



Predicting Infidelity Proneness Using Early Maladaptive Schemas

Ali Zeinali^{1,*} and Lili Amirsardari²

¹Department of Psychology, Urmia Branch, Islamic Azad University, Urmia, Iran

²Young Researchers and Elite Club, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran

*Corresponding author: Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Urmia Branch, Islamic Azad University, Urmia, Iran. Tel: +98-9143409171, Email: a.zeinali@iaurmia.ac.ir

Received 2017 May 23; Revised 2017 July 19; Accepted 2018 August 12.

Abstract

Background: Infidelity in marriage is defined as one of the main threatening factors in stability and survival of a marriage. The concept of infidelity is defined as the violation of the governing convention for couples, who have extramarital relationships.

Objectives: The present study aimed at predicting infidelity proneness using early maladaptive schemas (roots development).

Methods: A total of 357 undergraduate students of Urmia Branch, Islamic Azad University, Iran, were selected through random cluster sampling during 2015 and 2016. The students were assessed using the Schema Questionnaire-Short Form (SQ-SF) and Infidelity Proneness Scale.

Results: The results of the regression analysis showed that early maladaptive schemas (roots development) are significant predictors of infidelity proneness ($P < 0.005$).

Conclusions: Primary maladaptive schemas (roots development) are significant predictors of infidelity proneness, in a way that the role of early childhood events in instigating the person to commit this destructive behavior becomes more noticeable. Predictors of infidelity proneness are as follows: disconnection and rejection, over vigilance/inhibition, deprivation, other-direction, and impaired autonomy and performance.

Keywords: Infidelity Proneness, Early Maladaptive Schemas, Predicting

1. Background

Infidelity is one of the major threatening factors in stability and survival of a marriage (1). The concept of infidelity is defined as the violation of laws governing the relationship of couples for having extramarital interactions; a sociologist named Kinsely was one of the pioneers, who divided the extramarital behaviors to two categories, which are sexual and emotional (2). Sexual infidelity is defined as a behavior of sexual nature with someone, who is not your primary partner, and emotional infidelity refers to behaviors, such as spending time with someone, who is not your partner without having sex. These behaviors may include talking, sexual fantasies or going on a trip that also can lead to an emotional attachment, yet there is no sexual activity involved (3). However, nowadays, by the advent of the Internet (World Wide Web), Internet infidelity is considered as the 3rd type of infidelity that involves a relationship with someone, who is not the individual's primary partner, in order to gain sexual pleasure via alternative ways, such as email and social networks (4). Infidelity and lack of commitment in marriage eventually leads to raunchiness between partners and disrupts safe and secure family relationships (5). Several research studies have

been conducted about infidelity in Iran, indicating primary (early) maladaptive schemas and friendly attitude in married men, who have or have not broken their vows. The present study showed that impaired limits is an effective factor in marital intimacy (6). As the results revealed, there is a meaningful relationship between primary maladaptive schemas and the attachment style in females with infidelity, including schemas of emotional deprivation and abandonment, impaired autonomy and performance, and impaired limits over vigilance and inhibition (7). Investigation of the relationship between love schemas and the justifications of extramarital relations among married females of Isfahan revealed that secure love schemas are determining factors in maintaining a stable and friendly relationship (8). Since infidelity in marriage is a new phenomenon, and there has been no research carried out regarding this issue in Iran, the present research led the current researchers to embark on predicting infidelity proneness via primary maladaptive schemas.

Infidelity proneness in marriage refers to the tendency towards a sensual touch or emotional attachment with someone outside the person's main relationship (9). Research carried out in the field of infidelity showed under-

lying factors such as (1) deficiency pattern (emotional and sexual deficiency in primary relations, leads to infidelity and plays a major role in building and sustaining it), (2) anger, (3) envy, (4) revenge, (5) need of variety, (6) sexual dissatisfaction, (7) having a sexual relationship prior to marriage (10), (8) individual differences (such as personality traits and views), (9) quality of a relationship (level of dedication and satisfaction of the primary relationship, whether emotional or sexual), (10) circumstances (as the opportunity to commit infidelity or being attracted to a third party) as a stepping stone of infidelity in relationships (11,12), and (11) forced marriage (13). Extramarital relationships ruin trust in a relationship and marital intimacy in couples and result in negative and destructive effects in life. Adverse consequences, such as depression and divorce can be mentioned (14). By analyzing the reasons behind divorce in addition to social and economic factors, individual and psychological factors are of utmost importance.

Schemas are fairly robust internal structures comprised of experiences, ideas, and motives that are applied for organizing new data and are determining factors in understanding and comprehension of phenomenon; schemas act as a lens, by which we can see the world around us (15). Young calls the category of schemas that result in shaping psychological distress, “primary maladaptive schemas” and he believes that schemas, refer to self-continual pattern of memories, excitement, knowledge, senses and feelings that guide behaviors, and they are fixed and lengthy subjects that are shaped in early childhood and continue towards adulthood and eventually develop through all avenues of life and determine behaviors, feelings, and relations with other people (16, 17). While primary incompatible schemas become activated by chance, level of released emotion whether directly or indirectly results in various types of psychological distress, such as depression, stress, anorexia nervosa, and interpersonal problems (18). Young and Flanagan a psychologist and the head of research in schemas, identified 18 negative schemas that grow in early life (19). He suggested that these eight schemas are divided, according to five unsatisfied emotional needs that he called schema areas (17).

1.1. First Area: Disconnection and Rejection

People, whose schemas fall in this area, cannot interact in secure and satisfying attachment with others. The schema of this area includes: (1) abandonment/instability: People with this schema believe that their relationships with important people in their lives is not stable; (2) mistrust/abuse: People with this schema believe that others will exploit them with the smallest opportunity; (3) emotional/deprivation: People with this schema believe that

their emotional needs will not be satisfied in establishment of emotional relationships with others; (4) defectiveness/shame: People with this schema believe that bad people are imperfect and worthless and if they expose themselves to the others views, they will be rejected; (5) social isolation/alienation: People with this schema feel they are different from others and are an inappropriate patch of the society.

1.2. Second Area: Impaired Autonomy and Performance

In this area, the person's expectation from himself/herself and the environment interacts with her/his tangible abilities for separation, survival and function, independently, or to perform work successfully. The schema of this area include: (1) dependency/incompetency: The belief that a person cannot perform every day responsibilities without the help of others at an acceptable level; (2) vulnerability to harm or illness: Extreme fear that disaster is near and there is a probability of it happening, and one cannot avoid it; (3) enmeshed/undeveloped self: Intense emotional connection and closeness with one of the most important people in life at the expense of loss of individuality or natural social development; (4) failure: The belief that a person has failed or will fail in the future, and that failure is inevitable.

1.3. Third Area: Impaired Limits

The internal constraints of these people have not grown enough on mutual respect and restraint. This schema includes: (1) entitlement/grandiosity: Those with such a schema believe that they have special rights compared to others; (2) insufficient self-control/discipline: These people cannot achieve their goals to show restraint and cannot sufficiently tolerate failure.

1.4. Fourth Area: Other-Direction

These individuals give priority to satisfy the needs of others and do it to receive emotional support and ongoing relationship and avoid revenge. The schema of this area includes: (1) subjugation: Feeling forced to extreme submission of their control to others, which takes place to avoid anger, retaliation, and denial; (2) self-sacrifice: extreme focus on satisfying the needs of others in everyday life at the cost of not satisfying their own needs; (3) approval-seeking/recognition-seeking: Extreme emphasis on the confirmation of attention and acceptance from others, which prevents the semantic formation of confidence and reality from itself.

1.5. Fifth Area: Over Vigilance/Inhibition

Extreme emphasis on rejection of the feelings and impulses to act according to their inflexible and internal rules even at the cost of losing joy and peace of mind. This schema includes: (1) negativity/pessimism: Deep and constant focus on the negative aspects of life with underestimating positive and optimistic aspects of life; (2) emotional inhibition/radical inhibition of actions: Feelings and spontaneous communication that are usually developed in order to avoid the exclusion of others, a sense of shame and loss of self-control over impulses; (3) unrelenting standards/hyper criticalness: The person believes that in order to achieve ambitious standards of behavior and performance, he/she needs to spend a lot of effort and this is usually done to avoid criticism; (4) punitiveness: It is believed that people should be punished severely for their mistakes. According to the significant role of maladaptive schemas in interpersonal relationships, the current study was conducted to predict infidelity proneness using early maladaptive schemas (roots development) and results of this study can be used in therapeutic schemas, Premarital counseling and so on.

2. Objectives

The hypothesis of this research was that early maladaptive schemas (roots development) are predictors of infidelity proneness.

3. Methods

This was a descriptive-correlational study. In this study, the samples were selected through the cluster random sampling method. A total of 357 single male and female students of Urmia Branch, Islamic Azad University, Iran, during years 2015 to 2016 were selected using the Morgan table. The researchers used cluster random sampling method because a large community makes it impossible to provide a list of every individual. The sample consisted of 357 students, who were selected from several colleges, using the random multistage cluster sampling method. First, three colleges were randomly selected from five colleges of the university, then four classrooms were randomly selected from each college, and finally half of the students in every classroom were randomly selected. Furthermore, 357 completed questionnaires were received back from the students. Thus, this method was used to allow an equal chance for the selected individuals.

Due to the purpose and nature of this research, the best way to gather the needed information is to complete an inventory; therefore, two inventories were used in this study.

The Early Maladaptive Schema inventory by Young and Brown was designed to measure early maladaptive schemas (16). The SQ-SF was created because of its brevity, and it is used as an instrument to measure primary maladaptive schemas. The SQ-SF includes 75 items of the 205 items from the original form. These 75 items questioned 15 early maladaptive schemas of emotional deprivation (sentences 1 to 5), abandonment (sentences 6 to 10), mistrust/abuse (sentences 11 to 15), social isolation (sentences 16 to 20), defectiveness/shame (sentences 21 to 25), failure (sentences 26 to 30), dependence/incompetence (sentences 31 to 35), vulnerability to harm or illness (sentences 36 to 40), enmeshment (sentences 41 to 45), subjugation (sentences 46 to 50), self-sacrifice (sentences 51 to 55), emotional inhibition (sentences 56 to 60), unrelenting standards (sentences 61 to 65), entitlement (sentences 66 to 70), and insufficient self-control/discipline (sentences 71 to 75). Each one of these 75 scales of the SQ-SF were graded on a six-point scale; 1. Totally wrong about me, 2. Almost wrong about me, 3. Slightly more true than false, 4. Almost true, 5. Truer about me/truer than me, 6. Fully described me. A higher score on each item indicated the presence of a wide range of early maladaptive schemas in the answerer (20). The reliability and validity of this instrument has been demonstrated by several studies (21). The Farsi version of this inventory was standardized at the University of Tehran, Iran, by Divandari et al. Therefore, the internal consistency, obtained using Cronbach's alpha, was 0.97 in the female population, and 0.98 in the male population (22).

These 11 items, developed by Drigotas and Barta, are called "The Infidelity Proneness Scale". The scale was arranged to assess individual's emotional as well as physical intimacy apart from their primary relationship. Questions were intentionally initiated, according to the feeling or behavior that may be regarded as faithful or unfaithful and gradually moved towards more confronting questions. It is required for the respondents to measure their feelings on the level of intensity according on an eight-point Likert scale with zero indicating no feeling or behavior, and eight indicating strong feeling or extreme behavior. Instances of such questions pertain: (1) How appealing the person seemed to you? (4) How often do you think about him or her? (7) How often you get engaged in activities that couples usually do? (For instance, time of togetherness or talking on the phone). (11) How intimate were you? Higher scores represent the amount of emotional, physical, and cognitive intimacy that someone has besides his or her primary marriage.

Drigotas and Barta claimed that scores at the midpoint or higher revealed "intimate, physical extra-dyadic behavior" (p.512) because respondents reported their relation-

ships both “serious” and “exclusive” that represents infidelity proneness (23). As the authors mentioned earlier, overall score doesn’t specifically reveal intimacy, however, it they correlate with behavior ($r = 0.80$). The items that led to overall infidelity proneness score were found to have acceptable internal consistency with an alpha coefficient of 0.93.

In order to test the scale’s validity in terms of whether it represents infidelity or not, a sample of 67 undergraduate students were asked to express whether they believed that their partner would be unfaithful if they engaged in emotional or physical behaviors, represented by a midpoint score on the infidelity proneness scale. Based on 76% of respondents, this constituted infidelity proneness (11).

4. Results

The mean and standard deviation of descriptive findings in a sample of 338 (140 males and 198 females) are shown in Table 1. According to Table 1, a high score in infidelity proneness was related to males, and most schemas were connected to over vigilance and inhibition, disconnection and rejection, other-direction, impaired autonomy and performance, and impaired limits. According to Table 2, regarding the meaningful amount of $P < 0.005$ and square of $R = 0.16$, the conclusion was that over vigilance and inhibition could determine 16% of variance of infidelity in a marriage. In other words, over vigilance and inhibition (roots development) is a predictor of infidelity proneness. Also, based on the meaningful scale of $P < 0.005$ and $R = 0.14$, it was shown that there is a meaningful linear relationship between the two variables and the other-direction predicts 14% of variance in infidelity proneness. In the fourth area, regarding the amount of $P < 0.005$ and square of $R = 0.06$, it was found that impaired autonomy and performance predicts 6% of variance of infidelity proneness.

In conclusion, in the final area based on the amount of $P > 0.05$ and square of $R = 0.03$, it could be stated that there is no meaningful linear relationship between the two variables. Therefore, linear impaired limits (roots development) are not a predictor of infidelity proneness. Other findings of this study refer to the lack of a meaningful relationship among age, gender, and university major with infidelity proneness.

5. Discussion

The results revealed that out of five areas of primary maladaptive schemas, four areas were predictors of infidelity proneness. Out of five areas, over vigilance and inhi-

Table 1. Descriptive Data of Primary Maladaptive Schemas and Infidelity Proneness

Schemas' Areas	Mean		Variance	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Infidelity proneness	45.32	42.74	19.09	20.75
Over vigilance and inhibition	39.56	41.53	15.20	71.46
Disconnection and rejection	64.55	58.95	16.73	18.85
Other-direction	29.56	29.16	10.10	10.65
Impaired autonomy and performance	47.87	45.51	17.95	17.12
Impaired limits	31.79	30.41	9.70	9.78

bition (roots development) were strong predictors in marital infidelity. By explaining the results, one could declare that qualities, such as inflexible rules, perfectionism, excessive reproach, and unrealistic expectations of a partner result in a superficial relationship as well as lack of intimacy with a primary partner, leading to a search for a complete person as an alternative. Another predictor for extramarital proneness is disconnection and rejection that can be found in individuals, who as a result of appalling experiences in early childhood and lack of secure attachment in adolescence, move from a destructive relationship to another in a careless way. This idea, in individuals, in whom emotional relationship with others cannot be satisfied, can be regarded as a positive premonition in struggling over primary marital vows. On the other hand, growing up in insensitive, cold and angry families results in instability of interpersonal relationships, which is considered an independent factor in lack of commitment in marital relationships. It is worth mentioning that these individuals are so sensitive to relationships with these people due to the fear of separation from people, such as parents, spouses and friends, and if they are left alone, they will react in a jealous way. Another finding showed that the other-direction (roots development) has a role of premonition in infidelity proneness. The other-direction area indicates behaviors, such as prioritizing others’ needs for continuation of emotional relationships or avoiding revenge. As a result, overt reaction to rejection, and trickery and deception, makes a person susceptible to reactions. The area of impaired autonomy and performance is another predictor in infidelity proneness of individuals; to clarify this finding, it can be stated that as far as the person’s mind is pre-occupied with one or more important people in their life and the idea that one of them can’t live without the other, results in getting lost in the other one’s personality, lack of identity, and aimlessness in life. These are factors of instability in interpersonal relationships. On the other hand, needing someone, who is supportive makes a person move

Table 2. Prediction of Infidelity Proneness Based on Primary Maladaptive Schemas

Variable	β	B	F	R	R ²	P Value
Over vigilance and inhibition	0.40	0.32	63.13	0.40	0.16	0.00
Disconnection and rejection	0.39	0.35	28.20	0.28	0.08	0.00
Other-direction	0.43	0.22	55.56	0.38	0.14	0.00
Impaired autonomy and performance	-0.25	-0.22	7.90	0.22	0.06	0.005
Impaired limits	0.02	-0.11	6.98	0.21	0.03	0.06

from one relation to another in order to receive more support.

Another finding revealed that impaired limits have no role in predicting infidelity proneness. By explaining such finding, it can be stated that it seems traits, such as grandiosity and competency, selfishness, disregarding others' right, and higher self-confidence have no connection whatsoever with marital infidelity. Additional results of this research show the lack of relationship between gender and infidelity, which may be due to the blending effects of culture and change. The current research was proved by Fricker (11) Wiederman and Allgeier (24), Feldman and Cauffman (25), Rafiee et al. (7), Sharifi et al. (8), Koolae et al. (6), and Yoosefi (26).

According to the results, it is advised to follow the same procedure on people in different cities, age groups, educational backgrounds, and different cultures. Limitations of this research can be regarded as the use of self-reporting questionnaire and samples that make it almost impossible to overgeneralize the results to other communities. It is well advised that in further research, infidelity proneness in married couples, who attend family courts, be investigated.

Acknowledgments

The current researchers would like to thank all of the students, who participated in this study.

Footnote

Authors' Contribution: Ali Zeinali and Lili Amirsardari conceived and designed the evaluation tool, collected and interpreted the clinical data, performed the statistical analysis, and drafted the manuscript. Ali Zeinali revised the manuscript critically for important intellectual content. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

References

1. Mark KP, Janssen E, Milhausen RR. Infidelity in heterosexual couples: demographic, interpersonal, and personality-related predictors of extradyadic sex. *Arch Sex Behav*. 2011;**40**(5):971-82. doi: [10.1007/s10508-011-9771-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-011-9771-z). [PubMed: [21667234](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21667234/)].
2. Kinsey AC, Pomeroy WB, Martin CE. *Sexual behavior in the human male*. Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders; 1984.
3. Shackelford TK, LeBlanc GJ, Drass E. Emotional reactions to infidelity. *Cogn Emot*. 2000;**14**(5):643-59.
4. Cooper AL. Sexuality and the internet: Surfing into the new millennium. *Cyberpsychol Behav*. 1998;**1**(2):187-93. doi: [10.1089/cpb.1998.1.187](https://doi.org/10.1089/cpb.1998.1.187).
5. Torabain L. 2012 [A comparative study of personality traits and attachment style of couples, unfaithful and normal]. *J Qomon*. Persian.
6. Koolae A, Motlagh T, Esmaili A, Rahmatizadeh M. [The comparison of early maladaptive schema and intimacy in married infidelity and non-infidelity men]. *Iran J Psychiatr Nurs*. 2014;**2**(3):12-23. Persian.
7. Rafiee S, Hatami A, Foroughi A. [Relationship between early maladaptive schema and attachment style in woman with infidelity]. *J Woman Soc*. 2011;**2**(1):21-36. Persian.
8. Sharifi M, Haji Heydari M, Khorvash F, Fatehizadeh M. [Correlation between love schemas and justifications for extramarital involvement in married women]. *J Res Behav Sci*. 2012;**10**(6):526-34. Persian.
9. Yarab PE, Allgeier ER. Don't even think about it: The role of sexual fantasies as perceived unfaithfulness in heterosexual dating relationships. *Journal of Sex Education and Therapy J Sex Educ Ther*. 1998;**23**(3):246-54.
10. Roscoe B, Cavanaugh LE, Kennedy DR. Dating infidelity: behaviors, reasons and consequences. *Adolescence*. 1988;**23**(89):35-43. [PubMed: [3381685](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/3381685/)].
11. Fricker J. *Predicting infidelity: The role of attachment styles, lovstyles, and the investment model*. Swinburne University of Technology Melbourne, Australia; 2006.
12. Wiederman MW, Hurd C. Extradyadic involvement during dating. *J Soc Pers Relatsh*. 1999;**16**(2):265-74.
13. Momeni Javid M, Shoa Kazemi M. [The effect of psychotherapy in infidelity of married couples and the quality of their lives in Tehran]. *J Res Health*. 2015;**7**(2). Persian.
14. Marchese Jeanfreau M. *A qualitative study investigating the decision-making process of women's participation in marital infidelity*. Kansas state university; 2009.
15. Clark DA, Beck AT. *Scientific foundations of cognitive theory and therapy of depression*. New York: Wiley and sons; 1999.
16. Young JE. Cognitive therapy for personality disorders: A schema-focused approach (Practitioner's resource series). In: Sarasota FL, editor. *Professional Resource Press/Professional Resource Exchange*. Professional Resource Press; 1999.
17. Young J, Klasko J, Weishar M. *Schema therapy: A practitioner's guide*. New York: The Guilford Press; 2003.
18. Nordahl HM, Holthe H, Haugum JA. Early maladaptive schemas in patients with or without personality disorders: does schema modification predict symptomatic relief? *Clin Psychol Psychother*. 2005;**12**(2):142-9. doi: [10.1002/cpp.430](https://doi.org/10.1002/cpp.430).

19. Young JE, Flanagan C. Schema-focused therapy for narcissistic patients. In: Ronningstam EF, editor. *Disorders of narcissism: Diagnostic, clinical, and empirical implications*. Washington, D.C: Jason Aronson; 2000.
20. Welburn K, Coristine M, Dagg P, Pontefract A, Jordan S. The Schema Questionnaire-Short Form: Factor analysis and relationship between schemas and symptoms. *Cogn Ther Res*. 2002;**26**(4):519-30.
21. Bosmans G, Braet C, Van Vlierberghe L. Attachment and symptoms of psychopathology: early maladaptive schemas as a cognitive link? *Clin Psychol Psychother*. 2010;**17**(5):374-85. doi: [10.1002/cpp.667](https://doi.org/10.1002/cpp.667). [PubMed: [20013761](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20013761/)].
22. Divandari H, Ahi G, Akbari H, Mahdian H. The young schema questionnaire-short form (SQ-SF): Investigation psychometric properties and factor structure between students in Islamic Azad University, Kash-mar Branch. *Pazhouhesh-Nameye Tarbiati*. 2009;**5**(20):103-33.
23. Drigotas SM, Barta W. The cheating heart: Scientific explorations of infidelity. *Curr Dir Psychol Sci*. 2001;**10**(5):177-80.
24. Wiederman MW, Allgeier ER. Expectations and attributions regarding extramarital sex among young married individuals. *J Psychol Hum Sex*. 1996;**8**(3):21-35.
25. Feldman SS, Cauffman E. Sexual betrayal among late adolescents: perspectives of the perpetrator and the aggrieved. *J Youth Adolesc*. 1999;**28**(2):235-58. doi: [10.1023/a:1021605532205](https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1021605532205).
26. Yoosefi N. Comparison of the effectiveness of family therapy based on schema therapy and bowens emotional system therapy on the early maladaptive schema among divorce applicant clients. *Q J Fundam Ment Health*. 2012;**13**(4):356-73.