

Predicting the Inclination to Extramarital Relations Based on Sexual Assertiveness and Spouse Selection Criteria in Married Women

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The present research aimed to predict the inclination towards extramarital relations based on sexual assertiveness and spouse selection criteria in married women of Yasuj city.

Materials and Methods: The research method was descriptive-correlational. The statistical population consisted of all married women in Yasuj city in 2022. From this population, 384 individuals were selected through two-stage cluster sampling for the study. Data were collected using questionnaires: the Spouse Selection Criteria by Rafahi et al. (2008), the Extramarital Relations by Whitley (2006), and the Sexual Assertiveness by Halbert (1991). After data collection and extraction, participants' scores were analyzed using Pearson correlation coefficient and multiple regression analysis through the SPSS-24 statistical software.

Findings: The correlation coefficients indicated a significant negative relationship between sexual assertiveness and spouse selection criteria (both content and process) with the inclination towards extramarital relations in married women of Yasuj city. Furthermore, regression analysis showed that sexual assertiveness and spouse selection criteria (content and process) could negatively predict the inclination towards extramarital relations in these women.

Conclusion: The findings of this study confirm the role of spouse selection criteria and sexual assertiveness as predictive variables for the likelihood of inclination towards extramarital relations.

Keywords: *Extramarital Relations, Sexual Assertiveness, Spouse Selection Criteria, Married Women.*

1 Introduction

The family is introduced as a social institution or organization, originating from the matrimonial union of a man and a woman. In this setting, family members, including spouses, children, and sometimes grandparents and grandchildren, coexist based on peaceful cohabitation, purity, intimacy, affection, and understanding, participating and cooperating in life. The family is typically a small unit consisting of at least two or three people, but in terms of importance, it is considered one of the most significant social institutions and the primary source of generation building and nurturing, the highest source of happiness, and the richest source of affection (Hoshmandi et al., 2019; Saadati et al., 2021).

The family provides a safe place for the satisfaction of various physical, rational, and emotional needs (Parsakia et al., 2023). Nowadays, external stresses, including workplace and social problems, have threatened the quality of couples' lives. These factors increase dissatisfaction in marital relations and raise the likelihood of divorce, extramarital relationships, and marital infidelity (Wang & Zhao, 2023). When intimate relations between husband and wife are damaged, marital understanding and commitment decrease, leading to detrimental and negative effects on the family's mental health and the children's psychological well-being (Rasouli Rad et al., 2023; Wusu, 2022). Furthermore, avoiding intimate relations is one of the factors leading to failure in family life, emotional divorce, and a tendency towards extramarital relations and marital infidelity (Heidari, 2022; Mohamed Nordin et al., 2022). In Iran, one of the main themes in women's lives is the issue of infidelity and extramarital relationships. The emergence of this concern in society indicates a slow and gradual transformation, or more drastically, a gradual revolution in society (Soltani et al., 2021; Yaarmohammadi Vassel et al., 2021). Extramarital relations in marriage signify disloyalty and a lack of commitment to the marital bond, involving any emotional and sexual relationship with the opposite sex outside the said commitment. Extramarital relations in marriage are a major cause of marital dissatisfaction, the primary background for conflicts and marital disputes, and one of the most significant problems in marital relations, being a primary reason for divorce and separation among couples (Fallahian et al., 2019; Kiaee Rad et al., 2020; Labrecque & Whisman, 2019; Soltani et al., 2021; Tajbakhsh, 2021). A man and a woman who voluntarily establish a family officially and accept marital conditions

are both obliged to adhere to this principle of decency, ensuring the security and survival of the family. Extramarital relations between spouses are the source of emotional and psychological problems, giving rise to sorrows and concerns (Paulinus, 2022; Schulsinger, 2022; Vowels et al., 2022; Weiser et al., 2023).

One of the contributing factors to marital lethargy for women and their inclination towards extramarital relations is their dissatisfaction in the sexual aspect of their shared life. Sexual dissatisfaction can lead to a decline in the quality of sexual and overall marital relations (Mosadegh et al., 2023; Shadanloo et al., 2023). This decrease in quality can, in turn, lead to marital dissatisfaction, frustration, and marital infidelity. Lethargy can be considered one of the underlying causes of marital disputes and infidelity (Ebrahimi et al., 2023; Şerban et al., 2022). When couples are unable to fulfill each other's desires, the unmet needs of each lead to conflicts between them, perpetuating this flawed cycle. While marriage can be a source of pleasant feelings and love for couples, if they do not express their needs or fail to understand and positively address each other's needs, dissatisfaction, anger, conflict, frustration, and lethargy arise. Sexual assertiveness and dissatisfaction cause conflict, which in turn leads to lethargy, restarting the vicious cycle of sexual dissatisfaction (Brassard et al., 2022; Seiter et al., 2020; Zarenezhad et al., 2019).

Sexual assertiveness refers to women's sexual interactions with their partners, where they do not desire intercourse but rather seek a more satisfying and mutual relationship. However, if women do not advocate for their sexual expression, they often face resistance and denial of their rights (Buss, 1989; Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Sexual dissatisfaction means the compatibility, balance, and level of sexual desire between a man and a woman. In marital life, if one partner has a strong need for sexual relations but the other feels less desire, problems arise. If a husband or wife encounters such problems, it leads to marital infidelity and extramarital relations (Mallory, 2022; Seiter et al., 2020).

Marriage is the first and most important stage in the family life cycle, where the choice of a spouse is made, and the success in other stages of life and the stability of the marriage depend on the success in this stage. Although marriage is still part of the societal structure, parents and marriage intermediaries no longer impose spouse selection. Instead, free choice prevails or seems to be the case (Alavi et al., 2014; Bijari et al., 2020). Therefore, having a set of knowledge and information to improve the quality,

commitment, and stability of marriage is essential. Successful marriages are those where spouse selection criteria are correctly observed, and both parties are aware of and have a clear understanding of their criteria (Yousefi & Bagheryan, 2012). Preferences and criteria for spouse selection are perceptions about traits or characteristics demanded from an imaginary lover or potential spouse, and many of these perceptions are clearly associated with emotions (Bijari et al., 2020). In recent decades, different approaches to spouse selection have emerged, each analyzing the process and manner of couples' selection by individuals from different perspectives. Each perspective also examines the criteria individuals consider when choosing a spouse. For instance, some believe that spouse selection is fundamentally a psychological phenomenon. In various psychology fields, this phenomenon is studied from different perspectives. For how spouses are chosen, factors such as selection based on randomness from a limited set of individuals similar to oneself, homogamy or the tendency to choose a similar spouse, complementarity or the attraction to a complementary and attractive individual, reasons like benefiting from romantic relationships (social exchange theory), and maintaining harmony in their thinking and social communications (balance theory) have been mentioned (Alavi et al., 2014).

Extramarital relations in Iranian society are a growing concern, associated with instability in marital relations. This issue leads to the disintegration of the warm family nucleus and leaves children in limbo. It results in the formation of a generation characterized by distrust, psychological turmoil, and the destruction of the mental health of all individuals involved with these couples. However, due to the taboo nature of the issue, few studies have been conducted in this area. Therefore, the present research aims to further clarify the factors influencing individuals' (couples') inclination towards extramarital relations. In light of the aforementioned discussions, the present research seeks to answer the question, "Can sexual assertiveness and spouse selection criteria predict the tendency towards extramarital relations in married women?"

2 Methods and Materials

2.1 Study design and Participant

The present research is of an applied nature and follows a descriptive-correlational methodology. The statistical population of this study consisted of all married women in

Yasuj city in the year 2022, estimated to be around 100,000 based on the 2016 statistics. Sampling in this research was conducted using a two-stage cluster random sampling method. Given the extensive size of the statistical population and the impossibility of accessing all members of the community, it was necessary to select a sample representative of the entire population. In this study, the sample size was determined using the Morgan table. The sample size of the current research was estimated to be 384 individuals with a confidence level of 95% and a power of 80%. For this purpose, several organizations, departments, and public and private companies in the city of Yasuj were randomly selected. Subsequently, 384 married women who volunteered to participate in the research were selected according to the Morgan table and responded to questionnaires on extramarital relations, spouse selection criteria, and sexual assertiveness.

2.2 Measures

2.2.1 Extramarital Relationship Tendency

The Extramarital Relationship Tendency Questionnaire, developed by Whatley (2008), is designed to measure attitudes and inclinations towards marital infidelity. This questionnaire consists of 12 questions and is based on a Likert scale, with items such as "In marital relationships, infidelity is a reason for divorce." The scoring of the questionnaire is based on a 7-point Likert scale, where 'strongly agree' scores 7 points and 'strongly disagree' scores 1 point. The reverse-scored items in this questionnaire are items 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 12, scored as 'strongly agree' (1 point) and 'strongly disagree' (7 points). To calculate the total score of the questionnaire, the scores of all items are summed. The minimum and maximum scores for this questionnaire are 12 and 84, respectively. Higher scores indicate a greater acceptance of and positive attitude towards infidelity (Whatley, 2008). The reliability and validity of this questionnaire have been confirmed in numerous studies (Anwar et al., 2022; Lişman & Corneliu, 2023; Movahedrad et al., 2023).

2.2.2 Spouse Selection Criteria

A 22-item questionnaire on spouse selection was used to measure spouse selection criteria. Responses are arranged on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 'very important' to 'very unimportant'. The questionnaire examines two types of criteria in spouse selection. Items 1, 5, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14,

15, 17, 18, and 21 measure content criteria of spouse selection, referring to characteristics such as individual and family psychological traits (e.g., age, education, occupation, income), as well as mental and physical health, ethnicity, and religion. Items 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 12, 16, 19, 20, and 22 assess process criteria in spouse selection, encompassing actions that organize the family system, such as understanding the partner, social and communication skills, coping skills, problem-solving abilities, and flexibility. The overall test reliability is calculated at 88%, with the process dimension at 85% and the content dimension at 74%. The reliability and validity of this questionnaire have been confirmed in numerous studies (Alavi et al., 2014; Yousefi & Bagheryan, 2012).

2.2.3 Sexual Assertiveness

The Sexual Assertiveness Questionnaire, developed by Halbert (1991), is designed to measure women's level of sexual assertiveness in interactions with others. This questionnaire contains 25 questions and uses a Likert scale with items like "I feel shy in sexual relations." Scoring is based on a 5-point Likert scale from 'always' (0 points) to 'never' (4 points). To calculate the total score, sum the scores of all items. The score range for this questionnaire is 0 to 100, with higher scores indicating greater levels of sexual assertiveness. The reliability and validity of this questionnaire have been confirmed in multiple studies (Zarenezhad et al., 2019).

2.3 Data Analysis

For data analysis, the statistical software SPSS-24 was used, along with descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) and inferential statistics (Pearson correlation coefficient and multiple regression).

3 Findings and Results

In this study, demographic characteristics revealed that the largest group of participants held a Bachelor's degree, representing 45% (171 participants), followed by those with a diploma or associate degree at 31% (118

participants), and those with a Master's degree at 24% (95 participants), summing up to a total of 384 participants. As for the duration of marriage, the majority, 52% (198 participants), have been married for 2 to 5 years, succeeded by those married for 6 to 10 years at 25% (94 participants), and those married for 10 to 15 years at 23% (92 participants), totaling the same sample size of 384.

Table 1

Mean and Standard Deviation of The Research Variables

Components	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance
Spouse Selection Criteria	61.56	6.79	22.66
Content Criteria	31.32	5.09	14.24
Process Criteria	29.89	3.69	13.15
Sexual Assertiveness	51.56	5.79	22.66
Extramarital Relations	64.16	6.44	19.72

As can be seen in the results of the Table 1, the descriptive statistics for the spouse selection criteria are reported with a mean of 61.56 and a standard deviation of 6.79. Additionally, sexual assertiveness is reported with a mean of 51.56 and a standard deviation of 5.79, and the inclination towards extramarital relations is reported with a mean of 16.16 and a standard deviation of 4.44.

Table 2

Results of Pearson's Correlation Test

Variable	Inclination to Extramarital Relations	
	Correlation Coefficient	P
Sexual Assertiveness	-0.27	0.001
Spouse Selection Criteria	-0.26	0.001

To investigate the hypothesis that sexual fulfillment and spouse selection criteria can predict the inclination towards extramarital relations in married women, Pearson correlation coefficient and multiple regression analysis were initially used. The results of Table 2 show a significant negative correlation between the scores of sexual fulfillment and spouse selection criteria with the inclination towards extramarital relations at a significance level of 0.010.

Table 3

Summary of Regression Model

Model	SS	Df	MS	R	R ²	R ² _{adj}	F	p
Regression	11569.89	4	1652.84	0.82	0.67	0.66	56.31	0.001
Residual	5635.25	379	29.35					

Total	17205.14	383
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Given the established correlation between sexual assertiveness and spouse selection criteria with the inclination towards extramarital relations, multiple regression analysis was employed in the Table 3 to predict the inclination towards extramarital relations based on sexual assertiveness and spouse selection criteria. As observed in the table, the sig value has become less than 0.01, indicating the significance of the regression model, meaning that at least one of the predictor variables has a significant effect on the criterion variable.

R^2 (multiple determination coefficient): This index indicates the percentage of variance in the criterion variable that is explained by the predictor variables, or in other words, the percentage of the dependent variable's variability that the predictor variables can fit. In this study, the R^2 value is 0.67, meaning that sexual assertiveness and spouse selection criteria can predict 67% of the inclination towards extramarital relations.

R^2_{adj} (adjusted determination coefficient): This index assesses the predictive ability of the dependent variable by the predictor variables in the population, effectively extending the sample to the entire population with some adjustment. In this study, this coefficient is 0.66, implying that sexual assertiveness and spouse selection criteria collectively have a 66% predictive ability for the inclination towards extramarital relations.

Given the significance of the overall model, it is now necessary to determine which coefficients are not zero, or in other words, which variable or variables have a significant impact in the model. For this purpose, the t-test is used.

Table 4

Standard Coefficients and T-values

Predictor Variable	Regression Coefficients		t	sig
	Standard Error	Standardized Beta		
Spouse Selection Criteria	-0.06	-0.13	2.25	0.025
Sexual Assertiveness	-0.09	-0.12	2.13	0.031

As the results of Table 4 showed, spouse selection criteria with a beta coefficient of -0.13 and sexual assertiveness with a beta coefficient of -0.12 were able to predict the inclination towards extramarital relations in married women ($p < 0.05$).

4 Discussion and Conclusion

The current research aimed to predict the inclination towards extramarital relations based on sexual assertiveness and spouse selection criteria in married women of Yasuj city. The results showed a significant negative correlation between the scores of sexual assertiveness and spouse selection criteria with extramarital relations at a 0.01 level. Furthermore, regression analysis indicated that spouse selection criteria with a beta coefficient of -0.13 and sexual assertiveness with a beta coefficient of -0.12 could predict extramarital relations in married women.

In line with these findings, Yousefi and Bagherian (2012) in their research showed that spouse selection criteria could positively predict the desire to continue married life among couples and found a significant negative relationship between spouse selection criteria and the inclination to infidelity (Yousefi & Bagherian, 2012). These findings also align with the research of some other studies (Ebrahimi et al., 2023; Fallahian et al., 2019; Olamijuwon et al., 2021; Pirzadeh et al., 2019; Sadeghi et al., 2021; Şerban et al., 2022; Soltani et al., 2021; Tajbakhsh, 2021; Vowels et al., 2022; Weiser et al., 2023)

Regarding the negative predictive role of sexual assertiveness for extramarital relations, research has shown that the most important motive for married individuals inclined towards extramarital relations is the experience of renewed sexual and personal intimacy. According to Glasser, couples start their married life with love but observe that the initial intimacy gradually fades. Over time, the life of some couples leads to extramarital relations and separation, while the majority continue their married life in a monotonous and tedious rhythm, resorting to alcohol, overeating, drugs, or illicit relationships and marital infidelity to endure this life. Therefore, a decrease in sexual assertiveness causes the emotional and psychological commitment that couples have towards each other to diminish, and the affected spouse seeks to satisfy their need for sexual intimacy and fulfillment outside their marital relationship, receiving this intimacy and affection from a third party, which is one of the main reasons for married women with low sexual assertiveness to incline towards extramarital relations. This finding can also be explained based on previous research results; that enhancing the

emotional and sexual dimension of sexual assertiveness leads to the use of effective conflict resolution methods and a healthy husband-wife relationship (Lampis et al., 2019; Mirzaie et al., 2018), increasing self-esteem, loving others, paying attention to others' feelings and emotions, sense of responsibility, proficiency in problem-solving, stronger communication skills, higher resilience, and growth in independence and ability to manage situations based on personal capabilities (Scheinkman et al., 2022). For this reason, couples with greater sexual assertiveness and intimacy are less inclined towards extramarital relations. When this need for sexual assertiveness (sexual assertiveness) is satisfactorily met by the couple, the individual feels valued, directly affecting their quality of life. Hence, couples with weak relationships experience emotional disconnection, lack of intimacy, and adaptability issues, leading them towards extramarital relations.

In interpreting the results obtained, it can be said that satisfying the needs of intimacy and sexual assertiveness causes couples to regulate negative and positive emotions, understand the situation, and learn to manage their emotions. This organization of psychological and mental capacity enhances the mental health of the couple and, consequently, the stability of married life. In explaining the results obtained, it should be said that choosing a spouse and marriage is one of the most important decisions in an individual's life, which, if done with proper understanding and according to desired criteria, can promise a stable life for the couple. Conversely, if the choice is based on convenience and lacks suitable criteria, this marriage can lead towards instability and an inclination towards extramarital relations (Heidari, 2022; Péloquin et al., 2022; Yu et al., 2020).

It can be said that married women who have considered spouse selection criteria in choosing their partner pay special attention to their spouse's requests, needs, and expectations in their marital relationships. While being attentive to their own needs, they value their spouse's values and aspirations. They feel guilty for inappropriate behavior in marital relations and strive to console and correct their behaviors. These individuals possess intellectual independence, capacity, self-esteem, commitment, resilience, and a high ability to cope in family interactions. Therefore, it seems logical that women with high spouse selection criteria have fewer marital conflicts in married life and are also less inclined towards extramarital relations.

5 Limitations and Suggestions

The present research, like any other scientific investigation, faced several limitations. These limitations included financial, administrative, and implementation constraints. The study was conducted within the married female population of Yasuj city, and therefore, generalizing the results to other married women in different provinces should be done cautiously. A major limitation was the use of correlational methods and self-report instruments (cross-sectional nature of the research). In this approach, the discovered relationships cannot be assumed as causal, and in self-report instruments, there may be a lack of sufficient introspection and responsible responses by individuals. The measurement of inclination towards extramarital relations was solely based on questionnaires. Since individuals tend to present themselves more favorably than they might actually be, the questionnaire responses might not have been completely honest. The study did not control for intervening variables such as age, education level, years of marriage, and cultural and religious beliefs on the questionnaire results of extramarital relations and sexual assertiveness. Moreover, numerous other variables that influence the development of inclination towards extramarital relations in women were overlooked. The large number of questions caused fatigue and resulted in incomplete responses to the final questions.

Based on the findings of this study, ignoring spouse selection criteria before marriage impacts the extent of married women's inclination towards extramarital relations. Counselors are advised to use the results of this research to reduce extramarital relations among couples. Considering the importance of intimacy and sexual assertiveness in reducing extramarital relations, it is suggested that educational workshops in this area be included in pre-marital training. The level of emotional and sexual intimacy among couples on the verge of divorce should be investigated and increased in couple therapies. Psychologists and family counselors should use the obtained results in pre-marriage workshops and workshops to reduce marital problems. Family counselors are advised to organize workshops on pre-marriage education and counseling and spouse selection criteria to reduce extramarital relations among couples. This research can be useful for couples to be aware of and pay attention to mutual understanding and learning spouse selection criteria before marriage, in decision-making, and in preventing extramarital relations and infidelity in married life. It can

also be useful for researchers and psychologists to understand the underlying reasons for accepting extramarital relations and for couple therapists to expedite the therapy process. Future researchers are advised to consider the sample size and involve more participants to obtain a broader statistical sample and more comprehensive results. Similar studies should be conducted in other cities and cultures, considering factors such as family structure, socio-economic status, number of children, and couples' education as influential factors. Compare the inclination towards extramarital relations in married women in government offices and housewives. Conduct research considering demographic variables such as economic status, social status, and use interviews alongside questionnaires, and also on male populations. Future research should control for intervening variables like the age of the couple, year of marriage, and the couple's education level. Explore the lived experiences of couples inclined towards extramarital relations to develop a therapy model based on it and compare this model with cognitive therapies for reducing their psychological symptoms. Use shorter questionnaires to increase the sample's interest and willingness to respond. Future research should use structured and semi-structured interviews for data collection. Also, conducting intervention studies to investigate their effects and establish causal relationships is a suitable suggestion for future research. Compare the inclination towards extramarital relations and spouse selection criteria in married and housewife women.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

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.

Ethics Considerations

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

Authors' Contributions

Namazi played a role in conceptualization, methodology design, and data analysis, while Kermani, as the principal investigator, led the project, developed research objectives, supervised data collection, and provided crucial insights into data analysis and manuscript preparation.

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