

Explaining the Causes of Women's Tendency Toward Extramarital Relationships in Yazd: A Grounded Theory Study

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E d i t o r	R e v i e w e r s
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1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

The statement “women’s tendency toward extramarital relationships requires particular scholarly attention” needs greater conceptual caution. The manuscript should avoid implying that women’s infidelity is inherently more important or more problematic than men’s infidelity. Instead, the authors should explicitly state that women’s experiences are underexplored, socially stigmatized, and shaped by gender-specific cultural expectations, which justifies the focus on women without producing a normative or gender-biased framing.

In the methods section, the phrase “all married women aged 25 to 45 years residing in Yazd who had experienced extramarital relationships or had shown a tendency toward them” requires more methodological precision. The authors should clearly explain how “tendency toward extramarital relationships” was identified during recruitment. Was it based on self-report, prior counseling records, screening questions, therapist referral, or explicit disclosure during the initial interview? Without this clarification, the boundary between actual experience and mere tendency remains ambiguous.

The sampling description states that “participants were selected through purposive sampling with an emphasis on maximum variation in experiences and areas of expertise,” but the manuscript does not specify the dimensions of maximum variation.

The authors should report which characteristics were intentionally varied, such as age, duration of marriage, education, occupation, number of children, type of extramarital involvement, religious orientation, or socioeconomic status. This information is important for evaluating the breadth and credibility of the qualitative sample.

The methods section reports that “theoretical saturation was reached after the twenty-third interview” among women and “after the seventh participant” among experts. This claim should be supported with a clearer explanation of how saturation was determined. The authors should specify whether saturation referred to code saturation, meaning saturation, theoretical saturation, or absence of new categories. They should also describe whether a saturation grid, memoing process, or comparative analysis was used to document the point of saturation.

The manuscript states that data were collected from “women, experts, and Islamic religious sources,” but the integration of these three data sources needs stronger methodological justification. Religious texts are not participants in the same sense as interviewees; therefore, the authors should explain how textual analysis of Islamic sources was methodologically integrated with grounded theory coding. The manuscript should clarify whether Islamic sources were coded inductively, deductively, or used as sensitizing concepts after participant data had been analyzed.

In the findings section, the central phenomenon is described as “the tendency toward extramarital relationships as a way of redefining identity and responding to unmet needs.” This is a strong theoretical statement, but the manuscript should demonstrate more clearly how this category emerged from participants’ data rather than from the researchers’ interpretive assumptions. The authors should provide more participant quotations that directly support identity redefinition, unmet needs, and the relationship between these two dimensions.

The category “sexual arousability” should be reconsidered terminologically. In English scientific writing, “sexual arousability” may refer to a trait-like capacity for sexual arousal, whereas the data seem to indicate sexual dissatisfaction, lack of excitement, desire for attractiveness, and fantasy-based stimulation. The authors may consider replacing this term with “sexual dissatisfaction and desire for sexual validation” or another term that more accurately reflects the coded data.

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

In the paragraph describing the interview questions, the item “How did these relationships create conflict with your religious beliefs?” may be leading because it presupposes that religious conflict occurred. The authors should revise this section by presenting questions in a more neutral form, such as “How, if at all, did this experience relate to your religious or spiritual beliefs?” This would strengthen the credibility of the data collection process and reduce the risk of imposing a religious-conflict framework on participants’ narratives.

The ethical section notes that “no financial or nonfinancial compensation was offered to participants in order to prevent any influence on their responses.” While this is understandable, the authors should also discuss how participant vulnerability was managed, given the sensitive nature of the topic. The manuscript should provide more detail about confidentiality procedures, data storage, anonymization, psychological risk management, referral pathways, and whether an institutional ethics committee approved the study.

The sentence “failure to adhere to the ethical principles of the research, such as dishonesty in responses” as an exclusion criterion is problematic. In qualitative research, the researcher usually cannot objectively determine “dishonesty” during interviews, especially in sensitive topics such as infidelity. The authors should either remove this criterion or reframe it as “provision of inconsistent or unverifiable information that prevented meaningful participation,” while also explaining how such cases would be identified without violating participant dignity.

The analysis section reports that “more than 280 initial codes” were extracted and then organized into “14 main categories and 42 subcategories.” The authors should provide a more transparent audit trail showing how raw statements were transformed

into initial codes, then subcategories, main categories, and finally the selective code. A table presenting at least several examples of this analytic movement would significantly strengthen the methodological rigor of the grounded theory process.

The manuscript states that the analysis followed “the systematic method of Strauss and Corbin,” but the paradigmatic model needs closer alignment with this approach. Specifically, the model should clearly distinguish causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, action/interaction strategies, and consequences. At present, some concepts appear to overlap; for example, cyberspace is described as an intervening condition, but it also appears in the strategies as a space for seeking emotional validation. The authors should clarify how each category was assigned to one paradigmatic position.

The reported reliability procedure states that “the kappa agreement coefficient was calculated to be higher than 0.85,” but the manuscript does not explain what exactly was coded for intercoder agreement. The authors should specify the number of transcripts recoded, the unit of analysis, the coding level used for kappa calculation, the number of coders, and whether disagreements were resolved through discussion. Without these details, the reliability claim remains incomplete.

Table 1 is useful, but the demographic information of the female participants is insufficient for a qualitative study on marital infidelity. The authors should consider adding additional participant characteristics, such as duration of marriage, number of children, type of extramarital relationship, duration of extramarital involvement, employment status of spouse, and whether the relationship was disclosed or concealed. These variables would provide a richer contextual understanding of the participants’ experiences.

Table 2 reports age, gender, and academic rank of experts, but it does not sufficiently describe their expertise. Because experts are central to the triangulation strategy, the manuscript should report their disciplinary background, years of professional experience, field of practice, and specific expertise in family counseling, Islamic psychology, jurisprudence, or ethics. Merely stating academic rank does not establish their relevance to the phenomenon under study.

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

2. Revised

Editor’s decision after revisions: Accepted.

Editor in Chief’s decision: Accepted.