



Developing a model of attitude towards extramarital relationships based on attachment styles, emphasizing the mediating role of confrontational styles and marital intimacy

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Abstract

Aim: The purpose of this research was to develop a model of attitude towards extramarital relationships based on attachment styles, emphasizing the mediating role of confrontational styles and marital intimacy. **Methods:** The current research is a correlational and socio-statistical type, including all people with extramarital relationships or the attitude of ordinary people to refer to welfare, relief committee and counseling centers of Qom province in 2021. 320 people were selected as the research sample using available sampling method. The sample of the research is the attitude questionnaire towards extramarital relationships (Whatley, 2007), adult attachment styles (Collins & Reed, 1990), confrontational styles (Lazarus & Folkman, 1988) and marital intimacy questionnaire. (Walker & Thompson, 1983) were completed. The data were analyzed by Pearson's correlation test and the research model was analyzed by the partial least squares (PLS) structural equation modeling technique and SPSS 27 and Smart PLS 3 statistical software. **Results:** The results of the path analysis test showed that the research model has a good fit. Examining the mediation results showed that confrontational styles have a significant mediating role in the relationship between secure style, avoidant style and ambivalent style with attitudes towards extramarital relationships ($p < 0.05$). The findings showed that the escape and avoidance strategy have a significant mediating role in the relationship between safe style and avoidant style with attitude towards extramarital relationships ($p < 0.05$). The findings showed that positive reappraisal strategy has a significant mediating role in the relationship between safe style and ambivalent style, as well as ambivalent with attitude towards extramarital relationships ($p < 0.05$). Also, the mediating role of marital intimacy variable in the relationship between safe, avoidant and ambivalent style was confirmed ($p < 0.05$). **Conclusion:** It can be concluded that confrontational styles and intimacy play a mediating role in relation to attachment styles and attitudes towards extramarital relationships.

Keywords: *extramarital relationships, attachment styles, confrontational styles, marital intimacy.*

Introduction

Marriage is a complex, delicate, and dynamic relationship. The existence of a strong, warm, intimate, and mutually respectful family is one of the outcomes of a successful marriage, which can lead to physical and mental health, comfort, tranquility, and safety for both spouses and family members (Lewis & Lewis, 2022). In the latter half of the last century, marriage has been influenced by numerous factors due to cultural changes, which have altered individuals' committed relationships (Aisma & Tiurneip, 2019). Among these factors, extramarital relationships or infidelity can be noted (Ahmadi Ardakani, Zarei Mahmoudabadi & Kalateh Sadati, 2021).

Research indicates that there is a relationship between attachment style and the pattern of intimate relationships in adulthood (Obeid, Sakri, Haddad, Akl, Faris & colleagues, 2020; Qabayi & Lafontaine, 2020; Nemat Zadeh Getabi & colleagues, 2021; Bakhtiari, Hosseini, Arefi & Afsharina, 2020). According to attachment theory, psychological disorders are the product of insecure internal working models. In these cases, models are relatively inflexible, and new information about (the other) and (the self) is closed off; as a result, the individual struggles in psychological and communicative interactions. Observing marital life in society and studying existing research in this field indicates that warm interpersonal relationships, stemming from passionate, romantic, and emotional attachment, are of great importance in a stable marital relationship. Obviously, an individual who experiences a higher level of intimate relationships presents themselves more desirably in the relationship and expresses their needs more effectively to their spouse (Nemat Zadeh Getabi & colleagues, 2021). Consequently, marital intimacy is closely related to extramarital relationships. Unfulfilled intimacy can lead to a positive attitude towards extramarital relationships (Jitariu & Tiurliuk, 2022; Penanakhonsaf, 2019; Padgett, Mahoney, Pargament & DiMaris, 2019; Eskandari & Parandian, 2021).

Considering the mentioned information and within the theoretical framework of this research, which combines John Bowlby's attachment style theory (1988), Folkman and Lazarus's cognitive-emotional theory (1984), and Bagarozzi's theory of couple intimacy (2014), in relation to the attitude towards extramarital relationships, it can be hypothesized that attachment styles may indirectly relate to attitudes towards extramarital relationships through coping styles and intimacy. Furthermore, the current research seeks to answer whether a predictive model of attitudes towards extramarital relationships based on attachment styles, emphasizing the mediating role of coping styles and intimacy, fits the research data.

Method

The current research is a correlational and socio-statistical type, including all people with extramarital relationships or the attitude of ordinary people to refer to welfare, relief committee and counseling centers of Qom province in 2021. 320 people were selected as the research sample using available sampling method. The sample of the research is the attitude questionnaire towards extramarital relationships (Whatley, 2007), adult attachment styles (Collins & Reed, 1990), confrontational styles (Lazarus & Folkman, 1988) and marital intimacy questionnaire. (Walker & Thompson, 1983) were completed. The data were analyzed by Pearson's correlation test and the research model was analyzed by the partial least squares (PLS) structural equation modeling technique and SPSS 27 and Smart PLS 3 statistical software.

Results

The results of the path analysis test showed that the research model has a good fit. Examining the mediation results showed that confrontational styles have a significant mediating role in the relationship between secure style, avoidant style and ambivalent style with attitudes towards extramarital relationships ($p < 0.05$). The findings showed that the escape and avoidance strategy have a significant mediating role in the relationship between safe style and avoidant style with attitude towards extramarital relationships ($p < 0.05$). The findings showed that positive reappraisal strategy has a significant mediating role in the relationship between safe style and ambivalent style, as well as ambivalent with attitude towards extramarital relationships ($p < 0.05$). Also, the mediating role of marital intimacy variable in the relationship between safe, avoidant and ambivalent style was confirmed ($p < 0.05$).

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to develop a model of attitude towards extramarital relationships based on attachment styles, emphasizing the mediating role of coping styles and marital intimacy. The results showed that the model of attitude towards extramarital relationships based on attachment styles, with an emphasis on the mediating role of coping styles and intimacy, is a good fit.

Like other studies, this research had limitations and challenges, including the use of a convenience sampling method, which may not fully represent the population. Moreover, the study was conducted only in the province of Qom, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, since the subject of the research is one of the highly challenging topics in society and is considered a societal taboo, it could raise questions about the honesty in responding to the questionnaires. Considering the findings of the research on the direct effect of attachment styles on marital intimacy and coping styles, it is recommended that ministries and responsible organizations, such as the Welfare Organization, Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, and broadcasting authorities, provide training for individuals to enhance marital intimacy and the proper use of coping strategies.

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