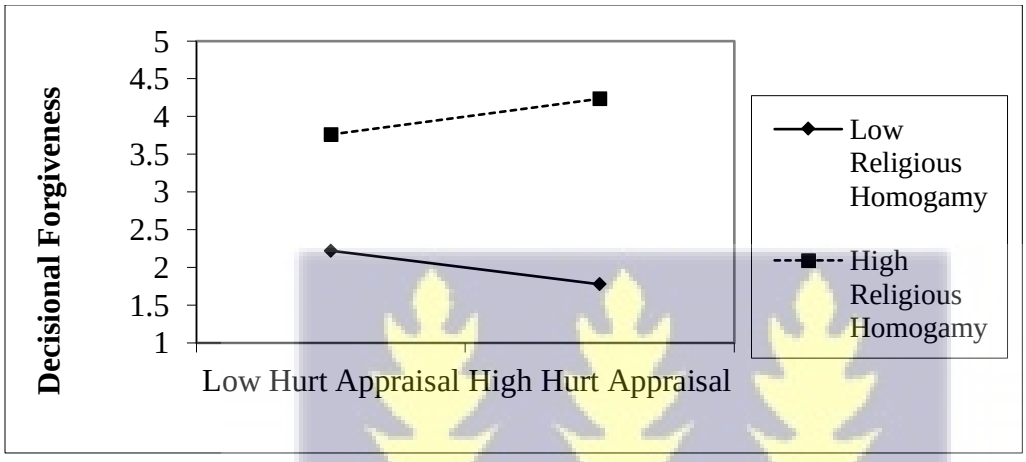
Findings from Table 13 indicate that, in the second step of the model, the interaction between negative appraisals and religious homogamy made a significant contribution in predicting decisional forgiveness ($\beta = -.47$, $p < .001$). This interaction increased the explained variance to 13% ($F = 10.30$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .134$), beyond the variance accounted for in step one. The significant interaction effect demonstrates that religious homogamy moderates the relationship between negative appraisals and decisional forgiveness. In other words, the extent to which negative appraisals influence decisional forgiveness depends on the degree of religious homogamy within the couple. Thus, Hypothesis 6a was supported.

To ascertain that indeed the relationship between hurt appraisal and decisional forgiveness was moderated by religious homogamy, a moderation graph was generated using the

unstandardized coefficients. From the graph, hurt appraisal related more positively to decisional forgiveness for those who score high on religious homogamy than their counterparts who are low on religious homogamy.

Graph 1

Graph on the relationship between Decisional Forgiveness and religious homogamy



H6b- *Length of relationship will moderate the relationship between the Impact of hurt and decisional forgiveness*

Hypothesis 6b tested the moderating effect of Length of Relationship on the relationship between negative appraisals (IV) and decisional forgiveness (DV). Results are shown below in Table 14.

Table 14

Summary of Length of relationship influencing the relationship between negative appraisal and decisional forgiveness

Model	*B*	*SE*	*β*	*T*	*p*
Step 1 Constant	11.67	1.27		9.17	.000
Negative Appraisals	.38	.05	.47	7.55	.000
Length of relationship	-.07	.05	-.08	-1.28	.202
Step 2 Constant	12.30	1.57		7.84	.000
Negative Appraisals	.35	.07	.42	4.68	.000
Length of relationship	-.15	.13	-.17	-1.17	.246
Negative Appraisals * Length of relationship	.01	.01	.11	.69	.492

a. Dependent Variable: Decisional Forgiveness.

Results from Table 14 indicate that, in the second step of the model, the interaction between negative appraisals and length of relationship did not make a significant contribution to predicting decisional forgiveness ($\beta = .11$, $p > .05$). The variance explained remained essentially unchanged ($R^2 = .236$, $F = 20.61$, $p < .001$), showing that the addition of the interaction term did not improve the model beyond the effects of negative appraisals alone. Thus, the hypothesis that length of relationship would moderate the relationship between negative appraisal and decisional forgiveness was not supported.

Summary of Findings

The analysis examined various hypotheses to find the relationship between variables. Hypotheses 1a, 1b, and 2 were tested using the Pearson correlation coefficient. Hypothesis 3 was analyzed with MANOVA, Hypotheses 4 and 5 were examined with APIM multilevel modeling to capture dyadic interdependence and gender differences, and Hypothesis 6 was tested with hierarchical regression. Summary of the findings is below:

Hypothesis 1a: The analysis showed that there was no significant relationship between age and impact of hurt.

Hypothesis 1b: The findings indicated that there was no significant relationship between length of a relationship and impact of hurtful events.

Hypothesis 2: The results showed that there was no significant relationship between the length of a relationship and negative appraisals of hurtful events.

Hypothesis 3: Religion did not have a significant effect on either decisional or emotional forgiveness among spouses. Thus, the hypothesis that religion significantly influences these types of forgiveness was not supported.

Hypothesis 4: Findings revealed that the impact of hurt experienced by one partner significantly predicted their own negative effect, but did not significantly predict their partner's negative affect. Conversely, the partner's impact of hurt predicted their own negative effect but not the actor's. Gender differences were observed, with both males and females showing significant associations between the impact of hurt and negative affect, suggesting that the hypothesis was partially supported but varied by gender.

Hypothesis 5a: Results showed a significant negative relationship between the impact of hurt and forgiveness for both partners. Specifically, higher levels of hurt were associated with lower levels of forgiveness. Gender differences were evident, with males and females displaying distinct patterns in forgiveness levels. Therefore, the hypothesis was supported.

Hypothesis 5b: Analysis indicated a significant negative association between negative appraisals and forgiveness for both partners. However, the effect of one partner's negative appraisals on the other partner's forgiveness was not significant. Gender differences were

observed, with females displaying slightly higher levels of forgiveness. This supports the hypothesis that higher negative appraisals are associated with lower forgiveness.

Hypothesis 6a: The analysis revealed that religious homogamy alone did not significantly predict decisional forgiveness, but its interaction with negative appraisals significantly predicted decisional forgiveness. This indicates that religious homogamy can moderate the relationship between negative appraisals and forgiveness, thereby supporting the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 6b: Results showed that the length of the relationship did not significantly moderate the relationship between the impact of hurt and decisional forgiveness. Therefore, the hypothesis that the length of a relationship influences this relationship was not supported.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The study examined hurtful events that couples encounter, how they appraise these hurts in terms of the negative emotions they associate with them, and the impact on forgiveness. The specific objectives were to explore the different types of hurt experienced by couples in their relationships, assess how they appraise these hurts and the influence of negative appraisals of hurt on forgiveness; analyze the relationship between impacts of the hurts couples encounter, negative appraisals, and forgiveness in relationships; and assess the uniqueness of gender and age differences in hurtful events and forgiveness among couples.

Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, data was analyzed thoroughly to achieve the aims and objectives above. This chapter thus discusses the research findings, taking into consideration the theoretical framework and previous literature. The chapter will further discuss the implications of the findings, outline the study's limitations, provide recommendations for future research, and draw conclusions.

Qualitative Findings

Typologies of hurtful events

To address the first objective of the study, which is to explore the different types of hurt experienced by Ghanaian couples in their relationships, the findings enhance and expand on existing typologies of hurtful events. Five categories of hurts identified in this study aligned with Feeney (2004) typologies: active disassociation, passive disassociation, infidelity, criticism, and deception. Three aligned with Osei-Tutu et al. (2019): disrespect, abuse, and neglect of duty. This study identified two more types of hurt: insecurity and humiliation. These categories both

confirm cross-cultural typologies of relational hurt and project the context-specific extensions (humiliation and insecurity) that deserve particular theoretical and practical attention in the Ghanaian setting.

Active disassociation includes behaviors showing a partner's indifference and detachment, like intentional avoidance, emotional neglect, and lack of affection. Consistent with findings by Feeney (2004), such behaviors indicate a lack of commitment and care, damaging intimacy and exacerbating feelings of rejection and loneliness (Leary, 1998; Richter et al., 2024). Emotional neglect can lead to feelings of being unloved, loneliness, and decreased marital satisfaction (Finkenauer & Hazam, 2000). It can cause uncertainty about a partner's support and availability, leading to attachment insecurity. Closeness and contentment develop through mutual response and emotional engagement, but a lack of responsiveness can increase unhappiness and emotional turmoil. The present data, therefore, treat sustained emotional withdrawal as not only a sign of conflict but as a discrete form of hurt that undermines attachment security and complicates repair efforts.

On the other hand, exclusionary behaviors that left partners out of important choices, events, or discussions showed passive disassociation. This exclusion leads to emotional disengagement and distance, negatively impacting the unity and enjoyment of relationships (Chen, 2024). As a result, unresolved conflicts, diminished closeness, and ineffective communication often ensue (Baxter & Montgomery, 2010). Similar to our findings, Feeney (2004) asserts that, Frequent exclusion in relationships can lead to feelings of neglect and a lack of appreciation for others and have significant emotional impacts on individuals and their relationships, including sadness, anxiety, and discontent (Leary, 1998). Together, active and passive disassociation suggest a relational process in which different forms of withdrawal,

whether overt avoidance or subtle exclusion, create chronic distance that makes reconciliation more difficult.

Infidelity includes emotional or sexual activities with someone outside the primary relationship, leading to breaches of trust and relational norms (Rahman, 2025). Consistent with Osei-Tutu et al. (2019), participants framed infidelity as both an immediate betrayal and a long-term corrosive force on trust and marital cohesion in the Ghanaian context. Sexual infidelity disrupts physical intimacy exclusivity, while emotional infidelity harms the emotional connection between partners (Rokach & Chan, 2023). Infidelity causes deep emotional pain, betrayal, and loss, harming trust and communication while reducing marital satisfaction and unity. The study findings are also supported by Shrestha et al.'s (2023) claims that Infidelity leads to emotional pain, creating feelings of inadequacy, anger, and sadness, affecting both the relationship and the individual over time (Feeney, 2004).

Deception in relationships, whether through lies, withholding information, exaggerations, half-truths, or sharing personal concerns, also impacts relationship dynamics. Notably, participants described deception as hurtful, even when motivated by conflict avoidance, implying that intent alone does not reliably mitigate its hurtful impact. As confirmed by Feeney (2004) findings, Deception weakens the security and integrity of the relationship, creating distrust and doubt. Deception, even when intended to preserve harmony, is often viewed as damaging and can seriously harm relationships (Horan & Dillow, 2009), leading to anger, disappointment, and fostering mistrust (Fehr, 2010).

Much rooted in the African context, specifically Ghana, Osei-Tutu et al. (2019) identified seven key categories of transgressions in Ghanaian marriages, expanding on those noted by Feeney (2004). This includes five transgressions from Feeney and two unique ones common

among the Ghanaian participants in their study, also noted here. These included disrespect, neglect of duty, and violence. These parallels validate earlier Ghanaian typologies while pointing to local emphases on public reputation, duty, and honor (Dzokoto et al., 2018; Malm et al., 2022).

Disrespect in romantic relationships often manifests itself in behaviors or actions that are indicative of a lack of care, consideration, or decency towards one's partner. When couples feel unappreciated or treated unfairly, it has a substantial effect on their emotional and psychological well-being (Jayamaha et al., 2021). According to study results, feeling belittled or embarrassed often results from behaviors such as yelling at a partner or using mean words during conflict, which constitutes a severe form of disrespect. Similar to Osei-Tutu et al. (2019), cultural norms around individual roles in relationships mediate these feelings of disrespect. Cultural and economic issues impact couples' perceptions regarding disrespect and its impact on couples' relationships (Finkel & Campbell, 2001). This behavior hurts self-esteem and produces an unsupportive, hostile relationship (Osei-Tutu et al, 2019). So, cultural norms mediate what counts as disrespect and affect the emotional consequences of it in different ways among couples in Ghana.

Domestic violence is a means of control involving physical and verbal abuse that degrades the victims and disempowers their self-confidence and self-determination (Rakovec-Felser, 2014). Physical abuse is obviously damaging, leaving physical wounds and scarring, but verbal abuse in the form of threats and intimidation leaves similarly deep psychological scars (Dziewa & Glowacz, 2021). The participants said that the manipulation and coercion tactics used by the perpetrator deny the victim his/her freedom and destroy self-esteem, a poisonous relationship that strengthens the role of the abuser (Dichter et al., 2018). The stories also point to the intersections of coercive control with culturally situated gender norms, which magnify its

psychological hurt and make seeking help even more difficult. In line with this statement, Stark and Hester (2018) also reported that the negative impact of Coercive control (characterized by isolation and intimidation) is often more severe on autonomy and mental health than physical assault. Consequently, the cycle of violence leads to fear and imprisonment, which prevents the victims from escaping.

Cultural gender roles influence the expectations of relationships. When these are not met, it indicates an absence of responsibility in a relationship, showing the lack of concern for the needs of one's partner (Osei-Tutu et al., 2019). Unlike malicious hurt, neglect is the result of carelessness or inattentiveness and tends to make it hard to assign blame (Moore & Hurd, 2011). In other words, this negligence produces a lack of clarity regarding responsibility or whether its effects are the same as those of intentional acts (Goldberg & Zipursky, 2016). Either way, inattention can hurt relationships by causing feelings of neglect and emotional hurt. Because neglect often does not have clear intentionality, participants discussed a challenge in allocating blame, which in turn makes processes of reconciliation and perceived justice more difficult.

In addition to the typologies of hurt by Feeney (2004) and Osei-Tutu et al. (2019), we identified two more typologies specific to our study: humiliation and insecurity. Humiliation, including public shame, personal insults, and reputational harm, significantly affects a person's self-esteem and emotional well-being. Public humiliation, where a spouse is belittled or ignored in front of others, increases feelings of shame and vulnerability. Attacks on identity aspects like cultural or ethnic origin often led to feelings of devaluation. One notable thing is that this study categorized insult under humiliation, even though Osei-Tutu et al. (2019) pointed out that insult is a major offense with its own unique nature. According to Osei-Tutu et al. (2019), the primary concern is not the content of the insult, instead how publicly it is delivered. However, this study

analyzed both the content and the nature of insults, classifying this offense as rather humiliating, especially in public, as it signals personal attacks that can lead to prolonged feelings of inadequacy, causing sadness, anxiety, social withdrawal, and strained relationships (Mofatteh, 2020; Torres & Bergner, 2010). By subsuming insult under the broader category of humiliation, the study foregrounds public shaming and reputational harm as central mechanisms that generate prolonged emotional damage in relationships.

Insecurity in relationships, driven by uncertainty, self-doubt, and inadequacy, greatly affects relationship dynamics and personal well-being (Lawati et al., 2025). This may manifest as a need for constant attention, disrupting the relationship dynamics. For example, one partner may feel neglected, while the other feels burdened by ongoing requests for reassurance. These imbalances can put a strain on relationships, particularly when stemming from attachment anxiety linked to past experiences or personality traits (Simpson & Overall, 2014; Simpson & Rholes, 2016). Similar to our findings, Kouri et al. (2024) found that attachment anxiety acts as a hurtful transgression that heightens negative emotions, reduces positive emotions, and increases emotional distress. Mood swings and emotional instability amplify these issues, creating a volatile environment that obstructs mutual support (Bhola & Kharsati, 2016). This emotional instability can lead to emotional contagion, worsening hurt between couples, increased conflict, and lower relational satisfaction (Johnson & Whiffen, 2003). Insecurity, therefore, emerges as an emotionally driven typology that interacts with attachment anxiety and emotional contagion to create cyclical patterns of hurt and withdrawal.

Gender Differences in Hurtful Events

As part of the fourth objective of the study, which sought to examine the specificity of gender differences in hurtful events among couples, the results showed unique gender patterns in

hurtful events perpetrated by their partners, often guided by societal expectations and norms of relationships.

Male partners tended to participate in activities that conflicted with emotional intimacy and confidence, active and passive disidentification, and emotional desertion or isolation. Such practices are in line with the research on how damaging neglect, loneliness, and the silent treatment are to relationships (Guerrero, 2014). Holding back on communication or love often led to a loss of interaction and left the female partners feeling helpless and frustrated. This mental pressure meant that they could not afford the safety that could support a healthy relationship. That is in line with findings that indicate that women often experience emotional distress as a result of practices like neglect and abandonment (Metts & Cupach, 2007).

Adultery was identified with men. These actions erode the fundamental trust in relationships, leading to ongoing complications in repairing and rebuilding them. Infidelity often sends the message of betrayal to women because of its emotional impact (Varma & Maheshwari, 2024). This is consistent with Rokach and Chan's (2023) study of infidelity, in which women are more likely to interpret infidelity in terms of trust violation and are less worried about the utilitarian aspect of the relationships. This means that some interpretations of betrayal among Ghanaian couples focus on the emotional aspect rather than the relationship breakage.

Male partners were also related to violence or controlling behaviors. The verbal or physical abuse was perceived as an endeavor to gain dominance and control in the relationship (Adjei, 2015). These actions demonstrate the knowledge mentioned in the literature on relational power relations, specifically how control techniques and emotional abuse can undermine the freedom of a partner and his or her self-image, especially when male partners often use control to achieve dominance (Mshweshwe, 2020; Ubillos-Londa et al., 2020). Men, being highly dependent on

masculine norms, as the paper by Reidy et al. (2014) confirms, are more prone to use violence towards their women, and these findings indicate that relational actions of male partners tend to contribute to the aggravation of relational hurt and hinder forgiveness.

Female spouses tend to be associated with acts that disrupt relational harmony, particularly through emotional displays or actions that challenge the male partner's role or power. The lack of relational responsibility, particularly in relationships where there are rigid traditional-based gender roles, was also linked with females. In line with the findings, Osei-Tutu et al. (2018) also stated that male counterparts were more likely to understand this neglect as a show of disrespect or a lack of commitment, which contributes to frustration and tension in the relationship. Such results are consistent with the studies of gendered expectations, which suggested that the lack of attention to domestic roles in certain cultural settings might become the source of relational strain (Osei-Tutu et al., 2018; Thomeer et al., 2020). Women who are trying to live conventional lives do find it hard to reconcile their own wishes with societal demands, and they find themselves being misunderstood and not supported. It is based on the results of Delgado-Herrera et al. (2024), who presume that female behavior, associated with neglect, cannot be viewed as noncompliance at all, as this is what social judgment and emotional work pressure cause.

Another observation was the insecurity of the female partners. Although they were the weaker sex, reassurance or infidelity concerns were generally viewed by male partners as heavy or unreasonably harsh. Such actions commonly caused male partners to draw away, because the higher the emotional intensity of their partners' concerns, the further apart the partners were (Oliffe et al., 2022; Simpson & Overall, 2015). All of these dynamic matches were consistent with Ding et al. (2021), who suggest that insecurity can facilitate emotional distress and relationship problems with aggravation through negligence or negative remarks (Kouri et al., 2024). Based on the results

of the study, Female partners wanted to be validated or be given attention, and male partners withdrew, making it hard to communicate. These trends are reminiscent of the effect of gendered understandings of vulnerability and reassurance on relational hurt and forgiveness probability.

Some female partners committed crimes such as humiliation and disrespect, especially when their acts were perceived to embarrass or disrespect their male counterparts. On other occasions, female partners made decisions or did things in the community that male partners viewed as a challenge to their position or social status. These acts tend to cause injuries in the relationship, leading to feelings of belittlement due to actions that affect their image to others, which in turn indicates social demands in relationships related to men and power relations. Like the study results, Overall et al. (2016) claim that men with less relationship power become less masculine when their partner does not want to resolve conflicts, and this may result in increased aggression towards their partner. Public humiliation greatly affects male partner self-worth, especially with reference to their perceived failure to fulfill societal demands of power and dominance (Tsirigotis et al., 2013). This observation validates the previous research on the subject of public humiliation but adds to it by highlighting its significant role in the perceived relational authority of male partners in Ghanaian cultural contexts (Anapey et al., 2021; Sikweyiya et al., 2020).

The trends reveal how social norms and relationship expectations can lead to hurtful actions. Relational hurt was caused jointly by both male and female partners, although their behavior often reflected typical gender roles and emotional vulnerabilities of their partners. These findings were combined with the previous findings in the study in order to identify the dynamics of relational hurt and also in terms of the relevance of both partners to relational issues being addressed, and more so the cultural and gendered expectations of relational issues. These gendered

inclinations create a set of guidelines according to which relational hurt might be framed as having oppositional effects on coping and forgiveness.

Age Differences in Hurtful Events

To build upon the fourth objective, the research incorporated the issue of age difference and its impact on relational processes and emotional experiences and conflict management in couples, with the focus on its impact on the reaction to hurtful situations. Injurious events revealed a gap in age between various age groups and couples with age gaps.

It was found that relational transgressions including active and passive disassociation and infidelity were especially prone to younger couples, and infidelity during pre-marriage tended to exacerbate these difficulties into marriage. Being more insecure and humiliated compared to others, they easily have insecurity and a desire to receive peer affirmation and social acceptance when they are more in need of them (Baumeister et al., 2001). This is consistent with evidence from the study of Lavner et al. (2013) which showed that younger newlyweds in general, and those entering marriage with histories of premarital infidelity or unstable relationships in particular, were more likely to experience greater marital distress. Immaturity, social pressures from the outside world, and the need for acceptance from peers made them more likely to be hurt by relational wounds and to escalate conflict. This insecurity was further compounded by repeated episodes of verbal assaults, which led to considerable emotional suffering (Fincham et al., 2004; Steiner et al., 2011). Taken together, the patterns in this new study affirm the previous studies while showcasing the heightened sensitivity of younger adults to relational hurt and peer influence in the Ghanaian context (Bingenheimer et al., 2015).

Middle-aged couples face unique relational issues that make them different than younger couples. Silent treatment, neglect and feelings of being shut out from decision-making processes were on the rise (Steiner et al., 2011). In this age group, infidelity tends to be more flirting and flings away from the home, a contrast to the more blatant cases of infidelity in younger couples. Middle-aged people encounter significant relational challenges, such as anger, verbal abuse, and control issues, with insecurity frequently stemming from the difficulty of balancing work and personal lives. The findings also highlight specific challenges related to financial support for adult children. These patterns illustrate that middle-aged couples' relational hurt is often influenced by life-stage pressures, complicating forgiveness and emotional recovery. To confirm these claims, Umberson et al. (2005) emphasize that role overload, caregiving responsibilities, and financial stress in midlife frequently intensify conflict and emotional distance, reinforcing the view that such pressures undermine relational stability. However, Carr and Utz (2020) note that accumulated conflict-management skills and stronger commitment in middle age can help couples navigate these difficulties more effectively than younger couples, suggesting that while the challenges are real, middle-aged partners may also possess resources that buffer their impact.

Older couples face relational hurts that mirror their life stage (Steiner et al., 2011). While verbal abuse might happen less frequently in older individuals, factors like neglect and infidelity in the marital relationship become more relevant (Charles & Almeida, 2006). Infidelity in older couples often includes connections with extended family members, while a need for attention and widespread mistrust characterizes insecurity. Older adults face humiliation in private, domestic settings, emphasizing the enduring impact on personal dignity. This is different from the deeper relational pains experienced by younger and middle-aged couples. Supporting this, Charles and Piazza (2009) found that older adults manage minor conflicts and avoid disputes to enhance

emotional closeness and maintain good relationships, prioritizing stability over confrontation. However, Birditt and Fingerman (2005) suggest that despite these adaptive strategies, older adults may still experience unresolved tensions with spouses or adult children that continue to erode well-being, showing that avoiding conflict does not always eliminate the emotional toll of relational hurts.

In addition, the findings indicated patterns of dissociation for age-gap couples in both active and passive form. Older adults often use passive emotion regulation strategies such as avoidance and passive conflict management (Charles & Carstensen, 2008) that is related to the passive disassociation observed in these relationships. In contrast to older adults, younger adults appear to withdraw emotionally and have more relational hurts. This power differentials were exposed, in some cases older partners took the lead, which led to more resentment from younger partners. Young people have a greater sensitivity to negative feedback and typically view the power imbalance as controlling/oppressive. This differs from findings by Cabras et al. (2022), who observed that older adults are more forgiving than younger adults and had higher levels of passive coping strategies, which would indicate lower intensity of emotional reactions to conflicts. These findings suggest that age-related power dynamics impact emotional response, relational hurt, and paths to forgiveness.

One of the issues in age-difference relationships is disrespect, often in the form of degrading and dismissive behavior. Young partners are more likely to be sensitive about feeling disrespected, while older partners might decide to look past such behavior in order to keep peace (Baumeister et al., 2001). This amplifies relational hurt and supports the results of Charles and Almeida (2006), who suggested that younger adults might consider older adults' passive response to being treated with disrespect as dismissive. Deception and humiliation became relational

wounds with weight, conditioned by intergenerational differences in communication and expectation. Withholding information might lead older adults to be perceived as deceptive by younger couples (Charles & Carstensen, 2008; Coats et al., 2013). This expectation gap creates strain on the relationship as younger spouses feel undervalued by behaviors they judge as deceptive or dishonest. Fingerman and Charles (2010) corroborate this observation, noting that younger couples tend to encounter uncertainty and trust problems while older couples tend to avoid scenarios that could result in embarrassment. These show that the generational differences in perception and communication increase relational hurt and create challenges to forgiveness across generations.

Criticism causes relational tension and is a result of generation differences in expectations. Young people are very sensitive to negative feedback; they perceive criticism as judgment or devaluation, while older adults may perceive criticism as constructive. This gap between the generations is a permanent source of frustration for adults born after the old generation, which is criticized and positioned in the sphere of emotional alienation. Neglect of duty: It is often regarded by young partners as a lack of commitment and by older adults as affected by outside factors (like work or health priorities). This result is consistent with the work of Helson and Soto (2005), who suggest that older people may tend to prioritize less but more important social relationships and overlook the need to attend to relationship responsibilities, leading to feelings of neglect on the part of the younger partner. From the study, it was determined that age not only affects the nature of hurt but also subjective meanings and coping styles with implications for forgiveness and relational maintenance.

Quantitative Findings

Age, Relationship Length, and Their Impact on Hurt

To address the third objective of the study, which assesses the uniqueness of age differences in hurtful events and forgiveness among couples, the findings from Hypotheses 1a and 1b show that age and relationship length do not have a statistically significant effect on the impact of hurtful events. This finding indicates that emotional responses to hurt are not automatically moderated by chronological age or the duration of the relationship. This finding challenges the common assumption that older individuals or those in long-term relationships are better able to deal with emotional pain or experience hurt differently. Rather than age or relationship length, individual characteristics and environmental considerations impact emotional responses to hurtful events. This suggests that chronological age alone does not necessarily attenuate emotional responses to relational hurt. The absence of a significant age impact aligns with broader psychological research emphasizing the importance of individual differences in emotional processing and coping (Benson et al., 2019). Personal history, personality traits, and situational contexts have a greater influence on emotional well-being and the ability to cope with hurtful events than age alone. For example, individuals with effective coping strategies may navigate painful situations better, regardless of age (Yang et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the data indicate that hurtful events in relationships have a significant impact on emotional well-being, regardless of age or relationship duration. Emotional fallout from hurtful events affects anyone in an intimate relationship, emphasizing the need for effective management of these experiences to sustain emotional health (Fincham & Beach, 2010). The findings also challenge the assumption that longer relationships automatically result in greater emotional resilience. While longer-term couples are often presumed to have stronger coping strategies, this study found that relationship length does not significantly influence the impact of hurt. Instead,

relationship quality, communication patterns, and individual coping abilities play more critical roles in moderating emotional responses. This aligns with Weber and Hülür (2022), who found that relationship duration did not buffer emotional reactions to conflict among older couples. Instead, it was relationship satisfaction that reduced negative emotional responses, particularly among women. Additionally, factors such as attachment patterns, emotional regulation abilities, previous experiences of hurt, and the presence of social support can dramatically influence outcomes (Eilert & Buchheim, 2023). Thus, age and relationship duration are less influential than the context and individual factors surrounding relational hurt.

Negative Appraisals and Their Influence on Forgiveness

To address the second objective of the study, which is to analyze the relationships among hurt impact, negative appraisals, and forgiveness in couples' relationships, Hypotheses 2, 4b, and 5a examined how negative appraisals influence the forgiveness process. The data indicate that negative appraisals decrease over time in longer relationships, although this trend is not statistically significant. This suggests that while relationship duration may allow for reflection, the presence of negative appraisals still limits forgiveness, emphasizing the importance of cognitive and emotional processing in managing hurtful events.

Negative appraisals are consistently associated with lower forgiveness rates for both partners, demonstrating that negative perceptions of hurtful events hinder forgiveness. This finding is consistent with previous research, which has shown that negative appraisals act as emotional barriers to forgiveness, thereby complicating the management of forgiveness in relationships (Feeney, 2004; Lazarus, 2000). Similarly, Beltrán-Morillas et al. (2019) found that ongoing negative emotions, such as resentment and anger, were linked to non-forgiveness, often leading

individuals to respond with revenge or avoidance rather than reconciliation. These results reinforce the view that negative appraisals and emotional responses act as barriers that obstruct the forgiveness process in close relationships. Our study highlights the bidirectional nature of this dynamic: one partner's negative appraisals affect not only their own willingness to forgive but also the emotional environment of the relationship, influencing the partner's forgiveness process. Such appraisals can cause people to reflect on the offense, resulting in prolonged hurt and resentment that hinder the willingness to forgive (Lacey & Pickard, 2015; Poggi & D'Errico, 2018). The constant negative relationship between negative appraisals and forgiveness in both spouses emphasizes the dynamic's bidirectional nature. When one partner carries negative appraisals, it affects not only their willingness to forgive but also the emotional environment of the relationship. This shared influence emphasizes the dynamics of forgiving in close relationships, in which both partners' views and emotions are linked (Fincham, 2000; Wazid & Shahnawaz, 2017).

Negative appraisals can perpetuate a cycle of blame and defensiveness, exacerbating hurt and making forgiveness more challenging (Malle et al., 2014). Furthermore, the results are consistent with theories that offer negative appraisals (Lazarus, 2000). According to the stress-and-coping model of forgiveness, negative appraisals can raise stress and limit the cognitive resources available for forgiveness (Toussaint et al., 2016; Worthington & Scherer, 2004). The findings of this study, which show that negative appraisals are inversely associated with forgiveness, support the notion that cognitive and emotional responses to hurt are important determinants of forgiveness. Thus, when partners focus on the negative aspects of hurt, they are less likely to demonstrate the empathy and perspective-taking required for forgiveness (Fupšová & Záhorcová, 2022). Therefore, these findings emphasize that both cognitive and emotional

responses to hurt are central determinants of forgiveness, and interventions targeting these appraisals could support healthier relational outcomes.

Gender Differences in Hurt intensity and Forgiveness

The study's multilevel analysis revealed notable gender differences in responses to hurt and forgiveness, with females showing greater levels of forgiveness compared to males. This finding addresses the fourth objective of the study, which examines gender differences in hurtful events and forgiveness among couples**.** The results align with earlier research suggesting that variations in emotional processing and socialization contribute to these differences (Overall et al., 2015; Valor-Segura et al., 2010). More hurt usually corresponds with less forgiveness, and gender plays a role in shaping this dynamic (Greenman & Johnson, 2013; Kaleta & Mróz, 2021). These distinctions are important for understanding how men and women experience and respond to hurt and forgiveness in relationships.

Women tend to practice emotional forgiveness, which involves understanding and expressing feelings related to the offense. This type of forgiveness is typically more holistic and integrative, helping individuals process emotions and achieve reconciliation with painful events (Schumman & Ross, 2010; Worthington, 2013). Women are generally socialized to develop greater empathy and emotional intelligence than men, which enhances their capacity for emotional forgiveness. Research indicates that women are often encouraged from a young age to be emotionally expressive and in touch with their feelings, which supports their ability to process and forgive emotional injuries (Thompson & Voyer, 2014; Valor-Segura et al., 2010).

In contrast, men tend to practice decisional forgiveness, meaning they consciously choose to forgive without necessarily engaging in the emotional processing associated with emotional

forgiveness. This form of forgiveness emphasizes thinking and practicality, focusing on the decision to release resentment and move forward (Farrow & O'Connor, 2017). Men are often socialized to value rationality and emotional control, which results in a more cognitive or distant approach to forgiveness (Kato, 2016; Tsirigotis et al., 2013). This highlights how gender influences the forgiveness process differently.

The relationship between higher levels of hurt and lower forgiveness underscores the significant role of emotional pain as an obstacle to forgiveness. While this applies to both genders, the mechanisms differ: women may struggle with absorbing and processing emotional trauma, even though they lean toward emotional forgiveness (Schumman & Ross, 2010), whereas men may experience difficulty in the decisional aspect, where deep hurt complicates the mental choice to forgive (Greenman & Johnson, 2013; Toussaint & Webb, 2005). These findings underscore that gendered socialization and emotional processing patterns shape the ways individuals respond to hurt and engage in forgiveness within romantic relationships.

Impact of Hurtful Events on Negative Appraisals

Hypothesis 4, addressing the third objective of the study, examines how the impact of hurt experienced by one partner predicts negative appraisals within the relationship**.** The findings demonstrate that the hurt experienced by one partner significantly predicts their own negative affect, but not that of their partner. Similarly, each partner's hurt strongly predicts their own negative affect, while showing no significant effect on the other partner. This pattern suggests that individuals predominantly internalize their emotional responses to hurtful events, reflecting high levels of negative appraisals that are largely self-directed**.**

These results are consistent with Feeney (2004) Theory of Perceived Hurt, which posits that hurt feelings arise from relational violations that undermine self-worth, partner value, and relationship value, leading to negative appraisals. Aligning with the Stress Appraisal Theory, this finding emphasizes that individuals' primary appraisal of hurtful situations drives their emotional responses and negative evaluations (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

The negative consequences of these appraisals include increased depressive symptoms, heightened anxiety, and reduced self-worth, particularly in relationships characterized by frequent or severe hurt (Goldsmith & Freyd, 2005; Peatee, 2018). Both parts of the dyad demonstrate that hurtful events can generate substantial negative appraisals and psychological distress, highlighting the importance of implementing effective coping strategies. The study findings indicate that subjective interpretations and relational context are central to understanding the emotional and cognitive impact of hurt in couples.

Moderating Factors in the Relationship Between Hurt and Forgiveness

To control moderating variables, hypothesis 6 was analyzed. This analysis directly addresses Objective 2, as it examines how hurt impact, negative appraisals, and forgiveness interrelate in couples' relationships. Hypothesis 6 indicates that religious homogamy and relationship length influenced the connection between negative appraisals and decisional forgiveness.

The findings in Hypothesis 6a suggest that religious homogamy moderates the connection between negative appraisals and decisional forgiveness. Negative appraisals, which include experiences of harm or betrayal, were strong predictors of decisional forgiveness, consistent with prior work showing that the severity of an appraisal raises emotional barriers to forgiveness

(Fitness, 2006). While religious homogamy alone did not exert a significant effect on decisional forgiveness, incorporating the interaction term between negative appraisals and religious homogamy greatly enhanced the model's explanatory power. This indicates that shared religious beliefs play an important role in shaping how partners respond to hurt, particularly in the decision to forgive. These results complement the findings of Osei-Tutu et al. (2021), who reported that religious homogamy was directly associated with lower unforgiving motives, such as avoidance and revenge, but did not moderate the relationship between personality traits (e.g., agreeableness and trait forgivingness) and unforgiveness. Whereas their study emphasized the main effect of religious similarity in reducing unforgiveness, the current findings highlight its moderating role in shaping how negative appraisals influence decisional forgiveness. Together, these studies suggest that religious homogamy not only reduces unforgiveness but also interacts with appraisals of hurt to shape forgiveness processes, offering a more nuanced understanding of the role of shared faith in intimate relationships. This finding is further supported by Lambert and Fincham (2011), who demonstrated that shared religious beliefs help couples interpret hurtful events more forgivingly by providing a framework of compassion, reconciliation, and spiritual goals. Such shared beliefs enhance coping skills and create a relational context that fosters reconciliation. By contrast, couples from different religions may lack this shared perspective, making forgiveness more difficult. In line with Osei-Tutu et al. (2021), interfaith couples were more likely to display unforgiveness when combined with traits such as high neuroticism, lower tolerance when hurt, and reduced marital satisfaction or commitment.

Hypothesis 6b also provides important insights into the role of forgiveness in relationships, particularly concerning relationship length. The data indicate that the length of the relationship does not significantly influence the connection between the impact of hurt and decisional

forgiveness. This result contradicts the notion that the duration of a relationship might naturally influence the forgiveness process (McCullough et al., 1998; Pronk et al., 2017). Longer relationships were thought to provide more opportunities for resolving conflicts and understanding each other, leading to improved outcomes in forgiveness (Asadi et al., 2016). However, this finding suggests that forgiveness is a complex process influenced more by emotional and relational factors than by the passage of time. This claim is consistent with those of Sandilya and Shahnawaz (2014), who found that forgiveness is shaped by emotional and relational factors (e.g., gender roles, emotional hurt), rather than simply the length of the relationship (Fincham et al., 2002; Finkel et al., 2002). In long-term relationships, partners may struggle to forgive due to unresolved conflicts, deep-seated issues, or a breakdown in trust (Fincham et al., 2004). Shorter relationships, on the other hand, might find it easier to forgive due to a desire to maintain harmony, often referred to as the "honeymoon effect" (Kato, 2016). This confirms that, forgiveness is not determined by time alone but is deeply embedded in the emotional and relational context surrounding hurtful events.

Integrated Model of Hurt, Appraisal, and Forgiveness in Romantic Relationships

The study's findings emphasize the key role of perceived hurt in the dynamics of relationships and in the potential for forgiveness. As seen in the conceptual model, hurt has a mediating effect between relational offenses and appraisal processes. As expected, high-impact hurts (e.g., infidelity, active disassociation, and humiliation) were associated with more negative evaluations, which in turn decreased the propensity to forgive. Conversely, lower impact transgressions (i.e., low levels of neglect of duty or mild criticism) were more likely to be positively reappraised, producing forgiveness as well as resilience with regard to the relationship. This is consistent with the possibility that hurt intensity mediates the relation between relational transgressions and appraisal processes. Although these results are based on a Ghanaian sample,

the mechanisms through which hurt affects appraisal and forgiveness have implications for relational research in other cultural contexts.

The qualitatively identified typologies of hurtful events are consistent with patterns observed in the quantitative data on the impact of hurt and forgiveness. Although the qualitative and quantitative strands were analyzed separately, the quantitative analyses found significant correlations between higher 'impact-of-hurt' scores and lower 'appraisal/forgiveness' scores, supporting the hypothesis that more serious transgressions provoke stronger affective responses and reduce the disposition to forgive. The qualitative accounts complement these results by illustrating how such hurts are played out in daily interactions and how partners make sense of them emotionally.

Qualitatively identified gender and age differences were also supported quantitatively. Male partners were more likely to engage in behaviors such as disassociation, infidelity, and control behaviors; while female partners were more likely to have displayed emotional expressions, insecurity, or behaviors believed to be disrespectful. Age differences also moderated the experience and appraisal of hurt: younger couples reported a stronger response to infidelity and criticism, whereas older couples engaged in avoidance and passive emotion regulation (in line with adaptive coping strategies). These findings support the conceptual model with regard to the individual influence of gender and age on appraisal processes, which consequently affects the outcomes of forgiveness.

Novel Contributions

This study contributes to the literature on hurtful events in intimate relationships by providing support for existing typologies (Feeney, 2004; Osei-Tutu et al., 2019), but also reveals categories

of hurt previously unaddressed in the literature. Two other kinds of hurt - insecurity and humiliation - were identified. Insecurity describes the deep emotional scars that occur when partners feel inadequate, abandoned or unvalued, while humiliation describes the hurt of shaming, insult and reputational injury. By locating insult within the framework of humiliation, the study demonstrates how relational hurts, which are not private in the Ghanaian cultural context (where public image and honor matter), are expanded into the social domain (Malm et al., 2021). These contributions add to current typologies and expand theorization about relational hurt. Although these findings are reported with Ghanaian couples, the inclusion of insecurity and humiliation as unique categories adds to theoretical constructions relevant for cross-cultural studies of relational hurt.

The study also contributes to theory in a redefinition of relational withdrawal. While previous research often treats withdrawal as a byproduct of conflict, this study differentiates active and passive disassociation and demonstrates that withdrawal becomes a discrete hurt that depletes attachment security and complicates the process of forgiving (Fincham & Beach, 2002). This reformulation gives a more subtle account of the processes of relational breakdown. Although this distinction is developed from data collected from Ghanaian couples, it provides a conceptual tool for understanding withdrawal and its role in forgiveness in relational research more generally.

Another key contribution of this study lies in its examination of demographic influences. Contrary to common assumptions that age and relationship duration buffer couples against relational hurts, the results indicate that neither age nor years together reliably moderated the emotional impact of hurtful events. This finding challenges the stereotype that older couples or long-term partners are inherently more resilient, redirecting scholarly attention to the influence of

cultural scripts, individual differences, and relational contexts as more powerful explanatory factors (Osei-Tutu et al., 2019; Steiner et al., 2011).

The study also draws attention to the gendered nature of hurt. Male partners were more often associated with control, violence, and disassociation, whereas female partners frequently emerged in relation to neglect, humiliation, and expressions of insecurity. These findings underscore the role of gender norms in scripting not only expectations but also the ways hurt is perpetrated and experienced (Malm et al., 2021). Life stage further shaped these dynamics: younger couples often struggled with insecurity, infidelity, and pressures from peers; middle-aged couples experienced relational strains tied to financial and role-related stressors, leading to neglect and withdrawal, and older couples frequently encountered quiet neglect and generational differences in communication (Osafo et al., 2017; Steiner et al., 2011). Such patterns reveal hurt as a dynamic, life-course phenomenon that evolves with changing roles and responsibilities.

Finally, the study contributes to the literature on forgiveness by demonstrating that negative appraisals of hurtful events not only reduce an individual's likelihood of forgiveness but also affect the partner's emotional climate. This supports the view of forgiveness as a relational rather than purely individual process (Worthington, 2005). Furthermore, the moderating role of religious homogamy indicates that shared spiritual and moral frameworks can shape how couples navigate hurt and forgiveness, offering protective pathways for relationship repair (Malm et al., 2021).

Taken together, these findings make three important contributions: (1) the extension of hurt typologies by incorporating insecurity and humiliation as distinct and culturally grounded categories; (2) the challenge to conventional assumptions about age and relationship length as moderators of hurt, highlighting instead the salience of cultural and contextual factors; and (3) the

illumination of gendered, age-specific, and religiously framed dynamics of hurt and forgiveness. These contributions deepen theoretical understandings of relational hurt and position forgiveness as a culturally embedded, relationally negotiated process.

Hypotheses and Conceptual Integration

The quantitative part of the study largely supported the hypotheses tested, showing that negative appraisals of hurt predicted lower levels of forgiveness. Specifically, relational transgressions that threatened self-value or partner-value or emotional value were positively related to hurt feelings, confirming the mediating role of impact of hurt proposed in the conceptual framework. By integrating these results with qualitative findings, the study demonstrates that relational context, partner behavior, and individual appraisal tendencies, together with objective transgression severity, give rise to the subjective experience of hurt.

In conclusion, hurt, appraisal of hurt, and the effect of hurt constitute a complex system of interrelated variables that eventually affect relationship forgiveness in this study. The qualitative data allows contextualizing these experiences and providing detailed knowledge around the relational context of everyday life, while the quantitative analysis enables empirically validating the relationships proposed in the conceptual framework. Together, these findings provide support for a model where forgiveness is not simply an individual decision but rather a function of how hurt is perceived, evaluated, and attributed within a relational context.

Limitations

This study is a valuable addition to the body of knowledge on the nature of hurtful events experienced by Ghanaian couples, on how they evaluate these hurts, and on the role of forgiveness

in relationships. Despite its valuable contributions, there are a few limitations to this study that are important to note.

The study did not consider the timing of offense, which could have a very strong effect on how participants answered. Some of the offenses may have occurred long ago; others may be ongoing. Offenses committed years ago might have been worked through emotionally, and so the emotional intensity could have decreased, and there could be more forgiveness or acceptance. On the other hand, offenses that are relatively recent are likely to be associated with more intense emotional responses, such as anger, sadness, or a lack of forgiveness. By mixing together offenses that happened far in the past with those that happened more recently, the study might be missing important temporal effects in emotional and behavioral responses.

Moreover, offenses were not classified by their severity, which can have a wide range of impact upon relationships and emotional well-being. Small wrongs can lead to short-lived frustration and big wrongs can devastatingly cause hurt and relational damage. This limitation has implications for inferences regarding forgiveness, emotional recovery and relational outcomes, and limits generalizability.

In addition, the cross-sectional nature of the study prevents causal inferences about the relationship between variables. Longitudinal studies (studies that follow change over time) would be more relevant to grasping the development of hurtful events and the long-term effects of such events on relationships.

Finally, the small set of variables considered in the study is a significant limitation. By focusing mainly on hurtful events, their severity, and demographic differences, the study neglects other moderating or mediating factors such as personality, communication style, attachment, coping

style, or external stressors that can have a major impact on relationship functioning but are not accounted for in this study. This narrow focus robs us of the full richness of knowledge about the dynamics of interpersonal relationships.

Implications for Future Studies

This study will be a useful source of information on the nature of hurtful events experienced by Ghanaian couples, how they evaluate these hurts, and the place of forgiveness in the relationship. Limitations or shortcomings were reported for several suggestions to be implemented to improve future studies. A mixed methods longitudinal study to document the change in hurtful events and their impacts over time will provide a clearer framework of cause and effect and long-term impact. This way, you will get a clearer picture of how relationships are not static and how hurtful events may shift in meaning over time. Also, to extend the research to more culturally diverse populations in order to study the impact of cultural contexts on the mechanisms of hurt and forgiveness in relationships.

Additional research may be pursued to understand the role of external stressors, including money problems or social disturbances, personality factors and attachment styles on relationship processes and forgiveness. Once again, Future research also needs to consider other useful variables like patterns of communication, coping styles and external stressors in life, so that it can get a much more accurate picture of what happens to relationships. These can be critical determinants of the experience and management of hurtful events in relationships.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

The intervention of couple therapy should be supported by helping the couple to manage perceptions of hurt and enhance communication to reduce negative appraisals and promote forgiveness. The traumatic effects on the victims are mitigated to a very limited extent with the

aid of specific therapeutic programs, which are implemented through the insights that empathy development and communication training can play an important role in the reduction of the impact (Thomas, 1998, p. 45). Indicatively, the effects of negative appraisals can be mitigated by combining cognitive-behavioral strategies aimed at assisting partners to reinterpret their perceptions regarding other partners' actions. It may be helpful to encourage therapists to apply models developed by Fincham and Beach (2010) that emphasize forgiveness and reconciliation as the central elements of couples' therapy.

These models also highlight the need to put personal hurt into context and develop empathy to guide couples through the nuances of forgiveness. Regional therapy centers should be established to provide special programs focused on forgiveness and relationship enhancement. Such centers would be able to provide regular training and classes that use evidence-based treatments such as Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) and Gottman Method, which have been shown to enhance communication and emotional literacy between couples effectively. Moreover, these facilities can provide sliding scale charges to make the centers accessible to all couples, irrespective of their economic status.

There is a need to utilize community and religious platforms to advance forgiveness education and awareness, with a particular focus on addressing the diverse aspects of religious beliefs and practices. The initiatives that can be used to model campaigns are based on the campaigns that the Fetzer Institute has been carrying out to promote the healing power of forgiveness by engaging in community activity (Griffin et al., 2018; The Fetzer Institute, 2006). To make these campaigns even more effective and to reach a broader audience, it may be useful to use case studies of a variety of religious settings to explore some of the cultural idiosyncrasies of attitudes towards forgiveness. For example, by holding interactive seminars and workshops

where people can exchange their stories and experiences, the collective understanding of forgiveness within the community can be strengthened. Annual forgiveness festivals in the different communities should be organized, and these events should include things like forgiveness testimonial sessions, mediation booths, and guest speakers of different religious and cultural backgrounds talking about the importance of forgiveness. With these occurrences, it can be considered a platform to build awareness and teach the masses about the positive effects of forgiveness, thereby building a system of support in the community.

Utilizing programs that incorporate elements of emotional intelligence and conflict resolution across different age groups can foster stronger interpersonal relationships and promote forgiveness from an early age. Based on Goleman's (1995) findings on emotional intelligence, educational programs can be established to inform students on how to regulate their own emotions and interpret those of others. Through this training, the number of bullying cases and the relationship between peers can be reduced through compassion and understanding. Thus, conflict management programs, such as cooperative learning programs (Johnson & Johnson, 1996), can be used in schools in order to equip students with the knowledge that will help them resolve interpersonal conflict and develop forgiveness. Incorporate a forgiveness and conflict resolution curriculum in the national education system, beginning in elementary school through high school. Interactive activities, role-playing, and peer mediation training will be included in this curriculum to ensure that skills in emotional intelligence and conflict management are learned from an early age. Schools would also be able to collaborate with the local psychologists and counselors to host workshops that would train students and equip teachers to strengthen these skills.

Couples in the community can be better supported by training community and religious leaders on the subtle effects of shared religious beliefs on forgiveness. This training must include

the results of research by Fincham et al. (2006), which postulates that shared religious beliefs may at times increase the difficulties in forgiving. The International Forgiveness Institute has created training modules that can be modified to equip leaders with the means necessary to facilitate discussions and mediations that accommodate various views on forgiveness. By recognizing the complications that shared religious beliefs may bring to the forgiveness process, leaders can be taught how to guide couples through such a process and thereby foster healthier relationship dynamics within their congregations. Create a certification course to make community and religious leaders Certified Forgiveness Facilitators. In this program, they will be trained in psychology and social forgiveness, how to solve conflicts, and how to lead community discussions on sensitive issues.

Conclusion

The analytical presentations in both works focus on the multidimensionality of hurt, as well as forgiveness in intimate relationships. The results of this research are particularly relevant in the current context of modern society instability in Ghana and the global community as a whole, where relationships between individuals are being put to the test due to financial limitations, social implications, and the changing cultural norms. In Ghana, as in most parts of the world, the psychological and social aspects of relationships are gradually being recognized and influenced by both the traditional and contemporary stresses. This paper has shown that the nature of the hurt and the perceptions of the partners (negative appraisals) significantly contribute to the processes of forgiveness, and that the context is essential in understanding the processes of forgiveness.

The results also demonstrate that relationship-specific issues like religious homogamy and length of relationships, and demographic issues such as age and gender, contribute to some degree of influence on forgiveness. It is a multifaceted cluster of personal and interpersonal issues that

can be attributed to broader societal trends, where individualism is on the rise and traditional support systems in relationships are frequently undermined by the demands of modern life. The findings of the study undermine the widespread belief that time is the best remedy or that common values will be a sufficient factor to release interpersonal barriers. Instead, they also emphasize that forgiving is an activity that heavily relies on individual emotions and the details of relationship dynamics.

As Ghana and other communities continue to develop, and people become more aware of mental health and dynamics in relationships, this study can provide invaluable knowledge on how people can navigate hurt and forgiveness in a shifting world. A more subtle interpretation of these processes is further emphasized by the global context, in which a pandemic has challenged both personal and communal relations. The presented results lead to a reconsideration of classical views on forgiveness, encouraging more personalized strategies in the professional field of relationship counseling and social policy that will reflect the complex interrelation of emotional, cultural, and relational variables to promote forgiveness and healing.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Data Collection Instrument

Introduction

This research study aims to examine the hurtful events couples face in marriage, their feelings, and their ability to forgive. Participants will be required to fill a questionnaire, which will take 20-30 minutes. The information collected will be kept confidential and kept safe, and no personal information will be shared in any publications or presentations. Responses to the questionnaires will only be accessible to members of the research team.

SECTION A

Demographic Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions:

1. Age _____ years
2. What is your gender?
   - □ Male
   - □ Female
3. Which best describes you? (Choose all that apply)
   - □ Akan
   - □ Ga-Dangme
   - □ Mole-Dagbani
   - □ Ewe
   - □ Guan
   - □ Other (Specify: _____)
4. What is the highest grade or degree you have completed?
   - 1 □ no education
   - 2 □ up to secondary education
   - 3 □ post-secondary education Bachelor's degree
   - 4 □ master's degree
   - 5 □ doctorate degree
5. What is your current marital status?
   - 1 □ Married
   - 2 □ Cohabiting

Religion:

- □ Christian
- □ Islam
- □ Traditional
- □ No religion
- □ Other, please specify: _____

6. Length of relationship____

How old is your spouse? _____ years

What is the highest level of education…

… **you** have attained?

- ☐ No school certificate
- ☐ Primary School
- ☐ Junior Secondary School
- ☐ Senior Secondary School
- ☐ Training College
- ☐ University or Polytechnic

… **your spouse** has attained?

- ☐ No school certificate
- ☐ Primary School
- ☐ Junior Secondary School
- ☐ Senior Secondary School
- ☐ Training College
- ☐ University or Polytechnic

What is **your** current employment status?

- ☐ Full time ☐
- ☐ Part Time
- ☐ Retired
- ☐ Not employed

Is **your spouse** currently employed?

- ☐ Full time
- ☐ Part Time
- ☐ Retired
- ☐ Not employed

SECTION B

6. Describe one of the most hurtful events committed against you by your spouse in your marriage.

Hurtfulness of the Hurt

7. Please rate the hurtfulness of the offense you described above, using the scale below. Circle your answer.

1	2	3	4	5
Very little hurt				Large amount of hurt

8. Time Since the Hurt or Offense

Please estimate the time in months since the offense you described above occurred.

The offense occurred _____ months ago.

Relationship Closeness

9. Please describe the closeness of your relationship with the person **prior to the incident**.

-2	-1	0	+1	+2
Negative & Conflictual		Neutral or None		Positive & Harmonious

10. Please describe the closeness of your relationship with the person **after the incident**.

-2	-1	0	+1	+2
Negative & Conflictual		Neutral or None		Positive & Harmonious

Impact of Event Scale

DIRECTIONS: As you think about the offense, please indicate how frequently you experience each of the following experiences. Please circle your answer.

1. I thought about it when I didn't mean to.	Not at all	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
2. I had trouble falling asleep or staying asleep because of pictures or thoughts about it that came to my mind.	Not at all	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
3. I had waves of strong feelings about it.	Not at all	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
4. I had dreams about it.	Not at all	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
5. Pictures about it popped into my mind.	Not at all	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
6. Other things kept making me think about it.	Not at all	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
7. Any reminder brought back feelings about it.	Not at all	Rarely	Sometimes	Often

Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS-SF)

DIRECTIONS: Indicate the extent you have felt this way over the past week. Please circle your answer.

		Very slightly or not at all	A little	Moderately	Quite a bit	Extremely
PANAS2	Distressed	1	2	3	4	5
PANAS4	Upset	1	2	3	4	5
PANAS6	Guilty	1	2	3	4	5
PANAS7	Scared	1	2	3	4	5
PANAS8	Hostile	1	2	3	4	5

PANAS11	Irritable	1	2	3	4	5
PANAS13	Ashamed	1	2	3	4	5
PANAS15	Nervous	1	2	3	4	5
PANAS18	Jittery	1	2	3	4	5
PANAS20	Afraid	1	2	3	4	5

Trait Forgiveness Scale

Directions: Indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement below by using the following scale:

5 = Strongly Agree 4 = Mildly Agree 3 = Agree and Disagree Equally

	1	2	3	4	5
1.People close to me probably think I hold a grudge too long.	1	2	3	4	5
2.I can forgive a friend for almost anything.	1	2	3	4	5
3.If someone treats me badly, I treat him or her the same.	1	2	3	4	5
4.I try to forgive others even when they don't feel guilty for what they did.	1	2	3	4	5
5.I can usually forgive and forget an insult.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I feel bitter about many of my relationships.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Even after I forgive someone, things often come back to me that I resent.	1	2	3	4	5
8. There are some things for which I could never forgive even a loved one.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I have always forgiven those who have hurt me.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I am a forgiving person.	1	2	3	4	5

Decision to Forgive Scale (Davis et al., 2015)

Rate your agreement with each of the items using 5-point ratings ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*.

	Strongly Disagree (SD)	Disagree (D)	Neutral (N)	Agree (A)	Strongly Agree (SA)

1. I have decided to forgive him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA
2. I made a commitment to forgive him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA
3. I have made up my mind to forgive him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA
4. My choice is to forgive him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA
5. My choice is to release any negative feelings I have.	SD	D	N	A	SA
6. I have chosen not to intentionally harbor resentment towards him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA

Emotional Forgiveness Scale

Think of your current emotions toward your spouse who hurt you. Indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree (SD)	Disagree (D)	Neutral (N)	Agree (A)	Strongly Agree (SA)
1. I care about him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA
2. I no longer feel upset when I think of him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA
3. I'm bitter about what he or she did to me.	SD	D	N	A	SA
4. I feel sympathy toward him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA
5. I'm mad about what happened.	SD	D	N	A	SA
6. I like him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA
7. I resent what he or she did to me.	SD	D	N	A	SA
8. I feel love toward him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA

Appendix 2: Informed Consent Document

Section A- BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Title of Study: Hurtful Events and Forgiveness Among Ghanaian Couples

Principal Investigator: Rhoda Aforkor Quaye

Participant's ID No: …….

Section B– CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

General Information about Research

The purpose of this research study is to obtain information and examine the hurtful events couples have encounter in marriage, how they felt and whether they have been able to forgive or not. If you meet the inclusion criteria and agree to participate in the study, you will be required to spend 20 to 30 minutes of your time to fill a questionnaire of your experience on the aforementioned.

Benefits/Risks of the study

This study does not have the tendency to pose any risk to you as a participant and all efforts will be made to ensure that it continues not to pose any danger. However, participants may be required to recall some hurtful events that might be discomforting. In this case, participants have the opportunity to contact the researcher for appropriate referral or assistance. The benefit from this study might be indirect where findings will inform psychologists the areas to focus on in mediation and couples' therapy.

Confidentiality

All information obtained from during the study from you during the study will be confidential and kept safe. Your privacy will be protected at all times. Your data which will be reviewed, evaluated and archived as part of this study, will be kept safe. Participants will not be identified individually and no personal identifying information will be shared in any publication or presentation resulting from the research. By this, you will not be required to provide your name. Responses to the questionnaires will be made accessible only to members of the research team. By signing this form, participants agree to provide such access.

Compensation

After the interview, you will be given souvenir to recompense you for your time and expenses for participating in this study. Participants also have the opportunity to inquire about available support for challenges they face as a result of their hurtful event shared for this study. Participants may also request for the findings of the study by contacting the principal investigator through the contacts provided below.

Withdrawal from Study

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. As a result, you have the option to withdraw from the study at any time. There will be no repercussions if you opt to withdraw from the study. Following your withdrawal, no data obtained from you will be included in the study. You will, however, be compelled to indicate your cause for termination. If your response to the questionnaires is incomplete, your participation will be revoked**.**

Contact for Additional Information

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, kindly contact

Dr. Annabella Osei-Tutu	Dr. Adote Anum	Rhoda Aforkor Quaye
University of Ghana	University of Ghana	University of Ghana

aopare-henaku@ug.edu.gh aanum@ug.edu.gh raquaye010@st.ug.edu.gh

0244745424 0249107770 0244906989

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant in this study you may contact the Administrator of the Ethics Committee for Humanities, ISSER, University of Ghana at ech@ug.edu.gh or 00233- 303-933-866.

Section C- PARTICIPANT AGREEMENT

"I have read or have had someone read all of the above, asked questions, received answers regarding participation in this study, and I am willing to give my consent to participate in this study. I will not have waived any of my rights by signing this consent form. Upon signing this consent form, I will receive a copy for my personal records."

_____

Name of Participant

_____ _____

Signature or mark of Participant Date

If participant cannot read and or understand the form themselves, a witness must sign here:

I was present while the benefits, risks and procedures were read to the volunteer. All questions were answered and the volunteer has agreed to take part in the research.

_____

Name of witness

_____ _____

Signature of witness/ Mark Date

I certify that the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research have been explained to the above individual.

_____

Name of Person who Obtained Consent

_____ _____

Signature of Person Who Obtained Consent Date

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA
ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR THE HUMANITIES (ECH)
P. O. Box LG 74, Legon, Accra, Ghana

My Ref. No: ECH 252/ 22-23

November 01, 2023

Rhoda Aforkor Quaye
Department of Psychology
University of Ghana
Legon

ETHICAL CLEARANCE
(ECH 252/ 22-23)

The Ethics Committee for the Humanities (ECH) conducted a full board review and approved your protocol titled:

HURTFUL EVENTS AND FORGIVENESS AMONG GHANAIAN COUPLES

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: **RHODA AFORKOR QUAYE**

Please note that the final review report must be submitted to the Committee at the completion of the study. Your research records may be audited at any time during or after the implementation. Any modification of this research project must be submitted to ECH for review and approval prior to implementation.

Please report all serious adverse events related to this study to ECH within seven (7) days verbally and in writing within fourteen (14) days.

This certificate is valid until October 31, 2024. You are required to submit annual reports for continuing review.

Please accept my congratulations.

Yours Sincerely,

Professor C. Charles Mate-Kole
ECH Chair

Cc: Professor Annabella Osei-Tutu, Department of Psychology, UG
Professor Adote Anum, Department of Psychology, UG

Tel: +233 30 393 3866 Email: ech@ug.edu.gh