



Predicting psychological distress based on initial maladaptive schemas and coping strategies in women affected by marital infidelity

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Email: parisameghrazi@gmail.com | Received: 14.09.2021 | Acceptance: 02.03.2022

Journal of Applied Family Therapy
eISSN: 2717-2430
<http://Aftj.ir>
Vol. 4, No. 2, Pp: 487-506
Summer 2023

Original research article

How to Cite This Article:

Khatibi, P., & Mehrazi, P. (2023). Predicting psychological distress based on initial maladaptive schemas and coping strategies in women affected by marital infidelity. *aftj*, 4(2), 487-506.



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Abstract

Aim: The aim of this study was to predict psychological distress based on initial maladaptive schemas and coping strategies in women affected by marital infidelity. **Method:** The present study is descriptive-correlational in terms of method. The statistical population included all women involved in the issue of marital infidelity (spouse) who referred to counseling centers in District 5 of Tehran in 2021. 210 people were selected by convenience sampling method. Data collection tools included the Yeniseri and Kokdemir (2006) Marital Infidelity Questionnaire, the Lovibond & Lovibond (1995) Psychological Assistance Questionnaire, Lazarus Folkman (2001), and Young's Early maladaptive Schema Questionnaire (2000). Statistical analysis was performed using Pearson correlation coefficient and multiple regression method. **Results:** The results of the study showed that based on the initial maladaptive schema and coping strategies, psychological distress in women affected by marital infidelity can be predicted. **Conclusion:** The study of these predictor variables in premarital and family counseling is necessary to identify people at risk. **Keywords:** Psychological distress, early maladaptive schema, coping strategies.

Introduction

Marriage has been described as the most important and fundamental human relationship, because it provides the basic structure for establishing a family relationship and educating the future generation (Karimi et al., 2013). The cornerstone of marriage and one of the main elements of any long-term and romantic relationship is characterized by the loyalty of couples to each other (Arinfar & Etamadi, 2016). Marital infidelity can be mentioned among the harmful factors that threaten the loyalty of couples to the marriage contract and sometimes end in the separation of couples from each other (Kuryan, 2017).

Marital infidelity can cause severe emotional consequences in couples. Marital infidelity caused a severe emotional blow to the injured spouse. In addition, spouses affected by marital infidelity will often experience negative emotions such as insecurity, hostility, depression, anxiety, blame, and humiliation. It can be severe and out of control and disrupt their social functioning and marital relationship pattern (Ellis, 2017). Marital infidelity is one of the main reasons that bring couples to family counseling clinics for divorce (Hawkins et al., 2012).

One of the consequences of participating in extramarital relationships and cheating on your spouse is psychological distress. Psychological distress is a general term to describe unpleasant feelings. In other words, it is a mental disorder that interferes with a person's daily life activities. Psychological distress can be created based on negative views of the environment, others and oneself. Sadness, anxiety, distraction and symptoms of mental illnesses are manifestations of psychological distress (Heidari et al., 2016).

Five warning signs of psychological distress include decreased concentration, abnormal weight changes, strong tendency to drink alcohol or smoke, desire to be alone and isolated, and self-harm (Yousefi & Karimipour, 2018). Psychological distress includes the concepts of depression, anxiety and stress. High psychological distress can have a negative effect on the level of emotional and cognitive performance and relationships of a person (Zabura et al., 2015). One of the factors that causes people in the society to consider stress as stressful and others to deal with it easily is strategies to deal with stress (Farhadi, 2014). This means that if coping methods are ineffective, maladaptive and insufficient, not only does it not control stress, but this reaction itself is considered a source of pressure and worsens the situation (Mahoy, 2015). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) have defined coping strategies as a set of behavioral and cognitive responses that aim to minimize the pressures of stressful situations. Recent studies have shown that the type of coping strategy used by a person affects not only his mental health but also his physical well-being (Piko, 2015). Coping strategies affect the field of interpersonal relationships, especially the quality of couples' relationships (Zirner and Andler, 2013). Primary approaches to the coping process distinguish three main styles: the problem-oriented coping style, which is characterized by direct action to reduce pressures or increase stress management skills; Avoidant coping style, whose main feature is to avoid facing the stressful factor; and emotion-oriented coping style, which is characterized by cognitive strategies that delay the resolution or elimination of the stressful factor by giving it a new name and meaning (Zeidner & Andler, 1996).

Early maladaptive schemas are patterns or deep and pervasive themes that are composed of memories, emotions, cognitions and bodily sensations. They are formed in childhood or adolescence, persist throughout the life course, are about the self and relationships with others, are highly dysfunctional, and have severe effects on well-being and adaptive functioning (Zhang & He, 2010). Early maladaptive schemas do not lead to a specific mental disorder, but they increase a person's vulnerability to mental disorders (Tim, 2010). Young believes that some schemas, especially those formed as a result of unfortunate childhood experiences, may be the main cause of personality disorders, milder cognitive behavioral problems, and some chronic disorders. Young has compiled a set of schemas that he calls early maladaptive schemas (Young et al., 1999). These schemas help a person to organize their experiences about the world around them and process the received information (Maltby & Day, 2014).

Therefore, the present study was carried out to answer the question whether it is possible to predict psychological distress based on early maladaptive schema and coping strategies in women affected by marital infidelity.

Method

The present study is descriptive-correlational in terms of method. The statistical population included all women involved in the issue of marital infidelity (spouse) who referred to counseling centers in District 5 of Tehran in 2021. 210 people were selected by convenience sampling method. Data collection tools included the Yeniseri and Kokdemir (2006) Marital Infidelity Questionnaire, the Lovibond & Lovibond (1995) Psychological Assistance Questionnaire, Lazarus Folkman (2001), and Young's Early maladaptive Schema Questionnaire (2000). Statistical analysis was performed using Pearson correlation coefficient and multiple regression method.

Results

The squared multiple correlation coefficient was obtained as $2R = 0.28$, which is a significant value. This issue indicates that the predictive variables of early maladaptive schemas subscales can explain 28% of the changes in the criterion variable of psychological distress. In order to investigate the issue of which of the subscales of early maladaptive schemas is able to predict the criterion variable of psychological tension, multiple regression coefficients were used simultaneously. The standardized multiple regression coefficients show that in the second research hypothesis, the five subscales of early maladaptive schemas can significantly predict psychological distress at a level of at least 0.05: emotional deprivation (Beta = 0.342); Abandonment/instability (Beta = 0.396); social isolation (Beta = 0.285); distrust of misbehavior (Beta = 0.282); Emotional inhibition (Beta = 0.332).

The squared multiple correlation coefficient was obtained as $R = 0.22$, which is a significant value. This issue indicates that the predictor variables of the coping strategies subscales can explain 22% of the changes in the psychological distress criterion variable. In order to investigate which of the subscales of coping strategies is able to predict the psychological distress criterion variable. Standardized regression coefficients show that all eight subscales of coping strategies can predict psychological distress at a level of at least 0.05: direct confrontation (Beta = -0.312); distancing (Beta = 0.412); self-control (Beta = -0.294); seeking social support (Beta = -0.386); Responsibility (Beta = -0.443);

escape and avoidance (Beta = 0.354); planned problem solving (Beta = -0.459); Positive reappraisal (Beta = -0.437).

Conclusion

This research was done with the aim of predicting psychological helplessness based on early maladaptive schema and coping strategies in women affected by marital infidelity. The research results showed that psychological distress can be predicted based on early maladaptive schema in women affected by marital infidelity. Also, there is a significant positive correlation between the total score of early maladaptive schemas and psychological distress.

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