

Factors Affecting Extramarital Relationships in Iran: A Meta-Synthesis Study

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1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

The authors claim that the literature remains fragmented and therefore necessitates a meta-synthesis. However, in the paragraph beginning “*Despite the richness of existing studies, the literature remains fragmented*”, the manuscript does not critically compare previous review, Delphi, meta-analysis, and meta-synthesis efforts. A table summarizing prior syntheses, their scope, limitations, and unresolved gaps would strengthen the originality claim and clearly position the contribution of the current study.

The search strategy described in “*Studies were retrieved through a systematic search...*” lacks sufficient methodological detail. The exact Boolean operators, Persian and English search strings, date of searches, and screening procedures should be reported. Replicability is a fundamental requirement for synthesis studies, and currently another researcher would be unable to reproduce the search process.

The inclusion criteria specify “qualitative research conducted in Iran between 2012 and 2022,” yet the manuscript does not clarify whether mixed-method studies, dissertations, conference proceedings, or unpublished theses were eligible. The paragraph beginning “*After formulating the research question and search strategy...*” should provide a more detailed eligibility framework and justify each criterion.

The statement “out of 1,343 identified studies, application of the inclusion and exclusion criteria resulted in a final sample of 37 studies” requires a transparent screening flow diagram. A PRISMA-style figure documenting identification, duplicate removal, title screening, abstract screening, full-text review, and final inclusion would substantially improve methodological transparency.

The manuscript repeatedly emphasizes the influence of digital media and virtual environments. However, the category “Impact of Media and Virtual Spaces on Couples” is represented only by pornography and inappropriate social networking use. Given the rapidly evolving digital ecosystem, a more nuanced discussion of online emotional affairs, dating applications, anonymity, and algorithm-mediated interactions would enhance the contemporary relevance of the model.

The study relies exclusively on Iranian research, which is appropriate for a culturally grounded synthesis; however, the manuscript would benefit from a more explicit discussion of transferability. In the Conclusion, the authors should clarify which dimensions may be culturally specific to Iran and which may have broader applicability across collectivist societies, religious cultures, or developing countries.

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

The manuscript reports that “146 concepts were extracted and identified” but does not explain how the extraction process was performed. Please clarify whether coding was inductive, deductive, or hybrid, how many coders participated, whether a codebook was developed, and how disagreements were resolved. Without these details, the credibility of the analytical process is difficult to evaluate.

Table 2 presents expert agreement percentages ranging from 80% to 100%; however, the selection criteria for the ten experts are not reported. The manuscript should describe their academic qualifications, years of experience, disciplinary backgrounds, and expertise in family therapy, counseling, sociology, or qualitative research. This information is necessary to assess the validity of the expert review process.

The interpretation of Cohen’s Kappa in Table 3 requires reconsideration. The table reports a Kappa Index of 0.71 but simultaneously presents a Kappa Value of 0.004 and a significance level of 0.90. These statistics appear inconsistent and require clarification. The authors should explain the software output, define each reported statistic, and justify the interpretation of “acceptable validity.”

The conceptual distinction between “Personality Factors” and “Individual Factors” is not sufficiently justified. For example, negative self-concept, self-esteem, attachment styles, and personality characteristics are conceptually overlapping constructs. The authors should provide a stronger theoretical rationale for separating these categories and explain how coding decisions were made when concepts could fit multiple domains.

The category labeled “Religious–Ethical Beliefs of Couples” contains only two concepts—“legitimation of male sexual freedom” and “incorrect and extreme prejudices.” These concepts do not appear to comprehensively represent the broader construct of religious and ethical beliefs. Additional explanation is needed regarding how these concepts emerged and why other commonly discussed religious dimensions were not identified.

The dimension “Failure to Respect Marital Boundaries” is classified under socio-cultural factors, yet the associated concepts—low self-differentiation, lack of maturity, and power-seeking tendencies—appear predominantly psychological rather than socio-cultural. The authors should justify this categorization theoretically or consider revising the structure of the model.

Figure 1 presents the final conceptual model; however, it remains descriptive rather than explanatory. The figure would be considerably strengthened by illustrating directional relationships, hierarchical pathways, mediating mechanisms, or interactions among the five major categories. At present, the model functions as a taxonomy rather than a conceptual framework capable of explaining causality.

In the Discussion section, the authors primarily restate findings and align them with previous studies. For example, in the paragraph beginning *“One of the major findings of the study was the identification of personality factors...”*, greater emphasis should be placed on explaining why personality variables may influence extramarital relationships within the specific socio-cultural context of Iran rather than merely citing supporting studies.

The discussion of gender differences is extensive in the Introduction, particularly in the paragraph beginning *“Gendered experiences of infidelity have received considerable attention...”*, yet gender does not appear as a major category in the final model. The authors should explicitly explain whether gender emerged as a cross-cutting theme, was subsumed under other dimensions, or failed to meet coding criteria.

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

2. Revised

Editor’s decision after revisions: Accepted.

Editor in Chief’s decision: Accepted.