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# Predicting Attitudes Towards Marital Infidelity Based on Marital Conflict and Marital Quality Among Women

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#### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** Marital infidelity is one of the most significant threats to the stability and continuity of marriage and refers to any sexual or emotional relationship beyond the committed relationship between two spouses. The current research was conducted to determine the relationship between marital conflict and marital quality with attitudes towards marital infidelity.

Methods and Materials: This descriptive-correlational study involved all married women visiting counseling centers in Tonekabon city during the first six months of the year 2023, from which a sample of 118 participants was selected. The research instruments included: the Attitude Towards Marital Infidelity Scale by Mark Whatley (2006), the Marital Conflict Scale by Barati and Sanaei (1996), and the Marital Quality Scale by Busby et al. (1995). Data analysis was performed using correlation and regression analysis methods with the aid of SPSS version 23 software.

**Findings:** The results showed a significant positive relationship between marital conflict and attitudes towards marital infidelity (r = 0.42, p < 0.001). The results also indicated a significant negative correlation between marital quality and attitudes towards marital infidelity (r = -0.33, p < 0.001).

**Conclusion:** It can be concluded that there is a relationship between marital conflict and marital quality with attitudes towards marital infidelity.

Keywords: Marital conflict, Marital quality, Attitudes towards marital infidelity.

# 1. Introduction

The family is one of the main pillars of society and the smallest unit of community, which can have a significant impact on the mental, physical, and sexual health of individuals (Zangeneh & Arefi, 2022). The first step towards establishing this social institution is marriage. Having a successful marital life is one of the goals of

families in all human societies (Alexopoulos, 2021; Ammari et al., 2022). When individuals decide to marry and form a family, trust and loyalty towards each other in the marital relationship are fundamental for its continuity. If this trust and loyalty are compromised, the continuation of the marital life faces challenges (Barraca & Polanski, 2021; Ebrahimi et al., 2023). Marital infidelity is one of the issues that can destroy the trust between spouses.



Marital infidelity is one of the most significant factors threatening the stability and continuity of marriage and refers to any sexual or emotional relationship beyond the committed relationship between two spouses (Talaeezadeh et al., 2023; Weiser et al., 2023). Marital infidelity is defined as an individual crossing the boundaries of the marital relationship by establishing physical or emotional intimacy with someone outside of the relationship (Paulinus, 2022). Marital infidelity can have severe emotional consequences for the spouses. The betrayed spouses often experience feelings such as anger, low self-esteem, degradation, depression, and helplessness. The unfaithful spouses deal with feelings such as shame, guilt, doubt, anger, and despair, which can significantly negatively affect the marital life atmosphere and lead to various problems (ÇElİK et al., 2022), hence the need for more attention.

Investigations into factors related to marital infidelity indicate that these factors generally fall into three domains: individual differences such as personality traits and attitudes, the nature of the relationship including level of commitment and satisfaction, and environmental conditions like the opportunity for infidelity or the attractiveness of a third party (Sharifi et al., 2013). Researchers also categorized the factors influencing marital infidelity into three groups: individual factors, spouse relationship factors, and societal factors. The individual component includes psychological issues and past experiences that explore causes before the existing relationship in forming a life. The second component comprises five sub-components named: sexual and physical problems, emotional, inappropriate marriage, behavior, and absence of the spouse. The societal component includes economic and environmental aspects. Consequently, all these components affect each other and overlap, forming cyclical chains (Aghili & Kashiri, 2022; Dehghani et al., 2019; Fallahian et al., 2019; Ferdosi, 2019a). As mentioned in the causes of marital infidelity, one category relates to the relationships between peers, hence marital conflict can be one of these causes for marital infidelity. Marital conflict arises from discrepancies between husband and wife in terms of needs and how to satisfy them, selfishness, differences in demands, behavioral schemas, and irresponsible behavior towards marital relationship and marriage (Kyegombe et al., 2022; Navabinejad et al., 2023). If these conflicts increase among spouses, it can heighten dissatisfaction with the spouse, widen the gap between them, and potentially lead to marital infidelity (Navabinejad et al., 2023). Various studies have confirmed the relationship between marital conflicts and attitudes towards marital

infidelity (Navabinejad et al., 2023; Zangeneh & Arefi, 2022).

Generally, marital quality can be considered one of the most important causes of marital infidelity. The quality of marital relationships is defined as the relative agreement between husband and wife on important issues such as cooperation in tasks and joint activities and expressing affection towards each other (Lisman & Corneliu, 2023). The quality of the marital relationship, as a multifaceted phenomenon, encompasses dimensions such as compatibility, satisfaction, cohesion, happiness, commitment, and its nature and quality change over time (Safarzadeh & Azizpoor, 2017). Many studies associate low relationship quality with an increased likelihood of tendencies towards marital infidelity (Monika et al., 2023; Pirzadeh et al., 2019; Yasai Seke & Motthabian, 2022).

Considering the importance of family consolidation and stability for the health and growth of society on the one hand, and the growing damages to families including marital infidelity, divorce, and marital dissatisfaction on the other, it is necessary to conduct more research in this field to employ more effective and efficient interventions for preventing, reducing, and treating these family issues. Marital infidelity is among the damaging factors to family life and can bring about many harms and problems for the family and couple. In this context, and to identify the effective factors in the occurrence of marital infidelity, the present research aims to answer whether marital infidelity can be predicted based on marital conflict and marital quality.

#### 2. Methods and Materials

# 2.1. Study design and Participant

The present study was descriptive-correlational. The population of the study included all married women who visited counseling centers in Tonekabon city during the first six months of 2023. Based on the number of variables, the sample size was estimated to be 128 participants. Using convenience sampling, four centers were selected from the counseling centers in Tonekabon, and from those who consented to participate in the study, 128 individuals responded to the research questionnaires. After collecting the questionnaires, 10 were found to be invalid, and ultimately 118 questionnaires were analyzed. Ethical considerations in this study included: creating a sense of trust in the researcher, obtaining consent from participants to partake in the study, registering information confidentially without mentioning names or surnames, responding to all



questions and concerns of the participants at all stages of the research, assuring participants that participation in the study was free of charge and they would not incur any costs, and expressing gratitude to the respondents and participants before and after the study.

The research was conducted after coordinating with counseling centers in Tonekabon city and obtaining the necessary permissions. After preparing the questionnaires and selecting participants, the research questionnaires were distributed. Participants were given necessary instructions by the researcher on how to complete the questionnaires and were asked to request further explanation if they encountered any difficulties. Participants were assured that their information would remain confidential and that participation was voluntary and free of charge. After completing the questionnaires, they were collected for analysis.

#### 2.2. Measures

#### 2.2.1. Attitude Towards Marital Infidelity

This scale was developed by Mark Whatley in 2006 and translated by Abdollahzadeh (2010). It consists of 12 statements rated on a seven-point scale (1-7). The highest score is 84, indicating acceptance of infidelity, and the lowest score is 12, indicating rejection of infidelity. A score of 48 places an individual between accepting and rejecting infidelity (Whatley, 2006). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of this questionnaire, as reported by Abdollahzadeh (2010), was 0.84 (Zangeneh & Arefi, 2022).

#### 2.2.2. Marital Conflicts

This questionnaire was developed by Barati and Sanaei (1996) and comprises 42 questions covering seven areas of spousal conflict: decreased cooperation, decreased sexual

relationship, increased emotional reaction, increased relationship with one's relatives, decreased relationship with spouse's relatives, separation of financial matters from each other, and increased seeking of child support and overall marital conflicts. Scores range from 1 to 5 for each question, with the total questionnaire score ranging from 42 to 210. The scoring of the questions is based on the Likert method. Lower scores indicate normal conflict, and higher scores indicate more severe conflict. The reliability of this instrument, as determined by Barati (1996), ranged from 0.52 to 0.69 (Zangeneh & Arefi, 2022).

#### 2.2.3. Marital Quality

This scale was developed by Busby and et al. (1995) to measure the quality of marital relationships. The questionnaire consists of 14 items and 3 subscales: agreement, satisfaction, and cohesion, which collectively indicate the quality of marital life. Higher scores denote higher marital quality. The Cronbach's alpha reliability for the three subscales—agreement, satisfaction, cohesion—was reported as 0.79, 0.80, and 0.90, respectively (Busby et al., 1995; Pirzadeh et al., 2019).

#### 2.3. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using multiple regression and Pearson correlation coefficient. SPSS software was used for statistical data analysis.

#### 3. Findings and Results

The mean (standard deviation) age of the participants in this study was 38.79 (8.44), with a minimum and maximum age of 25 and 49 years, respectively. Descriptive statistics of the research variables are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**Description of Research Variables Based on Mean and Standard Deviation

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Attitude Towards Marital Infidelity	34.81	8.74	16	55
Marital Conflict	65.90	14.98	30	98
Marital Quality	33.47	8.50	15	53

The data in Table 1 show the statistical characteristics of the research variables. Considering the skewness and kurtosis values, which fall within a reasonable range (-2 to +2) for assuming normality of the data, we can propose and accept the assumption of data normality.



 Table 2

 Correlation Matrix Among Marital Conflict, Marital Quality, and Attitude Towards Marital Infidelity

Variable	1	2	3
1. Attitude Towards Marital Infidelity	-	0.42**	-0.33**
2. Marital Conflict		-	-0.52**
3. Marital Quality			-

<sup>\*\*</sup>p<0.01

Table 2 shows that the correlation values between marital conflict and marital quality with attitude towards marital infidelity are statistically significant (p < 0.01).

 Table 3

 Summary of Regression Analysis for Predicting Attitude Towards Marital Infidelity Based on Marital Conflict and Marital Quality

Multiple R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Standard Error	F	Sig
0.44	0.20	0.18	16.36	13.98	0.001

The results of the simultaneous regression, as shown in Table 3, indicate that marital conflict and marital quality

explained 20% of the variance in attitude towards marital infidelity.

 Table 4

 Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for Predicting Attitude Towards Marital Infidelity Based on Marital Conflict and Marital Quality

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Regression	7492.28	2	3746.14	13.98	0.001
Residual	30776.54	115	267.62		
Total	38268.82	117			

As seen in Table 4, the obtained F value of 13.98 (F(2, 115) = 13.98, p < 0.01) is significant; thus, with 99% confidence, it can be concluded that predicting attitudes towards marital infidelity based on marital conflict and

marital quality is significant, and both marital conflict and marital quality have predictive power for attitudes towards marital infidelity.

 Table 5

 Summary of Regression Results for Predicting Attitude Towards Marital Infidelity Based on Marital Conflict and Marital Quality

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t	Sig
Constant	23.15		4.14	0.001
Marital Conflict	0.19	0.358	3.66	0.001
Marital Quality	-0.13	-0.183	-2.35	0.02

According to the results in Table 5, marital conflict (t = 3.66, B = 0.358, p < 0.01) directly and marital quality (t = -2.35, B = -0.183, p < 0.02) inversely were able to predict attitudes towards marital infidelity (p < 0.05).

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present research was conducted with the aim of determining the relationship between marital conflict and marital quality with attitudes towards marital infidelity. The results indicated that there is a significant relationship between marital conflict and marital quality with attitudes towards marital infidelity. Furthermore, the results showed a significant relationship between marital conflict and attitudes towards marital infidelity, as well as between marital quality and attitudes towards marital infidelity. These findings are consistent with the previous results (Apostolou & Panayiotou, 2019; Brewer & Abell, 2015;





ÇEIİK et al., 2022; Ferdosi, 2019b; GHIURCA & VINTILA, 2019; Goodarzi, 2019; Monika et al., 2023; Navabinejad et al., 2023; Olugbenga, 2018; Pirzadeh et al., 2019; Safarzadeh & Azizpoor, 2017; Sharifi et al., 2013; Tasew & Getahun, 2021; Yasai Seke & Motthabian, 2022; Zangeneh & Arefi, 2022).

Evidence suggests that couples in today's society face numerous challenges in establishing intimate relationships and understanding the emotions of their spouses. It is evident that the deficiencies in the emotional and emotional competencies of couples, along with various other factors, will have adverse effects on their family life (Parsakia et al., 2023). One of these problems is marital conflict, which can undermine the foundations of a family and pave the way for divorce and separation. Marital conflict represents a continuous and significant lack of agreement between spouses, one of which reports it. The significance refers to the impact of this issue on the spouses' functioning, and continuity refers to disagreements that do not disappear over time (Weiser et al., 2023; Yasai Seke & Motthabian, 2022). When spouses have many unmet emotional needs and grow apart, they become vulnerable to the presence of another individual who can fulfill these needs. What complicates the situation is the individual's feelings towards the person who meets their emotional needs, potentially leading to love, and this feeling of love can take their behaviors and reactions out of their control (Ferdosi, 2019a; Kyegombe et al., 2022; Lişman & Corneliu, 2023).

These differences and conflicts create an undesirable family atmosphere, and spouses do not feel satisfied with their life conditions. These negative feelings towards life conditions and spouse can lead to tendencies towards deviations (Parsakia et al., 2023). Generally, it can be stated that if conflicts are not resolved effectively and correctly, they cause tension and conflict in the family and in the relationship between couples, making individuals involved in the conflict feel that they are not understood by the other party. This leads them to seek safer spaces that provide a sense of security and understanding, potentially leading to a relationship outside the family based on impulse decisions to escape from this psychological and emotional void caused by a conflict-ridden couple relationship, which can be the start of relationships leading to marital infidelity (Navabinejad et al., 2023; Olugbenga, 2018).

Another finding from the research showed that there is a negative correlation between marital quality and attitudes towards marital infidelity, meaning that an increase in marital quality can lead to a decrease in attitudes towards marital infidelity. Monika and et al. (2023) stated that marital quality has an inverse relationship with marital infidelity and that increasing marital quality can protect the family against marital infidelity (Monika et al., 2023). Explaining this finding, it can be said that since marital quality encompasses satisfaction, cohesion, and agreement, improving any of these components in marital relationships reduces attitudes towards marital infidelity. Just as a good marriage can be the best means to fulfill the need for love and belonging, disruption in achieving it causes frustration and disappointment. Couples who can reach agreements, resolve disagreements, perspective differences, and past lifestyle differences with mutual understanding, and reach compromises that satisfy them to some extent, have a more positive feeling towards their relationship and view it more committedly. Many of their needs are met, and they experience fewer emotional and psychological voids, serving as a shield against marital life damages, including marital infidelity.

#### 5. Limitations and Suggestions

Considering the explanatory power of these variables for marital infidelity, it is recommended that to prevent and reduce marital infidelity, educational and intervention programs for couples should focus on conflict resolution and effective methods. By teaching individual and couple skills to couples, they can be helped to improve their marital quality and protect their couple life against damages, including marital infidelity.

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#### **Declaration of Interest**

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

#### **Ethics Considerations**

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

#### **Authors' Contributions**

All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript for publication.

#### **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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