

## Original Article

# A comparative study of psychological profile of men and women with and without extramarital affairs

**Mahnaz Babaei<sup>1\*</sup> and Mahshid Zavrei<sup>2</sup>**

1. Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Golestan, Gorgan, Iran.
2. M.A. in General Psychology, Department of Psychology, University of Golestan, Gorgan, Iran.

### Abstract

Extramarital affair is one of the most important issues in society and one of the main factors disrupting the foundation of family life. The aim of this study was to compare the psychological profile of men and women with extramarital affairs with normal people. The research method is causal-comparative and the population included all men and women who betrayed their spouses referred to counseling and psychology centers and clinics and all normal men and women in Gorgan city in 2013. Sampling of betrayers was performed through availability and normal individuals at random. The sample size was 200 people (50 male and 50 female betrayers and 50 men and 50 normal women) and the participants filled the Minnesota Multidimensional Personality Questionnaire. For data analysis, one-way analysis of variance and Tukey post hoc test were used. The results revealed that in the subscale of social deviation between men who cheated on their spouses with normal men and between women who cheated on their husbands and normal women, as well as hypomania between women who cheated on their wives and normal men and self-morbidity among women who cheated on them. Normal men and women were different. But other subscales of the Minnesota Personality Questionnaire (depression and hysteria) did not differ significantly between the groups. The presence of some disorders in people can be the cause or predisposing factor for some social disorders such as infidelity.

### Keywords

Psychological profile  
Extramarital  
relationship  
Personality

**Received:** 2021/01/25

**Accepted:** 2021/02/09

**Available Online:** 2021/03/30

### Introduction

Family is considered as the most critical social system formed based on matrimony of the two opposite sexes. Maintaining and surviving family is extremely important. Family as a social unit is the focus of growth and development, healing and healer, changes and evolution of damages and outcomes which is both the platform of prosperity as well as collapsing the relations among its members. Glosser believed that spouses begin their common life with love, but the early devotion gradually disappears. Over time, the life of some couples gets over; however, some still monotonously go on and turn into alcohol, gorge, drug abuse or liaisons to tolerate that miserable life. The most critical stimulus motivating a

married man or woman to liaison is re-experiencing personal and sexual intimacy, i.e. the missing link in their marriage. Hence, liaison and illegal relations are attracted as no parties criticize, blame or complain the other (Glassar, & Glassar, 2004). Marital infidelity is a phenomenon often occurring in order to meet individual emotional needs through extramarital involvement (Harley & Jenifer, 2014). Drigotas and Bartha (2001) defined infidelity as violating the borders and limitations of a marriage relationship by establishing physical or emotional intimacy with someone else. Disloyalty and infidelity is a kind of behavioral disorder as it may lead to abnormal and undesired outcomes as well as creating damages and various difficulties for each party. National Public Opinion Research Center at the University of

Chicago, in 1992, conducted a study in the United States of America and found out that about 25% of married men and 15% of the married women reported at least one extramarital relationship during their marriage (Kaveh, 2007).

Many studies showed that individual response to spouse infidelity is similar to post-traumatic stress symptoms such as being shocked, confusion, anger, depression, damaged self-esteem and reduced self-confidence in personal and sexual affairs (Stefano & Oala, 2008). Moreover, results of other studies also indicate that families encountered issues such as marital crisis, poor parental performance and occupational problems followed by the partner infidelity disclosure. Beating, spouse murdering and suicide attempt are other infidelity consequences. Even in many cases, wives are being murdered by husbands due to a third person (lover) (Shackelford, Buss & Weekes-Shackelford, 2003). Studies show that marital life problems and defects are considered as the main cause of most men aberration and obliquity; the most critical problem is how couples behave each other and the deep gap existed between their trusts (Neuman, 2009). In a study, men stated the emotional problems (48%), both emotional and sexual dissatisfaction (32%) and other factors (12%) and sexual dissatisfaction (only 8%) as the most causes of infidelity (Neuman, 2009). Furthermore, psychologists and sociologists believe that personality failures and neurotic and psychotic disorders in parallel with family and social situation, lack of proper human relations between couples gradually push one of the couples toward infidelity and extramarital involvement (Shackelford, Buss & Weekes-Shackelford, 2003).

Since infidel, disloyal men and women own different attitudes and orientations about partner infidelity, this issue is regarded as a critical concern. Gender differences are considerable in sexual behavior and modes. Women seek for wide sex experiences, extramarital involvement, and random sex outside a committed relationship less than men. Sexual behavior is proportionate with sex values.

Women are less exposed to extramarital involvement as compared to husbands (Shoaakazemi, Safe, 2010). However, men look for sexual relations with no emotional commitment; women regard emotional relation as a prerequisite to sex. Thus, women in comparison to men consider infidelity as a threatening factor for marriage. Once men and women are asked about confirming the extra marital involvement, women talk more about falling in love than men and less about sexual satisfaction. It also seems that there are some differences between those who betray and normal individuals, differences that apparently are the main cause of disloyal behavior. Studies also supported this issue and

demonstrated that infidel men and women have personality differences with others. Ameri, Torabia, & Khodabakhsh (2012), in a study comparing the personality traits and attachment styles of betrayed women and disloyal men with normal men and women (lacking such an experience) presented that betrayed women (court) in neurosis and betrayed women (counseling centers) in conscientiousness are significantly different from normal women. There was seen a significant difference between anxiety and attachment avoidance of the betrayed women at court with counseling centers women. Disloyal men were also significantly different from normal men in neurosis, conscientiousness, anxiety and attachment avoidance. Finn, Mitte and Neyer (2013), in a research, the relationship-specific interpretation bias mediates the link between neuroticism and satisfaction in couples. Data results in this study showed that there is a relation between neuroticism personality characteristics and infidelity to partner. They believed that these people experience the least shame, guilt and empathy and easily betray their partners. Miri, Besharat, Asadi and Shahyad (2011), in a research studying the relationship between personality and psychological dimensions and sexuality in men and women found out that there is a significant relation between sexuality and personality characteristics such as extraversion, neuroticism and compatibility in men and women. In this regard sex desires is negatively related to neuroticism and positively related with extraversion. Wisent (2010), studied effective personality and psychology factors on couples extra marital involvements and stated 5 personality problems including narcissistic personality disorder, antisocial personality, erratic personalities, borderline personalities and sex addicts vulnerable to extra marital involvements (Shoaakazemi, Safe, 2010). According what was mentioned, it seems that studying personality characteristics of the infidelity individuals can be largely useful along with policy making and concentrating on mental aspects in men and women which lead in to betraying. Therefore, the present research is conducted with the purpose of comparing psychological profile of the married infidel individuals to partner with normal people.

## Method

### Participants

The present descriptive study is a causal-comparative research. The participants included all the men and women betraying their partners visiting counseling centers and psychological clinics and normal individuals, in 2014, in Gorgan, Iran. The sampling of infidelity individuals was goal-oriented or availability sampling. Normal individuals were randomly selected by simple sampling. The sample included 200 individuals (50 infidel women and 50 infidel men to partners; and 50 normal women and

50 normal men). The data were collected by Minnesota multidimensional personality inventory.

**Instrument**

*Minnesota multidimensional personality inventory:*

MMPI included 71 questions to evaluate individuals’ mental status. MMPI is considered as the greatest and valuable questionnaires which is currently popular as its technical and clinical properties. This questionnaire was presented by Hethe Vey and Mc Lin Lee, for the first time, at Minnesota University in 1943. The short form of this test contained 71 questions published by Keen canon under the name of Mini Malt in 1968. Statistical properties of this test were approved by Iranian scholar (Momenzade, 1989) in various studies for Iranian community. The short form of this questionnaire contains 3 lie detector validity scales (L), bad feeling or infrequency scale (F) and reconciliation scale (K); and 8 clinical scales including hypochondria (Hs), Depression (D), Hysteria (Hy), Social- mental obliquity (Pd), Paranoia (Pa), Mental weakness (Pt), Schizophrenia (Sc) and hypomania (Ma). Studies conducted on MMPI within 1970- 1980 showed that all MMPI scales are strongly stable with the reliability coefficient ranges from 0.71 (Ma) to 0.84 (Pt scale). (Dockworth & Anderson, 2018). In another study, Davoudi, Hooman, Sharifi and HosseinChari (2010), reported the inventory early validity coefficient equal to 0.82. In this research, they obtained the initial scholars factors in studying construct validity using exploratory factor analysis with Aplyman rotation which explained 27.5% of the total variance

**Results**

As data shown in Table 1, mean scores of hypochondria, depression, hysteria, social obliquity and hypomania subscales were higher in infidel individuals as compared to normal ones. The Line chart also illustrated that infidelity individuals were more socially deviated than normal individuals. One-way analysis of variance was used in order to compare subscales means in the four studied groups; then, according to f measured significance levels, groups’ means were compared using Tukey post-hoc test.

**Table 1.** Central tendencies and dispersion of MMPI subscales in the studied groups

		Infidelity individuals		Normal individuals	
		Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation
Men	Hypochondria	3.9600	2.70000	3.380	2.1178
	Depression	7.4000	2.78388	6.560	1.8969
	Hysteria	8.1600	3.89102	8.040	2.8994
	Social deviation	8.1600	2.86764	5.660	2.5363
	Hypomania	3.7600	1.50776	3.060	1.9315
Women	Hypochondria	5.0000	2.16025	3.979	2.1585
	Depression	7.6800	2.88271	7.541	1.7130
	Hysteria	9.7200	3.16912	9.041	3.2482
	Social deviation	9.2400	2.72764	6.980	2.8677
	Hypomania	4.6800	2.05589	3.700	2.2790

**Table 2.** One-way variance analysis for comparing hypochondria in the studied groups

Change sources	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Squared means	F	Significance level
Inter-group	68.028	3	22.676	4.344	0.005
Intra-group	1012.679	194	5.220		
Total	1080.707	197			

**Table 3.** Tukey post-hoc test of Hypochondria subscale in the studied groups

Dependent variable	I	J	(I-J)	Standard deviation error	Significance
Infidelity men	Normal men		0.580	0.45695	0.584
	Infidelity women		-1.040	0.45695	0.107
	Normal women		-.0191	0.46168	1.000
Normal men	Infidelity men		-0.580	0.45695	0.584
	Infidelity women		-1.620*	0.45695	0.003
	Normal women		-0.599	0.46168	0.565
Hypochondria	Infidelity men		1.040	0.45695	0.107
	Normal men		1.620*	0.45695	0.003
	Normal women		1.020	0.46168	0.124
Infidelity women	Infidelity men		0.019	0.46168	1.000
	Normal men		0.599	0.46168	0.565
	Infidelity women		-1.020	0.46168	0.124

**Table 4.** One-way variance analysis results of depression subscale in the studied groups

Change sources	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean squared	F	Significance level
Inter-group	37.893	3	12.631	2.258	0.083
Intra-group	1085.117	194	5.593		
Total	1123.010	197			

**Table 5.** One-way variance analysis results of Hysteria subscale in the studied groups

Change sources	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean squared	F	Significance level
Inter-group	93.707	3	31.236	2.863	0.068
Intra-group	2116.637	194	10.910		
Total	2210.343	197			

**Table 6.** One-way variance analysis results for comparing social deviation in the four studied groups

Change sources	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean squared	F	Significance level
Inter-group	355.940	3	118.647	15.819	0.000
Intra-group	1470.040	196	7.500		
Total	1825.980	199			

**Table 7.** Tukey post-hoc test of Social deviation subscale in the studied groups

Dependent variable	I	J	(I-J)	Standard deviation error	Significance
Social deviation	Infidelity men	Normal men	2.500*	0.547	0.000
		Infidelity women	-1.080	0.547	0.202
		Normal women	1.180	0.547	0.140
	Normal men	Infidelity men	-2.500*	0.547	0.000
		Infidelity women	-3.580*	0.547	0.000
		Normal women	-1.320	0.547	0.079
	Infidelity women	Infidelity men	1.080	0.547	0.202
		Normal men	3.580*	0.547	0.000
		Normal women	2.260*	0.547	0.000
	Normal women	Infidelity men	-1.180	0.547	0.140
		Normal men	1.320	0.547	0.079
		Infidelity women	-2.260*	0.547	0.000

**Table 8.** One-way variance analysis results of hypomania subscale in the studied groups

Change sources	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Squared means	F	Significance level
Inter-group	66.680	3	22.227	5.814	0.001
Intra-group	749.320	196	3.823		
Total	816.000	199			

**Table 9.** Tukey post-hoc test hypomania subscale in the studied groups

Dependent variable	I	J	(I-J)	Standard deviation error	Significance
Hypomania	Infidelity men	Normal men	0.700	0.391	0.281
		Infidelity women	-0.920	0.391	0.090
		Normal women	0.060	0.391	0.999
	Normal men	Infidelity men	-0.700	0.391	0.281
		Infidelity women	-1.620*	0.391	0.000
		Normal women	-0.640	0.391	0.361
	Infidelity women	Infidelity men	0.920	0.391	0.090
		Normal men	1.620*	0.391	0.000
		Normal women	0.980	0.391	0.062
	Normal women	Infidelity men	-0.060	0.391	0.999
		Normal men	0.640	0.391	0.361
		Infidelity women	-0.980	0.391	0.062

## Discussion

As research data demonstrated, infidelity women to their partners have higher hypochondria in comparison to normal men. These findings are consistent with the results of Sayehmiri, Kareem, Abdi, Dalvand and Gheshlagh (2020), Miri, Besharat, Asadi and Shahyad (2011), Barta and Kiene (2005), Hendrick and Hendrick (1987), Feldman and Cauffman (1999). An explanation provided according to psychodynamic theory is that hypochondria disorder in psychodynamic approach is related to aggression motivations against others turning into physical complains through backlash and displacement (Delahousse, Hitter-Spinelli & Pedinielli, 1982). On the other hand, there are some evidences showing that infidelity individuals to partners considerably experience anger, guilt and shame. Therefore, it is possible that a betraying woman due to beyond-self pressures over to the third person has repressed its anger and enmity; hence, tries to remove the negative feelings through defensive backlash and displacement mechanisms. Furthermore, psychodynamic theorists also believed that patient acceptance in most hypochondrias is, indeed, an escape that enable individual to avoid annoying commitment and to post pone undesired challenges (Noyes, Stuart, Langbehn, Happel, & Longley, 2002; Noyes, Stuart, Langbehn, Happel & Muller, 2003). Thus, infidelity women also may not prefer mentally facing violated commitments so they choose to play the patient role in order to attract attentions and its secondary advantage. In this way, they will be able to remove intrusive and

obsessive thoughts from betraying. In fact, Alizadeh (2000), mentioned that these patients, on one side, are similar to obsessive individuals looking for an object to think about in order to escape from their emotional problems.

Another research finding was that social deviation was higher in infidelity men and women comparing to normal ones. This finding is relevant with results of studies such as Miri, Besharat, Asadi and Shahyad (2011), Barta and Kiene (2005), Hendrick and Hendrick (1987), Feldman and Cauffman (1999). In explaining these findings, it is possible to take social deviation issue and infidelity consistent with society movement toward modernization and increased social activities of the deviated behavior. Indeed, modernism may cause creating some attitudes on freedom from obligations and traditional thoughts. In addition, Willson believed that decreasing religion contribution in the social layers and trying to get free from traditions and conventions may lead to culturally normalizing some issues. In this case, the role of cultural and religious instructions and values would vanish in forming comprehensive culture and valued system. Morality and emotions will strongly decrease, too (Shojaeizand, 2001). So, normality can increase social deviation; and in fact, as Abbasisfejer and Rahmani Firoozjaee (2010) provided cultural normalization push the individual toward social deviation; on the other side, social deviation and repeating it would direct individual to cultural normalization. So, if cultural normalization occurs, issues including extra marital involvements or other relationships considering as infidelity would seem common. Hence, infidelity is an explicit instance of cultural normalization or in other word, moving toward social deviation. Therefore, the main features of individuals betray their partners will certainly be fraud, deception and violating social norms which are considered as the major indications of the social deviation. Based on aforementioned, it can be said that those who betrayed their partners are usually those who are disloyal to moral commitments, too. Actually, they do not consider extra marital involvements as infidelity to partners so simply try any extra involvements. Therefore, at is was earlier stated, it is clear that social deviation is high in infidelity individuals as betraying itself is a social deviation led to infidelity.

This research concluded that infidelity women to their husbands have higher hypomania as compared to normal men. This finding is relevant with the findings of Miri, Besharat, Asadi and Shahyad (2011), Hendrick and Hendrick (1987), Feldman and Cauffman (1999) and Barta and Kiene (2005). It seems that, in general, hypomania is regarded as some cause of infidelity to partners. These types of people have psychological characteristics which apparently can lead to destructive behaviors, social deviations and infidelity. Some mania

symptoms including impulsiveness (Sadock & Sadock, 2015) in these individuals may increase the risk of betrayal. In addition, it is known that individuals with mania indications are lighthearted and stimulated with high distraction and strongly high activity pressure. Reflective content of hypomania is contrasted with the depressed one ideology. The patient regards every activity as useful and beneficiary; gives a positive value to all life events and experiences; and unrealistically expects to achieve all its efforts. In addition, they also exaggerate in their capabilities. Their positive assessments lead to euphoria; besides, continuously positive assessments and extremely optimistic expectations motivate these individuals toward continuous activities (Beck, 2007). The euphoria, exaggeration and overestimate in abilities particularly in sexual ability are also observed in these individuals creating extra marital involvements. Therefore, it is evident that outbreak of high-risk behaviors including infidelity is higher in hypomania individuals.

## Conclusion

Totally, it can be concluded that determining factors of infidelity to partner are classified into special categories which are considered as one of the critical and considerable psychological characteristics requiring detailed investigation by scholars and professionals.

## Disclosure statement

## ORCID

Mahnaz Babaei <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8186-8201>

## References

- Abbasisfejer, A. A., Rahmanifiroozjaee, A. (2010). Studying the relation between modernized behaviors and mild social deviations. *Behavioral Sciences*, 2(5), 99-114. <https://www.sid.ir/fa/journal/ViewPaper.aspx?id=129955>
- Alizadeh, R. (2000). A comparative study of personality characters and mental health in traitors and normal people. Master thesis, *Tehran Payam Noor University*.
- Ameri, F., Torabian, L., & khodabakhsh, R. (2012). A comparative study of attachment dimensions and personality traits among unfaithful men and women who experienced infidelity and normal couple. *Quarterly Journal of Psychological Studies*, 8(3), 9-26. doi: 10.22051/PSY.2012.1721
- Barta, W. D., & Kiene, S. M. (2005). Motivations for infidelity in heterosexual dating couples: The roles of



- gender, personality differences, and sociosexual orientation. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 22(3), 339-360. doi: 10.1177/0265407505052440
- Beck, A. (2007). *Love is never enough*. Translated by Mehdi Qarachehdaghi. Tehran, Asim Publication. <https://beckinstitute.org/love-is-never-enough/>
- Delahousse, J., Hitter-Spinelli, B., & Pedinielli, J. L. (1982). What does the painful "organ" represent in hypochondriasis? *Schweiz Arch Neurol Neurochir Psychiatr*, 131(1), 41-54. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/7146838/>
- Dockworth, J., & Anderson, W. (2018). *MMPI and MMPI-2 interpretation manual for counselors and clinical experts*. <https://www.amazon.com/MMPI-MMPI-2-Interpretation-Counselors-Clinicians-ebook/dp/B07MJTYYMV>
- Drigotas, S M., Barta, W. (2001). The cheating heart: Scientific exploration of infidelity. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 10(5), 177-180. doi: 10.1111/1467-8721.00143
- Feldman, S. S., & Cauffman, E. (1999). Sexual betrayal among late adolescents: Perspectives of the perpetrator and the aggrieved. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*. 28(2), 235-258. doi: 10.1023/A:1021605532205
- Finn, C., Mitte, K., & Neyer, F.J. (2013). The relationship-specific interpretation bias mediates the link between neuroticism and satisfaction in couples. *European Journal of Personality*, 27(2), 200-212. doi: 10.1002/per.1862
- Glassar, W., & Glassar, C. (2004). *Marriage without failure, or, getting together and staying together*. <https://www.amazon.com/Getting-Together-Staying-Solving-Marriage/dp/006095633X>
- Harley, W. F., & Jenifer, H. C. (2014). *Getrid Marital Infidelity*. <https://www.amazon.com/Surviving-Affair-Willard-Jr-Harley/dp/0800719549>
- Hendrick, S. S., & Hendrick, C. (1987). Love and sexual attitudes, self-disclosure, and sensation seeking. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*. 4(3), 281-297. doi: 10.1177/026540758700400303
- Hosseinchari, M., Davoudi, H., Hooman, H. A., & Sharifi, H.P. (2010). An Iranian shortened version of Minnesota multidimensional personality test. *Educational Measurement*. 1(3), 31-48. <https://www.sid.ir/fa/journal/ViewPaper.aspx?ID=159022>
- Kaveh, S. (2007). *Psychology of Couples Disagreements*. Tehran, Sokhan Publication. <https://lib.ui.ac.ir/inventory/1/89615.htm>
- Miri, M., Besharat, M A., Asadi, M., & Shahyad, S. (2011). The Relationship between Dimensions of Personality and Sexual Desire in Females and Males. 15:823-827 doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.03.192
- Momenzade, S. (1989). *Study and comparison of clinical diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder with MMPI test rates*. Master thesis, Isfahan University.
- Neuman, M. G. (2009). *The truth about cheating: Why men stray and what you can do to prevent it*. Wiley Publication. <https://www.amazon.com/Truth-about-Cheating-Stray-Prevent/dp/0470502134>
- Noyes, R., Stuart, S., Langbehn, D. R., Happel, R. L., Longley, S. L., & Yagla, S.J. (2002). Childhood antecedents of hypochondriasis. *Psychosomatics*, 43(4), 282-289. doi: 10.1176/appi.psy.43.4.282
- Noyes, R., Stuart, S. P., Langbehn, D. R., Happel, R. L., Longley, S. L., & Muller, B. A. (2003). Test of an interpersonal model of hypochondriasis. *Psychosomatic Medicine*. 65(2), 292-300. doi: 10.1097/01.PSY.0000058377.50240.64
- Sadock, B.J., & Sadock, V.A. (2015). *psychiatry Brief*. Translated by Farzin Rezaei. Tehran. Arjmad Publication.
- Sayehmiri, K., Kareem, K. I., Abdi, K., Dalvand, S., & Gheshlagh, R.G. (2020). The relationship between personality traits and marital satisfaction: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *BMC Psychology*, 8(15), 1-8. doi: 10.1186/s40359-020-0383-z
- Shackelford, T. K., Buss, D. M., & Weekes-Shackelford, V. A. (2003). Wife killings committed in the context of a lover's triangle. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 25(2), 137-143. doi: 10.1207/S15324834BASP2502\_4
- Shoakazemi, M., & Safe, S. (2010). *Family therapy by approach of Satire*. Tehran, Pazeneh Publication. <https://www.adinehbook.com/gp/product/9649922690>
- Shojaeizand, A. R. (2001). *Religion in society and normalization*. Tehran, Center Publication.
- Stefano, J. D., & Oala, M. (2008). Extramarital affairs: Basic considerations and essential tasks in clinical work. *The family journal*, 16(1), 13-19. doi: 10.1177/1066480707309128