




Sociological Investigation of Factors Influencing Extramarital Relationships in Couples from Bandar Abbas

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Extramarital relationships represent one of the most significant threats to the stability of marital relationships and are among the leading causes of divorce across various cultures. Given the social and cultural context of Iran, the importance of religious boundaries in relationships between women and men, and the prevalence of these relationships as indicated by statistics published by the Welfare Organization, extramarital affairs are recognized as a social issue.

Methods and Materials: Since solving a problem without descriptive studies and identifying the processes affecting the emergence of the problem is not feasible, the current qualitative study was conducted through problem-centered interviews with 19 participants (13 women and 6 men).

Findings: The results showed that the most significant factors include the ineffective presence of the man in the home, a history of marital infidelity in the family and acquaintances, forced marriage based on traditional criteria, differing social classes of the spouses, the opportunity for infidelity in society and the workplace with colleagues of the opposite sex, and the disappearance of traditional norms, changes in attitudes towards marriage and family values, lack of adherence to ethical and religious values, forced marriage based on traditional criteria, spouse addiction to drugs and psychotropic substances, inappropriate living environment and the presence of seducers, influence from social networks, having a previous marriage, stinginess, and suspicion and cynicism of the spouse, and changes in the normative structures of society as the most significant background and intervening factors in the creation and expansion of extramarital relationships.

Conclusion: This study demonstrated that extramarital relationships and infidelity are complex and multidimensional phenomena, and individuals are inclined towards marital infidelity for various reasons. Therefore, this phenomenon should be approached considering these complexities, and a single solution cannot be offered to everyone.



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Keywords: *Extramarital relationships, Divorce, Infidelity, Social disorganization, Anomie, Normlessness.*

1. Introduction

The family is one of the most important institutions in society, the stability of which requires the commitment of spouses to each other. Understanding and examining the factors contributing to the durability and stability of these social institutions can be a valuable step towards enhancing the cultural level of society. Various factors influence the stability and permanence of the family, among which the commitment between spouses is notable. Moreover, commitment is considered a very important concept in marital relationships because it is associated with better communication, happiness, and more constructive behavior during problems (Sharifi et al., 2022). The family has always been regarded as one of the effective contexts for an individual's mental and physical health. One of the main factors that undermine the pillars and health of families and couples is extramarital relationships, which are among the most significant threats to the function, stability, and continuity of marital relationships (Mayeli & Allahyari, 2022). Extramarital relationships are one of the most damaging phenomena in marital life. These relationships can create a profound sense of worthlessness and insecurity in the affected partner. Extramarital relationships mean crossing the boundaries of the marital relationship and establishing physical or emotional intimacy with someone outside of the relationship (Lainez & Nguyen, 2020; Mayeli & Allahyari, 2022). Extramarital relationships are among the issues that couple therapists regularly encounter in their clinical activities; it is considered any sexual or emotional relationship beyond the committed framework between couples (Exton, 2010), which the individual hopes to satisfy their psychological needs through (Apostolou, 2019).

Extramarital relationships, by general definition, violate the commitment of a relationship, leading to the formation of some degree of emotional and physical intimacy with someone outside of this relationship and are characterized by their secrecy and confidentiality (Rezakhaniha & Ashkan, 2022; Wiederman & Allgeier, 1996). Extramarital relationships are a type of sexual, emotional, or emotional-sexual relationship with someone other than the spouse, hidden from the spouse (Abdolmaleki & Azadeh, 2014; Baran Oladi et al., 2018; Bozorgi & Zadeh, 2016). This is a traumatic and shocking interpersonal incident for the injured partner, but unfortunately, it occurs extensively in marriages (June, 2020). In recent years, the definition of extramarital relationships has expanded to include a wider range of behaviors. For example, extramarital relationships include

behaviors such as having an illicit relationship, deception, sexual intercourse, viewing pornography, excessive physical intimacy with someone other than the spouse, and even emotional intimacy beyond usual friendly relations with someone other than the spouse; therefore, any behavior leading to the violation of the marital covenant between two people can be classified under extramarital relationships (Fouladiyan et al., 2021; Previti & Amato, 2004). Extramarital relationships are divided into two types: 1) Sexual infidelity: having a sexual relationship with someone other than the spouse. 2) Emotional infidelity: placing emotional resources such as love, time, and attention on someone other than the spouse (Habibi Askarabad & Hajiheydari, 2015). In Iran, based on marriage and divorce statistics for the year 2017, the number of registered marriages decreased by about eight percent compared to 2016, while the number of divorces reached approximately 175,000 cases, the highest recorded number in Iran's history. According to the same research, about 80 percent of these divorces were due to infidelity (Sharifi et al., 2022).

Along with the emergence of modernity, the development of technology, communication tools, and advancements worldwide, and in line with the phenomenon of globalization, Iran has also been affected by the changes resulting from this, which due to the type of culture and tradition prevailing in Iranian society against Western modernity, has resulted in conflicts and issues such as extramarital relationships, infidelity, increased age of marriage, divorce, white marriage, etc., as its consequences (Fouladiyan et al., 2021). The development of globalization and the integration of geographical, economic, and cultural borders, as well as issues such as unemployment, poverty, lack of cohesion, and the like, have caused confusion in most countries of the world. In other words, today's world is facing the greatest transformations in human history; transformations that have limited the opportunity for normatization and adaptation to new conditions and in many cases, do not provide the possibility of appropriate decision-making (Baran Oladi et al., 2018; Bozorgi & Zadeh, 2016). The acceleration of such transformations in developing countries has decisively affected the formation and intensification of social problems among society's individuals, especially couples. Among these, anomie as a social problem also arises from conditions part of which is due to rapid changes and another part to the existing disorders in society (Fincham & May, 2017). In anomic conditions, due to the weakness in the governance of norms,

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the conflict among them, and even the emergence of areas lacking clear norms, non-compliance with ethical and social rules occurs, and patterns do not adequately guide social behaviors; in other words, in these conditions, disorder, conflict, instability of norms, and in some areas, normlessness are clearly visible. Moreover, the tendency towards deviant behaviors is one of the issues that makes the development of a stable society free from tensions and deviations impossible and puts any social and economic planning and progress at risk (Shiani & Mohamadi, 2007).

Currently, the new generation, situated in the era of communication within the global village, is more exposed to social harms than ever before. Family disintegration, as a significant variable in the emergence of crime and social harms, encompasses various dimensions. Among the definitions provided for family disintegration, the most important and complete one is attributed to William J. Goode: the breaking down of the family unit or a decomposition and recombination of social roles due to one or more individuals failing to fulfill their role obligations as expected; in this context, aspects such as dissolution, separation, and divorce, and the hollow family can be mentioned. Therefore, studying the roots and sociological factors of extramarital relationships, given the consequences such relationships can have, is of great importance (Ejtehadi & Vahedi, 2016; Fouladiyan et al., 2021). The concept of social disorganization means a time when agreement, coordination, and compatibility in the execution of a system is reduced or disappears. This perspective views the cause of social harms as the infiltration of new values into social life and changes occurring across various layers of society, especially in culture, politics, or economy, or when social changes disrupt the coordination among components, leading to the emergence of social harms (Giddens, 2020; Habibi Askarabad & Hajiheydari, 2015). This approach considers social harms as a result of the breakdown of regulations and social disorganization, occurring when social control fails to regulate individual behavior (Rezakhaniha & Ashkan, 2022). Metropolises, too, have been a suitable ground for crisis conditions, positioned on the path of rapid growth and developments of globalization on one hand, and significant social events and resulting structural changes in recent decades on the other, significantly affecting the formation and intensification of social problems among society's individuals, especially couples (Aminiha et al., 2015). Accordingly, in the current research, we aim to conduct a sociological investigation of the factors affecting extramarital relationships among

couples in Bandar Abbas and respond to the question of what impacts social disorganization and social anomie have on couples' extramarital relationships.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study is exploratory in nature, applied in terms of research type, inductive in terms of research strategy, and qualitative in terms of data nature, based on the grounded theory model according to Strauss and Corbin (1998) (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Additionally, in this research, for the grounded theory research approach, the paradigmatic model of Strauss and Corbin, which is based on identifying six elements: causal conditions, context, intervening conditions, action/interaction strategies, consequences, and the core phenomenon and their relationships, was used. In examining extramarital relationships among couples who have experienced such relationships, the strategy of "sampling with multiple purposive techniques" was employed, where the researcher combined more than one sampling strategy to find samples for this study, initially approached the Welfare Organization of Bandar Abbas and examined the divorce applicant files. Subsequently, access was gained to couples who had sought counseling for divorce due to their spouse's extramarital relationships, resulting in 19 interviews (13 women and 6 men) being recorded. Women involved were aged between 18 to 39 years, having been married for at least 2 years and at most 7 years, and participating men were aged 22 to 41 years, with their marital relationship lasting between 3 to 9 years.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Semi-Structured Interview

The interview method adopted in this research was the problem-centered interview introduced by Witzel. This method includes suggestions for formulating questions and exploring during the interview, particularly using an interview guide containing questions and verbal stimuli. In this research, instead of analyzing data to discover dimensions and characteristics, actions and interactions over time were addressed to explain and interpret how actions change. In this method, life is considered as a narrative to analyze the construction of narrative reality without relying on data collection procedures aimed at obtaining narratives (Flick, 2004). In this study, interviews were conducted with

women and men involved in extramarital relationships to analyze the processes leading to such relationships. In all 19 interviews, based on the analytical method, there exists a narrative linkage over time. This analysis identified the life history of women and men involved in extramarital relationships and the factors leading them into these relationships, ultimately extracting a model for engaging in extramarital relationships.

2.3. Data analysis

In the current study, the grounded theory method was used for data collection through interviews. To ensure credibility and reliability, the concept of research trustworthiness proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1989) was applied (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). They introduced four criteria—credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability—as alternatives to the classic criteria of validity and reliability. In the current research, the validity and reliability of the study were collected through prolonged engagement in the research environment and consultation with experts regarding the interviews. The raw data were reviewed and revisited after analyzing the results to assess interpretations. Transferability was also achieved in this research, and the context and conditions of the study were fully described, including the research's geographical scope and the participants and their numbers. Regarding dependability, interviews were recorded and noted during the interview, and the categories obtained from open coding were logically and reasonably connected. Additionally, the research's influence was examined by comparing the obtained data with existing sources and consulting with participants and experts. In the current study, the systematic approach was used, which includes causal conditions, central category, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and outcomes.

To validate the process and results of the research, the researchers endeavored to ensure that the steps taken in interviews and analysis were consistent with methodological recommendations in this field from credible sources. The success of the researchers in this area was evaluated based on the seven criteria of Strauss and Corbin (1990), including

detailed sampling processes, the main categories emerged in the research findings section, narratives, events, and actions related to the emerged categories were brought as evidence for each category as much as possible, and attention was paid to clarifying the strategies adopted by the actors studied and the outcomes of these strategies for theoretical sampling advancement. To enhance the transferability of results, with maximum data extraction and the use of theoretical sampling, an effort was made to generalize the results as much as possible. The data analysis stage employed the grounded theory method, a type of inductive and exploratory research method that allows researchers in various subject areas to develop theories instead of relying on existing, predetermined theories. The data analysis used Strauss and Corbin's continuous comparative analysis technique, including open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, and utilized MAXQDA software.

3. Findings and Results

In this research, a total of semi-structured interviews were conducted with 19 individuals based on a guide prepared by the researcher. Thirteen of the interviewees were women and six were men, and pseudonyms were used to protect the privacy of participants in this study. 47% of the interviewees had education up to the diploma level, 31.5% had undergraduate degrees, and 21% had associate degrees. 31.5% of the interviewees were homemakers, and 68.5% were employed. Among the 11 individuals, 5 had not divorced and continued their extramarital relationships while living with their spouse. The other 14 had separated due to their spouse discovering the extramarital relationship and continued their extramarital relationships. For the analysis of the findings of this study, after identifying the causal and contextual factors leading to the occurrence of extramarital relationships for each individual, models were drawn for each of the interviewees. Next, general and comprehensive models of the occurrence of extramarital relationships were extracted from all interviews, which were the result of combining and abstracting from the process of each interview.

Table 1

Summary of Qualitative Results

Row	Concept
1	Ineffective presence of the man at home
2	History of marital infidelity in the family and acquaintances
3	Forced marriage based on traditional standards
4	Different socio-economic status of the spouses
5	Lack of social support from the spouse
6	Lack of awareness of the harms of extramarital relationships
7	Existence of opportunities for infidelity in society
8	Desire to experience modern love in a modern society
9	Inclination towards deviant forms in social relationships
10	Lack of effort to preserve social identity
11	Imitation of peers and colleagues
12	Incorrect cognitive patterns and sexual diversity seeking
13	A climate of freedom-seeking in society
14	Resistance against patriarchal views and objectification of women
15	Work environment with colleagues of the opposite sex
16	Stinginess and suspicion and cynicism of the spouse
17	Changes in societal normative structures
18	Lack of planning for leisure activities
19	Value and attitude changes
20	Unwillingness to accept limitations
21	Lack of social and cognitive maturity
22	Cultural differences
23	Dependence on the spouse's family of origin and their interference
24	Disappearance of traditional norms
25	Interaction with individuals involved in extramarital relationships
26	Changing attitudes towards marriage and family values
27	Observing an increase in relationships outside the marital scope
28	Lack of adherence to ethical and religious values
29	Forced marriage based on traditional standards at a young age
30	Prevalence of unconventional norms in society
31	Spouse's addiction to drugs and psychotropic substances
32	Prohibition of children from experiencing love and relationships with the opposite sex
33	Increased age of marriage
34	Inappropriate spouse selection
35	Inappropriate living environment and the presence of seducers
36	Influence from social networks
37	Spouse's unemployment and financial issues
38	Dependency on spouse's family of origin and their interference
39	Suggestions of extramarital relationships to married women in society
40	Watching satellite movies with themes of infidelity
41	Having a previous marriage
42	Spouse's addiction to drugs and psychotropic substances

In this study, data obtained from the interviews were coded using a three-stage coding process: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Open coding is the first stage of the coding process in the paradigm model. Nineteen interviews were conducted, and 43 concepts were extracted. Axial coding involves moving to a higher level of abstraction by identifying the main relationships and structures or elements around which other concepts revolve. Axial coding confirms concepts based on their dynamic

relationships. These concepts form the basis for theory development. In axial coding, connections between categories and subcategories are established. In this stage, data are further condensed by establishing connections between categories. This research attempted to understand the sociological factors affecting extramarital relationships by examining the above concepts.

Causal conditions refer to conditions that cause the phenomenon under study to occur.

Table 2

Causal Conditions

No.	Causal Condition
1	Lack of effective presence of the man at home
2	History of marital infidelity in family and acquaintances
3	Forced marriage based on traditional criteria
4	Different socio-economic status of the spouses
5	Cultural differences
6	Existence of opportunities for committing infidelity in society
7	Desire to experience modern love in modern society
8	Inclination towards deviant forms in social relationships
9	Lack of effort to maintain social identity
10	Imitation of surroundings and colleagues
11	Incorrect cognitive patterns and sexual novelty-seeking
12	Climate of liberalism in society
13	Resistance against patriarchal views and instrumentalization of women
14	Workplace environment with non-homogeneous gender colleagues

The emergence of conditions such as the ineffective presence of the man in the home, a history of marital infidelity in the family and acquaintances, forced marriage based on traditional criteria, different social classes of the spouses, poor social origin, cultural differences, opportunities for committing infidelity in society, desire for modern love; inclination towards abnormal forms in social relationships, lack of effort to preserve social identity, imitation of surroundings, incorrect cognitive models, and

sexual novelty-seeking, the climate of liberalism in society, resistance against patriarchal views and instrumentalization of women, and work environment with colleagues of the opposite sex led to the occurrence or expansion of the phenomenon of extramarital relationships.

Contextual conditions refer to conditions that are the locus of events or incidents related to the phenomenon under study.

Table 3

Contextual Conditions

No.	Contextual Condition
1	Disappearance of traditional norms
2	Interaction with individuals involved in extramarital relationships
3	Changing attitudes towards marriage and family values
4	Observing an increase in relationships outside the marital domain
5	Lack of adherence to ethical and religious values
6	Forced marriage based on traditional criteria
7	Forced marriage at a young age
8	Prevalence of unconventional norms in society
9	Spouse's addiction to drugs and psychotropic substances
10	Prohibition of children from experiencing love and relationships with the opposite sex
11	Increased age of marriage
12	Inappropriate spouse selection

Factors such as the disappearance of traditional norms, interaction with individuals involved in extramarital relationships, changing attitudes of the youth towards marriage and family values, observing an increase in relationships outside the marital domain, lack of adherence to ethical and religious values, forced marriage based on traditional criteria, prevalence of early marriage, prevalence

of unconventional norms in society, spouse's addiction to drugs and psychotropic substances, preventing children from experiencing love and relationships with the opposite sex, increased age of marriage and inappropriate spouse selection are among the most significant sociological contextual factors affecting the creation of extramarital relationships in the studied community.

Intervening conditions refer to conditions in which the phenomenon (category) manifests.

Table 4

Intervening Conditions

No.	Intervening Condition
1	Inappropriate living environment and the presence of seducers
2	Influence from social networks
3	Spouse's unemployment and financial issues
4	Dependency on spouse's family of origin and their interference
5	Suggestions of extramarital relationships to married women in society
6	Watching satellite movies with themes of infidelity
7	Having a previous marriage
8	Spouse's addiction to drugs and psychotropic substances
9	Dependency on spouse's family of origin and their interference
10	Lack of social support from spouse
11	Lack of awareness of the harms of extramarital relationships
12	Stinginess and suspicion and cynicism of spouse
13	Changes in societal normative structures
14	Lack of planning for leisure activities
15	Changes in values and attitudes
16	Reluctance to accept limitations
17	Lack of social and cognitive maturity

Factors such as inappropriate living environment and the presence of seducers, influence from social networks, spouse's unemployment and financial issues, spouse's dependency on their family and their interference, suggestions of extramarital relationships to married women in society, watching satellite movies with themes of infidelity; having a previous marriage, spouse's addiction to drugs and psychotropic substances, dependency on spouse's family of origin and their interference, lack of social support from spouse, unawareness of the harms of extramarital relationships, stinginess and suspicion and cynicism of spouse, changes in societal normative structures, lack of planning for leisure activities, value and attitude changes, reluctance to accept limitations, and lack of social and cognitive maturity were among the most significant intervening factors in creating extramarital relationships among couples.

As the analysis of the interviews showed, with the formation of causal-social conditions for extramarital relationships in society and the increase of psychological pressures resulting from relational disturbances between couples and the emergence of stimuli intensifying individuals' inclination towards extramarital relationships, this inclination intensifies over time. This process may last from a few months to several years, and with the provision of contextual conditions, individuals engage in extramarital relationships outside the framework of marriage. Engaging

in extramarital relationships is a strategy adopted by participants when faced with the aforementioned causal, contextual, and intervening conditions. Establishing emotional and sexual relationships with someone other than the spouse outside the family framework, becoming pregnant by a man other than the spouse, fulfilling emotional needs by someone other than the spouse, fulfilling sexual needs by someone other than the spouse, and ultimately divorce are strategies for extramarital relationships.

Consequences refer to outcomes obtained based on the implementation of strategies. Relationships with the opposite sex after marriage have various levels; these relationships start at the level of verbal and virtual relationships, progress to emotional and affectionate relationships, and ultimately culminate in sexual relationships. Thus, relationships that reach their final stage will be of the extramarital type. When couples experience emotional ruptures in their relationships with each other and parents, parents with each other, and also suffer from issues such as divorce, addiction, and infidelity in their family origins, or if they are deprived of the opportunity to experience love due to being in a traditional family environment and have married out of coercion or necessity, they generally experience disturbances in emotional and sexual relationships with their spouse in the years following marriage. Thus, entering an emotional relationship with someone other than the spouse to some extent fulfills their

emotional needs and reduces disturbances in their relationships, suggesting that engaging in extramarital relationships was the strategy of the actors studied in facing the phenomenon of the desire to experience modern love.

If the extramarital relationship of one of the spouses is revealed, harms and problems emerge in the relationship, which have unavoidable consequences. The first issue is the collapse of emotional and sexual feelings. If the spouses had a proper emotional and sexual relationship with each other before the establishment of extramarital relationships, they would experience a crisis emotionally after learning of their spouse's infidelity, affecting various dimensions of their relationship. The second factor is the creation of feelings of anger and revenge due to the spouse's infidelity. After discovering the spouse's infidelity, individuals exhibit intense emotions such as anger and irritation, and if the person does not have appropriate control over these emotions, it may lead to the formation of a sense of revenge in various forms in the individual.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Extramarital relationships, considering the social and cultural context of Iran, the importance of religious boundaries in relationships between women and men, and the prevalence of this relationship based on statistics published by the Welfare Organization, are recognized as a social issue. Since solving a problem without descriptive studies and identifying the processes affecting the emergence of the problem is not possible, the current qualitative study was conducted with problem-centered interviews involving 19 participants (13 women and 6 men). According to the research findings, the origin of extramarital relationships is a set of causal, contextual, and intervening conditions. These conditions, in relation to each other, create a context and environment for the emergence and manifestation of the inclination to establish emotional and sexual relationships other than with the spouse.

The emergence of conditions such as the ineffective presence of the man in the home, a history of marital infidelity in the family and acquaintances, forced marriage based on traditional criteria, different social classes of the spouses, poor social origin, cultural differences, opportunities for committing infidelity in society, desire for modern love; inclination towards abnormal forms in social relationships, lack of effort to preserve social identity, imitation of surroundings, incorrect cognitive models, and sexual novelty-seeking, the climate of liberalism in society,

resistance against patriarchal views and instrumentalization of women have caused and led to the occurrence or expansion of the phenomenon of extramarital relationships. The results are in line with the research by Sharafuddin and Salehi Zadeh (2016) that concluded continuous interaction between individuals, mixed work environments, and ignoring ethical and social norms are factors in infidelity (Sharaffoddin & Salehi Zadeh, 2016). Neglecting ethical boundaries in relationships with the opposite sex and multiple sexual relationships before marriage (Ghafoorian Nourozi et al., 2018) are among the causes of extramarital relationships among couples. Sharifi et al. (2021) suggest that teaching necessary skills regarding the use of virtual social networks and examining personality traits and early maladaptive patterns in pre-marriage counseling can significantly prevent these issues (Sharifi et al., 2022). Ejtehadi et al. (2016) mentioned that marital commitment and social control had the highest explanatory power in delineating the potential for infidelity (Ejtehad & Vahedi, 2016).

Another set of influencing factors on the emergence of extramarital relationships are contextual factors. The results showed that factors such as the disappearance of traditional norms, interaction with individuals involved in extramarital relationships, changing attitudes of the youth towards marriage and family values, observing an increase in relationships outside the marital scope, lack of adherence to ethical and religious values, forced marriage based on traditional criteria, prevalence of early marriage, prevalence of unconventional norms in society, spouse's addiction to drugs and psychotropic substances, preventing children from experiencing love and relationships with the opposite sex, increased age of marriage and inappropriate spouse selection have paved the way for the creation of extramarital relationships in the studied community. Additionally, the lack of internal adherence to religious beliefs can be a factor for individuals' inclination towards marital infidelity (Habibi Askarabad & Hajiheydari, 2015; Lainez & Nguyen, 2020; Mark et al., 2011). Weakness in religious and ethical core values (Asayesh et al., 2019); the promotion of alternative values, absence of authentic relationships, facilitative effects of technology and social media, changing attitudes of women towards femininity and its responsibilities, and the diminishing of religious beliefs (Baran Oladi et al., 2018; Mayeli & Allahyari, 2022; Panjehband & Enayat, 2016; Zomorodian & Akbari, 2021) play roles in the emergence and increase of extramarital relationships.

Based on the results obtained, in addition to causal and contextual factors, another factor that affects the creation of extramarital relationships among couples is the intervening factor. Intervening conditions refer to conditions in which the phenomenon (category) is displayed. Interviews with the actors made it clear that factors such as inappropriate living environment and the presence of seducers, influence from social networks, spouse's unemployment and financial issues, watching satellite movies with themes of infidelity; having a previous marriage, spouse's addiction to drugs and psychotropic substances, suggestions of extramarital relationships by men to married women, changes in societal normative structures, and lack of social and cognitive maturity are among the most significant intervening factors in creating extramarital relationships among couples. Garbinsky et al. (2019) stated that having relationships with the opposite sex before marriage and unrequited love are factors of infidelity (Garbinsky et al., 2019). Furthermore, increasing the level of social support lays the necessary groundwork for enhancing couples' understanding and reducing the inclination towards extramarital relationships (Rezakhaniha & Ashkan, 2022). Studies also concluded that significant age differences, class differences, forced marriages are factors of infidelity. Social transformation, marriages of convenience without affection, cultural differences (Afshari Kashanian et al., 2019), influence of friends, social networks facilitating relationships with the opposite sex, watching satellite TV and pornographic images and videos (Panjehband & Enayat, 2016), viewing arousing images, engaging in risky and unrealistic sexual behaviors (Fincham & May, 2017), are other factors influencing extramarital relationships. Additionally, Fouladiyan et al. (2021) state that social mobility and changing standards over time and lifting the taboo of suggesting extramarital relationships by men to married women are among the causal conditions for the phenomenon of the desire to experience love (Fouladiyan et al., 2021).

This study demonstrated that extramarital relationships and infidelity are complex and multidimensional phenomena, and individuals are inclined towards marital infidelity for various reasons. Therefore, this phenomenon should be approached considering these complexities, and a single solution cannot be offered to everyone. The four main stages of marital infidelity—formation of the context for marital infidelity, predicting marital infidelity, engaging in marital infidelity, and consequences of marital infidelity—are interconnected, where various causal, contextual, and intervening factors influence the creation or expansion of it.

The factors examined in this research included sociological factors, taking into account the two components of social disorganization and anomie (normlessness). The results showed that in addition to individual factors, attention to social and sociological factors is also important, and policymakers and planners should make the necessary plans in this direction.

5. Limitations & Suggestions

The study's limitations include the specific sociocultural context of Iran, which might not generalize to other cultures, the reliance on self-reported data that could introduce bias, and the small sample size that limits the statistical power and diversity of perspectives. Future research could address these limitations by expanding the geographical scope to include a variety of cultural backgrounds, employing a larger and more diverse sample size, and utilizing mixed methods to triangulate findings. The implications of this study underscore the need for culturally sensitive interventions targeting the identified factors influencing extramarital relationships, suggesting policymakers and practitioners consider these dynamics in developing programs aimed at strengthening marital relationships and addressing the root causes of infidelity.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethics Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this article.

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