

⇒ Research Article



Association of Emotional and Cognitive Intimacy With Promiscuous Married Men Through Mediating Role of Attitude Towards Infidelity

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Background: Promiscuity and attitude towards infidelity can harm family health and cause many family problems. They are also two important reasons for divorce and separation. This study aimed to investigate the association of emotional and cognitive intimacy with promiscuity through the mediating role of attitude towards infidelity in married men.

Methods: This applied descriptive study had a correlational design and adopted the structural equation modeling method. The statistical population included all married men in Bushehr (Iran) who visited marriage counseling centers in 2020. A total of 384 married men were selected as the sample using convenience sampling. The research tools included the Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships, Attitudes towards Infidelity Scale, and the Justifications for Extramarital Relationships. Data were analyzed via the Pearson correlation method and structural equation modeling. SPSS version-24 and AMOS-24 were further used for analyzing the data.

Results: The results indicated that there was a direct association between emotional intimacy and attitude towards infidelity ($\beta=0.18$, $P=0.001$), cognitive intimacy and attitude towards infidelity ($\beta=-0.62$, $P=0.001$), emotional intimacy and promiscuity ($\beta=0.11$, $P=0.014$), attitude towards infidelity and promiscuity ($\beta=0.68$, $P=0.001$), but there was no a significant association between cognitive intimacy and promiscuity. The findings also revealed a significant relationship of emotional ($\beta=0.19$, $P=0.009$) and cognitive ($\beta=-0.39$, $P=0.007$) intimacy and promiscuity with mediating role of attitude towards infidelity in men.

Conclusion: In general, this study revealed that emotional-cognitive intimacy is a predictor of promiscuity. Therefore, the findings can contribute to studies that lead to marital stability.

Keywords: Emotion, Cognitive psychology, Intimacy, Sexual behavior, Betrayal, Men

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Background

Marriage is the start of family formation. It is a relationship that people choose to enter into. A man and a woman in a marriage must be able to adjust themselves to social developments, growth, and changes in each other; otherwise, they will have a problematic marriage, which is accompanied by many damages and problems, including extramarital affairs (1, 2). Promiscuity is one of the most important risk factors for the performance, stability, and persistence of marital relationships (3). Novelty-seeking is a state in which a person is not very stable in various aspects of life, including family, emotion, and social matters and tends strongly to constant changes (4). Promiscuity refers to an effective sexual motivation for sexual intercourse and marital performance, which is considered a personality trait or a preparation for marital infidelity (5, 6). Secrecy in extramarital affairs is a form of disloyalty that may be rooted in promiscuity. Among different forms of promiscuity are emotional promiscuity

(i.e., emotional engagement without sex) and sexual promiscuity, which refers to sex without emotional involvement (7).

Marriage, as a common contract between humans, is sometimes affected by the issue of infidelity. Infidelity is a factor that challenges family health and is the most important threat to the functioning, stability, and persistence of marital relationships. Infidelity and extramarital affairs are the main causes of divorce (8, 9). Infidelity refers to any secret sexual or emotional relationship with the opposite gender that breaks marital commitment. Studies on infidelity have targeted sexual and emotional infidelity. In fact, the range of behavioral relationships varies from talking to sexual intercourse and from short-term to long-term, with varying intensity (10). Infidelity is defined as being hurt by an intentional or unintentional behavior of a trusted person. It appears in the forms of sexual, emotional, hybrid (e.g., emotional-sexual), and virtual (e.g., phone sex) disloyalty (11, 12).

Studies have demonstrated that extramarital affairs are extremely common in modern societies and are the most prevailing challenge facing couples and marriage therapists (13). Many studies have found that infidelity is the leading cause of a breakdown and marital conflict, leading to reduced marital satisfaction (14, 15).

The reasons for promiscuity, mentioned in some studies, are issues related to emotional and cognitive intimacy. By definition, intimacy is closeness, similarity, and affective-emotional relationship with another person, which requires a deep understanding of the thoughts and feelings of that person and is used as the source of similarity and closeness (16, 17). Among different intimacy dimensions, affective, emotional, and cognitive aspects in a romantic relationship have a significant effect on satisfaction (18). Emotional and cognitive intimacy requires the connection and sharing of all positive and negative feelings with the spouse. The experience of emotional and cognitive intimacy plays an important role in keeping sexual desire on the road in long-lasting relationships (19). Positive intimacy changes are a predictor of sexual satisfaction and a passionate relationship with the partner (20). Emotional and cognitive intimacy is defined as the need for having a relationship, sharing thoughts, feelings, wishes, and desires, as well as having an emotional and cognitive nature (21, 22). Intimacy and sexual desires are interconnected, particularly in committed marital relationships. It seems that the experience of emotional intimacy has an important role in the stability of sexual desire in long-term romantic relationships (23, 24).

Sexual desires enhance when a person receives emotional responses from his/her partner. Pascoal et al (25) found that emotional intimacy was the best predictor of sexual satisfaction in both male and female samples. Tracy observed a positive significant relationship between cognitive-emotional intimacy and the promiscuity of men. Findings also showed that men with greater emotional and cognitive intimacy are more promiscuous (26). According to researchers, intimacy appears when marriage works well, and a lack of intimacy is indicative of poor marital function. Therefore, intimacy problems make couples seek couples therapy (22). As a result, it is necessary to develop methods and approaches to

enhance this important and valuable aspect of the marital relationship.

Objectives

Accordingly, the present study aimed to investigate the relationship between emotional and cognitive intimacy and promiscuity in married men through mediating role of attitude towards infidelity in Bushehr, Iran. The theoretical model of the research is presented in Figure 1.

Methods

This applied descriptive study had a correlational design and adopted the structural equation modeling method. The statistical population included all married men in Bushehr, Iran, in 2020. Participants in the present study referred to counseling centers in Bushehr for various reasons such as marital conflict, sexual satisfaction, and family problems. A total of 384 married men were selected as the sample using convenience sampling. In the current study, there was a total of 31 observed variables ($31 \times 10 + 50 = 360$). Accordingly, to reduce the sampling error, 410 married men participated in the study and received the questionnaires. After eliminating the distorted questionnaires, 384 married men were included in the study. Married men aged 20-60 years who were willing to participate and did not receive any therapy or marital training were included. The exclusion criterion was the failure to answer all questions of the questionnaire.

Research Instruments

Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships: This scale was developed by Schaefer and Olson in 1981 (27) to measure intimacy from emotional, social, sexual, mental, leisure, and conventional dimensions. Using this questionnaire, people describe their intimacy in relationships based on what they are currently experiencing in their relationship (perceived intimacy) as well as what they expect from their relationship (expected intimacy). This is a 36-item self-report instrument, which uses a five-point Likert scale anchored from 1 “never” to 5 “always”. The minimum and maximum scores of the scale are 36 and 180, respectively. The minimum and maximum scores of each subscale are 6 and 30, respectively. A higher

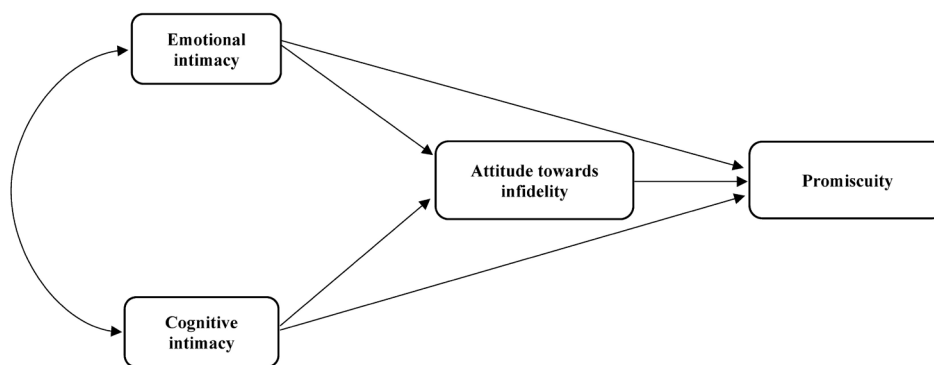


Figure 1. The Theoretical Model of the Study.

Table 1. Mean±SD, Skewness, Kurtosis, and Minimum and Maximum Scores Among the Research Variables

| Variables | Mean ± SD | Min. | Max. | Skewness | Kurtosis |
|-----------------------------|--------------|------|------|----------|----------|
| Emotional intimacy | 17.73 ± 4.70 | 9 | 34 | 0.84 | 0.81 |
| Cognitive intimacy | 22.08 ± 5.02 | 10 | 34 | -0.24 | -0.63 |
| Attitude towards infidelity | 35.56 ± 9.60 | 13 | 59 | 0.20 | -0.01 |
| Promiscuity | 39.47 ± 7.24 | 22 | 63 | -0.15 | -0.45 |

Note. SD: Standard deviation; Min: Minimum; Max: Maximum.

score is indicative of greater intimacy. In the present study, 12 items related to two subscales of emotional and cognitive intimacy were used (27). Zarra Nezhad and Moazami Goodarzi (28) reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87 for the questionnaire. In this study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.83 for the scale.

Attitudes towards Infidelity Scale

The Attitudes towards Infidelity Scale (extramarital affairs) was developed by Whatley (29). This scale is composed of 12 items scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "completely agree" to 5 "completely disagree". Items 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 12 were reverse items. To calculate the total score, the scores of all items are added. The minimum and maximum scores of the questionnaire are 12 and 84, respectively. The higher score is indicative of higher acceptance of infidelity and a positive attitude towards it; whereas, the lower score is indicative of lower acceptance of infidelity and a negative attitude towards it (29). Habibi et al (30) reported the reliability of this scale to be equal to 0.71 based on Cronbach's alpha coefficient. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.80 for the scale.

Justifications for Extramarital Relationships: This 17-item questionnaire was developed by Glass and Wright to measure the justifications for extramarital relationships. The items are responded to and scored on a five-point Likert scale (31). Sharifi et al (32) reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.94 for the questionnaire. In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.88 for the questionnaire.

Statistical Analyses

Data were analyzed by descriptive and inferential statistics such as mean, SD (standard deviation), and Pearson correlation coefficient. The skewness and kurtosis were utilized to specify the data normality. The indices used for evaluating the fitness of the model included comparative fit index (CFI), goodness of fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI), incremental fit index (IFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). The path analysis was used to assess the proposed model. Further, SPSS version 24 and AMOS-24 were used for analyzing the data. The significance level of the study was considered to be $\alpha = 0.05$.

Table 2. Pearson Correlation Coefficients Among the Research Variables

| Variables | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|--------------------------------|--------|---------|---------|---|
| 1- Emotional intimacy | 1 | | | |
| 2- Cognitive intimacy | -0.167 | 1 | | |
| 3- Attitude towards infidelity | 0.290* | -0.653* | 1 | |
| 4- Promiscuity | 0.310* | -0.425* | 0.7169* | 1 |

Note. * $P < 0.05$.

Results

The participants consisted of 384 married men aged 45.29 ± 6.37 years old. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics, including the mean, SD, minimum and maximum scores, kurtosis, and skewness. The kurtosis and skewness of all the variables fell in the range of -2 to +2. To examine the collinearity assumption, the variance inflation factor was calculated. According to the results, the variance inflation factor was lower than 10.0. Table 2 presents the correlation matrix of the variables, suggesting that the correlation coefficients are significant ($P < 0.05$).

Structural equation modeling was used in the present study to examine the proposed model. There was no latent variable in the proposed research model. Since in the estimation stage, the proposed model was a non-significant path (cognitive intimacy path to polyamory), the model was modified to improve its fit.

Table 3 depicts the fit indices of the initial proposed model as well as the fit indices of the final modified model. According to Table 3, RMSEA (0.11), TLI (0.909), and AGFI (0.922) are indicative of moderate fit of the proposed model; however, it was a direct insignificant path. After removing the insignificant path to modify the model fit, the proposed model was examined once again. Fit indices, including the chi-squared index ($\chi^2 = 1.53$), relative chi-squared index ($\chi^2/df = 1.53$), GFI (0.99), AGFI (0.97), CFI (0.99), IFI (0.99), TLI (0.99), RMSEA (0.006) suggest the proper fit of the modified model. Figure 2 illustrates the final model of the present study along with path coefficients.

As Table 4 indicates, all direct paths except the path of cognitive intimacy to promiscuity are significant. According to the results, the association between cognitive intimacy and attitude towards infidelity is negative and significant ($\beta = -0.62, P = 0.001$). Further, there is a positive and significant association between emotional intimacy and attitude towards infidelity ($\beta = 0.18, P = 0.001$), between emotional intimacy and promiscuity ($\beta = 0.11,$

Table 3. Initial and Final Models Fit Indicators

| Fit Indicators | χ^2 | df | (χ^2/df) | GFI | AGFI | CFI | NFI | IFI | TLI | RMSEA |
|----------------|----------|----|-----------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Initial model | 4.82 | 2 | 2.41 | 0.94 | 0.92 | 0.96 | 0.96 | 0.95 | 0.90 | 0.11 |
| Final model | 1.53 | 1 | 1.53 | 0.99 | 0.97 | 0.99 | 0.99 | 0.99 | 0.99 | 0.006 |

Note. df: Degree of freedom; GFI: Goodness of fit index; AGFI: Adjusted goodness-of-fit index; CFI: Comparative fit index; NFI: Normed fit index; IFI: Incremental fit index; TLI: Tucker–Lewis index; RMSEA: Root mean square error of approximation.

Table 4. Path Coefficients of Direct Effects in the Initial and Final Models

| Path | Initial Model | | | | Final Model | | | |
|--|---------------|-------|--------|--------|-------------|-------|--------|--------|
| | β | B | t | P | β | B | t | P |
| Emotional intimacy and attitude towards infidelity | 0.18 | 0.38 | 4.00 | <0.001 | 0.18 | 0.38 | 4.00 | <0.001 |
| Cognitive intimacy and attitude towards infidelity | -0.62 | -1.18 | -13.40 | <0.001 | -0.62 | -1.18 | -13.40 | <0.001 |
| Emotional intimacy and promiscuity | 0.11 | 0.19 | 2.46 | 0.014 | 0.11 | 0.19 | 2.49 | 0.013 |
| Cognitive intimacy and promiscuity | 0.07 | 0.11 | 1.24 | 0.211 | - | - | - | - |
| Attitude towards infidelity and promiscuity | 0.73 | 0.63 | 12.54 | <0.001 | 0.68 | 0.59 | 15.25 | <0.001 |

Table 5. Results of the Bootstrap Method for Investigating Indirect and Intermediary Paths

| Predictor Variable | Mediator Variable | Criterion Variable | Coefficient | β | Lower Limit | Upper Limit | P |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|-------------|---------|-------------|-------------|-------|
| Emotional intimacy | Attitude towards infidelity | Promiscuity | 0.24 | 0.14 | 0.08 | 0.19 | 0.009 |
| Cognitive intimacy | Attitude towards infidelity | Promiscuity | -0.74 | -0.45 | -0.52 | -0.39 | 0.007 |

$P=0.013$), and between attitude towards infidelity and promiscuity ($\beta=0.68$, $P=0.001$).

The bootstrapping technique was employed to examine the mediating relationships among the variables. Table 5 presents the results of the indirect paths. The indirect path from emotional intimacy to promiscuity through mediating role of attitude towards infidelity ($\beta=0.14$, $P=0.009$) and the indirect path from cognitive intimacy to promiscuity through attitude towards infidelity ($\beta=-0.45$, $P=0.007$) were significant.

Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the association of emotional and cognitive intimacy with promiscuity through the mediating role of attitude towards infidelity in married men in Bushehr, Iran. The results showed that emotional intimacy had a positive and significant association with attitude towards infidelity. Moreover, cognitive intimacy had a negative and significant association with attitudes towards infidelity in men. This

finding is consistent with the results of van Lankveld et al (22) and Soltanizadeh and Bajelani (33). Emotional and cognitive intimacy is defined as the need for a relationship and sharing thoughts, feelings, wishes, and desires, which have emotional and cognitive nature. Intimacy is a complicated issue that requires special attention as the lack of satisfaction in this regard can affect other aspects of the relationship between couples (15). Intimacy and sexual desires are interconnected, particularly in committed marital relationships. It seems that the experience of emotional intimacy has an important role in keeping sexual desire on the road in long-term romantic relationships (18). Experimental studies have evidenced that sexual desires increase when a person receives emotional responses from his/her partner. Pascoal et al (25) found that emotional intimacy is the best predictor of sexual satisfaction in both male and female samples. Intimacy is a process through which humans develop and improve their relationships. Intimacy is a type of relationship in which self-disclosure, perception,

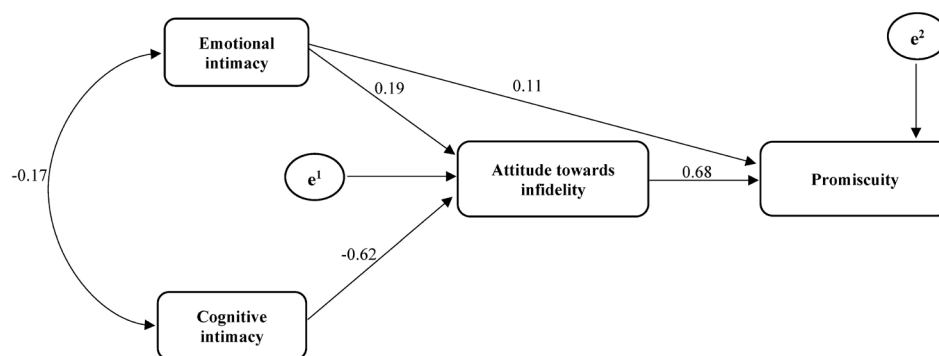


Figure 2. The Final Model Pertaining to the Mediating Role of Attitude Towards Infidelity in the Association of Emotional and Cognitive intimacy with Promiscuity in Married Men.

trust, and deep and multidimensional closeness are experienced, and commitment is enhanced. Commitment in marital life refers to the extent of interest and intention that a person has to remain in a marital relationship and maintain their commitment (20).

Moreover, the results revealed that emotional intimacy has a positive and significant association with promiscuity in men. Further, there was a causal association between emotional intimacy and promiscuity in men. Emotional and cognitive intimacy needs connection and sharing of all positive and negative feelings between couples. Positive feelings encompass happiness and satisfaction, while negative feelings comprise sadness, fear, anger, guilt, shame, loneliness, boredom, and fatigue. Emotional and cognitive intimacy plays an important role in keeping sexual desires on the road in long-lasting relationships (22). Reports by couples therapists show that promiscuity is one of the most important threatening factors of marital functionality, stability, and persistence and one of the most difficult problems for treatment (5). Diversity-seeking is a male characteristic, which is evoked in response to his mental needs, always encourages him to change, and is formed differently in different people. It can be recognized from his appearance, the way he talks, and his clothing. Through diversity-seeking behavior, people seek diversity in their life and social affairs, which becomes more prominent with a greater adaption of technology and can appear in every area, including job, sex, and clothing. Findings also demonstrated that men with greater emotional and cognitive intimacy are more promiscuous (25). On the other hand, studies have found that diversity-seeking is more common among men than among women, and they tend more to promiscuity. The main cause of this greater tendency among men is unsatisfied sexual desires. Inability to resolve marital conflicts, curiosity to discover the unseen, psychological deficiencies, desire to experience different people, and sexual perversions are among other reported factors. Therefore, emotional intimacy had a significant effect on promiscuity in men in the present study.

Infidelity is defined as disloyalty, lack of commitment in marriage, and establishing an emotional and sexual relationship with the heterogeneous sex. Infidelity is the main cause of the lack of marital intimacy, marital and sexual conflicts, as well as maladjustments and is one of the most important problems in marital relationships and divorce (15). In conclusion, there was a causal association between emotional intimacy and polyamory in men.

The results confirmed that there is a positive and significant association between attitude towards infidelity and promiscuity in men. This finding is consistent with the results of Barbaro et al (34). Among the most important causes of the growing rate of divorce in recent decades are infidelity and extramarital affairs (9). Evidence is indicative of a high rate of infidelity, particularly among men. The experience of infidelity is a

damaging interpersonal event, which results in cognitive, emotional, and behavioral symptoms in the victim. Given the vulnerability of females, it seems that they suffer more than men from the symptoms of this harmful act. This is because experiencing such harmful behavior from the most intimate person (i.e., spouse) results in losing interpersonal trust and growth of such negative feelings as anger, depression, and reduced self-confidence.

The statistical population in this study comprised all the married men in Bushehr, Iran, visiting marital counseling centers. As the results may be limited by the demographic characteristics of this city, the results should be generalized to other populations with caution. Moreover, some confounding variables such as socioeconomic status and family background could have affected the results. To ensure the accuracy of the findings, it is recommended that this study be replicated on other populations and samples to provide more experimental background for future research. As promiscuity in men leads to marital problems, it is suggested that future studies examine the role of other variables on promiscuity.

Conclusion

According to the results of the present study, emotional-cognitive intimacy is a predictor of promiscuity. Therefore, the findings can contribute to studies that lead to marital stability. Given the role of attitude towards infidelity in promiscuity in men, their awareness of controlling promiscuity and consequent marital insecurity should be raised through education and seminars.

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Author Contributions

All authors participated in the study concept and design, data collection, data analysis, and critical revision of the manuscript for important intellectual content.

Conflict of Interests

There was no conflict of interests to be declared.

Ethical Approval

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Islamic Azad University, Ahvaz branch (Code: IR.IAU.AHVAZ.REC.1400.098).

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