Original Article

Correlates of infidelity in adults

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Abstract

Infidelity is a complex phenomenon that is influenced by multiple psychological and behavioral factors. This study investigated the correlates of infidelity among adults by focusing on personality traits, sexual attitudes, narcissism, and self-disclosure. Data were collected through an online Google Forms survey for Emotional Responses to Sexual Infidelity, Personality Inventory for DSM-5 –Brief Form, Brief Sexual Attitude Scale, Sexual Narcissism Scale, and Self-Disclosure Index. The forms were administered to 200 adults with the Marathi language as their mother tongue, aged 18 to 30 years, across various colleges within the Pune city area. The results indicate a significant association between infidelity and personality traits. These included negative affect, detachment, antagonism, disinhibition, psychoticism, sexual attitudes, sexual narcissism, and self-disclosure. Forward stepwise regression analysis revealed that negative affect, self-disclosure, antagonism, sexual attitudes, and disinhibition were the most influential predictors of infidelity. The regression model accounted for 38.1% of the variance in infidelity behavior, suggesting a reasonably good fit for prediction. These findings highlight that higher levels of negative affect and antagonism, along with permissive sexual attitudes and disinhibited behaviors, increase the likelihood of infidelity. Conversely, self-disclosure is typically associated with relational transparency, indicating its complex role in the romantic dynamics.

Keywords: Infidelity, personality, sexual attitude, sexual narcissism, self-disclosure, adult, regression, correlation

Introduction

Being disloyal to a committed relationship is known as infidelity. Words such as cheating, disloyal, extramarital, adultery, or stepping out were interchangeably used to refer to sexual infidelity (Fincham & May, 2017). This occurs when one partner betrays trust by engaging in sexual or physical relationships with another. This can involve lying, concealing relationships outside of the committed one, or cheating physically or emotionally. Therapists rank infidelity as one of the most harmful and challenging problems to address in couple therapy and it is a heart-breaking experience for many couples. Additionally, infidelity has been linked to symptoms, including anxiety and sadness, as well as symptoms that resemble those of post-traumatic stress disorder. Research indicates that infidelity is a multifaceted problem, with several forms, such as sexual and emotional infidelity. Oberle, Dooley, and Nagurney (2016) found that women, high-communion individuals, and those with low intimacy fear are more likely to view sex-based and emotion-based acts as infidelity.

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Nevertheless, certain actions may be regarded as disloyal and have special motives, even if they are often not associated with emotional or sexual infidelity. Additionally, studies indicate that sexual characteristics are a significant predictor of infidelity and that gender affects these trends, particularly when it comes to hazardous and sexual behaviors. Researchers have used statistical methods to create an infidelity scale to better understand infidelity and reveal that there are numerous forms of infidelity, each with its own cause. The forms of physical and emotional infidelity may vary, and these behaviors may have an impact on gender.

Several psychologists have used personality as a key term for investigating infidelity (Gibson et al., 2016). Jia, Ing, and Chin (2016) reviewed researches on sexual and online infidelity from personality perspectives, through looking from Dark Triad Traits, The Big Five Factors and HEXACO. Total 51 papers from various publications were reviewed, and the findings confirmed the connection between personality and infidelity. High levels of the Dark Triads Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy were associated with infidelity. The Big Five Factors showed that conscientiousness was associated with lower levels of infidelity, agreeableness, and extraversion, with higher levels of infidelity, openness, and neuroticism, with contradictory results. According to HEXACO, infidelity was more common among those with low honesty-humility scores. Sexual infidelity is linked to low agreeableness (Apostolou & Panayiotou, 2019), positive association with spousal infidelity, and negative correlation with lifetime partner infidelity (Mahambrey, 2020). Openness to experience correlates with sexual infidelity (Apostolou & Panayiotou, 2019), while conscientiousness, neuroticism, marital satisfaction, and gender predict attitudes towards infidelity (Isma & Turnip, 2019). In contrast, Adubi et al. (2023) found that conscientiousness and gender are significant negative predictors of sexual infidelity. This study emphasizes the importance of considering personality traits when attempting to comprehend infidelity. However, a meta-analysis of 137 studies found no relationship between openness and infidelity and a weak relationship between extraversion and infidelity. Notably, lower levels

of agreeableness and conscientiousness were consistently significant predictors of sexual infidelity (Allen & Walter, 2018)

Romantic relationships have been associated with personality traits for a long time. Maladaptive traits including negative affectivity, disinhibition, and hostility are associated with improved infidelity. According to Porter (2022), disinhibition is strongly associated with trouble perpetuation in faithful relationships, whereas people with higher impulsivity and hostility are more likely to be infidelity-prone. However, it is frequently assumed that permissive sexual attitudes lead to infidelity. According to Fife et al. (2019), individuals with firm or traditional sexual beliefs may suffer from emotive despotism or cognitive conflict, which may be marked as hidden infidelity. In other words, people who have more exposed sexual attitudes might be less prone to cheating because they communicate their anticipations and desires in an improved manner (Fife, et al., 2019).

A narcissistic tendency unique to sexual relationships and sexual narcissism encompasses characteristics such as lack of empathy, exploitation, and sexual entitlement. Even in the absence of marital discontent, McNulty and Widman (2014) found that people with high levels of sexual narcissism are more likely to cheat. Similarly, according to Brunell and Campbell (2011), sexual narcissism is linked to self-centered and exploitative sexual behaviors, which raises the possibility of betrayal in close relationships. These results support the conclusion that infidelity and sexual narcissism are significantly positively correlated (Brunell & Campbell 2011).

Most people believe that intimacy and relationship happiness correlate with self-disclosure. However, its effects can differ according to limits and context. According to Aviram and Hamburger (2017), high degrees of self-disclosure, especially in digital settings, may encourage intimacy with people outside the primary relationship, which increases the risk of infidelity. Jacobsen and Schulz (2022) highlight that emotional fragility can be exploited in extradyadic encounters due to excessive or incorrect self-disclosure.

Particularly for young individuals negotiating changing romantic and sexual orientations, infidelity is a serious relational problem that affects their emotional health, trust,

and long-term commitment (Pour et al., 2019). Despite their commonality, psychological and interpersonal indicators of infidelity are still complicated and poorly understood. This study examined the relationship between infidelity and personality traits, sexual views, sexual narcissism, and self-disclosure in individuals aged between 18 and 30 years. Lenient sexual opinions may stabilize or rationalize extradyadic engagement (Fife et al., 2019; Mahalwal et al., 2021), while maladaptive personality traits, such as disinhibition and hostility, have been associated with impulsive and unfaithful behaviors (Porter, 2022).

Furthermore, infidelity and dissatisfaction in relationships are associated with sexual narcissism, which is characterized by abuse, a lack of empathy, and entitlement (Widman & McNulty, 2010; Brunell & Campbell, 2011). While self-disclosure mostly nurtures intimacy, some research points out that, when it is heading outside the crucial relationship, it may, in some cases, be related to infidelity (Aviram & Hamburger, 2017). By inspecting these factors, this study aimed to advance knowledge of the aspects related to counselling interventions that contribute to infidelity and offer directions for marital and romantic relationships.

Method

Participants

In this study, 200 young adults (aged 18-30 years) with Marathi as their mother tongue were considered.

Measure

The Emotional Responses to Sexual Infidelity Scale (ERSIS), developed by Turliuc & Scutaru (2014). This scale measures emotional reactions to infidelity using 32 items divided into seven categories: sadness, dread, anger, pain, fear, jealousy, and guilt. Responses are rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Fully Disagree, 5 = Fully Agree), with higher scores indicating stronger emotional responses.

The Personality Inventory for DSM-5 – Brief Form (PID-5-BF) developed by Krueger et. al. (2013) used a brief version of the PID-5 to assess maladaptive personality traits across five domains: Negative Affectivity, Detachment, Antagonism, Disinhibition, and Psychoticism, based on the DSM-

5 Alternative Model of Personality Disorders. It contains 25 statements rated on a four-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating stronger maladaptive traits.

The Brief Sexual Attitude Scale (BSAS) was developed by Erin Logue (2006) to measure sexual attitudes, and includes four subscales: permissiveness, birth control, communication, and instrumentality. The scale includes 15 statements rated on a five-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating more permissive or instrumental views of sexuality.

The Sexual Narcissism Scale (SNS) developed by Widman and McNulty (2010). The scale evaluates narcissistic traits in sexual situations using 20 items divided into four subscales: Sexual Exploitation, Sexual Entitlement, Low Sexual Empathy, and Sexual Skill. Statements were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree), with higher scores indicating greater sexual narcissism.

The Self-Disclosure Index (SDI) by Miller et al. (1983) measures the tendency to reveal personal information through 10 items covering topics such as Personal Beliefs, Emotions, Work, Hobbies, and Relationships. It uses a five-point Likert scale (1 = Do not Disclose at All 5 = Discuss Fully and Completely), with higher scores indicating greater self-disclosure.

Procedure

Participants were selected using a non-probability sampling method. The scales were administered individually. Although the questionnaire was created using Google Forms, it was administered offline and only the response recording process was conducted online. Informed consent was obtained from each participant before participation. Data were collected from colleges in Pune, after obtaining ethical permission from their respective institutions. The age range of the participants was 18-30 years old.

Result

Based on the objectives and hypotheses, the following results were obtained. Hypothesis 1 states that infidelity is significantly related to personality traits. for testing these values (Negative affect = 0.523, Detachment =0.425, Antagonism= 0.438, Disinhibition = 0.497, Psychoticism = 0.480) *was* found significant at 0.01 level of significance

hence the above hypothesis was accepted. Hypothesis 2 stated that infidelity is positively related to sexual attitudes. To test this value, $r = -.252$ was found to be significant at a significance level of 0.01; hence, the above-stated hypothesis was accepted. Hypothesis 3 states that infidelity is negatively related to sexual narcissism. To test this

value, $r = 0.188$ was found significant at 0.01 level of significance hence the above-stated hypothesis was accepted. Hypothesis 4 posits that infidelity is negatively related to self-disclosure. To test this value, $r = 0.216$ was found significant at 0.01 level of significance hence the above-stated hypothesis was accepted.

	Infidelity	Negative Affect	Detachment	Antagonism	Disinhibition	Psychoticism	Sexual Attitude	Sexual Narcissism	Self-Disclosure
Infidelity	1								
Negative Affect	.523**	1							
Detachment	.425**	.563**	1						
Antagonism	.438**	.411**	.607**	1					
Disinhibition	.497**	.622**	.613**	.543**	1				
Psychoticism	.480**	.656**	.652**	.537**	.653**	1			
Sexual-Attitude	-.252**	-0.133	-.152*	-.304**	-.237**	-.161*	1		
Sexual Narcissism	.188**	.184**	.182**	.143*	.200**	.146*	.163*	1	
Self-Disclosure	.216**	0.019	0.015	0.077	0.083	0.087	0.020	.315**	1
. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).									
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).									

A forward stepwise regression method was employed to examine predictors of infidelity. The model demonstrated an accuracy of 38.1%, indicating a reasonably good fit for predicting infidelity behavior. More than a few key factors emerged as significant predictors in the model. Specifically, negative affect, self-disclosure, antagonism, sexual attitude, and disinhibition were recognized as the most dominant variables in elucidating variations in infidelity, and the effects of these predictors on infidelity were converted to capture their association with the dependent variable. This change enhances the interpretability and predictive power of the model. The insertion of these predictors highlights the multifaceted interaction of affective, interpersonal, and attitudinal factors in infidelity behavior, and associates the hypothetical context underlying the present study.

The findings of a regression model ANOVA examined how different predictors affected the target variable, infidelity. With a substantial F-statistic (25.534) and significant p-value (Sig = 0.001), the adjusted model explains a significant amount of variation. This result implies that infidelity is significantly affected by the independent variables. Whereas the residual sum of squares (58.934) shows unexplained variance, the sum of squares for the adjusted model (38.764) shows explained variance. The total amount of data and predictors included in the model are indicated by degrees of freedom (df). According to our findings, the predictors in the model had a significant impact on the explanation of infidelity, underscoring their significance. Further interpretation should examine the individual predictor coefficients to understand their specific effects.

Discussion

Positive relationships were observed between infidelity and negative affect, detachment, antagonism, disinhibition and psychoticism. Negative relationships were found between infidelity and sexual attitude. Positive relationships have been observed between infidelity and sexual narcissism. We find a positive relationship between infidelity and self-disclosure .

This study aimed to examine the relationship between infidelity and various psychological constructs including personality traits, sexual attitudes, sexual narcissism, and self-disclosure. These findings provide mixed support for our proposed hypotheses.

The first hypothesis posits that infidelity is significantly related to personality traits. This hypothesis was supported as significant positive correlations were found between infidelity and all five maladaptive personality dimensions: negative affect (r = 0.523), detachment (r = 0.425), antagonism (r = 0.438), disinhibition (r = 0.497), and psychoticism (r = 0.480), all significant at the 0.01 level. These findings are in line with prior research stating that individuals with narcissism and psychopathy are more likely to experience infidelity (Alavi et al., 2018); also externalizing behavior is primarily linked to trait antagonism and, to a lesser extent, disinhibition at the domain level (Johnson et al., 2018). Such traits may impair interpersonal functioning and increase susceptibility to impulsive or self-centered behavior, which can contribute to unfaithful actions.

The second hypothesis suggested a positive relationship between infidelity and sexual attitudes. Contrary to expectations, a significant negative correlation was found (r = -0.252, p < .01). This finding may indicate that individuals with more permissive or open sexual attitudes are less likely to engage in infidelity, possibly because of greater communication or mutual agreement regarding sexual boundaries within relationships (Mark et al., 2014).

The third hypothesis proposed a negative relationship between infidelity and sexual narcissism. However, the results revealed a significantly positive correlation (r = 0.188, p < .01). This suggests that individuals with higher levels of sexual narcissism may be more prone to infidelity, potentially due to an inflated sense of sexual entitlement or a lack of concern for their partner's emotional well-being (McNulty & Widman, 2014).

Similarly, forth hypothesis, assumes a correlation between infidelity and self-disclosure. A significant positive correlation (r = 0.216, p < .01) was found, implying that individuals who engage in greater self-disclosure may also be more likely to engage in infidelity. This finding could be attributed to the complex nature of intimate communication, in which self-disclosure may not necessarily reflect emotional fidelity or relationship satisfaction.

This result is consistent with earlier research showing that people who score highly on detachment but primarily on Intimacy Avoidance are less likely to be content in their close relationships (Decuyper et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2020). From the perspective of the attachment theory, these findings make sense. Attachment avoidance, particularly among men, is linked to relationship dissatisfaction (Mikulincer et al., 2016). Individuals with avoidant attachment styles are self-sufficient, independent, and frequently uneasy with emotional closeness and dependence. When they enter a relationship, they often complain about feeling stifled and avoiding commitments. According to previous research, attachment avoidance, anxiety, and insecure attachment styles are linked to detachment and negative affectivity (Ball Cooper et al., 2021; Rosa-Mendes et al., 2019). Detachment, negative affectivity, and antagonism domains, particularly Intimacy Avoidance and Separation Insecurity, significantly contribute to relationship satisfaction (Savard, ett al., 2024).

Conclusion:

The results indicated significant relationships between infidelity and negative affect, detachment, antagonism, disinhibition, psychoticism, sexual attitudes, sexual narcissism, and self-disclosure. Forward stepwise regression analysis revealed that negative affect, self-disclosure, antagonism, sexual attitudes, and disinhibition were the most influential predictors of infidelity, with 38.1% of the variance in infidelity behavior. These findings highlight that higher levels of negative affect and antagonism, along with permissive sexual attitudes and disinhibited behaviors, increase the likelihood of infidelity.

Author Contributions: Nikita S. Kumbhar and Dr. Santosh B. Walke collaborated on the design and implementation of the study; Nikita S. Kumbhar wrote the report, and Santosh B. Walke conducted the analysis. Santosh B. Walke designed and supervised the study.

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