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Survey of the sexual satisfaction and the prevalence of marital infidelity (online and sexual) in the Iranian population

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Abstract

The quality of spouses' relationships is the basis of the health or illness of the individual, family, and society. Therefore, study efforts can predict and control possible problems in this field. Thus, in the present study, the survey of sexual satisfaction and the prevalence of marital infidelity (online and sexual) in the Iranian population was discussed. The research method was a descriptive-survey. The statistical population was all Iranian married men and women living in Iran, who were selected from this community and by multi-stage cluster sampling in four provincial capitals. Then, according to Morgan's sampling table, a proportional number of participants were taken from each center of the province, and their total was 1208 participants. Finally, the participants were examined by answering a few simple questions. Also, after mixing and classification, the frequency technique was used for experimenting and analyzing the data. The results showed that 204 participants (17.3 percent) were unsatisfied with sex with their spouses. Also, 189 participants (16 percent) reported online cheating, and 78 participants (6.6 percent) reported sexual cheating by their spouse. In this study, only the amount of online and sexual infidelity that the spouses were aware of was determined. Therefore, considering the importance of sexual satisfaction in consolidating the family structure and marital infidelity in its collapse, organizational planning by managers and mental health experts in the form of preventive and reformative programs seems necessary.

Keywords: *Marital satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, marital sexual infidelity, online marital infidelity, marriage age, marriage style, social network platforms*

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Introduction

The family is the first and the most unique social institution, the health and happiness of the society depends on the health and satisfaction of its members (Mikaili, Rahimi and Sedaghat, 2018). Therefore, many psychologists, sociologists and pathologists emphasize the role of family health in the health of society (Bastit, Pastilles and Mortelmans, 2018). Families in which couples understand each other and are satisfied with life have a more appropriate function and fulfill their roles better (Parvandi, Arefi, and Moradi, 2016; Sharifi Fard, Boroujerdi, Attaran, and Shast Fuladi, 2022). In the meantime, marriage as an important event in people's lives causes the formation of a family, and the family as a fundamental social unit provides the basis for human growth and excellence (Launer and Clark, 2017). This is why one of the most important factors in improving mental health in society is marriage. If it faces a problem, the mental health of the society will also be challenged and it will have negative and lasting effects such as depression, anxiety and other mental disorders (Olsen and Defrain, 2016; Sharifi Fard et al., 2022).

Therefore, the feeling of marital satisfaction plays an important role in the functioning of the family and society. Marital satisfaction is a multidimensional construct consisting of different dimensions. It can be measured by measuring current interactions between couples (mutual interest, care for each other, acceptance of each other, understanding and coordination in doing things, division of labor, sexual relations, expression of feelings and quality of communication) (Spiecher, Wenzel and Harvey, 2010; Greif, 2015). In this context, the number of children, the type of marriage and the amount of income can predict marital conflict (Shahmoradi,

Fatehizadeh and Ahmadi, 2011). Also, there is a relationship between the quality of life and marital satisfaction with the age of marriage, age gap with spouse, duration of marriage, reproductive age, place of residence and other demographic factors such as ethnic difference, family type, number of years of living together, number of family members, and spouse selection method. (Rashid, Kazemipour and Aghajanimersa, 2018; Ghofranipour, Amin Shokravi and Turkashund, 2017; Zare Shahabadi and Montazeri, 2019; Salek Ebrahimi, Faraz, Saadat and Mousavi, 2022). In the meantime, one of the important factors that predicts marital satisfaction is sexual satisfaction (Schoenfeld, Loving, Pope, Houston, and Stollhoffer, 2017; Sarjini, Taghipour, Mirseifard, and Moradi, 2019). Sexual satisfaction is defined as an assessment of the pleasure of sexual behavior (Flynn, Lin, Brunner, Ceranowski, Hahn et al., 2016) and the degree of satisfaction and happiness of couples from sexual intercourse and the ability to enjoy and make each other happy (Nordstrom, Westerkamp, Jaoko, Okiyo and Bailey, 2017). Physiological performance satisfaction is not always equal to sexual satisfaction (Nomejko and Dolinska-Zygmunt, 2014). In a study by Fernido, Capotelli, Moisisdis, Koutsogiannis, Giacomolos, and Hatzi Christou (2008), 80% of women reported being satisfied with their sex, although 70% of them mentioned at least one sexual problem. However, half of women who are satisfied with their physiological performance during intercourse have not experienced sexual satisfaction (Fernido et al., 2014). In this area, also in Portugal, a study on 1144 participants between the ages of 20 and 80 showed that men and women did not have

any difference in satisfaction with their sex life (Neto and Konscaupinto, 2013).

Similarly, based on other studies, between 40 and 60 percent of middle-aged adults in Denmark, Norway, Belgium, and Portugal reported sexual satisfaction (Treijn, Stolhofer, Janssen, Carvalhoira, Hald, Long et al., 2019). Also, a study of 38,747 participants in the United States found that the vast majority of participants were satisfied with their sex lives in the first six months of their relationship (83% of women and 83% of men). However, their views about their current sex lives were different. Almost half of the participants reported overall satisfaction (55% of women and 43% of men), and the other half felt neutral (18% of women and 16% of men) or dissatisfied (27% of women and 41% of men) with their sex lives. (Frederick, Lorgilespie and Garcia, 2017). Also, more than one in three participants (38% of women and 32% of men) claimed that their sex lives are now as passionate as they were in the beginning (Frederick et al., 2017). In general, various studies have pointed out the role of sexual satisfaction in marital satisfaction (Brzenia and Weissman, 2014; Selousarz, 2013; Nichols, 2015; Zhang, 2017; Madness, 2015; Byers, 2014).

In this regard, Hockathorn and Ashdan (2020) consider sexual dissatisfaction as one of the motivations for infidelity. Based on Acord et al.'s (2018) definition, infidelity is defined as "sexual intercourse outside the framework of a monogamous relationship" that results in significant distress among couples (Gravingen, Mitchell, Wellings, Johnson, Geer, 2017). A study by Mark, Janssen, and Millhassen (2011) found that there are two types of cheating behavior: emotional and sexual. In emotional infidelity, a married partner has a deep

emotional bond with someone other than the partner, while in sexual infidelity, actual sexual intercourse occurs with someone other than the spouse or partner. Studies have shown that the probability of sexual infidelity on the part of men and emotional infidelity on the part of women is higher (Sheeran, Appellaniz, & Wigner, 2018; Debel et al., 2016; Chono et al., 2013).

In this context, the results of the study by Indore, Perry Paldi, Hirschberg, Birunbaum and Deutsch (2015) showed that 21-25% of men and 11-15% of women committed infidelity during their married life. In another study conducted in the United States of America, Marquis (2009) reported that 21-70% of women and 26-75% of men had extramarital affairs at least once during their married life. Harris (2018) also stated in his study that 50 to 65 percent of couples therapy is related to the treatment of issues related to extramarital relationships.

The development of technology and rapid exchange of written-visual information has made it easier for some people to engage in some unhealthy motivations, such as experiencing virtual sexual or emotional relationships with another person, outside of the framework of marital commitment (Maho and Syotenik, 2010; Cooper, 2004). As Aviram and Amichai (2005) also state that with the introduction of technology, marital infidelity has been facilitated. On the other hand, some consider having sex with another person and some having an emotional relationship with another person, even though in virtual space, as betrayal (Jones, Dickey, Figuerdo and Yacob, 2007; Richardson, 2015).

In this context, people who have a low level of sexual and emotional satisfaction are more likely to engage in behaviors related to online cheating (Gonzales-Rivera et al.,

2020; Heckthorne and Ashdown, 2020). Studies have shown that 95.3% of people (97.1% of men and 86.2% of women) have experienced at least one type of online sexual activity (written, audio or video) as a form of Internet cheating. . It has included recreation, entertainment, education, seeking approval for sexual interests, purchasing sex tools, and seeking a sexual partner (Liu and Zheng, 2020). Therefore, it seems that social network platforms can be one of the underlying and facilitating factors for sexual and emotional marital infidelity (Hackthorne and Ashdown, 2020). In particular, the high rate of use of social networking platforms such as Facebook and Instagram continues to increase (Statista, 2022; Echenberg, Haas and Kassel, 2017). In Iran, the Instagram platform (91.5 percent) is significantly more used than other platforms (Global Stat, 2022). According to the latest statistics, 53% of Iranian people are Instagram users (Rights-Con, 2022). Accordingly, Sharifi Fard et al. (2021) also reported mild, moderate, and severe addiction to Instagram among Iranian students as 23.2, 53, and 21.7 percent, respectively. In the meantime, only 1.2% of users did not have an addiction, which indicates the stormy use of the Instagram platform among the Iranian student population.

Therefore, according to the high and increasing statistics of the use of social network platforms (especially Instagram in Iran) and their facilitating feature in extramarital relationships (emotional and sexual). Suppose the destructive effects of marital infidelity among couples and families, including marital violence, divorce, and psychosocial problems, and the effective role of sexual satisfaction in marital satisfaction and marital satisfaction in the healthy functioning of the family and

society. Thus, in this study, the survey of couples' sexual satisfaction and the prevalence of marital infidelity (sexually and online) will be discussed in the Iranian population.

Method

The current research is applied in terms of purpose and survey type in terms of statistical method. The statistical population of this research includes all married Iranians living in Iran. The center of Tehran was chosen by the multi-stage cluster type probability sampling method of three provincial capitals and also due to the large concentration of people from different cities, groups and cultures in the capital of the country (four cities in total). According to Morgan's sampling table, a proportional number of people were selected from each center of the province, and their total was 1208. Finally, some questions were asked to the participants: 1- Are you satisfied with your sexual relationship with your spouse? 2- Have you seen your spouse betray you in cyberspace (for example, WhatsApp or Instagram) (exchange of romantic or sexual content such as text or image that you are sure of)? 3- Have you seen sexual infidelity from your spouse (physical sex with another person that you are sure of)? The data was completed online.

It should also be noted that because the questions were sensitive, the probability of filtered or unrealistic answers was higher in face-to-face or face-to-face situations and less online without the presence of the questioner. After mixing and classification, the frequency technique was used in SPSS-25 software to test and analyze the data.

Materials

Body Image Concern Scale. The body image concern questionnaire was designed in 2005 by Littleton, Axom, and Pury, which

includes 19 items with two dimensions of dissatisfaction with appearance (12 items) and interference with one's social functioning (7 items), which are on a five-option Likert scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always) are scored. Littleton et al. (2005) checked the reliability of this questionnaire using the internal consistency method and obtained Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.93. Also, Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the first and second factors was reported as 0.92 and 0.76, respectively, and the correlation coefficient between the two factors was 0.69. In Iran, Basaknejad and Ghafari (2006) reported the validity of this test based on internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha method of 95%. Inteziri and Alavizadeh (2013) also reported the internal consistency of this test to be 89% using Cronbach's alpha method.

Physical Appearance Perfectionism Scale.

The Physical Appearance Perfectionism Scale (PAPS) was presented by Young and Stoeber (2012), which has two components: hope for perfection and worry about imperfection, and has a total of 12 items: worry about imperfection has seven items and hope for perfection has five items. They are graded on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the scale's total score are 0.83, concern about imperfection is 0.85, and hope for perfection is 0.80. Also, the scale's total score has high time stability, which was checked through the retest method. The findings show that this scale is a reliable and valid tool for evaluating the positive and negative aspects

of physical appearance perfectionism. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was obtained for the total score of the scale of 0.90, for the component of worry about defects of 0.89, and for the component of hope for perfection, it was 0.89, which indicates the reliability of this questionnaire.

Appearance-based comparisons on Instagram.

Fardouly, Pinkus, and Vartanian (2015) used three questions to measure appearance-based comparisons. 1- When using Instagram, I compare my physical appearance with the physical appearance of others. 2- When using Instagram, I compare how I dress with others. 3- When using Instagram, I sometimes compare my poses with other people's poses. However, since these questions did not cover all aspects of this variable, the checklist of comparisons based on Appearance on Instagram designed by Sadeghzadeh et al. (2019) was used to measure. Cronbach's alpha of this questionnaire was 0.92, which indicates its reliability. Also, to check the validity, the correlation between each item with the total score was calculated, and the average of these coefficients was 0.76. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was calculated, and the value was 0.92, indicating this questionnaire's reliability.

Findings

According to the elimination of incomplete data (n=29), 1179 people were included in the analysis. First, the demographic characteristics of the research sample, its investigation and results are presented below.

Table 1: Frequency and percentage of the study sample based on age, education and gender

| | Index | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----|-------|-----------|------------|
| Age | 15-20 | 61 | 4/4 |
| | 20-25 | 263 | 13/7 |
| | 25-30 | 231 | 16/5 |
| | 30-35 | 216 | 18/3 |

| | | | |
|-----------|-------------------|------|------|
| | 35-40 | 195 | 19/6 |
| | 40-50 | 161 | 22/3 |
| | 50-60 | 52 | 5/2 |
| | Total | 1179 | 100 |
| Education | Under diploma | 98 | 8/3 |
| | Diploma | 331 | 28/1 |
| | Associate degree | 99 | 8/4 |
| | Bachelor's degree | 441 | 37/4 |
| | Master's degree | 172 | 14/6 |
| | PhD | 38 | 3/2 |
| | Total | 1179 | 100 |
| Gender | Male | 310 | 26/3 |
| | Female | 869 | 73/7 |
| | Total | 1179 | 100 |

According to Table 1, 63 people (4.4 percent) aged between 15 and 20 years old; 263 people (13.7 percent) 20 to 25 years old; 231 people (16.5 percent) 25 to 30 years old; 216 people (18.3 percent) 30 to 35 years old; 195 people (19.6 percent) 35 to 40 years old; 161 people (22.3 percent) 40 to 50 years old; and 52 people (2.5 percent) 50 to 60 years old. In terms of education: 98 people (8.3 percent) graduated for high school; 331 people (28.1

percent) have a diploma; 66 people (8.4 percent) have an associate degree ; 441 people (37.4 percent) have a bachelor's degree; 172 people (14.6 percent) have a master's s; 38 people (2.3 percent) have a Ph.D. According to the results, 310 people (26.3%) were men and 869 people (73.7%) were women. Next, the data related to the field of study, occupation and economic status of the participants were analyzed.

Table 2: Frequency and percentage of study, job and economic status

| | Index | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------|---------------|-----------|------------|
| Field of study | Art | 143 | 12/1 |
| | STEM | 258 | 29/9 |
| | Exp. Sciences | 310 | 26/3 |
| | Humanities | 468 | 39/7 |
| | Total | 1179 | 100 |
| Job | Unemployed | 73 | 6/2 |
| | Housewife | 422 | 35/8 |
| | Self-employed | 273 | 23/2 |
| | Employee | 254 | 21/5 |
| | Student | 157 | 13/3 |
| | Total | 1179 | 100 |
| Economic status | Very good | 37 | 3/1 |
| | Good | 321 | 27/2 |
| | Average | 705 | 59/8 |
| | Weak | 116 | 9/8 |
| | Total | 1179 | 100 |

According to Table 2, in terms of field of study: 143 people (12.1 percent) in art fields; 258 people (29.9 percent) in technical engineering and mathematics; 310 people (26.3 percent) in experimental sciences; 468 people (39.7 percent) in humanities. In terms of jobs: 73 people (6.2 percent) were unemployed; 422 people (35.8 percent) were housewives; 273 people (23.2 percent) were

self-employed; 254 were employees (21.5 percent); 157 people (13.3%) were students. In terms of economic status: 37 people (1.3 percent) were very good; 321 people (27.2 percent) were good; 705 people (59.8 percent) were average; 116 people (9.8 percent) were weak. Other demographic indicators of the sample are also presented in Table 3.

Table 3- The main demographic indicators of the study sample (couples)

| | Index | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------------------------|--|-----------|------------|
| Have child | No | 491 | 41/6 |
| | Yes | 688 | 58/4 |
| Marriage method | With previous acquaintance and voluntary | 562 | 47/7 |
| | With previous acquaintance and non-voluntary | 41 | 3/5 |
| | Voluntary and traditional | 485 | 41/1 |
| | Voluntary and mandatory | 91 | 7/7 |
| Marriage age | Bellow 20 | 341 | 28/9 |
| | 20-30 | 743 | 63/1 |
| | Above 30 | 94 | 8 |
| Marital sexual satisfaction | No | 204 | 17/3 |
| | Yes | 975 | 82/7 |
| Marital infidelity (online) | No | 990 | 84 |
| | Yes | 165 | 14 |
| | Much | 24 | 2 |
| Marital infidelity (physical, sexual) | No | 1101 | 93/4 |
| | Yes | 65 | 5/5 |
| | Much | 13 | 1/1 |

According to Table 3: 491 people (41.6 percent) had children and 688 people (58.4 percent) had no children. Regarding the marriage style, 562 people (47.7 percent) had a previous acquaintance and optional marriage; 41 people (3.5 percent) had previous dating and almost forced marriage; 485 people (41.1 percent) had voluntary and traditional marriage; 91 people (7.7 percent) had forced and traditional marriage. In terms of marriage age: 341 people (28.9 percent) were under 20 years old; 743 people (63.1 percent) were between 20 and 30 years old; 94 people (8 percent) were over 30 years old.

Considering the large sample size in the study, these results are of great importance. Regarding the main variables of the study, 204 people (17.3 percent) were not satisfied with sex with their spouse and 975 people (82.7 percent) were satisfied with sex with their spouse. About infidelity in cyberspace and through social network platforms such as Instagram: 990 people (84%) have not seen infidelity on the part of their spouse; 165 people (14 percent) were betrayed; 24 people (2 percent) had experienced many betrayals by their spouses. Thus, in total, 189 people (16%) had experienced online infidelity by their spouse. About sexual infidelity: 1101

people (93.4 percent) did not see infidelity from their spouse; 65 people (5.5 percent) were betrayed; 13 people (1.1 percent) have seen many betrayals by their spouses. Therefore, in total, 78 people (6.6 percent) had experienced physical sexual betrayal by their spouse. In the meantime, only the amount of online and sexual infidelity that the spouses were aware of was determined.

Discussion

This study aimed to survey sexual satisfaction and the prevalence of marital infidelity (sexual and online) in the Iranian population. The present study showed that 82.7% of the participants were satisfied with the quality of sex with their spouse and 17.3% of them were not satisfied. In the study of Fernido et al. (2008) related to this finding, 80% of women declared that they were satisfied with their sexual relationship (Nomejko et al., 2014). Also, in another study, between 40 and 60 percent of middle-aged people in Denmark, Norway, Belgium, and Portugal reported sexual satisfaction (Trien et al., 2019). A large study of 38,747 people in the United States also found that the majority were satisfied with their sex lives in the first six months of their relationship (83% of women; 83% of men), but satisfaction with their current sex life varied. Almost half of the participants reported overall satisfaction (55% women; 43% men), and the rest felt neutral (18% women; 16% men) or dissatisfied (27% women; 41% men). Also, a study in Portugal, on 1144 participants aged 20 to 80 years, showed that men and women did not significantly differ in satisfaction with their sex life (Neto et al., 2013).

According to the results of this study and other studies, sexual dissatisfaction in Iranian married population is less than in other countries. This issue can be related to the Eastern adaptive culture (here, being satisfied with what is) as well as advertisements and less sexual freedom in Iranian culture. Value and religious frameworks can also be among the things that contribute to sexual satisfaction. These

values and religious frameworks prevent or reduce unrestrained sexual fantasy (especially fantasy of sexual relations with another person). It also leads to being faithful to the sexual relationship with the spouse and trying to correct the possible problems of sexual communication, which results in a higher frequency of sexual satisfaction. On the other hand, encouraging factors for marital satisfaction (caused by sexual satisfaction) lead to the increase and maintenance of behaviors related to sexual satisfaction and ultimately marital satisfaction. (1) enhancements in couples' relationships with the intention that quality sexual relationships are in themselves enhancements; (2) religious recommendations about the value of couples' sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction; (3) cultural emphases. Skinner's behavior-consequence theory also confirms the explanation that encouragement and reinforcement lead to an increase in target behavior.

Also, the upcoming study about sexual infidelity showed that 93.4% of the participants have not seen infidelity from their spouse, 5.5% have seen infidelity and 1.1% have seen much infidelity. Eindoret al.'s (2015) study in America also showed that 21-25% of men and 11-15% of women committed adultery during their married life. In another study, Marquis (2009) reported in the United States that 21-70% of women and 26-75% of men had extramarital affairs at least once during their married life. Also, Harris (2018) showed in his study that 50 to 65 percent of couples therapy is related to treating issues related to extramarital relationships.

Marital sexual infidelity is less in the Iranian population (compared to the results of studies in other countries) can be related to three big inhibiting factors: cultural, social and legal-religious. (1) About the cultural factor. Considering the collective and traditional moral values about loyalty and the immorality and anti-value of marital infidelity in Eastern culture, especially Iran, from ancient times until now, the cultural factor is considered a serious deterrent

factor. (2) About the social factor. Severe psychological pressure from family and acquaintances, if betrayal is revealed, and then severe social exclusions, including blame from those around you, rejection from family and friends, divorce, distance from children, lead to social inhibition. In this regard, observing the humiliation of cheating people in society through the observational learning model can also be considered as a deterrent for others. (3) legal and religious factor. Harsh legal punishments (if proven) and religious prohibitions and punishments (worldly or hereafter in case of not returning from one's work) provide a negative and inhibiting mental background regarding marital infidelity. On the other hand, in the case of initial actions (such as familiarity and superficial conversations), these mental contexts lead to torment of conscience (superego in Freud's theory) or fear (external reality). It can hinder the progress towards the next serious action (here sexual infidelity). As in Freud's theory, the superego part of personality can prevent certain behaviors by creating moral anxiety. Also, laws, through punishment or encouragement, reduce or increase the probability of behavior (Skinner's theory). Here too, the torment of conscience (superego) and fear (legal punishment) can be a religious and legal obstacle for marital infidelity or extramarital relations.

Other results about online infidelity also showed that 84% of the participants had not seen infidelity from their spouse, 14% had seen infidelity and 2% had experienced this type of infidelity a lot (online and through platforms). In this context, Liu et al.'s study (2020) also showed that 95.3% of people (97.1% of men and 86.2% of women) have experienced at least one type of online sexual activity as a form of Internet cheating. In explaining this finding, i.e., the lower prevalence of online cheating in Iran compared to the results of studies in other countries, it should be said: the triple deterrent factors that were mentioned about sexual cheating by spouses in the Iranian population, are also true for online cheating.

Also, the higher prevalence of online cheating than sexual cheating in this study depends on several factors. (1) the milder and superficial nature of online infidelity; (2) easy access to social networking platforms; (3) the existence of many users on these platforms; (4) audiovisual appeals and engaging power of platforms; Finally (5) the possibility of the user remaining hidden and his betrayal not being revealed. Medium sample size, survey of participants who may be unaware of their spouse's infidelity, and not implementing a structured tool were among the limitations of this research. Also, the bisexual sample is considered both as a limitation and as a strength in this study. Therefore, future studies can target the participant themselves to know whether or not they have cheated, in which case more accurate statistics may be obtained. Also, a unisex or larger sample reveals more accurate statistics. The use of structured psychological tools also provides multidimensional and more detailed information. According to the results, special trainings for couples, especially along with the use of social network platforms and the updating of relevant existing trainings, can prevent the beginning and face possible infidelity and improve sexual satisfaction. In this case, social networking platforms can be a suitable platform.

Ethics

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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Conflict of Interest

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

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