

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

The role of psychosocial factors affecting marital satisfaction in couples after marital infidelity

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Abstract

Background: Marital infidelity in our country is increasing and a few studies have been done on the factors influencing marital satisfaction afterwards. Therefore, in this study, we decided to determine the role of psychosocial factors affecting marital satisfaction in couples after marital infidelity.

Method: This analytical-cross-sectional study was conducted on 235 couples who betrayed and did betrayal referred to relevant centers (counseling centers of Tehran and Mashhad's university and court). Subjects completed marital satisfaction questionnaires (ENRICH)4, attitudes toward infidelity scale (MARK WHATLY), adult attachment scale (RAAS), men's and women's sexual schema scale, and data were entered into SPSS 21 software after encoding and were analyzed by linear regression statistical method.

Results: The results of data analysis showed that the most important factors affecting marital satisfaction were: attitude toward infidelity, scale of passionate – romantic scale, age and embarrassed - conservation schema (women) ($p < 0.05$). Among these variables, age, attitude towards infidelity and embarrassed - conservation scale are inversely correlated with marital satisfaction, meaning that the higher the variance in terms of these variables, we will see less marital satisfaction after infidelity. But the passionate – romantic scale has a direct relationship with marital satisfaction, meaning that the more men are stronger in terms of this schema, the greater the marital satisfaction between the couples after the infidelity.

Discussion and Conclusion: According to the findings of this research, it can be recommended to therapists to consider these variables in their therapeutic components to promote marital satisfaction after infidelity.

Keywords Attitude of marital infidelity, attachment styles, sexual schemas, emotional divorce, marital satisfaction

Introduction

Family is one of the most important social systems based on the marriage between the two sexes. Maintaining and sustaining the family is of great important. The family as a social unit is the center of growth and evolution, healing, and the transformation of harm and complications which is both a bed of flourishing and a platform for the collapse of relations among its members (1).

Glasser believes that couples begin their common life with love, but they observe that initial intimacy gradually dies. With the passage of time, some couples will be separated, but the majority will continue to live in a monotonous and boring tone, and to endure this life, they turn to alcohol, overeat, drug use, or illicit communication. The most important motive for married women and men who are drawn to illegitimate relationships (extramarital) is the re-experience of personal and sexual intimacy. What else they can't find in their common life. Therefore, the attractiveness of illegitimate relations is because neither side is defamatory, blaming or glorifying (2).

Marital infidelity is an unfaithfulness phenomenon that often occurs because of the emotional needs of the individual met through the extramarital relationship (1). Treyogutz and Bartha define infidelity by passing a person from the marital relationship by establishing physical or emotional intimacy with someone outside the relationship. Infidelity and betrayal are a kind of disorder and illness in behavior, because of the abnormal and unpleasant complications that it causes, resulted in various injuries and problems for each other person (3). Marital infidelity is a topic that couple therapists face regularly in their clinical work and can be daunting and painful experiences for everyone involved with it. In addition, infidelity is one of the major reasons for divorce and disintegration. The infidelity is the sexual intercourse of a married individual to an opposite sex, outside the family (other than spouse) framework (4).

In the United States, most people who are married expect to be single-spouse (monogamy) and the level of opposition to extramarital sexual relationship is high (5). Nevertheless, about 34% of men and 19% of women in adult groups report engagement in extramarital sexual relationship in stages of their lives (6).

Many studies have shown that a person's response to his/her spouse's infidelity is similar to the symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) such as shock, confusion, anger, depression, self-esteem damage and reduced self-confidence in personal and sexual matters. Other research findings also indicate that after disclosure of the betrayal (infidelity) of the spouse, families are faced with issues such as marital crisis, functional impairment in parenting roles and job problems (7). Despite the fact that marital infidelity creates a large traumatic event, all couples do not cut their marital relationships after marital infidelity (8). The return of marital satisfaction after infidelity (betrayal) is one of the most important issues among these couples. However, there is no study to investigate this issue. In this article, we addressed the role of psychosocial factors affecting marital satisfaction in couples after marital infidelity.

Method

This is an analytical-cross sectional study. A sample of 235 couples with marital infidelity who referred to counseling centers of Tehran and Mashhad's university and courts were selected using convenience sampling method.

Research tool

1- ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire

This questionnaire is a long form and is developed by Olson and colleagues, which consists of 12 sub-scales, the first scale of which consists of 5 items and other scales of 10 items. These sub-scales are: 1) Idealized distortion 2) Marital satisfaction 3) Personality issues 4) Relationship 5)

Conflict resolution 6) Financial management 7) Leisure activities 8) Sex 9) Children and parenting 10) Family and friends 11) Egalitarian roles and 12) Religious orientation. The maximum score in this questionnaire is 460. The higher score is the indication of more marital satisfaction (8).

In a study conducted by Mahdavian, the Pearson correlation coefficient in the re-test method (1 week interval) was 0.937 for male group and 0.944 for female group and 0.94 for male and female group.

The Correlation coefficient of the Enrich questionnaire with family satisfaction scales is ranged from 0.41 to 0.60 and with life satisfaction scales from 0.32 to 0.41 indicating its structural validity. All of the subscales of this questionnaire distinguish satisfied and dissatisfied couples indicating this questionnaire has good criterion validity.

2- Attitude towards infidelity scale (MARK WHATLY)

This scale was produced in 2006 and translated by Abdollahzadeh (2010) to Persian. This scale consists of 12 terms that each question is in a seven range (from the completely disagree [point 1] to completely agree [point 7]). There is no true or false answer on this scale, and the questionnaire only requires the honest reaction of the subject to the sentences. The terms include sentences about negative and positive feelings about the subject of infidelity, in which, subjects according to their feelings, give the sentences 1 to 7 score. The highest score is 84, which means accepting infidelity and the lowest score 12 means rejecting infidelity and score 48, places the person between acceptance and rejection of infidelity.

Cronbach's alpha of this scale was 0.84 among 383 single and married women and men resident in the cities of Aliabad and Behshahr, who were randomly selected. The mean obtained for this sample is 39.15, which indicates that this scale, in addition to the survey research, is helpful in determining the causes and variables

affecting marital infidelity and attitudes toward infidelity (Abdollahzadeh, 2010).

3- Revised adult attachment scale

This scale was originally developed by Collins and Reed in 1990 and revised in 1996 (9). The theoretical basis for this test is the theory of attachment. This scale examines how a person evaluates communication skills and style of his/her intimate relationship. This scale has 18 items that respondents on a Likert scale of 5 degrees express their acceptance and opposition to each of the items. In this questionnaire, 3 subscales of dependency (subject's trust and reliance to others), the anxiety subscale (the degree of an individual's concern to be rejected), and the proximity subscale (measure the degree of intimacy and emotional closeness of the subject with others). The subject, based on the results, is placed in one of the three groups of secured, anxiety and avoidant attachment style.

The retest reliability coefficient of this test for each of the three subscales of closeness, dependency and anxiety has been reported to be 0.68, 0.71, and 0.52, respectively. Collins and Reid (1990) showed that subscales of closeness (C), dependency (D) and anxiety (A) remained stable over a period of 2 months or even 8 months. Given that the Cronbach Alpha values are equal to or greater than 0.80 and the reliability level is high.

In Iran, the amount of reliability using a test-retest method as a correlation between two implementations on a sample of 100 subjects, the results of the two time implementation of this questionnaire with a one-month interval, indicated that the difference between the two implementations of the C, D and A scales in RAAS has not been significant and this test is reliable at 95%, but with regard to the correlation between the results of the two implementations, the sub-scale A is the most reliable ($r = 0.75$), and the next is C subscale ($r = 0.57$) and D has the least reliability among these three subscales ($r = 0.47$). On the other hand, by calculating Cronbach's

alpha, it was found that the anxiety subscale (A) had the highest reliability (0.74) and dependency (D) had the lowest reliability (0.28), and the reliability of the subscale of closeness was moderate (0.52) that the results were consistent with the review through test-re-test (10).

4- Men's sexual self-schema

This scale was developed by Anderson, Cyranowski, and Espindle in 1999 to assess male sexual schemas. They stated that these schemas emanated from previous personal experiences and included a range of sexual dimensions such as sexual orientation, sexual behaviors, and cognitive representation and sexual identity of the individual. This scale consists of 45 traits that the subject should determine on a 7-points Likert scale (from the at all = 0 to very much = 6), which each of these traits, how much describes him. In this scale, 18 traits are used as fillers to hide the nature of the main characteristic evaluated from the viewpoint of the subjects. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of subscales of passionate-romantic, powerful, aggressive and intellectual-progressive has been reported 0.89, 0.78 and 0.65, respectively and the alpha coefficient of the whole scale has been 0.86. The retest reliability of whole scale was also 0.81 at a time interval of 9 weeks.

Since the results of the content analysis of the scale have shown that this test evaluates the structure of the male sexual schemas (cognitive self-sexual viewpoint), we find the structural validity of this scale and, and regarding the significant correlation between the scores of men's sexual self-schemas scale with the attitude and sexual behavior evaluation scales, convergent validity of this test is proved.

5- Woman's sexual self-schema

This scale was developed by Anderson, Cyranowski, and Espindle in 1994 to assess female sexual schemas. These schemas emanated from previous personal experiences and included a range of sexual dimensions such as sexual orientation, sexual behaviors, and cognitive representation and sexual identity of the

individual. This scale consists of 50 traits that the subject should determine on a 7-points Likert scale (from the at all = 0 to very much = 6), which each of these traits, how much describes her. In this scale, 24 traits are used as fillers to hide the nature of the main characteristic evaluated from the viewpoint of the subjects. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of subscales of passionate-romantic, open-direct and embarrassed -conservation has been reported 0.81, 0.77 and 0.66, respectively and the alpha coefficient of the whole scale has been 0.82. The retest reliability of whole scale was also 0.88 at a time interval of 9 weeks.

In this scale, 24 adjectives are used as fillers to hide the nature of the main attribute assessed by the subjects. Cronbach's alpha coefficient is a passionate romantic subscale = 0.81, explicit-comfortable = 0.77, shy-prudent = 0.66, and a total alpha coefficient of 0.88 was reported. The total retest reliability was also 0.88 at 9 weeks.

Since the results of the content analysis of the scale have shown that this test evaluates the structure of the male sexual schemas (cognitive self-sexual viewpoint), we find the structural validity of this scale and, and regarding the significant correlation between the scores of men's sexual self-schemas scale with the attitude and sexual behavior evaluation scales, convergent validity of this test is proved.

Data were analyzed by SPSS software version 18 and descriptive statistical methods (mean, standard deviation, minimum, maximum, frequency and percentage), and inferential statistics including Koloumugov Smirnov for the purpose of examining the normality of the data and in the case of parametric data, Pearson correlation test, linear regression, independent t-test, and in the case of non-parametric data, the nonparametric equivalence of these data will be used.

Findings

This study was conducted on 235 couples with marital infidelity, of which 115 subjects (84%) were male and 120 subjects

(51%) were female. Also, according to the degree of education, 100 subjects (42.6%) had a diploma and lower, 65 subjects (27.7%) had an associate degree to bachelor and 70 subjects (29.8%) had a bachelor's degree or higher. Based on the economic status, 27 subjects (11.5%) were in low economic level, 141 subjects (60%) were in the middle level, 55 subjects (23.4%) were at high economic level and finally the 12 subjects (15.1%) were at a very high economic level.

Of these, 79 subjects (6.33%) were self-employed, 86 subjects (36%) were employees, 9 subjects (8% 3) were unemployed and 61 subjects (26%) were housewives. Finally, 124 subjects (52.8%) had betrayed and 109 subjects (46%) were betrayed and 2 subjects (8%) had betrayed and were betrayed.

Other demographic characteristics of the subjects separated in terms of betrayal and betrayed persons are presented in Table 1.

As shown in the table in the betrayal subjects, 71.8% were male and 28.2% were female. In terms of education, diploma and lower was 39.5%, associate degree to bachelor was 31.5% and bachelor's degree and above was 29%. In terms of occupation, 44.4% were self-employed, 37.9% were employee, 3.9% were unemployed and 14.5% were housekeepers. In terms of economic status, the low level was 9.9%, the moderate was 60.5%, the high level was 24 and excellent was 6%.

In betrayed subjects, 23.9% were male and 76.1% were female. In terms of education, diploma and lower was 45.9%, associate degree to bachelor was 23.9% and bachelor's degree and above was 33%. In terms of occupation, 22% were self-employed, 35.8% were employee, 4.6% were unemployed and 37.6% were housekeepers. In terms of economic status, the low level was 11%, the moderate was 59.6%, the high level was 22% and excellent was 5.5%.

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of the people separated in terms of betrayal and betrayed

	<i>Group</i>	<i>Betrayal</i>		<i>Betrayed</i>	
		Frequency	percentage	Frequency	percentage
Gender	Male	89	71.8	26	23.9
	Female	35	28.2	83	76.1
Education	Diploma and less	49	39.5	50	45.9
	Associate degree to bachelor	39	31.5	26	23.9
	Bachelor and more	36	29	33	33
Occupation	Self-employed	55	44.4	24	22
	Employee	47	37.9	39	35.8
	Unemployed	4	3.2	5	4.6
	Housekeeper	18	14.5	41	37.6
Economic status	Low	11	8.9	12	11
	Moderate	75	60.5	65	59.6
	High	31	25	24	22
	Very high	6	4.8	6	5.5

What are the factors affecting marital satisfaction of married couples living together?

Table 2 A summary of linear regression analysis in a step-by-step style to analyze the factors affecting marital satisfaction

Model	R	R square	Modified R square	Standard error
1	0.65	0.43	0.36	28.95

As shown in the table, the variables studied including men's sexual self-schema, women's sexual self-schema, attachment styles, attitude to infidelity scale, Gatman's

emotional divorce scale, age, gender, education, economic status, having a child or not and ... generally explain 36% of the variance of marital satisfaction.

Table 3 Stepwise regression analysis to examine the factors affecting marital satisfaction

Model	Variable	Modified Coefficients		Modified Coefficient	T	Significance
		B	Standard Error			
1	Attitude to infidelity	-1.45	0.20	-4.81	-7.20	P<0.001
2	Attitude to infidelity	-1.2	1.98	-0.40	-6.09	P<0.001
	Passionate-romantic scale	1.16	0.25	0.29	4.54	P<0.001
3	Attitude to infidelity	-1.10	0.19	-3.66	-5.59	P<0.001
	Passionate-romantic scale	1.12	0.25	0.28	4.45	P<0.001
	Age	-0.59	0.20	-0.18	-2.92	0.004
4	Attitude to infidelity	-1.02	0.19	-0.34	-5.19	P<0.001
	Passionate-romantic scale	1.40	0.27	0.36	5.09	P<0.001
	Age	-0.56	0.20	-0.17	-2.82	P<0.001
	Embarrassed-conservation scale (women)	-2.37	-0.16	0.50	-2.37	0.01

As shown in the table above, the most important factors affecting marital satisfaction are respectively: attitude towards infidelity, passionate-romantic scale, age, and embarrassed-conservation schema (women) ($p < 0.05$). Among these variables, age, attitude towards infidelity and embarrassed - conservation scale are inversely correlated with marital satisfaction, meaning that the higher the variance in terms of these variables, we will see less marital satisfaction after infidelity. But the passionate – romantic scale has a direct relationship with marital satisfaction, meaning that the more men are stronger in terms of this schema, the greater the marital satisfaction between the couples after the infidelity.

Discussion and conclusion

The most important factors affecting marital satisfaction are: attitude towards infidelity, passionate-romantic scale, age variable and

embarrassed-conservation schema (women). Among these variables age, attitude towards infidelity and embarrassed-conservation scale are inversely related with marital satisfaction, meaning that the higher the variance in terms of these variables, we will experience less marital satisfaction after infidelity. But the passionate-romantic scale has a direct relationship with marital satisfaction, which means that as the men are stronger in terms of this scheme, marital satisfaction between couples will be greater after infidelity.

As shown, the most important explanation for marital satisfaction after infidelity is attitude towards infidelity. In general, studies by Glass and Wright in 1992, Thompson, 1983, and Trease and Jason in 2000 have shown that those who have a more lenient attitude toward infidelity are more likely to betray. And in the same vein, Hansen argued in 1987 that women with ease attitudes are the best way to predict

involvement in infidelity (12). On the other hand, infidelity in marital relationships is one of the main reasons for divorce and harm to couples (13). Concealed relationships outside the marital domain always cause severe emotional damage to the parties. These types of relationships cause symptoms similar to post-traumatic stress disorder and feelings like depression, anger and disappointment and lack of self-confidence, loss of identity and a sense of worthlessness in a spouse who has been betrayed (14). Marital infidelity also causes feelings of hesitation, depression and feelings of guilt in a spouse who betrays (15) and therefore feels less marital satisfaction.

The second explanation for marital satisfaction after infidelity is passionate-romantic sexual schema.

The findings of this research is consistent with research conducted by Zolfaghari and Saeed Karimnezhad Nareg and his colleagues (16, 17), which examined the relationship between schemas and marital satisfaction and marital intimacy, in which there is a significant positive correlation between attitude and sexual schemas and marital satisfaction (17). In addition, the findings of this study are consistent with findings of Stiels' research on the existence of the relationship between early maladaptive schemas and marital satisfaction, and in line with them suggest that as the presence of these schemas increases, marital satisfaction decreases (18). According to Veiner, there are logical sequences between schemas and behavior in the sense that schemas determine the type of human behaviors, and in the relationship between spouses these schemas also play an effective role in the form of the couple's interpretation from other behaviors and in the interpretation of this kind of behavior causes gratification and satisfaction, or misinterpretation causes dissatisfaction (19).

Age is the third explanation for marital satisfaction. And in this study, it was shown that the higher the age, the less marital satisfaction. This research is in line with the findings of the study of the Askarian Omran et al. (20). In this study, it was found that nurses expressed less marital satisfaction with increasing age. Various studies have shown that marital satisfaction and marriage duration follow the U-shaped curve, and with high marital satisfaction in the first years of common life (before becoming a parent), there is a maximum reduction in the middle years (parental courses) and increases in post-parental years (21, 22). This finding is also consistent with the research conducted by Attari (23). Because most young couples and those who have not spent much of their marital life report high marital satisfaction for a variety of reasons, including the existence of early love and affection, lack of dealing with problems, and a low number of children, and with increasing length of marriage, couples face newer issues and problems and more challenges that these negatively impact couples life and may reduce their marital satisfaction.

In general, this can be explained by the following:

1. Increasing the age, although in some people increases the amount of intimacy, but is accompanied by a decline in physical capacity in couples.
2. Increasing the age may reduce sexual desire and reduce sexual attractiveness. As mentioned above, sexual orientation is more important than a man's tendency toward marital satisfaction.

Conflict of interests

Authors declare no conflict of interest.

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