

A Comparative Study of Attachment Style and Personality Traits in Women with Marital Infidelity Experience and Those Who Didn't Have Such an Experience

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Article Information

Received: 02 May 2016

Accepted: 28 May 2016

Plagiarism software: Turnitin

Keywords:

Married women,
Marital infidelity,
Attachment style,
Personality traits



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ABSTRACT

Objective: The aim of this study was to determine the differences between Attachment Style and Personality traits in women who faced marital infidelity and those who didn't. Each component can play a significant role in promoting the marital relationships and reducing the marital infidelity.

Methods: The present research is a casual-comparative study. The study sample consisted of all married women who refer to Welfare Divorce Reduce centers in Tehran province because of infidelity. Of these, 120 married women are selected among which 60 women experienced infidelity and 60 of them didn't experience marital infidelity. Data collection tool was short form of Adult Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ) and NEO-Five Factor Inventory (NEO –SF). Data analysis was performed by using SPSS software and using statistical descriptions (frequency, tendency to center of index and dispersion index) and statistical analysis method was ANOVA.

Results: According to the results of this study, the hypotheses were confirmed. In other words, there is a significant different between the components of Attachment Style and Personality traits in women who had infidelity and those didn't face infidelity in their marriage. Each of the components of Attachment Style and Personality traits can be a predictor of marital dissatisfaction and infidelity.

Conclusion: women with Avoidant attachment and Neuroticism trait showed the highest percentage of entering into marital infidelity. It seems that determination of Attachment Style and Personality traits for each of the couples before marriage can be a contributing factors in improving marital relations.

INTRODUCTION

Although marital relationships can be the source of some of life's most enjoyable experiences, they are also the source of one of life's most painful experiences like infidelity. Estimates suggest that over 25 percent of married men and 20 percent of married women engage in extra-marital sex over the course of their relationships.¹ Based on researches conducted in Iran, declared that almost 27 percent of men have had a relationship with a person of the opposite

sex, which is called explicit infidelity. Based on this statistics published in a research titled "Prevalence of unfaithfulness and infidelity among Tehran couples", 38 percent of women thought about an affective relationship with another man and 13 percent thought to cheat their spouses and to have relationship with another person. From these women 13 percent had the affective relationship and 2 percent cheated their husbands by sexual relationships.²

Unfaithfulness or infidelity is a kind of disorder that usually has its origins in previous stages in one's life and according to its abnormal and undesirable complications creates a lot of problems and damages for all members of the family.³ The results of researches conducted in 15 provinces in Iran show that infidelity in 67 percent of cases has been a reason for women to kill their husbands, 33 percent of men have faced sudden attacks and threats of their wives.⁴

Access this article online	
Website: www.actamedicainternational.com	Quick Response code 
DOI: 10.5530/ami.2016.2.20	

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Also infidelity contains a series of elements such as improper emotional and sexual needs, opportunism, irresponsibility and deliberate deception, their acceptance for people who are somehow involved in this issue is not so easy.⁵ Infidelity can have serious negative consequences for those involved. Not only may infidelity lead to relationship distress, and thus decreased relationship satisfaction in both partners.⁶ the victims and perpetrators of infidelity also frequently experience negative intrapersonal outcomes, such as decreased self-esteem,⁷ increased risk of mental health problems,⁸ guilt, and depression.⁹

As we said many experts believe that childhood problems are repeated in a person's future relationships and can affect his adult romantic relationships.¹⁰ Therefore, understanding these characteristics like attachment styles and personality traits can be a means to predict lots of marital problems, including infidelity.¹¹

Teymorpour et al (2012) research on 192 married women showed that there is a direct and significant relation between secure attachment style, marital satisfaction and high sex drive, in the other hand there is also a direct and significant relation between insecure and avoidant attachment style, guilty conscience, low sex drive and low marital satisfaction.¹² Khoshkharam (2011) in a research about the effectiveness of increasing positive affect on marital satisfaction and attachment style, shows that positive affect training has lead to increased marital satisfaction and changes in attachment styles in married students with insecure attachment style.¹³

Sadeqi et al (2011) in some researches showed that intimacy and marital satisfaction in securely attached adults is more than their insecurely attached peers, he also showed that there is a close relation between types of attachment and adaptation level in such a way that securely attached couples have less negative interactions in comparison with insecurely attached couples.¹⁴

Further more, numerous researches emphasis on the fact that marital satisfaction and marital conflicts are influenced mainly by personality traits. Recognizing one's own and one's spouse personality traits is one of the factors that can be effective in reducing marital conflicts. Some researchers have considered the relationship between Five Factor Model of personality with marital satisfaction.¹⁵

Wise et al (2000) showed that Agreeableness and Conscientiousness have positive correlation with marital satisfaction. Researchers believe that high Agreeableness helps the person to regulate the emotions and to behave more modestly in interpersonal relations.¹⁶ Also because these people are able to resolve the conflicts easily, the

frequency and intensity of their negative interactions reduces. Therefore the personality can have persistent effects on marital relations.¹⁷ some personality traits and mental disorders lead to increased tensions and conflicts among couples and threats persistence of marital life.¹⁸

On the other hand personality differences may be the result of personality and genetic traits that influence thoughts, emotions and behaviors such as tendency toward anxiety and worry. Five Factor model of personality comprised of Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism provides a comprehensive and precise theoretical basis for explaining the personal differences.¹⁹ Kareni et al. (1997) believe that some personal tendencies such as emotional instability or neuroticism creates persistent vulnerabilities that influence couples' adaptation to stressful life events and this adaptation influences their satisfaction in marital relationships.²⁰

METHODS

The population consists of all married women who referred to welfare divorce reduction centers in Tehran because of marital infidelity. The study will perform in coordination with the State Welfare Organization and after a brief explanation about the nature of research and surveys; the distribution of questionnaires will be carried out. Of these, 120 married women are selected among which 60 women experienced infidelity and 60 of them didn't. Then subjects completed the short form of Adult Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ) and NEO-Five Factor Inventory (NEO-SF). Data analysis would be done by SPSS software and variance analysis would be performed through descriptive statistical method and statistical analysis.

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1: the components of attachment styles are different between women with marital infidelity and women without marital infidelity. To evaluate the first hypothesis ANOVA test was used.

Table 1 shows the comparison of mean scores of attachment styles components in terms of groups of study subjects. In order to compare the subjects, an analysis of variance test was conducted. The below table shows that the difference between the two groups (women with and without infidelity) is statistically significant at the level of $P < 0/01$ regarding their attachment styles (secure attachment, avoidant attachment and Ambivalent attachment).

In other words the average score for women without a marital infidelity experience is higher than that of women with infidelity, regarding the attachment styles such as

secure attachment and Ambivalent attachment, but the average score for women with infidelity is higher than that of women without a marital infidelity experience in avoidant attachment style. As a result the null hypothesis (Ho) is rejected and the second hypothesis of the study (HA), claiming a difference in attachment styles between women with marital infidelity and women without marital infidelity are confirmed.

Hypothesis 2: the components of personality traits are different between women with marital infidelity and women without marital infidelity. To evaluate the second hypothesis ANOVA test was used.

Table 2 shows the comparison of mean scores of personality traits components in terms of groups of study subjects in order to compare the subjects; an analysis of variance test was conducted. The table below shows that the difference between the two groups (women with and without infidelity) is statistically significant at the level of $P < 0.01$ regarding their personality traits such as Neuroticism, Extraversion and Conscientiousness.

Also the below table indicates that there is no significant difference between the two study groups regarding their personality traits such as Openness and Agreeableness.

In other words the average score for infidelity women is higher than that of women without a marital infidelity experience, regarding the personality traits such as Neuroticism. On the other side the average score for women

without infidelity experience is higher than the average score for infidelity women in personality traits such as Extraversion and Conscientiousness. Also two study groups are relatively the same, regarding their personality traits such as Openness and Agreeableness. As a result the null hypothesis (Ho) is rejected and the second hypothesis of the study (HA), claiming a difference in personality traits between women with marital infidelity and women without marital infidelity is confirmed.

DISCUSSION

These findings suggest that certain personality traits and some attachment styles may predict marital infidelity and successful marital adjustment. Based on obtained results two hypotheses of this research were confirmed. that Avoidant attachment style and neuroticism trait scores are more than mean scores of women who didn't infidelity. The results of the present research is consistent with the findings of Smith et al (2009), Dijkstra et al (2008) and Carfeldman et al (1999) researches.²¹

The result of this study has numerous implications for psychologists and consultants in different stages of consulting such as the period before marriage, marital life and the life after divorce.

Although this study has tried to examine specific angles of characteristics of the women faced with this phenomenon, but there are still many dark spots that needed to be observed thoroughly. Understanding these responses is

Table 1: Analytic statistics for attachment styles

Components of attachment styles	Groups	Mean	SD	F	DF	p
Secure attachment	Infidelity	10/83	2/203	279/259	181,1	0/001**
	Not infidelity	21/58	4/469			
Avoidant attachment	Infidelity	21/92	2/287	183/627	181,1	0/001**
	Not infidelity	15/55	2/831			
Ambivalent attachment	Infidelity	13/75	2/237	43/113	181,1	0/001**
	Not infidelity	17/43	3/725			

SD: Standard deviation, **: Significance level at 0.01%, DF: Degree of freedom

Table 2: Analytic statistics for personality traits

Components of personality traits	Groups	Mean	SD	F	DF	p
Neuroticism	Infidelity	32/63	2/804	221/196	181,1	0/001**
	Not infidelity	23/73	3/691			
Extraversion	Infidelity	28/62	2/598	237/832	181,1	0/001**
	Not infidelity	18/73	4/230			
Openness	Infidelity	21/23	2/324	0/767	181,1	0/383
	Not infidelity	20/78	3/232			
Agreeableness	Infidelity	21/17	2/478	0/234	181,1	0/630
	Not infidelity	21/42	3/148			
Conscientiousness	Infidelity	10/23	1/779	407/167	181,1	0/001**
	Not infidelity	17/85	2/320			

SD: Standard deviation, **: Significance level at 0.01%, DF: Degree of freedom

beneficial to counselors and individuals. That is, as infidelity is a concern for many couples, understanding responses to infidelity might help counselors guide couples toward healing and/or reconciliation.

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How to cite this article: Porjorat M. A Comparative study of attachment style and personality traits in women with marital infidelity experience and those who didn't have such an experience. *Acta Medica International*. 2016;3(2):93-96.

Source of Support: Nil, **Conflict of Interest:** None declared.