

Original Article

Infidelity and its impact in the perspective of women

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Abstract

Background: One of the biggest reasons of marital disintegration and domestic violence is infidelity in a marriage. With passing time, Infidelity has become common practice. Men and women see infidelity differently and the cultural differences also categorize infidelity based on the gender of the betrayer especially in the Muslim world. This study was sought to explore the perspective of women regarding infidelity and its impact.

Methodology: This observational study was carried out over 100 married women between 21 to 50 years of age. Information was collected through a structured questionnaire based on items related to perspectives, impacts of infidelity and jealousy related patterns among women. The data was gathered by the interviewer after obtaining permission from each respondent. Collected data was then analyzed using SPSS Version 22.0.

Results: The results showed that, a significant number of women thought that emotional infidelity (55%) is more harmful as compared to sexual infidelity (40%). The major reason for infidelity according to most women (38%) was the lack of marital satisfaction while 25% suggested loneliness as the reason for infidelity. Moreover, 63% of women suggested that cheating of the partner affects both physical and mental health, while 28% suggested that infidelity act can cause psychological problems. Sexting (60%) & following someone on a social networking site (56%) were thought as the major behaviors of infidelity. 94% women were completely distressed due to sexual relationship of the spouse.

Conclusion: The present study showed women's perceptions regarding infidelity and their experiences that are significantly important for couple's therapy and consultations. Thus, for women, infidelity is a reason of divorce, domestic violence and other problems, which harm a woman both physiologically and psychologically.

Keywords

Infidelity, Domestic Violence, Perspective, Emotional Infidelity, Sexual Infidelity.

Introduction

Infidelity has been known for more than 30 years¹, literature suggest that infidelity possess several negative impacts on the relationships and under the most severed outcomes it leads to Divorce². Based on a systemic review the infidelity prevalence ranges in between 1.2% to 89.4%³⁻⁵. Moreover, infidelity is more common among men, a study indicated men (60%) are more unfaithful as compared to women (47%)⁶. The intensity of infidelity has been precepted differently among different regions & cultures⁷. These terms include cheating, extra marital sex, to have an affair, sexual intercourse, erotic behavior, internet friendships, pornography, emotional attachments and friendships on the far side of friendship. Researchers have used the term extra relational involvement (ERI) or extra marital affairs (EMA) to study infidelity⁸.

Existing scholarly literature has defined infidelity as any sexual/emotional relationship outside the primary relationship which leads to the violation of trust in a committed romantic relationship and is considered as a breach of emotional or sexual exclusivity⁹. When infidelity occurs, partners often find it difficult to trust each other or to recover from the pain and loss¹⁰⁻¹². Rutherford has stated that the symptoms of the victim of infidelity are like those of the battered and the features of the unfaithful are like those of the batterer hence, infidelity is abusive¹³.

Family organization and life of the couple gets shattered by infidelity, the betrayed partner has the sense of anger at the betraying spouse¹⁴. It creates embarrassment among the two, leading to loss of trust, purpose and specialness for each other¹⁴. The events and experiences generate the hierarchy of investigations and inquiries by the partner who is uninvolved. Hence, the activities of inquiry by the partner annoy the involved partner that leads to other marital problems. This results in chronic stress, irritation and frustration and it causes serious

health problems¹⁵. Moreover, it is thought that the risk of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) also increases in a relationship where one of the partners is cheating on the other with unsafe sex outside the marriage^{11,15}.

There is uncountable statistics on infidelity conducted by different researchers, experts, therapists and social networking sites. A survey indicated that more than 40% of marriages have some sort of infidelity, 95% think that infidelity is wrong and 22-25% of men and 11-15% of women were involved in extra marital sex as per their own confession¹⁵. In the current era, the boundaries are diffused between men and women but studies have shown differences in the prevalence of infidelity among the two genders^{16,17}. Moreover, women respond more to emotional infidelity while in comparison men are more responsive towards sexual infidelity¹⁸. It was also observed that women usually consider the emotional relationship as infidelity even if not making any physical contact outside their marriage whereas men intend to make physical contact with no emotion involvement outside their marriage¹⁹.

The reasons of infidelity greatly vary, among them the most common factors leading EMA include sex related to curiosity, sex seeking behavior, intention to feel loved, emotional intimacy, gaps in the sex life, seeking respect, support, revenge and excitement, etc²⁰. It is evident that infidelity is becoming highly prevalent in our society and its associated factors are legitimate & common in our surrounding environment. Therefore, we aim to investigate the women's perspectives regarding infidelity and its impact.

Methodology

An observational study was conducted over a sample of 100 married women affiliated with different public and private organization of Karachi, Pakistan. The married females within the age range of 21 to 50 years were included in the study. A questionnaire was employed for data

collection, based on different aspects of Schonian (2013) perspectives of infidelity questionnaire²¹.

Questions related to perspectives, impacts and the behaviors associated with infidelity were inquired. Impact and distress due to infidelity were analyzed using three-point Likert scale. The collected data was statically analyzed using SPSS Version 22.0 and the results were displayed using percentages. The data confidentiality was maintained, written informed consent were taken prior to inclusion in the study and all ethical guidelines were followed.

Result

This observational study included 100 married women having experienced infidelity. The data was based on the perception of these women, emotional infidelity (55%) was more likely to be harmful for the uninvolved individual as compare to sexual infidelity (40%). Moreover, lack of marital satisfaction was identified as the main reason of infidelity (38%), followed by loneliness (25%). According to 67% of the women said the infidelity inquiry from the betraying spouse mostly end up under arguments (67%). 32% women believed that EMA greatly damages the relationship with the spouse & also affects the personal and family reputation. The health effects & consequences of infidelity were also investigated & are elaborated in table 1.

Table 1: Shows the experiences & perceptions of women regarding infidelity

Variables		n=100
Personal Experience	Spouse having affair	20%
	Spouse watched porn	3%
	Spouse having affair & watched porn	9%
Type of infidelity more harmful	Sexual	40%
	Emotional	55%
	Both	5%
Reasons of Infidelity	Feeling Alone	25%
	Lack of marital satisfaction	38%
	Lack of affection	22%
	Lack of Fun in normal life	15%
Investigation results in	Annoyance	33%
	Arguments	67%
Infidelity Damages	Personal Reputation	10%
	Family Reputation	15%
	Relationship with the spouse	32%
	All of them	43%
Health Effects of Infidelity	Physical health problem	9%
	Psychological health problem	28%
	Both	63%
Consequences of infidelity	Divorce	49%
	Fights	30%
	Domestic violence	6%

Distressed children	13%
Sexually transmitted disease	2%

The perception of respondents regarding infidelity behaviors was also taken, it was found that sexting with someone was the most high level infidelity behavior (89%), 48% women believed that having dinner with someone other than spouse, Fantasizing about someone other than spouse (56%), Spend time with someone other than spouse (50%). Majority women believed that even the non-physical acts among the below mentioned as infidelity behaviors.

Table 2: Infidelity Behaviors as per the respondent's perceptions

Behaviors	Yes	No
Having dinner with someone other than spouse	48%	22%
Fantasizing about someone other than spouse	56%	13%
Spend time with someone other than spouse	50%	18%
Gifting somebody other than spouse	54%	20%
Receiving Gift from somebody other than spouse	50%	26%
Sexting with someone other than spouse	89%	6%
Following someone on a social networking site	60%	30%
Messaging someone other than the spouse	56%	26%

It was found that 94% women were completely distressed because of Spouse having sexual relationship with someone, 70% reported being completely distressed as their spouse had feelings about someone.

Table 3: Shows the level of distress among the respondents due to various unfaithful behaviors of their spouse

Unfaithful behaviors	Completely distressed	Partially distressed	Not distressed
Spouse having friendship with someone	52%	24%	24%
Spouse spending time with someone	56%	33%	11%
Spouse having feelings about someone	70%	20%	7%
Spouse having sexual relationship with someone	94%	5%	1%

Discussion

Extra marital involvement or infidelity of any form affects the relationship, and due to this, divorce rates are increasing in Pakistan. Relationship problems such as lack of communication and attention result in one person being isolated, and then that person seeks to fill the vacuum elsewhere. The availability of technology has made communication easier and so many times gadgets such as smartphones are used to spend time for making fake friendships

causing cybercrime and other unethical activities. Technological advancement such as mobile phones and the internet have created the possibilities of indulging in affair. Sartaj 2016 stated that use of mobile phone has prevailed which leads to cheating and is accepting as modern thing²².

Behaviors such as fantasizing someone other than the spouse, spending time, having dinner, exchanging gifts are considered as mild infidelity behavior but majority respondents indicted them as cheating (Table

2). A study revealed that women clearly believe particular & even the non-physical acts as infidelity behaviors, whereas men on the other hand considered kissing or sexual contact or flirting as the infidelity act²³. Besides this, 38% women perceived that lack of marital satisfaction is the major reason of infidelity (Table 1). A similar study showed that seeking sexual satisfaction & marital dissatisfaction as the major cause of infidelity. Among women the emotion instability & lack of support are key motivators of infidelity while among men the sexual lust is prime stimulator²⁴. In addition, Scheeren in his study told that the men usually crave for more and even being satisfied with their current sex life, most men commit infidelity²³.

In the contemporary world, women are playing more than one role as housewives and working women, on gaining considerable status and rank their mobility provides them to interact with the opposite sex. In Pakistan, the ratio of working women is considerably low. Ahmad 2018 stated that the women's participation in labor force is only 24%. Whether these are working women or the housewives, the ratio of women experiencing violence due to cheating is high as compared to men²⁵. Due to high tolerability & lack of women rights in our society, women usually face violence and such an act from the female gender is more criticized as compared to males. Women are usually more emotional and develop an emotional attachment very quickly. It is necessary to see this issue in the context of women, because they are more vulnerable to emotional infidelity as compared to sexual.

In the present study, most of the women reported for emotional infidelity as more harmful. When it comes to the health, infidelity affects the psychological wellbeing of both men & women but in a different way, that has to be studied.

Conclusion

In conclusion, infidelity is becoming a growing issue globally and many of the

international guidelines have now considered putting an end to it with adultery, as now the men & women do not marry under pressures instead look for the appropriate choices. Such studies must be appreciated involving men, women, and single people as well to better understand the psychology & phenomenon of infidelity.

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