



## Developing a model of attitude towards extramarital relationships based on attachment styles, emphasizing the role of the effects of confrontational styles

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### ABSTRACT

**Background and Aim:** In the last half of the last century, marriage has been influenced by many factors due to cultural changes, which have changed the committed relationships of people. Among these factors, we can mention extramarital relationships or infidelity. The purpose of this research was to develop a model of attitude towards extramarital relationships based on attachment styles, emphasizing the role of confrontational styles. **Methods:** The current research is of the correlation type and the statistical population includes all people with extramarital relationships or the attitude of ordinary people towards welfare, relief committee and counseling centers of Qom province in the year 2021. 320 people were selected as the sample of the study by sampling method. The sample of the research paper included attitudes towards extramarital relationships (Whatley, 2008), adult attachment styles (Collins & Read, 1990) and confrontational styles (Lazarus & Folkman, 1988). **Results:** The results of the path analysis test showed that the research model has a good fit. Examining the mediation results showed that coping styles have a significant mediating role in the relationship between secure style, easy style and ambivalent style with attitude towards extramarital relationships ( $p < 0.05$ ). The findings showed that escape strategy has a significant mediating role in the relationship between secure style and avoidant style with attitude towards extramarital relationships ( $p < 0.05$ ). The findings showed that the re-evaluation strategy has a significant mediating role in the relationship between secure style and ambivalent style, as well as ambivalent with attitude towards extramarital relationships ( $p < 0.05$ ). **Conclusion:** Coping styles play a mediating role in relation to attachment styles and attitudes towards extramarital relationships.



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### Introduction

Marriage is a complex, delicate and dynamic relationship. The existence of a strong, warm, intimate and mutually respectful family is one of the consequences of a successful marriage, which can lead to physical and mental health, comfort, peace and safety of spouses and family members (Lewis & Lewis, 2022). In the last half of the last century, marriage has been influenced by several factors due to cultural changes (Pirzadeh & Parsakia, 2023), which have changed people's committed relationships (Isma & Turnip, 2019). Among these factors, extramarital relationships or infidelity can be mentioned (Ahmadi Ardakani et al., 2022). Marital infidelity means (action), sexual infidelity (sexual relationship without romantic conflict), romantic infidelity (romantic conflict without any sexual relationship) and sexual and romantic conflict (Filimon, Hoza, and Torliuk, 2021). Among these, attachment styles play an important role in the occurrence of marital problems, especially the tendency to extramarital relationships (Tapliodimirtas et al., 2022; Girard et al., 2020; Shams et al., 2022).

According to Bowlby's (1988) view, attachment is formed through non-verbal relationships between infants and their primary caregivers. John Bowlby refers to three styles: secure, anxious and avoidant attachment style (Iksong et al., 2022). People with a secure-attachment style have more self-confidence, higher regulation-emotional management, and more adaptive power due to the availability of their primary caregiver in life. This attachment style reduces the tendency of couples to have extramarital relationships (Top-Liudimirtas et al., 2022; Kazemian-Khamene & Rabatmili, 2020; Mikulinser & Shaver, 2019). Insecure-avoidant and insecure-ambivalent-anxious people have lower self-esteem and ineffective emotion regulation strategies and more pessimism than others (Soltanzadeh & Mahaleh, 2022) and according to research, these people tend to have higher marital relationships (Altenuk & Kilik, 2020; Xiong et al., 2022).

Of course, it should be noted that the relationship between attachment styles and extramarital relationship is not a simple relationship, but each of these variables may be influenced by various factors that also affect the relationship between these variables. For example, coping styles may make this relationship meaningful indirectly.

Coping styles are strategies that a person uses to reduce tension caused by stressful events in everyday life. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) have classified coping styles into two categories, problem-oriented and emotion-oriented, based on their performance. Problem-focused coping is a skill that focuses on dealing with the problem or situation itself, while emotion-focused coping is focused on controlling emotional distress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

The researchers' findings about the relationship between attachment styles and coping styles show that the adult attachment system is activated under stressful conditions and causes people with a different mental pattern of attachment to deal with emotional regulation and coping with stressful factors based on the methods that have been learned or strengthened in the past. For example: when facing a stressful event, people with secure attachment style use more compromised coping strategies such as problem-oriented coping style, and people with insecure attachment style use uncompromising coping strategies such as excitement-oriented and avoidant coping style. (Shakri & Fathi, 2019; Nematzadeh Getabi, Vaziri, and Lotfikashan, 2022; Agbaria, 2021; Toal, Beil, and Ding, 2020). Given that spouses use coping styles to reduce anxiety caused by marital events and conflicts, if they do not use coping styles appropriately, it causes the inability to communicate with others and solve the problem (Sadighi, Dokanehfard, and Rezakhani, 2020). The research results of Chi et al. (2019) also stated the relationship between inappropriate coping styles and marital infidelity. Also, Kamarbeygi and Kamarbeygi (2020) and Xiong et al. (2022) also stated the direct relationship of effective coping styles with marital satisfaction and compatibility.

According to the said contents and according to the theoretical framework of this research with a combination of the Bowlby's theory of attachment styles of (1988) and the cognitive theory of Hijan Folkman and Lazarus (1984) in relation to the attitude towards extramarital relationships, it can be guessed that attachment styles are indirectly related to the attitude towards extramarital relationships. By summarizing the literature and the background of various researches in this field, a theoretical model like Figure (1) is proposed, which may be helpful. Also, the current research seeks to

answer the question of whether the model for predicting attitudes towards extramarital relationships based on attachment styles with emphasis on the mediating role of coping styles is fit?

### Method

This research was a correlational study. The socio-statistics of all people with extramarital relationships or the attitude of normal people to refer to welfare, relief committee and counseling centers of Qom province in 2021. In this research, the available sampling method and the sample size according to the recommendation of Kline (2011) that 2.5 to 5 people are sufficient for each subject, but a minimum sample size of 200 is defensible. (Kline, 2011). In this research, according to the items of the questionnaires (12 items of attitude towards extramarital relationships, 18 items of attachment styles, 66 items of confrontational styles), 288 people had to be selected. Nevertheless, in order to be more sure, the sample size of 320 people was considered to be sufficient because it was possible that some people did not answer the questionnaires correctly during the implementation work.

### Materials

**1. Questionnaire of attitude towards extramarital relationships (ATIS):** The questionnaire of attitude towards extramarital relationships was created by Watley (2008). This questionnaire has 12 items. This questionnaire is formulated on a seven-point Likert scale. Totally disagree: 1, Totally agree: 7. Reversed questions of this questionnaire are: 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 12. To calculate the total score of the questionnaire, add the score of all questionnaire items together. The minimum and maximum score of this questionnaire is 12 and 84. The higher the score obtained from this questionnaire, the higher the acceptance of cheating and positive attitude towards cheating, and vice versa. Cronbach's alpha of this questionnaire was confirmed as 0.84 in the study of Borhanizadeh and Abdi (2016). The findings of Watley's research (2008) indicate the favorable validity of this attitude meter, so that the Cronbach's alpha obtained from the internal consistency coefficient was measured as 0.80. Cronbach's alpha and retest coefficient were used to determine the reliability of this scale. Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale of attitude towards extramarital relationships is estimated at 0.71. The retest coefficient of this test has been measured as 0.87. In order to check the validity of this test in Iran, the criterion validity of (divergent type) has been used. For this purpose, Allport's religious orientation questionnaire was used. Divergent validity with internal religious orientation was 0.29 and with external religious orientation was 0.16 (Habibi et al., 2019).

**2. Adult Attachment Styles Questionnaire (AAS):** The adult attachment styles questionnaire was

developed by Collins and Reed (1990). This questionnaire measures 18 items and three subscales of secure, insecure, ambivalent, anxious and insecure avoidant. Questionnaire questions are graded by marking on a 5-point Likert scale, including completely disagree with zero and completely agree with 4. Each scale contains 6 items. For options 1 to 5, grades 0 to 4 are considered respectively. Questions 1, 6, 8, 13, 12, 17 measure secure attachment. Questions 5, 2, 16, 14, 7, 18 assess avoidant attachment and finally questions 4, 3, 9, 10, 11, 15 measure ambivalent/anxious attachment (Collins & Read, 1990). In Iran, Cronbach's alpha has been used to check the reliability of the questionnaire, which has been reported with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.89 for safe, 0.77 for anxious ambivalent insecure, and 0.81 for avoidant insecure (Rezaee-Jamaloui et al., 2019). Abroad, Cronbach's alpha has been reported as 0.72 for safe, 0.67 for anxious ambivalent insecure, and 0.75 for avoidant insecure (Guin & McNeil, 2019).

**3. Coping Styles Questionnaire (CSQ):** The Lazarus Coping Styles Questionnaire is based on the theory of Lazarus-Folkman (1988) about tension. According to them, our interpretation and estimation of events is more important than the events themselves. They believe that a person's perception of situations determines their tension and intensity, and based on this, a questionnaire consisting of 66 items was designed. The sample from which coping scales were extracted. It consisted of 75 middle- and upper-middle-class white couples living with at least one child per household. Finally, factor analysis was performed on 750 observations and led to the extraction of the following 8 scales (Lazarus and Folkman, 1988, quoted by Agha Yousfi, 2001). Cronbach's alpha: face-to-face coping 0.70, avoidance 0.61, restraint 0.71, social support seeking 0.76, responsibility 0.66, avoidance avoidance 0.72, thoughtful problem solving 0.67 and positive reappraisal 0.79 (Brock Milan, 2014). Its reliability has been estimated by Folkman, Lazarus, Geron and DeLongis (1986), 0.66 to 0.79. In Behnam-Moghadam et al. (2014), the reliability of this test using Cronbach's alpha in a sample of 60 people was 0.92.

### Implementation

The data analysis of this research was done on two levels, descriptive findings and inferential findings. At the level of inferential findings, the relationship between variables was tested with the Pearson correlation test and the research model was tested with the structural equation modeling technique using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) method. The maximum level of alpha error to test the hypotheses was determined as 0.05 ( $p \geq 0.05$ ). Data analysis was done using SPSS 27 and Smart PLS 3 statistical software.

### Results

In terms of gender, 255 respondents (79.7%) were female and 65 respondents (20.3%) were male. The education of 83 people (25.9 percent) was diploma or lower, 130 people (40.7 percent) had master's degree and bachelor's degree, and 107 people (33.4 percent) had master's degree

and doctorate. In terms of age, 165 people (51.9 percent) were between 25 and 35 years old, 115 people (35.9 percent) were between 36 and 45 years old, and 40 people (12.2 percent) were between 46 and 55 years old. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics, skewness and kurtosis indices to check the normality and validity and reliability tests of the questionnaire.

**Table 1. Descriptive indices of research variables and evaluation of convergent validity and reliability**

Variable	Component	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	AVE	Combined Rel.	Alpha
<b>Attachment Style</b>	Secure	7/80	2/40	-0/589	-0/124	0/51	0/76	0/70
	Avoidant	5/86	2/73	0/074	-0/784	0/53	0/76	0/72
	Ambivalent	13/78	5/42	-0/176	-0/571	0/48	0/84	0/77
<b>Coping strategies</b>	Direct confrontation strategy	7/74	2/56	0/275	0/309	0/26	0/72	0/71
	Distance strategy	7/52	2/97	0/321	0/041	0/33	0/75	0/71
	Self-control strategy	8/92	2/55	0/055	1/07	0/27	0/74	0/73
	The strategy of seeking social support	9/57	2/82	0/083	0/160	0/35	0/76	0/75
	Responsibility acceptance strategy	4/91	1/56	-0/008	0/237	0/47	0/73	0/72
	Avoidance strategy	6/81	2/91	0/074	-0/665	0/43	0/78	0/75
	Problem solving strategy	7/87	2/19	-0/420	0/777	0/36	0/73	0/73
	Positive reappraisal strategy	9/73	2/83	-0/328	1/26	0/37	0/78	0/77
<b>Attitude towards extramarital relationships</b>	-	55/81	7/27	-1/86	1/73	0/37	0/84	0/78

The univariate normality was checked with skewness and kurtosis indices, and according to the results of Table 1, because the skewness and kurtosis values of all variables were obtained in the range of +2 to -2, the normality of the distribution of the variables was confirmed. The normality of the multivariate, which was the premise of the structural equation test, was checked with Merdia's coefficient, and the obtained coefficient was equal to 7.36. Based on criterion 5 for Merdia's coefficient, it can be concluded that there was a degree of deviation from the multivariate normal distribution. Therefore, and also due to the exploratory nature

of the model, the non-parametric method of partial least squares (PLS) was used to test the model.

The validity and reliability of the questionnaire was evaluated with the confirmatory factor analysis technique, and the factor loading criteria of 0.40 for the obvious variables of the model and only the questions that had a factor loading greater than 0.40 remained in the model. Convergent validity was evaluated with the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) index, which was obtained from a minimum of 0.26 for the direct coping strategy to a maximum of 0.53 for the avoidant attachment style, which were

moderate to appropriate values. The reliability of the measurement tools was checked with combined reliability tests and Cronbach's alpha, and since all the obtained values were greater

than 0.70, the reliability of the measurement tools was confirmed. Table 2 shows the results of the Pearson correlation test.

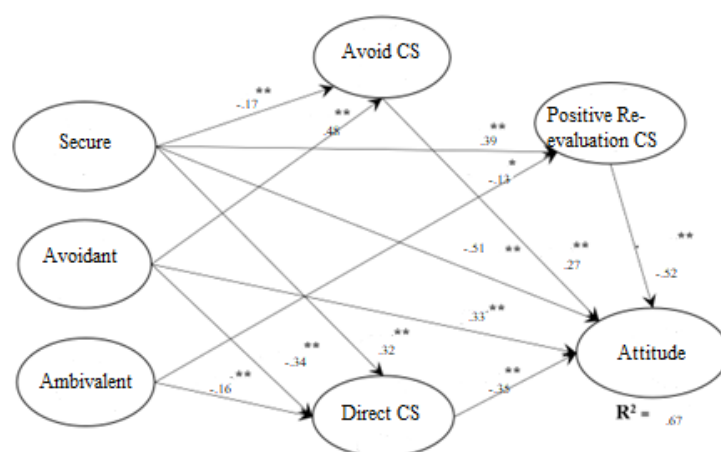
**Table 2. Pearson correlation test between research variables**

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Secure style	1										
2. Avoidance style	0/38**	1									
3. Ambivalent style	-0/21**	0/04	1								
4. Direct confrontation	0/36**	-0/28**	-0/23**	1							
5. Distance	0/07	0/14**	-0/04	-0/15**	1						
6. Self-control	0/16**	-0/04	0/05	0/14*	-0/17**	1					
7. Social support	0/14**	-0/15**	0/03	0/04	0/6	0/04	1				
8. responsibility	0/15**	0/07	0/002	0/16**	0/11*	0/19**	0/12*	1			
9. Avoidance	-0/35**	0/46**	0/14**	-0/26**	0/51**	-0/18**	0/02	-0/19**	1		
10. Problem solving	0/11	0/11*	-0/04	0/24**	0/45**	0/04	0/09	0/21**	-0/23**	1	
11. Positive evaluation	0/33**	-0/04	-0/22**	0/32**	-0/08	0/08	0/06	0/22**	-0/27**	0/29**	1
12. Extramarital relations	-0/48**	0/36**	0/16**	-0/34**	0/05	0/02	0/10	-0/04	0/42**	0/03	-0/45**

The results of Pearson's correlation test (Table 2) showed that all three attachment styles, three strategies of direct confrontation, escape and avoidance, and positive evaluation were related to extramarital relationships ( $p < 0.05$ ). According to the results, the correlation between the independent variables of attachment styles with the mediating variables of direct confrontation strategy, escape and avoidance strategy, and positive evaluation strategy was confirmed ( $p < 0.05$ ). Considering that only three strategies of direct confrontation, escape and avoidance and positive evaluation were related to the dependent variable of extramarital relations. In order to present a simpler model and avoid complexity in developing the model, out of 8 coping strategies, only three strategies mentioned in the model remained. Examining the intensity of correlation between independent and mediating variables showed that the intensity of

correlations was moderate and less than 0.70, which showed that there was no strong correlation and problem between the variables affecting extramarital relationships and the hypothesis of multiple non-collinearity was maintained.

The conceptual model of the research was tested using the structural equation modeling technique and Smart PLS software. Figure 1 is the experimental model in the form of standard coefficients, and the significance of the main relationships is marked with an asterisk. One star means the relationship is significant at the 95% confidence level ( $p < 0.05$ ) and two stars means the relationship is significant at the 99% confidence level ( $p < 0.01$ ). Also, the presented model is the final and modified model in which non-significant relationships have been removed and all relationships in Figure 1 are significant.



**Figure 1. Experimental model in the case of standard path coefficients (\*\* $p < 0.01$ )**

Figure 1 is the model in the standard mode, which according to the results of all the relations of the model is significant at the 95% confidence level ( $p < 0.05$ ). The comparison of standard coefficients showed that the strongest relationship in the model is related to the effect of positive evaluation strategy on the attitude towards extramarital relationships with a coefficient of -0.52 and the effect of secure attachment style on the attitude towards extramarital relationships with a coefficient of -0.51.

The model was fitted with coefficient of determination index ( $R^2$ ), redundancy index ( $Q^2$ ) and overall index of fit (GOF). The coefficient of determination for the dependent variable of attitude towards extramarital relations was equal to 0.67, and the independent and

mediating variables could explain 67% of the variance of the attitude towards extramarital relations, which indicates the appropriate and high explanatory power of the model. The value of the  $Q^2$  index for the attitude towards extramarital relations is 0.256, which is higher than 0.15, so it can be concluded that this index confirms the fit of the model. The value of the GOF index that measures the overall fit of the model for the research model is 0.39, which is a good value, and we can say that the GOF index confirms the fit of the model because it is higher than the standard of 0.36. Overall, the examination of the fit indices showed that the fit of the model is acceptable and confirmed and the fit of the model can be confirmed in general. Table 3 shows the results of the direct effects test of the experimental model.

**Table 3. Test of direct relationships of the experimental research model**

Path	Beta	SE	t	p
Secure attachment style -> direct coping strategy	0/318	0/054	5/58	<0/001
Secure attachment style -> escape and avoidance strategy	-0/169	0/048	3/67	<0/001
Secure attachment style -> positive reappraisal strategy	0/391	0/052	6/52	<0/001
Secure attachment style -> attitude towards extramarital relationships	-0/514	0/039	9/88	<0/001
Avoidant attachment style -> direct coping strategy	-0/337	0/047	6/24	<0/001
Avoidant attachment style -> escape and avoidance strategy	0/481	0/038	7/88	<0/001
Avoidant attachment style -> attitude towards extramarital relationships	0/328	0/051	5/96	<0/001
Ambivalent attachment style -> direct confrontation strategy	-0/160	0/059	2/71	0/007
Ambivalent attachment style -> positive reappraisal strategy	-0/128	0/049	2/17	0/031
Direct confrontation strategy -> attitude towards extramarital relationships	-0/353	0/042	7/20	<0/001
Avoidance strategy -> attitude towards extramarital relationships	0/270	0/041	5/19	<0/001

<b>Positive reappraisal strategy -&gt; attitude towards extramarital relationships</b>	-0/521	0/048	9/30	<0/001
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The results of Table 3 showed that all the relationships of the model were confirmed ( $p < 0.05$ ). Based on this, apart from ambivalent attachment style, the effect of secure attachment style, avoidant attachment style and three strategies of direct coping, avoidance and avoidance and positive reappraisal on the attitude towards extramarital relationships was confirmed ( $p < 0.05$ ). The effect of all three attachment styles on the mediating variable of direct coping strategy was confirmed. The effect

of two secure and avoidant attachment styles on avoidance and avoidance strategy was confirmed, and the effect of two secure and ambivalent attachment styles on positive reappraisal strategy was confirmed ( $p < 0.05$ ). Table 4 shows the results of the mediation test of coping strategies in the relationship between attachment styles and attitudes towards extramarital relationships using the bootstrapping method.

<b>Table 4. The results of the mediation test of coping strategies in relation to attachment styles and attitudes towards extramarital relationships</b>				
<b>Path</b>	<b>Indirect effect</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>
<b>Secure style -&gt; direct confrontation strategy -&gt; attitude towards extramarital relationships</b>	-0/112	0/026	4/31	<0/001
<b>Secure style -&gt; escape and avoidance strategy -&gt; attitude towards extramarital relationships</b>	-0/046	0/022	2/09	0/037
<b>Secure style -&gt; positive reappraisal -&gt; attitude towards extramarital relationships</b>	-0/203	0/033	6/15	<0/001
<b>Avoidance style -&gt; direct confrontation strategy -&gt; attitude towards extramarital relationships</b>	0/199	0/029	4/10	<0/001
<b>Avoidance style -&gt; escape and avoidance strategy -&gt; attitude towards extramarital relationships</b>	0/130	0/032	4/05	<0/001
<b>Ambivalent style -&gt; direct confrontation strategy -&gt; attitude towards extramarital relationships</b>	0/056	0/025	2/24	0/026
<b>Ambivalent style -&gt; positive reappraisal -&gt; attitude towards extramarital relationships</b>	0/068	0/030	2/25	0/025

The results of Table 4 showed that the mediating role of direct confrontation strategy was confirmed in the relationship between all three attachment styles with attitudes towards extramarital relationships ( $p < 0.05$ ). The mediating role of escape and avoidance strategy was confirmed in the relationship between secure and avoidant attachment styles with attitude towards extramarital relationships, and the mediating role of positive reappraisal strategy was confirmed in the relationship between secure and ambivalent attachment styles with attitude towards extramarital relationships. ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Conclusion**

The results showed that the attitude towards extramarital relationships based on attachment styles with emphasis on the mediating role of coping styles fits the model. Regarding the direct relationship between attachment styles and attitudes towards extramarital relationships, the results are in line with the previous results.

(Tapliodimirtas et al., 2022; Giard et al., 2020; Shams et al., 2022; Sultanzadeh & Mahaleh, 2022; Altnok & Kilik, 2020; Asl et al., 2022; Xiong et al., 2022).

In explaining the results, it should be said that attachment styles are among the variables that create a regulatory role in romantic relationships and perhaps marital problems (Asal et al., 2022). The safe attachment style considers the spouse as an undisputed life partner by creating a safe space for the couple and acts as a factor to prevent the creation of extramarital relationships and the tendency to cheat (Soltanzadeh & Mahaleh, 2022). Also, the axis of insecure attachment (anxiety and avoidance) in couples is related to marital misunderstanding, and this marital misunderstanding and marital dissatisfaction can also play a major role in predicting extramarital relationships. People with these attachment styles have a negative view of themselves and believe that they are not

worthy of the love and attention of others, so their current relationships are of low quality (Tapliodimirtas et al., 2022).

Regarding the mediating role of coping styles between attachment styles and attitudes towards betrayal, the results are in line with the previous results. (Nematzadeh Getabi et al., 2022; Chai et al., 2019; Kemmerbigi and Kemmerbigi, 2020; Agbaria, 2021; Tavol et al., 2020; Ixong et al., 2022).

In explaining the results, it should be said that couples with a secure attachment style, who use appropriate coping skills in stressful situations, are better able to deal with the needs and challenges of life and reduce the harmful effects of stress on their body and mind. become extramarital relationships (Agbaria, 2021; Tavol et al., 2020). Couples with an insecure, avoidant attachment style and anxiety do not allow a person to recognize and express their emotions in a real way due to the use of ineffective coping styles. The lack of real understanding of the situation and the emotions and cognitions related to it reduces the ability of a person to use appropriate solutions to regulate emotions and use problem solving (Nematzadeh Getabi et al., 2022). The inability to use coping styles, by reducing the individual's ability to adapt to stressful life events, can cause increased tension between couples and decrease life satisfaction. In this way, it increases the possibility of emotional divorce and then the attitude towards betrayal. Chai et al. (2019) as a result, insecurely attached couples use an ineffective and ineffective communication method in their relationships, and they do not have the ability to manage their emotional and emotional relationships, and their attitude towards betrayal is higher (Kamarbeygi and Kamarbeygi, 2022; Xiong et al., 2022).

People with secure attachment have the ability to establish relatively stable and satisfying emotional and intimate relationships and usually use problem-solving styles when problems arise, which increase their satisfaction with their relationship with their spouses and reduce the attitude towards infidelity in couples. On the other hand, spouses who have avoidant and anxious attachment styles are likely to express dissatisfaction with the type of their romantic and marital relationships and do not want to establish long-term intimate relationships, are afraid of self-disclosure and lack social skills. In stressful times, they use an emotional style, and emotional

divorce and finally an attitude towards extramarital relationships is formed between them, because such spouses are always worried about being rejected and abandoned by their spouses.

This research, like other researches, had limitations and problems, such as: the available sample method, which may not be a complete representative of the statistical population. Also, the present research was only in the scope of the citizens of Qom province, which makes its generalization difficult, and since the topic of the research is considered one of the most challenging topics at the level of the society and is one of the taboos of the society, the honesty in answering the questionnaires could be questioned. According to the findings of the research on the direct effect of attachment styles on confrontational styles, it is suggested that in this field, ministries and organizations in charge such as welfare-organization; The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance and Radio should consider training for individuals to promote the correct use of confrontational strategies.

#### Conflict of Interest

According to the authors, this article has no financial sponsor or conflict of interest.

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