

Marital infidelity and Betrayal Experiences: The Role of executive functions and Religious Coping Strategies in Predicting Divorce of Women

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Abstract

Objective: Infidelity means engaging in sexual or romantic relations with a person other than one's significant other, breaking a commitment or promise in the act. Marital infidelity is a very painful phenomenon that can lead to divorce. This study was conducted with the aim of the role of cognitive flexibility and religious coping strategies in predicting the desire for divorce of women with experience of infidelity. **methods:** The research method was descriptive-correlation. The statistical population included all women with experience of infidelity and referring to Tarannom-e-Vesal counseling center in Mashhad in 2021 that 89 people were selected by convenience sampling. The instruments used were Divorce Attitude Questionnaire (DTS), Cognitive Flexibility Questionnaire (CFI) and Religious Coping Questionnaire (RCOPE). Pearson correlation test, multiple regression and SPSS-22 software were used to analyze the data. **Results:** The results of the correlation test showed that there is a negative and significant relationship between the desire for divorce with cognitive flexibility and positive religious confrontation and a positive and significant relationship between the desire for divorce and negative religious confrontation. **Conclusion:** Also, the results of regression analysis showed that cognitive flexibility and religious coping strategies together explain 34.8% of the variance of the desire to divorce. According to the findings, education and intervention in improving cognitive flexibility and religious coping strategies can be suggested as an effective method to reduce the desire for divorce.

Keywords: Infidelity, Divorce Attitude Questionnaire (DTS), Cognitive Flexibility Questionnaire (CFI).

INTRODUCTION

Marital Infidelity means the act or fact of having a romantic or sexual relationship with someone other than one's husband, wife, or partner (Merriam Webster dictionary). Marital infidelity is a difficult and unbearable situation for many couples that can cause them a lot of trouble. Infidelity is a painful thing that unfortunately happens suddenly in different societies and puts couples in a state of confusion, sadness, depression, anger and surprise (Hall and Fincham, 2009). It can be said that infidelity is defined as a violation of commitment and going beyond marital boundaries and is mainly

divided into three types of emotional infidelity, sexual and emotional-sexual infidelity (Zare, 2011). Marital infidelity has a different prevalence in different societies and is based on gender, which may be due to the different definitions that come from it. However, infidelity is very common and can occur in an average of 25% of couples, in which men are more likely to be unfaithful than women (Blow and Hartent, 2005; Zare, 2011).

A successful marriage is the process by which a couple builds a privacy for their marriage and follows rules of that privacy (YousefiMardani, Fallahian & Mikaeili, 2019). Tuelo Masillo

(2019) based on his research showed that marital infidelity can cause problems such as domestic violence, marital boredom, substance abuse, child abandonment, unemployment and sexually transmitted infections, which can lead to the breakdown of marriage. Allen and Atkins (2012) showed in their research that when couples engage in marital infidelity, more than half of them tend to separate and divorce; Thus, the desire for divorce is one of the destructive effects of marital infidelity. The purpose of the desire for divorce is the degree of desire and interest of the couple to separate and break off the marital relationship. This concept has three dimensions: cognitive, emotional and behavioral. Its cognitive dimension includes the person's perceptions of divorce, the emotional dimension includes the person's negative and positive feelings and emotions towards divorce, and the behavioral dimension indicates the person's readiness to divorce (Yousefi, 2011).

Unfortunately People who end their relationship(divorce)may experience behavioral, cognitive, and emotional problems and may not be able to calm down for a long time and perform well in various areas(Sharma, 2011). Various personal, marital, social, cultural, economic, etc. factors can cause divorce, but what is important is to always consider the factors that affect divorce, because due to life changes, some of these factors may lose their power or Even other emerging factors can lead to divorce (Mohlatlole, Sithol and Shirini, 2018; Osafo, Opong Asant, Ampumah and Osi-Tutu, 2021). However, in situations where the desire for divorce is due to infidelity, some factors may play a role in preventing divorce, and it is necessary to examine these factors to deal with such a divorce.

When infidelity occurs, a person may become confused and go through different thoughts in his head. The person may try to think the relationship is over by growing and chewing on irrational thoughts and pessimism and anger. these people may have strong thoughts in their minds and may not be willing to adapt to the situation at all. In such a situation, the betrayed person is in no way willing to cooperate and forgive his spouse and does not try to show some flexibility (Williams, Belkin and Chen, 2020; Katovsich, 2007).

Timm and Blow (2018) believe that couples must-have resources to maintain and grow a

relationship in which infidelity has occurred. One of these very powerful sources is cognitive flexibility, which is part of executive function. executive function can be very helpful in improving the relationship which is founded attention, memory, language, time perception and Cognitive flexibility . Cognitive flexibility is a broad term and generally refers to our ability to adapt to a changing environment (Archambeau and Giovers, 2018). This concept expresses the ability of individuals to change different mental arrangements, tasks, or strategies to adapt to a changing environment (Dennis and Vanderwall, 2010).

In situations where a person has to be flexible to cope with changes in the environment but is unable to do so,

cognitive flexibility arises; he tries to adapt cognitively to his environment and perform adaptive processes. An example of this flexibility occurs when a person has already taken action and been effective but is now

ineffective in new situations; Therefore, one tries to be cognitively flexible (Sanagavi Mohair and Mirshakari, 2018). Research shows that the existence of cognitive flexibility can play a very positive role in married life and improve and heal the wounds of couples (Khorshidi and Dasht Bozorgi, 2019).

According to above, infidelity can have a devastating effect on relationship and can lead to growth of divorce. Divorce, in turn, has many disadvantages, which unfortunately the rate is increasing in the country, so that, for example, in the period of 10 years and from 2007 to 2017, the divorce rate has increased from 8.4 to 3.4; Thus, almost one out of every eight marriages of a divorce in 2007, its rate has reached the rate of one out of every three marriages of a divorce in 2017, which highlights the need to study different aspects of this phenomenon (Salimi et al., 2019). Therefore, the present study was conducted to investigate the effective factors in divorce to create positive steps to deal with it, to investigate the role of cognitive flexibility and religious coping strategies in predicting the divorce desire of women with infidelity. Given the harm that divorce can do, it seems necessary to find factors that can reduce the desire for divorce in betrayed women. It seems that the existence of cognitive flexibility and religious confrontation can play a prominent role in

reducing the desire for divorce, which needs to be examined; Because by knowing the extent and manner of the role of these factors, trainings and interventions can be used for betrayed people.

Materials and Methods

In this research, descriptive and correlational methods were used. The statistical population of the study

included all women who were referred to the Tarannom-e-Vesal counseling center in Mashhad in 2021 due to infidelity. In this study, there were three predictor variables and at least 45 people should be selected as a sample; however, to increase the statistical power of the research and reduce the error, 89 women were selected by available sampling and responded to the research tools. For the study, among the women who came to Tarannom-e-Vesal counseling center in Mashhad to receive marital counseling, those whose reason for referral was infidelity and related marital turmoil were selected as the research sample. These people generally had marital problems due to the infidelity of their spouse and had referred to a counseling center for help and deciding on their married life and the future of their relationship. Therefore, samples were selected based on the inclusion and exit criteria of the study

The method of performing and analyzing the data was that after selecting and confirming the subject, the

necessary information, as well as the confidentiality of the research, were explained to the samples, and then after verbal consent, the research tools were given to them. Inclusion criteria included being a woman,

being married and not having a legal divorce, having an experience of infidelity, living in Mashhad, and

having a desire and commitment to participate in the research. It was research.

Cognitive Flexibility Questionnaire (CFI):

The Cognitive Flexibility Questionnaire was developed by Dennis and Vander wall (2010) with 20 items. The tool scores based on a 7-point Likert scale from strongly disagree (score 1) to

strongly agree (score 7) and measures three aspects of cognitive flexibility: a) the desire to perceive difficult situations as controllable situations (perception of controllability), b) Ability to understand several alternative justifications for human life events and behavior (perception of behavior justification) and c) Ability to create multiple alternative solutions to difficult situations (perception of different options). The scores of this questionnaire are between 20 and 140, and higher scores mean more cognitive flexibility. In domestic studies, Kheyrollahi, Jafari, Ghamari, and Babakhani (2019) while confirming the content validity of this tool, reported Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.86. Shareh, Farmani and Soltani (2014) in validating this questionnaire showed that it follows a three-factor structure and has a good construct validity. In their study, the total retest coefficient of the scale was 0.71 and Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.90. In the present study, the total alpha coefficient of the questionnaire was 0.85.

Divorce Inquiry Questionnaire (DTS):

The Divorce Inquiry Questionnaire was developed by Roosevelt, Johnson, and Moro (1986) with 28 questions to assess individuals' desire for divorce. Each item is scored on a 7-point scale from Never (Score 1) to Forever (Score 7), The scores range from 28 to 196 and with a high score indicating a high degree of desire for divorce. The tool had four subscales: tendency to go out, unwillingness to be careless, lack of expression of feelings, and lack of loyalty. The alpha coefficient obtained by the designers of this questionnaire is for the dimension of exit (0.91), for the dimension of negligence (0.86), expression of emotions (0.76) and loyalty (0.63). In internal validation, Davoodi, Etemadi and Bahrami (2009) while confirming the content validity, reported the alpha coefficient of the mentioned subscales as 0.89, 0.72, 0.90 and 0.86, respectively, and for the whole questionnaire as 0.88. In the present study, the total alpha coefficient of the questionnaire was 0.88

Religious Coping Questionnaire (RCOPE):

The 14-item Religious Coping Questionnaire was developed by Pargament, Quing, and Perez (2000),

with seven items related to positive coping strategies and seven items related to negative

coping strategies. The Likert scoring method has four options from no way (zero point) to very high (3 points). The range of scores for each of the positive and negative religious coping strategies is between zero and 21, and higher scores in positive strategies mean positive religious coping and higher scores in negative strategies mean negative religious coping. Pargament et al. (2000) reported Cronbach's alpha coefficient of subscales above 0.80. In internal validation, Shahabizadeh and Mazaheri (2012) while confirming the content validity using factor analysis confirmed the existence of two factors of positive religious coping strategies and negative coping strategies and Cronbach's alpha coefficient of positive strategies 0.95 and negative strategies 0.93

reported. In the present study, the alpha coefficient of positive strategies was 0.83 and for negative strategies was 0.79.

To analyze the research data, descriptive index of mean and standard deviation were used and at the inferential level, Pearson correlation test and multiple regression were used simultaneously. Data were also analyzed by SPSS-22 software

Results

In this study, the mean and standard deviation of the age of the samples were 34.96 and 8.81 and their marriage duration was 11.74 and 7.24.

Table 1. *Descriptive indicators of research variables*

Variables	Components	Mean	Standard deviation	Maximum	Minimum
Desire to divorce	The desire to get out	32.54	9.68	46	14
	The desire to get out	29.54	8.19	41	14
	The desire to get out	32.8	9.41	9.41	16
	Lack of expression of emotions	28.24	8.10	42	15
	Lack of loyalty	28.24	9.31	45	17
	Desire to divorce	120.08	24/98	161	55
Cognitive flexibility	control-ability	34.42	7.51	51	11

	Perception of different options	50.63	11.32	61	17
	Perception of behavior justification	8.51	2.43	12	7
	Cognitive flexibility	93.56	17.83	125	35
Religious confrontation	Positive religious confrontation	11.04	2.87	17	3
	Negative religious confrontation	11.67	3.09	16	2

Table 2. *Correlation matrix between research variables*

Variables	1	2	3	4
Desire to divorce	1			
Cognitive flexibility	0.373	1		
Positive religious confrontation	-0.473	0.182	1	
Negative religious confrontation	0.277	-0.065	-0.149	1

Table 3. *Multiple regression analysis summaries*

Predictive variables	Standard beta	Beta	Standard error	T	Significance
Cognitive flexibility	-0.289	-0.405	0.125	-3.24	0.002
Positive religious confrontation	-0.390	-3.39	0.782	-4.33	0.001

Negative religious confrontation	0.200	1.61	0.716	-2.25	0.027
R= 0.590		R2= 0.348		P< 0.001, F= 15.10	

Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the role of cognitive flexibility and religious coping strategies in predicting the desire for divorce of women with experience of infidelity. The results showed that there is a negative and significant relationship between cognitive flexibility with the tendency to divorce women with experience of infidelity and cognitive flexibility can significantly predict the desire for divorce.

Accordingly, the tendency to divorce is expected to decrease as cognitive flexibility increases. Consistent with this study, Shara and Ishaqi Thani (2015) showed that cognitive flexibility can positively predict marital satisfaction. Khorshidi and Dasht-e Bozorgi (2019) also showed that cognitive flexibility can reduce marital burnout; therefore, according to the findings of this study and other studies, it seems that cognitive flexibility has a prominent role in marital life and can strengthen the marital relationship. In situations where the marital relationship is strained due to, when the couple has good cognitive flexibility, they may adapt to this painful event and suffer less from it. when a person uses cognitive strategies to change behavior and adapt to the environment, he/she uses flexible cognition. The relationship between couples also contains various complex and challenging situations that require the use of a flexible cognitive model (Shareh and Ishaghi Pani, 2018).

Cognitive flexibility is a very powerful resource that helps couples not lose because of infidelity and therefore can deal with such a situation properly (Shahabi et al., 2020).

This capacity and cognitive ability help the woman who has been betrayed not to give in to this situation and as a result not to move towards divorce too soon. a person goes to divorce when he cannot stand such a situation; Thus, cognitive flexibility helps them to better cope with adultery and thus deal with it more constructively. Other results of this study showed that there is a significant relationship

between religious coping strategies and the desire to divorce women with experience of infidelity, and positively negative religious strategies and negative religious strategies can positively predict the desire for divorce in women with infidelity. Accordingly, when women with experience of infidelity use positive religious coping strategies, they are expected to be less inclined to divorce, and women who use negative strategies are expected to increase their desire for divorce.

This finding is consistent with some studies (Jenkins et al., 2021; Salimi et al., 2019). Nemati, Imanzadeh,

Forouhi, Mahdavi, and Afshin (2019) showed in a study that religious coping strategies can predict marital satisfaction in women, but showed that negative coping strategies also have a positive relationship with marital satisfaction, which is somewhat inconsistent with the research findings. Is present. In explaining this finding, we can refer to the research sample because, in this study, the studied sample has special and painful conditions and strategies that are not effective may increase the desire for divorce. In a situation where a person suffers from a lot of unhappiness and confusion due to infidelity and as a result, tends to divorce, if he uses effective and positive religious confrontation strategies. And therefore, try to take steps to improve the relationship, not try to eliminate the relationship. When people use effective religious strategies, they can change their view of the situation and even consider it a divine test, and try to avoid divorce because it is commanded to maintain a married life. It seems that the use of effective and effective religious coping strategies can increase a person's tolerance, patience and resilience against infidelity (Webb et al., 2010).

The use of effective religious confrontations(Pargament ,1979) can increase forgiveness and thus reduce the desire for divorce by reducing the pain and suffering of infidelity and also creating a space for the couple to think and interact more. In general, the results

of this study showed that cognitive flexibility and the use of positive religious coping strategies and therefore less use of negative religious strategies can reduce the desire for divorce in women victims of infidelity. Cognitive flexibility and the use of effective religious strategies can create an environment in which the victim can better regain his or her peace of mind and move less toward divorce by adapting to adultery. Therefore, it is suggested that planners, counselors, and family and marriage specialists pay attention to this important issue and try to help improve cognitive flexibility and religious coping strategies in couples by taking interventions.

However this research, like other research, has limitation and problem, since in addition to betrayal, other factors may also play a role in referring people to the counseling center, and because the number of samples was small, the random sampling method was not used to collect information.

Appreciation

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Conflict of interest

No conflict of interest has been expressed by the authors.

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