

Identifying Factors Associated with the Occurrence of Marital Infidelity: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to identify and classify the factors associated with the occurrence of marital infidelity based on a systematic review of national and international studies.

Methods and Materials: The present study was conducted using a documentary research design and a systematic review approach. Relevant studies were identified through systematic searches of national databases, including IranDoc, the Scientific Information Database (SID), and Civilica, as well as international databases, including Scopus, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar. Keywords such as marital infidelity, extramarital relationships, factors affecting infidelity, and their Persian and English equivalents were used in the search process. After screening titles, abstracts, and full texts according to predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, 46 eligible studies were selected for final analysis. Data were extracted from the included studies and analyzed through coding and qualitative content analysis to identify recurring themes and categories.

Findings: The qualitative synthesis indicated that the factors associated with marital infidelity could be classified into five main components. Individual factors included personality traits and disorders, psychological and emotional conditions, and personal beliefs and attitudes. Relational factors included emotional and communicative quality, sexual and physical functioning, and the structure and history of the marital relationship. Familial factors included developmental background, family patterns, and kinship relationship networks. Socioeconomic factors included occupational and economic contexts, as well as social and cultural pressures. Technological factors included cyberspace, online interactions, and the role of digital technologies in facilitating extramarital relationships.

Conclusion: Marital infidelity is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by the interaction of individual vulnerabilities, relational dynamics, family background, socioeconomic pressures, and technological contexts. Therefore, prevention and

intervention programs should adopt an integrative perspective that addresses both personal and contextual determinants of marital relationships.

Keywords: *Marital infidelity; extramarital relationships; marital satisfaction; psychological factors; systematic review.*

1. Introduction

Marital infidelity is one of the most disruptive phenomena in intimate relationships and is widely recognized as a multidimensional psychological, relational, familial, social, and cultural issue rather than a merely private or moral transgression. In the context of marriage, infidelity generally refers to a violation of the explicit or implicit agreement of emotional, sexual, or romantic exclusivity between spouses. Although definitions vary across societies and research traditions, most contemporary studies consider marital infidelity to include a continuum of behaviors ranging from secret emotional attachment and online romantic communication to sexual extramarital involvement. This definitional breadth is important because changes in communication technologies, social norms, and marital expectations have expanded the forms through which infidelity can occur. Consequently, the study of marital infidelity requires attention not only to overt sexual affairs but also to emotional dependency, virtual relationships, concealment, relational betrayal, and perceived violation of commitment boundaries (Kalateh Sadati et al., 2025; Rokach & Chan, 2023; Rolle-Sands et al., 2026).

The significance of marital infidelity is rooted in its extensive psychological and relational consequences. For the betrayed partner, infidelity may be experienced as a form of attachment trauma, often accompanied by symptoms such as intrusive thoughts, anxiety, depressive affect, mistrust, anger, shame, and disruption of personal identity and relational security. Studies have shown that infidelity-related distress can produce enduring emotional aftershocks and may be associated with post-traumatic stress reactions, especially when betrayal violates deeply held assumptions about intimacy, safety, and commitment (Roos et al., 2019; Warach & Josephs, 2019). In addition, women affected by marital infidelity often report complex cognitive, behavioral, and emotional reactions, including rumination, ambivalence, avoidance, confrontation, and the use of different coping strategies to restore psychological balance or make decisions about the continuation of the relationship (Afsharzada et al., 2024; Morsali et al., 2018). These consequences show that infidelity is not limited to a single relational event; rather, it can reorganize the emotional structure of the marital

relationship and the psychological functioning of both partners.

From a relational perspective, marital infidelity is often associated with deficiencies in marital satisfaction, intimacy, communication, conflict resolution, sexual satisfaction, and commitment. Marital dissatisfaction has repeatedly been identified as a central correlate of extramarital involvement, particularly when emotional needs, sexual expectations, and communication patterns remain chronically unmet within the marital dyad. Research on couples after infidelity has emphasized the role of psychosocial factors affecting marital satisfaction, suggesting that infidelity both emerges from and further intensifies weaknesses in emotional connection, trust, and mutual responsiveness (Emami et al., 2018). Similarly, risk-factor studies have shown that breach of marital commitment is frequently embedded in a broader pattern of relational deterioration, including emotional distance, unresolved conflict, dissatisfaction, and reduced marital intimacy (Atapour et al., 2020; Badanfiroz et al., 2025). Therefore, infidelity may be understood not only as a cause of marital dysfunction but also as an outcome of accumulated relational vulnerabilities.

The process-oriented literature further suggests that infidelity develops through dynamic contextual pathways rather than through a single isolated factor. Contextual studies indicate that marital infidelity may emerge when individual predispositions interact with relational dissatisfaction, opportunity structures, and social meanings that make boundary crossing more likely or more justifiable for the individual (Atapour et al., 2021; Bashirpour & Doukaneifard, 2020). In this regard, qualitative and grounded theory studies have highlighted predisposing, underlying, and contextual factors, including emotional deprivation, marital conflict, unmet expectations, lack of mutual understanding, and the availability of alternative relational opportunities (Ghaem Mohammadi et al., 2023; Rezaei, 2024). Such findings support the view that marital infidelity is best conceptualized as a multicausal phenomenon in which personality characteristics, marital quality, family background, cultural norms, and situational opportunities collectively shape the probability of infidelity.

Individual factors constitute one of the most frequently examined domains in studies of marital infidelity. Personality traits, emotion regulation, self-control,

narcissistic tendencies, sensation seeking, emotional immaturity, low self-esteem, and poor assertiveness may increase susceptibility to infidelity by weakening impulse control, increasing the need for external validation, or reducing sensitivity to relational consequences. Studies have emphasized the role of narcissistic personality traits and emotional intelligence in explaining infidelity-related attitudes and behaviors, suggesting that individuals with lower emotional awareness or stronger entitlement may be more likely to rationalize extramarital involvement (Honarpisheh & Hashemi, 2024; Ogwuche et al., 2024). Similarly, structural models have linked infidelity-related tendencies to self-compassion and emotional maturity, indicating that intrapersonal regulation capacities may influence how individuals manage dissatisfaction, conflict, and temptation within marriage (Niknam, 2024). These findings point to the importance of psychological vulnerabilities in understanding why some individuals respond to marital strain through constructive coping, whereas others move toward extramarital alternatives.

Attachment theory provides another important explanatory framework for understanding marital infidelity. Insecure attachment styles may predispose individuals to seek external emotional reassurance, avoid intimacy, fear abandonment, or maintain relational distance through alternative attachments. A systematic review and meta-analysis on attachment styles and marital infidelity has emphasized that attachment insecurity is meaningfully connected with infidelity-related outcomes, particularly because attachment patterns shape expectations of closeness, trust, dependence, and emotional regulation in adult romantic relationships (Ghiasi et al., 2024). Studies on emotional dependency and “sweethearting” similarly show that dependency needs may contribute to extramarital involvement when individuals seek emotional support, validation, or compensatory attachment figures outside marriage (Rolle-Sands et al., 2026). Thus, attachment insecurity may operate as both a predisposing factor and a mechanism through which relational dissatisfaction is translated into extramarital behavior.

Sexual satisfaction, attitudes toward sexuality, and sexual novelty seeking also occupy a central place in the explanation of marital infidelity. In many marital relationships, sexual dissatisfaction interacts with emotional distance and poor communication, creating a context in which extramarital relationships may be perceived as a source of excitement, validation, or unmet desire. Research has examined the association between sexual satisfaction

and attitudes toward marital infidelity, while also considering the roles of social media and entertainment preferences in shaping permissive attitudes toward extramarital involvement (Nazari et al., 2024). Broader studies of marital satisfaction have also emphasized the importance of personality, meaning in life, forgiveness, and relational orientation in maintaining marital quality, suggesting that satisfaction is not only a sexual variable but also a psychological and existential component of marital stability (Celik et al., 2022). In this framework, infidelity may reflect the convergence of sexual dissatisfaction, weakened commitment, permissive attitudes, and available opportunities.

Family and developmental factors are also critical in understanding the emergence of marital infidelity. Early family experiences may shape beliefs about loyalty, conflict, intimacy, and the acceptability of extramarital behavior. Individuals who grow up in families marked by betrayal, emotional neglect, insecure attachment, harsh parenting, or marital instability may internalize relational models that later influence their own marital boundaries. Qualitative research has identified individual, familial, social, and religious factors in extramarital relationships, showing that family history and family interaction patterns are often intertwined with personal and relational vulnerabilities (Ghafoorian et al., 2018). In addition, studies of personality traits and family cohesion have shown that family cohesion may help explain tendencies toward emotional infidelity, especially among young people approaching marriage (Yaghoubnezhad & Khoshbazan, 2025). These findings suggest that infidelity prevention cannot be limited to couple-level interventions; it should also consider developmental and family-system foundations.

Sociocultural and economic contexts further contribute to the complexity of marital infidelity. Marriages are embedded in broader systems of gender expectations, cultural norms, economic pressures, employment structures, peer groups, and social supervision. Financial strain, unemployment, occupational stress, shift work, and long-term separation due to employment may weaken marital satisfaction and increase opportunities for emotional or sexual alternatives. Studies on divorce and marital breakdown, including gray divorce, have highlighted the role of accumulated dissatisfaction, social change, and changing expectations in destabilizing marital continuity (Rezaei et al., 2025). Research on preventive factors for marital infidelity in cyberspace has also indicated that spiritual and value-based resources may function as protective factors, particularly among women seeking

divorce (Gheybi et al., 2025). Therefore, social and economic factors can operate either as risk-enhancing pressures or as protective contexts, depending on the availability of support, meaning, supervision, and relational commitment.

The digital transformation of social life has created new conditions for the occurrence and normalization of infidelity. Online platforms, social networking sites, messaging applications, and anonymous communication environments have reduced barriers to extramarital contact by increasing accessibility, secrecy, immediacy, and perceived emotional safety. Online infidelity may begin with seemingly casual communication and gradually develop into emotional intimacy, sexualized exchange, or offline encounters. Studies have examined online infidelity in relation to marital relationship quality, social-emotional loneliness, and dark personality traits, showing that digital spaces may become particularly attractive when individuals experience loneliness, dissatisfaction, or emotional frustration (Taheri et al., 2024). Media-related factors and online cheating research further indicate that digital environments can normalize boundary violations and expand opportunities for concealed relational behavior (Shakiba et al., 2023). Accordingly, technological factors are no longer peripheral; they are now central to contemporary models of marital infidelity.

The role of cyberspace also intersects with pornography exposure, internet addiction, entertainment preferences, and virtual communication habits. Studies in Asian contexts have shown that infidelity is shaped by a combination of cultural norms, marital expectations, technology use, and interpersonal opportunity structures, emphasizing that digital behavior must be interpreted within specific cultural and relational contexts (Xin & Hassan, 2020). In Iran and other non-Western settings, qualitative studies have also shown that perceptions and experiences of marital infidelity are deeply influenced by moral values, gender norms, social judgment, and the perceived legitimacy or illegitimacy of emotional and sexual needs (Kalateh Sadati et al., 2025; Samadi Kashan & Pourghnad, 2019). These findings are important because they demonstrate that the meaning of infidelity cannot be separated from cultural context; what constitutes betrayal, how it is justified, and how couples respond to it may differ across societies.

Recent theoretical approaches have also attempted to explain marital infidelity through decision-making, uncertainty, and strategic interaction frameworks. Game-theoretical perspectives conceptualize infidelity as a

decision embedded in perceived costs, benefits, risks, and relational strategies, thereby emphasizing that individuals may evaluate secrecy, detection, emotional gain, and marital consequences before engaging in extramarital behavior (Gonen et al., 2025). Relational turbulence theory further suggests that after infidelity, injured partners experience profound relational uncertainty, including uncertainty about the self, the partner, and the future of the relationship (Zhong & Vangelisti, 2025). These perspectives enrich psychological explanations by showing that infidelity involves not only emotions and traits but also cognitive appraisals, relational expectations, and perceived alternatives.

Demographic and partner-selection factors also deserve attention. Assortative mating, educational similarity, class similarity, value congruence, and compatibility between spouses may influence marital stability and the risk of infidelity. When spouses differ substantially in values, social background, educational level, or expectations about gender roles and intimacy, relational dissatisfaction may intensify, especially if such differences remain unresolved. Research from China has emphasized the role of assortative mating in marital infidelity, suggesting that partner-selection patterns and compatibility structures can shape the likelihood of extramarital involvement (Chen & Luo, 2026). In addition, studies on sexual satisfaction, social media, emotional maturity, and attitudes toward infidelity indicate that demographic and psychosocial factors rarely operate independently; rather, they interact with marital quality and cultural expectations to influence infidelity risk (Nazari et al., 2024; Niknam, 2024).

Intervention-oriented studies further show that marital infidelity is closely connected with emotional regulation, resilience, depression, anger, forgiveness, and the possibility of relational repair. Research on mindfulness-based cognitive therapy and acceptance and commitment therapy among women affected by marital infidelity has emphasized the psychological burden of betrayal and the need for interventions targeting depression, anger, and acceptance processes (Mohammadi et al., 2024). Studies on forgiveness, return to marital life, and durability of marriage among women affected by infidelity similarly indicate that post-infidelity outcomes depend on motivation for forgiveness, emotional processing, relational reconstruction, and the perceived possibility of trust restoration (Shoaa Kazemi & Yadollahi, 2024). In addition, work on emotion regulation, resilience, and social support among wives experiencing infidelity shows that individual recovery is influenced not

only by internal coping resources but also by external support systems (Haziqatuzikra, 2025). These studies highlight that identifying risk factors is essential for prevention, but understanding protective and recovery-related factors is equally important for clinical practice.

Despite the growing body of research, the literature on marital infidelity remains fragmented. Some studies focus on individual and personality-based predictors, whereas others emphasize marital dissatisfaction, sexual problems, family history, religious factors, social pressures, or technological opportunities. Systematic reviews have attempted to synthesize associated factors and have shown that infidelity is influenced by a wide range of variables, including demographic, interpersonal, sexual, relational, cultural, and technological factors (Haseli et al., 2019; Xin & Hassan, 2020). However, the rapid emergence of online infidelity, changing cultural attitudes, and the increasing number of qualitative studies indicate the need for updated synthesis and conceptual classification. Without such classification, the field risks treating marital infidelity as a scattered collection of unrelated predictors rather than as an integrated multidimensional phenomenon.

Given the conceptual and empirical diversity of the existing literature, a systematic review can provide an organized framework for identifying, classifying, and interpreting the factors associated with marital infidelity. Such a review is particularly valuable because it allows the integration of quantitative, qualitative, and review-based evidence and can clarify how individual vulnerabilities, relational processes, familial patterns, socio-economic contexts, and technological environments interact in the occurrence of infidelity. A multidimensional synthesis may also assist family therapists, counselors, researchers, and policymakers in designing preventive interventions and culturally sensitive therapeutic programs. Therefore, the present study aimed to identify and classify the factors associated with the occurrence of marital infidelity through a systematic review of national and international studies.

2. Methods and Materials

The present study was conducted with the aim of identifying factors associated with the occurrence of marital infidelity, using a documentary method and a systematic review approach. A systematic review is a structured approach for identifying, selecting, evaluating, and analyzing previous studies in a specific field, enabling researchers to collect and synthesize existing evidence and

provide a comprehensive picture of the current state of knowledge in that field.

In this study, an extensive search was conducted in national and international databases to collect relevant scientific sources. The national databases included IranDoc, the Scientific Information Database of Academic Center for Education, Culture and Research (SID), and Civilica. In addition, Scopus, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar were used to access international studies. The search for sources covered the period from the beginning of the publication of relevant studies up to 2026.

In the search process, a set of keywords related to the research topic and their English equivalents was used. The most important Persian keywords included “marital infidelity,” “extramarital relationships,” “factors affecting infidelity,” “emotional divorce,” “marital satisfaction,” “marital fidelity,” “psychological factors of infidelity,” “social factors of infidelity,” “predictors of infidelity,” and “consequences of infidelity.” In the English searches, terms and combinations such as marital infidelity, extramarital affairs, marital satisfaction, predictors of infidelity, and consequences of infidelity were used. These keywords were combined in the databases using Boolean operators (AND, OR) to expand the scope of the search and identify a larger number of relevant studies.

After the initial search, all retrieved documents entered the screening stage. First, duplicate sources were removed, and then the titles and abstracts of the studies were reviewed to determine their relevance to the research topic. In the next stage, the full texts of the selected documents were examined, and the final sources were selected based on the predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria.

The inclusion criteria for studies in this research were as follows:

- Research articles, theses, books, and scientific reports that examined factors associated with the occurrence of marital infidelity.

- Documents published up to 2026.

- Studies published in Persian or English.

- Studies conducted using quantitative, qualitative, or review methods.

In contrast, the exclusion criteria were as follows:

- Documents that addressed only the consequences of marital infidelity and did not refer to its contributing factors.

- Studies that examined infidelity in non-marital relationships, such as dating or engagement relationships.

- Sources whose full texts were not accessible.

Duplicate documents or documents lacking sufficient scientific validity.

After selecting the final sources, information related to the research objective was extracted from each study. This information included study characteristics, including authors, year of publication, and type of study, the population under investigation, and the identified factors associated with the occurrence of marital infidelity. The extracted data were then examined using thematic analysis and conceptual categorization, and the identified factors were organized into general categories based on conceptual similarities.

Finally, by observing the principles of transparency, comprehensiveness, and impartiality in the process of searching and selecting sources, an attempt was made to identify and review all valid and relevant documents in order to provide a comprehensive picture of the factors affecting the occurrence of marital infidelity.

3. Findings and Results

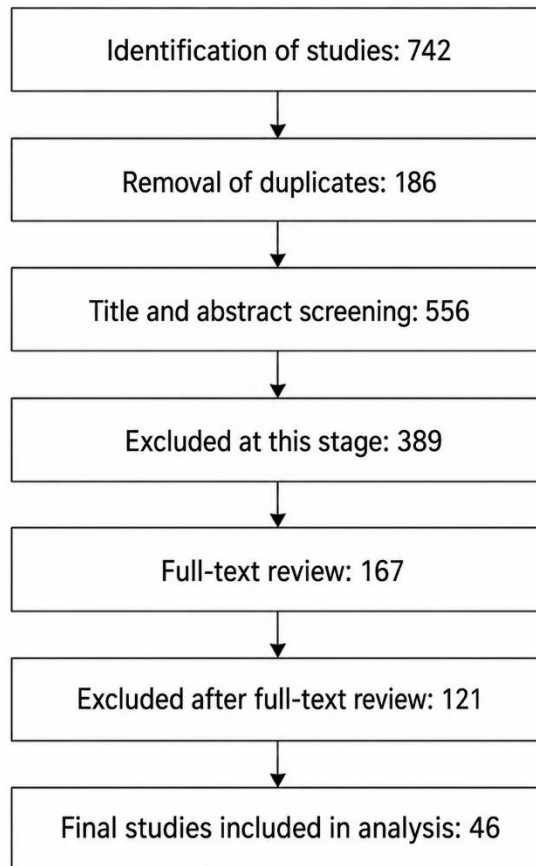
In this section, the results obtained from the systematic review of documents are reported in three stages: the process of selecting sources, the extraction of initial codes, and the final coding structure.

A. Process of Study Selection and Screening

After implementing the search strategy in national databases, including IranDoc, SID, and Civilica, and international databases, including Scopus, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar, using the predetermined keywords and Boolean operators, a set of relevant studies was identified. All records were entered into reference-management software, and duplicate records were removed. The screening process was then conducted in three stages, including review of titles, abstracts, and full texts. The following diagram presents the details of this process:

Figure 1

Flow diagram of study selection



According to Figure 1, 742 studies were retrieved at the initial identification stage. After removing 186 duplicate

records, 556 studies remained for initial screening. During the title and abstract review, 389 studies were excluded

because they were not consistent with the objective of the study. Of the 167 studies whose full texts were reviewed, 121 were excluded because they did not meet the inclusion criteria. Finally, 46 eligible studies were selected for the final analysis.

B. Open Coding Stage

At this stage, the full texts of the 46 selected studies were carefully reviewed, and all statements, concepts, and factors

associated with the occurrence of marital infidelity were extracted. The outcome of this stage was the identification of numerous initial codes, each representing a factor or variable affecting the occurrence of infidelity. All of these codes were categorized as initial codes and are reported in Table 1. The source related to each code is also presented.

Table 1

Initial Codes

Row	Source	Initial Code
1	Roos et al. (2019)	General marital dissatisfaction
2	Atapour et al. (2020)	Decreased emotional intimacy
3	Burdette et al. (2007)	Sexual dissatisfaction
4	Emami et al. (2018)	Poor conflict resolution
5	Rokach and Chan (2023)	High impulsivity
6	Haziqatuzikra (2025)	Narcissism
7	Warach and Josephs (2019)	Low self-esteem
8	Çelik et al. (2022)	Sensation seeking
9	Chen and Luo (2026)	Positive attitudes toward open relationships
10	Ghiasi et al. (2024)	Family history of infidelity
11	Nazari et al. (2024)	Reduced moral commitment
12	Christensen (1962)	Availability of cyberspace
13	Çelik et al. (2022)	Intimate workplace relationships
14	Burdette et al. (2007)	Drug addiction
15	Ogwuche et al. (2024)	Alcoholism
16	Rokach and Chan (2023)	Domestic violence
17	Roos et al. (2019)	Emotional divorce
18	Gonen et al. (2025)	Chronic loneliness
19	Roos et al. (2019)	Inability to say no
20	Rokach and Chan (2023)	Extreme extraversion
21	Badanfiroz et al. (2025)	Resentment toward the spouse
22	Zhong and Vangelisti (2025)	Lack of shared leisure activities
23	Warach and Josephs (2019)	Suspicion and paranoia
24	Warach and Josephs (2019)	Emotional dependence on another person
25	Christensen (1973)	Borderline personality disorder
26	Warach and Josephs (2019)	Antisocial personality disorder
27	Rolle-Sands et al. (2026)	Weakening of social supervision
28	Warach and Josephs (2019)	Extreme individualism
29	Greene et al. (1974)	Severe occupational stress
30	Warach and Josephs (2019)	Desire to regain youthfulness
31	Çelik et al. (2022)	Sexual dysfunction
32	Badanfiroz et al. (2025)	Lack of assertiveness skills
33	Christensen (1962)	Differences in religious beliefs
34	Badanfiroz et al. (2025)	Need to assert emotional dominance
35	Rolle-Sands et al. (2026)	Sexual novelty seeking
36	Chen and Luo (2026)	Peer modeling
37	Chen and Luo (2026)	Normalization of infidelity in the media
38	Torrie (1945)	Retaliation and revenge seeking
39	Rolle-Sands et al. (2026)	Midlife crisis
40	Rolle-Sands et al. (2026)	Avoidant insecure attachment
41	Niknam (2024)	Anxious insecure attachment
42	Çelik et al. (2022)	Sexual frigidity in one spouse
43	Niknam (2024)	Incompatibility of personality characteristics

44	Afsharzada et al. (2024)	Forced marriages
45	Niknam (2024)	Class disparity between spouses
46	Gheybi et al. (2025)	Shift work
47	Niknam (2024)	Long-term distance from the spouse
48	Niknam (2024)	Unemployment and economic poverty
49	Rezaei et al. (2025)	Marriage for financial gain
50	Kalateh Sadati et al. (2025)	Internet infidelity through chatting
51	Kalateh Sadati et al. (2025)	Sexual addiction
52	Rezaei (2024)	Differences in educational level
53	Yaghoubnezhad and Khoshbazan (2025)	Lack of intellectual compatibility
54	Mohammadi et al. (2024)	Need for artificial excitement
55	Taheri et al. (2024)	Escape from life problems
56	Kalateh Sadati et al. (2025)	Controlling behaviors by the spouse
57	Jeanfreau et al. (2014)	Generational gap
58	Shoaa Kazemi and Yadollahi (2024)	Unconventional sexual fantasies
59	Yaghoubnezhad and Khoshbazan (2025)	Lack of self-confidence
60	Yaghoubnezhad and Khoshbazan (2025)	Risk-taking behaviors
61	Xin and Hassan (2020)	Traumatic living environment
62	Honarpisheh and Hashemi (2024)	Reduced authority of one spouse
63	Xin and Hassan (2020)	Depression in one spouse
64	Karami et al. (2015)	Chronic anxiety
65	Xin and Hassan (2020)	Bipolar disorders
66	Xin and Hassan (2020)	Obsessive thoughts
67	Ghaem Mohammadi et al. (2023)	Watching pornographic films
68	Hajian and Enayat (2015)	Lack of time for the relationship
69	Honarpisheh and Hashemi (2024)	Access to pornography
70	Morsali et al. (2018)	Lack of spirituality in life
71	Jeanfreau et al. (2014)	Excessive perfectionism
72	Shakiba et al. (2023)	Sense of entitlement
73	Jeanfreau et al. (2014)	Poor stress management
74	Ghafoorian et al. (2018)	Cultural differences between spouses
75	Karami et al. (2015)	Interference by the spouse's family
76	Abdi et al. (2018)	Internet addiction
77	Ghaem Mohammadi et al. (2023)	Curiosity about new experiences
78	Samadi Kashan and Pourghnad (2019)	Weakening of religious beliefs
79	Ghaem Mohammadi et al. (2023)	Comparing the spouse with others
80	Haseli et al. (2019)	Work environments with high interpersonal interaction
81	Atapour et al. (2021)	Marriage at a very young age
82	Bashirpour and Doukaneifard (2020)	Lack of responsibility
83	Jeanfreau et al. (2014)	Seeking emotional support
84	Karami et al. (2015)	Being ignored by the spouse
85	Messripour et al. (2016)	Physical attractiveness of a third person
86	Zhong and Vangelisti (2025)	Peer-group pressures
87	Xin and Hassan (2020)	Facilitation of communication through social networks
88	Zhong and Vangelisti (2025)	Anonymity in cyberspace
89	Fathi et al. (2014)	Emotional coldness in the home environment
90	Ghafoorian et al. (2018)	Desire to possess others
91	Morsali et al. (2018)	Hedonism
92	Gonen et al. (2025)	Conflict in moral values
93	Gonen et al. (2025)	Lack of mutual understanding
94	Jeanfreau et al. (2014)	Concealment in financial matters
95	Ghafoorian et al. (2018)	Expedient marriages
96	Zhong and Vangelisti (2025)	Differences in sexual temperament
97	Morsali et al. (2018)	Need for variety in lifestyle
98	Abdi et al. (2018)	Modern and unconstrained lifestyle
99	Jeanfreau et al. (2014)	Poor self-control
100	Gonen et al. (2025)	Experience of childhood abuse

C. Axial and Selective Coding Stage

At this stage, the initial codes were categorized into subcomponents based on conceptual similarity through axial coding. The subcomponents were then organized at a more

abstract level into main components through selective coding. Finally, the codes were classified into five main components and their related subcomponents, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Axial and Selective Coding

Initial Codes	Subcomponent	Main Component
Impulsivity	Personality characteristics and disorders	Individual factors
Narcissism	Personality characteristics and disorders	Individual factors
Sensation seeking	Personality characteristics and disorders	Individual factors
Extreme extraversion	Personality characteristics and disorders	Individual factors
Borderline personality disorder	Personality characteristics and disorders	Individual factors
Antisocial personality disorder	Personality characteristics and disorders	Individual factors
Perfectionism	Personality characteristics and disorders	Individual factors
Low self-esteem	Psychological and emotional status	Individual factors
Depression	Psychological and emotional status	Individual factors
Anxiety	Psychological and emotional status	Individual factors
Loneliness	Psychological and emotional status	Individual factors
Need for approval	Psychological and emotional status	Individual factors
Low assertiveness	Psychological and emotional status	Individual factors
Poor stress management	Psychological and emotional status	Individual factors
Positive attitudes toward open relationships	Individual beliefs and attitudes	Individual factors
Hedonism	Individual beliefs and attitudes	Individual factors
Weakening of religious beliefs	Individual beliefs and attitudes	Individual factors
Individualism	Individual beliefs and attitudes	Individual factors
Sense of entitlement	Individual beliefs and attitudes	Individual factors
Marital dissatisfaction	Emotional and communicative quality	Relational factors
Emotional divorce	Emotional and communicative quality	Relational factors
Poor conflict resolution	Emotional and communicative quality	Relational factors
Concealment	Emotional and communicative quality	Relational factors
Being ignored	Emotional and communicative quality	Relational factors
Resentment	Emotional and communicative quality	Relational factors
Sexual dissatisfaction	Sexual and physical functioning	Relational factors
Sexual novelty seeking	Sexual and physical functioning	Relational factors
Sexual frigidity	Sexual and physical functioning	Relational factors
Differences in sexual temperament	Sexual and physical functioning	Relational factors
Unconventional fantasies	Sexual and physical functioning	Relational factors
Sexual dysfunction	Sexual and physical functioning	Relational factors
Reduced commitment	Structure and history of the relationship	Relational factors
Forced marriage	Structure and history of the relationship	Relational factors
Class or educational disparity	Structure and history of the relationship	Relational factors
Marriage at a young age	Structure and history of the relationship	Relational factors
Differences in values	Structure and history of the relationship	Relational factors
Family history of infidelity in the family of origin	Developmental background and patterns	Familial factors
Experience of childhood maltreatment	Developmental background and patterns	Familial factors
Insecure attachment	Developmental background and patterns	Familial factors
Parental communication patterns	Developmental background and patterns	Familial factors
Interference by the spouse's family	Kinship relationship network	Familial factors
Family pressures	Kinship relationship network	Familial factors
Cultural conflicts between families	Kinship relationship network	Familial factors
Occupational stress	Occupational and economic contexts	Socio-environmental factors
Mixed-gender environments	Occupational and economic contexts	Socio-environmental factors
Shift work	Occupational and economic contexts	Socio-environmental factors
Unemployment	Occupational and economic contexts	Socio-environmental factors
Poverty	Occupational and economic contexts	Socio-environmental factors
Distance due to work	Occupational and economic contexts	Socio-environmental factors
Peer modeling	Social and cultural pressures	Socio-environmental factors
Normalization in the media	Social and cultural pressures	Socio-environmental factors

Weakening of social supervision	Social and cultural pressures	Socio-environmental factors
Modern lifestyle	Social and cultural pressures	Socio-environmental factors
Internet addiction	Cyberspace and technology	Technological factors
Access to pornography	Cyberspace and technology	Technological factors
Online infidelity	Cyberspace and technology	Technological factors
Anonymity in networks	Cyberspace and technology	Technological factors
Ease of communication with others	Cyberspace and technology	Technological factors

According to the results presented in Table 2, five main components were extracted as factors associated with the occurrence of marital infidelity. These components are analyzed below:

1. **Individual factors:** This component indicates that the foundation of many extramarital behaviors lies in the individual's personality structure and mental health. Characteristics such as impulsivity and narcissism act as catalysts and direct the individual toward immediate responses in tempting situations. In addition, insecure attachment styles formed in childhood may manifest in adulthood as fear of intimacy or an excessive need for approval through multiple relationships.
2. **Relational factors:** The findings confirm that marital dissatisfaction and sexual dissatisfaction are among the most traditional yet most powerful predictors of infidelity. When emotional and physical needs are not met within the context of marriage, the individual experiences a form of "emotional deprivation" and may be drawn toward parallel relationships. Emotional divorce and poor conflict-resolution skills also lead couples to seek external escape routes rather than resolving their problems.
3. **Familial factors:** The role of intergenerational transmission was highly prominent in this study. Individuals who grew up in families where infidelity had been normalized or who had witnessed parental infidelity tend to have more flexible moral boundaries regarding fidelity in adulthood. Moreover, parental child-rearing styles and the degree of security provided during

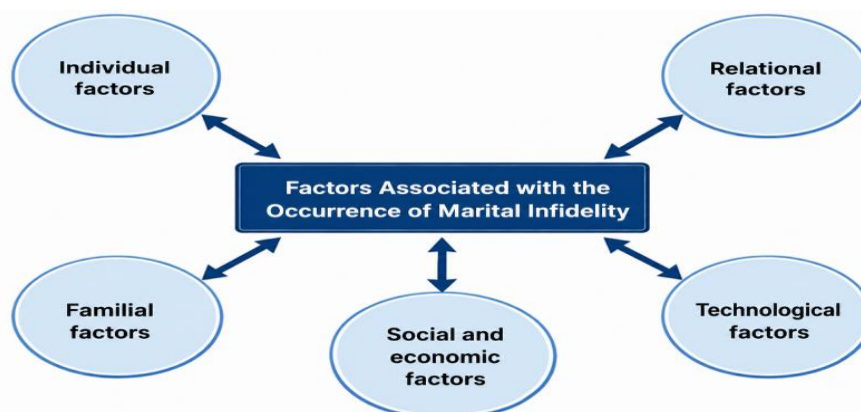
childhood directly affect the stability of future marital relationships.

4. **Social and economic factors:** Infidelity is not merely an individual phenomenon; rather, it occurs within a social context. Economic pressures and unemployment reduce marital satisfaction by creating tension in the home environment. On the other hand, mixed-gender work environments with high levels of intimate interaction and peer-group pressures, such as the normalization of infidelity among friends, function as facilitating factors.
5. **Technological factors:** This component, which has been strongly emphasized in recent studies from 2020 to 2026, reflects the changing nature of infidelity. Social networks have shifted the traditional boundaries of fidelity by providing conditions such as anonymity, 24-hour access, and low-cost communication. Addiction to cyberspace and easy access to pornographic content may reduce the attractiveness of the spouse and increase the tendency toward virtual relationships.

Based on the above findings, the conceptual model of the study indicates that marital infidelity results from a complex interaction among individual contexts, including personality predispositions, deficiencies in the couple bond, including relational triggers, and environmental and technological opportunities, all of which acquire meaning within a specific social and cultural context. To better display these relationships, and considering the 100 identified codes and the classifications performed, the following conceptual model was developed to explain the relationship among these factors:

Figure 3

Factors associated with marital infidelity



4. Discussion

The present systematic review aimed to identify and classify factors associated with the occurrence of marital infidelity based on national and international studies. The findings showed that marital infidelity is not reducible to a single psychological, moral, sexual, or social cause; rather, it emerges from the interaction of multiple determinants that operate at different levels of marital life. Through open, axial, and selective coding, 100 initial codes were extracted and organized into five main components: individual factors, relational factors, familial factors, social and economic factors, and technological factors. This multidimensional structure is consistent with previous systematic and qualitative studies indicating that infidelity is shaped by a complex constellation of intrapersonal vulnerabilities, marital dissatisfaction, developmental background, social conditions, cultural values, and opportunity structures (Atapour et al., 2021; Ghaem Mohammadi et al., 2023; Haseli et al., 2019; Xin & Hassan, 2020). Therefore, the findings support an integrative conceptualization of marital infidelity in which betrayal is understood not merely as an isolated act of individual misconduct but as a phenomenon located at the intersection of personality, relationship dynamics, family-of-origin experiences, social pressures, and contemporary communication technologies.

The first extracted component was individual factors, including personality characteristics and disorders, psychological and emotional conditions, and personal beliefs and attitudes. Codes such as impulsivity, narcissism, sensation seeking, extreme extraversion, borderline and antisocial personality traits, low self-esteem, depression,

anxiety, loneliness, low assertiveness, poor stress management, hedonism, individualism, weakened religious beliefs, and permissive attitudes toward open relationships were placed within this component. These findings are aligned with studies indicating that personality vulnerabilities and impaired emotional regulation can increase the likelihood of infidelity by reducing self-control, intensifying the need for external validation, and weakening the perceived importance of marital boundaries (Honarpisheh & Hashemi, 2024; Ogwuche et al., 2024; Rokach & Chan, 2023). In particular, narcissistic traits may predispose individuals to entitlement, admiration seeking, and reduced empathy toward the betrayed spouse, while impulsivity and sensation seeking may make immediate gratification more salient than long-term relational consequences (Celik et al., 2022; Haziqatuzikra, 2025). Similarly, psychological states such as loneliness, depression, anxiety, and emotional frustration can create vulnerability to extramarital involvement when the individual seeks compensatory emotional support or relief from distress outside the marital relationship (Mohammadi et al., 2024; Taheri et al., 2024). Thus, individual factors appear to function as predisposing conditions that increase susceptibility to infidelity, particularly when combined with relational dissatisfaction and available opportunities.

A second major finding concerned relational factors, which included emotional and communicative quality, sexual and physical functioning, and the structure and history of the marital relationship. Initial codes such as marital dissatisfaction, emotional divorce, weak conflict resolution, concealment, being ignored by the spouse, resentment, sexual dissatisfaction, sexual novelty seeking,

sexual dysfunction, unconventional sexual fantasies, reduced commitment, forced marriage, early marriage, class or educational disparity, and value differences were classified under this component. This result is strongly consistent with prior research showing that marital dissatisfaction, sexual dissatisfaction, reduced intimacy, and unresolved conflict are among the most robust correlates of infidelity (Atapour et al., 2020; Badanfiroz et al., 2025; Emami et al., 2018). When emotional and sexual needs remain unmet within marriage, spouses may experience deprivation, frustration, or alienation, which can make extramarital relationships appear as sources of attention, validation, novelty, or escape. Previous studies have also shown that forgiveness, marital durability, and the possibility of returning to the relationship after infidelity depend heavily on the quality of emotional processing, communication patterns, and restoration of intimacy (Morsali et al., 2018; Shoa Kazemi & Yadollahi, 2024). Therefore, the relational component extracted in this study confirms that infidelity often reflects a breakdown in the couple bond, particularly when spouses lack effective mechanisms for conflict resolution, sexual negotiation, emotional responsiveness, and mutual recognition.

The findings also revealed that familial factors play an important role in the occurrence of marital infidelity. This component included developmental background and patterns as well as kinship relationship networks. Codes such as family history of infidelity, childhood maltreatment, insecure attachment, parental communication patterns, interference by the spouse's family, family pressures, and cultural conflicts between families indicate that marital infidelity may be partly rooted in early relational learning and family-system dynamics. This finding is consistent with attachment-based explanations of infidelity, according to which insecure attachment styles can undermine trust, intimacy, emotional regulation, and commitment in adult romantic relationships (Ghiasi et al., 2024; Warach & Josephs, 2019). Individuals who have experienced insecure attachment, emotional neglect, or exposure to dysfunctional marital models may develop unstable expectations about closeness, loyalty, and conflict. In some cases, family-of-origin experiences may normalize betrayal or weaken the internalized meaning of fidelity. This interpretation is supported by studies emphasizing the role of family cohesion, family patterns, and individual-familial determinants in emotional or marital infidelity (Ghafoorian et al., 2018; Yaghoubnezhad & Khoshbazan, 2025). Therefore, the familial component suggests that marital

infidelity should not be examined only at the level of the current couple relationship; instead, it must also be understood in relation to developmental histories, intergenerational models, attachment patterns, and the broader family network surrounding the couple.

The fourth extracted component was social and economic factors, including occupational and economic contexts as well as social and cultural pressures. Codes such as occupational stress, mixed-gender work environments, shift work, unemployment, poverty, long-term distance due to work, peer modeling, normalization of infidelity in the media, weakening of social supervision, and modern lifestyle were included in this category. This result confirms that infidelity is not merely an intrapsychic or dyadic phenomenon; it is also embedded in social opportunity structures and cultural meanings. Economic strain, unemployment, and occupational stress may increase tension within the household and reduce marital satisfaction, while shift work and prolonged absence from the spouse may create emotional distance and increase exposure to alternative relationships (Gheybi et al., 2025; Rezaei et al., 2025). At the same time, peer groups, media representations, and weakened social monitoring can alter norms surrounding fidelity and make extramarital involvement appear more acceptable or less risky. Studies on cultural and social factors in extramarital relationships have similarly emphasized that social environment, religious beliefs, cultural values, and peer influence can shape both attitudes toward infidelity and opportunities for its occurrence (Ghafoorian et al., 2018; Nazari et al., 2024; Samadi Kashan & Pourghnad, 2019). Thus, the social and economic component highlights the importance of considering macro-level and contextual influences that may intensify marital vulnerability or weaken protective norms.

The fifth component was technological factors, including cyberspace, social networks, online infidelity, internet addiction, pornography access, anonymity in digital networks, and ease of communication with others. This finding is particularly important because contemporary technologies have transformed the boundaries, forms, and opportunities of marital infidelity. Unlike traditional forms of infidelity that often required physical proximity and substantial social risk, online infidelity can develop through private messages, anonymous identities, emotional disclosure, sexualized online exchanges, or sustained virtual intimacy. Prior research has shown that social media use, entertainment preferences, and online interaction patterns are associated with attitudes toward infidelity and may

facilitate secretive relationships outside marriage (Nazari et al., 2024; Shakiba et al., 2023). In addition, qualitative studies of cyberspace-related infidelity indicate that online communication reduces barriers to extramarital contact by providing accessibility, anonymity, immediacy, and psychological distance from the consequences of betrayal (Gheybi et al., 2025; Kalateh Sadati et al., 2025). This finding is also consistent with studies showing that online infidelity may be intensified by loneliness, poor marital quality, and dark personality traits (Taheri et al., 2024). Therefore, technological factors should be regarded as central rather than peripheral in contemporary models of marital infidelity, particularly because digital platforms can convert latent dissatisfaction or curiosity into accessible relational opportunities.

Another important implication of the findings is that the five components do not operate independently; rather, they interact dynamically. For example, an individual with insecure attachment, emotional loneliness, or narcissistic traits may be more vulnerable to infidelity when experiencing marital dissatisfaction, sexual frustration, or emotional neglect. This vulnerability may be amplified by family-of-origin models that normalize betrayal, occupational environments that increase contact with potential alternative partners, or digital platforms that make private communication easier. This interactive interpretation is consistent with process-oriented and grounded theory studies that describe infidelity as the outcome of interacting predisposing, underlying, contextual, and facilitating factors (Atapour et al., 2021; Bashirpour & Doukaneifard, 2020; Ghaem Mohammadi et al., 2023; Rezaei, 2024). It also aligns with decision-making and relational uncertainty perspectives, which suggest that individuals may evaluate perceived gains, risks, relational alternatives, secrecy, and consequences within a broader relational context (Gonen et al., 2025; Zhong & Vangelisti, 2025). Accordingly, the conceptual model derived from this review indicates that marital infidelity is best explained through a systemic and ecological framework in which individual readiness, couple-level disruption, family background, social pressures, and technological opportunities jointly contribute to the occurrence of betrayal.

The findings also indicate that cultural context plays an essential role in shaping both the meaning and predictors of infidelity. Studies conducted in Asian and Iranian contexts show that marital infidelity is closely tied to norms of family honor, gender roles, religiosity, social judgment, marital expectations, and the moral meaning of commitment (Haseli

et al., 2019; Kalateh Sadati et al., 2025; Xin & Hassan, 2020). In some contexts, emotional infidelity may be considered as threatening as sexual infidelity, whereas in others, the distinction between online, emotional, and sexual betrayal may be interpreted differently. Similarly, forced marriage, early marriage, educational or class disparity, and marriage for social or financial purposes may create relational contexts in which emotional intimacy and voluntary commitment are weakened (Afsharzada et al., 2024; Chen & Luo, 2026; Rezaei et al., 2025). Therefore, culturally sensitive interpretation is necessary when explaining marital infidelity, because the same risk factor may have different meanings depending on social norms, gender expectations, religious values, and the structure of marriage in a given society.

5. Conclusion

In sum, the results of this systematic review support a multidimensional model of marital infidelity. Individual factors explain psychological readiness and vulnerability; relational factors explain dissatisfaction, emotional rupture, sexual difficulties, and weak commitment; familial factors explain developmental patterns and intergenerational influences; social and economic factors explain contextual pressures and opportunity structures; and technological factors explain the modern channels through which extramarital relationships may be initiated and maintained. This structure is consistent with previous evidence showing that infidelity has multiple antecedents and consequences and requires integrative assessment and intervention (Haseli et al., 2019; Rokach & Chan, 2023; Rolle-Sands et al., 2026; Xin & Hassan, 2020). Therefore, prevention and therapeutic intervention should not focus narrowly on blaming one partner or addressing one isolated variable; instead, they should assess personality vulnerabilities, emotional regulation, attachment history, marital satisfaction, sexual functioning, family involvement, economic pressures, peer and media influences, and digital behavior patterns. Such a comprehensive approach can provide a stronger foundation for couple therapy, psychoeducation, family counseling, and culturally responsive prevention programs.

6. Limitations & Suggestions

The main limitation of this study was its dependence on the availability, quality, and methodological diversity of previously published studies. Because the included documents used different designs, samples, definitions of

infidelity, cultural contexts, and measurement approaches, direct comparison across findings was difficult. In addition, some studies focused on sexual infidelity, whereas others emphasized emotional or online infidelity, which may have affected the scope and interpretation of extracted codes. Another limitation was that the review included both empirical and review-based sources, which increased conceptual coverage but may have introduced heterogeneity in the level of evidence. Finally, although the systematic review process attempted to be comprehensive and transparent, publication bias, language limitations, and restricted access to some full texts may have influenced the final set of included studies.

Future research should develop more precise and culturally sensitive definitions of marital infidelity by distinguishing sexual, emotional, online, and combined forms of betrayal. Longitudinal studies are recommended to clarify causal pathways among individual vulnerability, marital dissatisfaction, family background, social pressure, and technological opportunity. Future studies should also examine gender differences, cultural variations, and the role of changing digital communication patterns in shaping infidelity-related attitudes and behaviors. In addition, mixed-methods research can provide a deeper understanding of how subjective meanings, emotional experiences, and social conditions interact over time. It is also suggested that future research test the conceptual model derived from this review using structural equation modeling or other advanced analytical approaches.

In practice, counselors, family therapists, and clinical psychologists should assess marital infidelity through a multidimensional lens rather than focusing only on the act of betrayal. Interventions should include assessment of personality traits, attachment patterns, emotional regulation, marital satisfaction, sexual functioning, conflict-resolution skills, family-of-origin experiences, economic stressors, and digital boundaries. Preventive programs for couples should strengthen communication skills, emotional intimacy, sexual dialogue, commitment, stress management, and responsible technology use. Couple therapy should also address the reconstruction of trust, management of anger and grief, clarification of relational expectations, and development of explicit agreements regarding online and offline boundaries. At the community level, psychoeducational programs can help normalize help-seeking before relational dissatisfaction develops into betrayal.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical 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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Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

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