Effective factors in women’s tendency toward extramarital relationships: the role of moral intelligence as a mediating factor

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Abstract
The present research aimed to investigate the effective factors in women’s tendency toward extramarital relationships and the role of moral intelligence as a mediating factor. Hence, the research employed descriptive-sectional method. A sample of 131 female individuals involved in extramarital relationships was selected through convenience sampling. The research tools included Moral Intelligence Questionnaire by Doug Lennick and Fred Kiel (2005), Infidelity Questionnaire (INFQ) by Drigotas et al (1999) and a researcher-made questionnaire to assess women’s tendency for extramarital relationships. Step-wise regression analysis was used to analyze the data. Results indicated that there exists negative and significant relationship between integrity, responsibility and the tendency for extra-marital relationships. However, no significant relationship was observed between forgiveness, compassion and the tendency for extra-marital relationships. Furthermore, significant and positive relationship was observed between personal and family factors and the tendency for extramarital relationships. The social factor didn’t enter the equation due to insignificant difference. Results also revealed that moral intelligence has significant impact on personal and family factors as a mediating variable. However, no such result was observed in terms of social factors. Therefore, integrity and responsibility are the most important features of moral intelligence in relation with extramarital relationships. The emotional aspect of extramarital relationships has the highest importance from among the indices of agreeableness. Moreover, the sexual aspect of extramarital relationships has the lowest importance amongst the participants of this research.

Keywords: Moral Intelligence, Extramarital Relationships, Married Women.
Introduction

Family stands amongst the most important social systems that is created based on the marriage between two opposite sexes. In a healthy family, husband and wife are committed to the family principles and there is no impact of transient and temporary feelings. Relationships are based on humane and mutual values. Any kinds of sexual relationships or secret extramarital relationships are considered as a threat to marital life which is legally defined as infidelity (Snyder, Baucom, Gordon & Doss, 2012). The risk of infidelity exists in most marriages and can be considered as severe emotional trauma to both sides (Omarzu, Miller, Schultz & Timmerman, 2012; De Stefano & Oala, 2008).

Extramarital relationship is considered as one of the most major reasons of family disintegration that might happen in every society (Shackelford et al, 2003). Infidelity, more than anything else harms the cheated spouse causing mental health disorders and the disruption of emotional and behavioral balance in him/her. In the meantime, the children would also suffer from the harms inflicted upon the family structure (Oppenheimer, 2007; Hall and Hall, 2011). Almost all the married or cohabiting individuals expect their partner to be emotionally and sexually committed to them (De Stefano & Oala, 2008).

A review of the research indicates that there are a number of factors contributing to the creation of such relationships. A look at the past of individuals involved in such relationships shows that their drives and tendencies for extramarital relationships might take its root from family violence (Yunibul, Cavusoglu & Geyim, 2010) and most of them were sexually abused during childhood (Rumstein-Mckeam & Hunsley, 2001). From among different factors that are closely associated to extramarital relationships, the followings can be mentioned: gender, religiosity, perceived relationship satisfaction, negligence and moral intelligence.

Moral intelligence encompasses ethics-based actions, values and beliefs, honesty, perseverance and insistence for what is right, faithfulness, accepting the responsibility for personal decisions, admitting mistakes and failures, taking the responsibility to serve others, active and spontaneous interest in others and the ability to forgive self and others. Such behavioral characteristics in couples can significantly improve the quality of their marital life and marital satisfaction (Lennick and Kiel, 2005). Integrity is the main aspect of moral intelligence. When the individual acts based on integrity, his behaviors and actions are accordance to human and universal principles. He knows what is right and what must be done and how to live in the framework of beliefs and ethical principles.

Responsibility is one main and key factors in an individual who has a high level of moral intelligence. An individual who accepts the responsibility for his actions and its possible consequences can be assured of the harmony between his actions and universal and human ethics. Compassion is another vital characteristics of individuals with high levels of moral intelligence that is a sign of respect, care and attention. Forgiveness is another important feature. Unless we tolerate others’ mistakes and gain this insight that the self is also in err, we may act rigidly and inflexibly and not have mutually beneficial interactions (Lennick and Kiel, 2011).
Little research has been carried out on the pathology, especially women’s extramarital relationships and personal, family and social factors that impact them in this regard and also the moral intelligence and its aspects. However, lack of studies in this area and the precise statistics doesn’t indicate the inexistence of problem but is a sign of inattention to this social pathology. Therefore, this subject should be brought to light regarding its negative consequences that endanger the family, and the security and health of society. With regard to the reviewed literature and studies, there exist some ambiguities and uncertainties in terms of moral intelligence and the tendency toward extramarital relationships. The question is that whether or not despite environmental factors, moral intelligence can be regarded as a mediator or not. The main subject in this research determines effective factors (persona, family and social), women’s extramarital relationships and the role of moral intelligence as a mediating factor.

**Method and materials**

The research statistical population comprised 131 married women who had referred to the counseling and psychological centers located in Ahvaz City due to extramarital relationships. The majority of the participants (38 percent) had an educational degree of BA. Most participants had moderate socio-economic status and 66.9 percent of them had spent the first ten years of their marital life. Furthermore, 42 percent of them were in the age range of 20 to 30.

Moral intelligence questionnaire: was designed and developed by Lennick and Kiel (2005). This 40-item questionnaire is scored on 5-point Likert scale (never, seldom, sometimes, often, and always). The minimum and maximum scores are 40 and 200, respectively. The higher score indicates higher levels of moral intelligence. The face and content validity of moral intelligence questionnaire has been assessed by experts and the Cronbach alpha was equal to .89. The subscales of integrity, responsibility, compassion and forgiveness were equal to .90, .86, .71 and .77, respectively. And the total Cronbach alpha coefficient was equal to .95.

Pathology of fidelity questionnaire: this researcher-made, 33-item questionnaire has been designed and developed with regard to the carried out studies in and out of country. The questionnaire was evaluated and confirmed by 5 experts. The questions are scored on 7-point Likert scale from 1 to 7. The items were divided into personal, family and social factors that contribute to the extramarital relationship. The reliability coefficient of the scale was equal to .89.

Tendency for extramarital relationships was designed and developed by Drigotas et al (1999) that can provide us with some information on extramarital relationship and it has also been called the infidelity scale. This questionnaire assesses participants’ sexual and emotional intimate relationships out of marital relationships and does this indirectly and step-by-step rather than proposing direct questions such as “have you ever been involved in extramarital relationships?” or “what have you done in extramarital relationships?” First, infidelity is considered in its lesser degree and then more serious aspects are brought into light. Items purposefully start with emotions and behaviors which might or might not be considered as infidelity. Close emotional bond are also assessed because women tend to get involved in
such relationships due to emotional reasons. 9 to 11 items show a reliability coefficient of .61 to .85 with another factor that is called as mixed infidelity. Drigotas et al (1999) assert that individuals who score high on emotional infidelity have emotional and sexual intimacy with the third person. Therefore, according to Drigotas, the important question is that whether or not this questionnaire can show extramarital relationship as the violation of the norms in a relationship. According to Fricker (2006), the subscales of this questionnaire includes cognitive, emotional and sexual subscales (cognitive subscale, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5), emotional subscale (7, 8, 9) and sexual subscale (5, 6, 10, 10, 11). Therefore, three scores are acquired. The validity of this questionnaire is obtained using Cronbach alpha that are equal to .85 for cognitive subscales, .84 for emotional subscale and .69 for sexual subscale.

Results and findings

Family factor entered the regression equation as the first factor in order to test the research hypothesis, the effectiveness of personal, family and social factors in married women’s tendency to extramarital relationships and also the role of moral intelligence as a mediating factor. This factor predicted 20 percent of the changes in the criterion variable (extramarital relationships). In the second step, with the entrance of personal factor, this rate increased by 24 percent. The social factor didn’t enter the equation due to insignificant relationship (Table 2).

The result of evaluating the structural model of the research and in order to investigate the role of moral intelligence as the mediating factor on the environmental variables, significant relationship was observed in terms of personal and family factors but no significant relationship was observed in terms of social factors. Therefore, it can be concluded that moral intelligence can decrease the level of effect of personal and family factors on extramarital relationships and also the possibility of extramarital behaviors. However, it can’t be considered of having effective and decreasing role in social factors (Model 1).

With the entrance of moral intelligence, the relationship between personal factor, family factor and criterion variable decreased to -2.56 and -3.78, respectively. However, it has no significant role in the decrease of social factors (1.60) (Model 1).

In order to investigate another research hypothesis and the relationship between the variables of moral intelligence and women’s tendency for extramarital relationships, the variable of integrity entered the regression equation and predicted 4.6 percent of changes of the criterion variable. In the second step, with the entrance of responsibility, this rate increased to 6.7 percent. The variables of integrity and responsibility showed significant relationship with the variable of extramarital relationships. However, no significant relationship was observed between forgiveness, compassion and extramarital relationships.

Table 1- step-wise regression analysis for the effect of environmental factors (personal, family and social) on the tendency for extramarital relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>Change R²</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Family factors</td>
<td>31.12</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

http://www.ijhcs.com/index.php/ijhcs/index
Step-wise regression analysis was done in order to investigate the simultaneous combination of the variables of moral intelligence, environmental factors and demographic variables and the results are presented in table 3.

Table 3- step-wise regression analysis in simultaneous combination of moral intelligence, environmental factors and demographic variables impacting extramarital relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>Change R²</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Family factors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>35.19</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Family factors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>25.12</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Duration of marriage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Family factors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>21.28</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Duration of marriage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal factors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Family factors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>18.81</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Duration of marriage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal factors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Openness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As observed in table 4, family factors entered the research and predicted 20 percent of the changes in the criterion variable. In the second step, the duration of marriage increased this rate to 25 percent. In the third step, the variable of personal factor increased this rate to 29 percent and finally, with the entrance of openness to experience, this rate increased to 31 percent.
Table 4- the relationship between the research structures and the mediating factor of moral intelligence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variable</th>
<th>Dependent variable</th>
<th>Estimation based on the main sample</th>
<th>The mean of sub variables</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Index of significance</th>
<th>Confirmation or rejection of variables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal factors</td>
<td>Tendency for extra-marital relationships</td>
<td>γ</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>2.23</td>
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<td>Family factors</td>
<td>Tendency for extra-marital relationships</td>
<td>γ</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>6.11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social factors</td>
<td>Tendency for extra-marital relationships</td>
<td>γ</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>3.14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moral intelligence</td>
<td>Personal factors</td>
<td>γ</td>
<td>-.26</td>
<td>-.27</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-2.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral intelligence</td>
<td>Family factors</td>
<td>γ</td>
<td>-.27</td>
<td>-.26</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-3.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral intelligence</td>
<td>Social factors</td>
<td>γ</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>1.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral intelligence</td>
<td>Tendency for extra-marital relationships</td>
<td>γ</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion and conclusion

The research aimed to investigate the effective factors in women’s tendency toward extramarital relationships and the role of moral intelligence as a mediating factor. Hence, the research employed descriptive-sectional method. Results indicated that integrity and responsibility are the most important features of moral intelligence with regard to extramarital behaviors. The variable of integrity in the regression equation predicted 4.6 percent of the changes of the criterion variable. This result is in line with the results of the research by Lewandowski & Ackerman (2006), Fisher (2006), Brand, Markey, Mills & Hodges (2007), Banfield & McCabe (2001). The results of this study indicated that there is significant relationship between integrity and extramarital relationships.

A few studies have indicated the cultural differences of extramarital relationships in some of Asian countries specifically (southern Asia). The factor of compassion has significant and positive relationship with extramarital relationships in these countries while no significant relationship is observed in other cultures. Therefore, the present research findings can indicate the importance of sociocultural factors. In the explanation of the obtained findings, it can be concluded that women who act upon ethical principles tend to have higher marital satisfaction in their marital relationships. To put it differently, it is obvious that following ethical principles such as compassion, wisdom, self-control, respect, kindness, fairness and patience (the components of moral intelligence) have great impact on interpersonal and marital
relationships (Borba, 2005). On the other hand, behavioral evolution and growth prevent the emergence of social and personal abnormalities. Ethical principles in the framework of marital relationships establish cemented relationships between the couples. It means that individuals who have high levels of moral intelligence can boost their marital adjustment employing appropriate strategies.

Moreover, integrity is associated with some features in sexual problems such as sexual satisfaction and marital distress (Liu, 2000). Some studies indicated that individuals who score high on integrity have stricter attitudes toward sexual relationships (Whisman & Snyder, 2007) and also less tendency for high risk sexual behaviors. Perhaps, individuals with integrity are more able to resist against their needs and tendencies (Allen, 2001). According to the previous research on the relationship between integrity and unrestrained sexual behaviors, it’s expected that there is significant relationship between integrity and extramarital relationship in all cultures (Brand, Markey, Mills & Hodges, 2007).

As previously stated, the variable of integrity entered the regression equation and predicted 4.6 percent of changes of the criterion variable. In the second step, with the entrance of responsibility, this rate increased to 6.7 percent. The variables of integrity and responsibility showed significant relationship with the variable of extramarital relationships. However, no significant relationship was observed between forgiveness, compassion and extramarital relationships. This relationship is also observed in cognitive, emotional and sexual aspects, as well. Extramarital relationships indicate that there is significant relationship between cognitive and sexual factors. Moreover, the same significant relationship is observed between emotional factors, integrity and responsibility. For want of a better word, the higher score on integrity and responsibility indicates fewer tendencies for extramarital relationships. Today, ethics is considered among the main factors in the performance of family and ignorance of ethics in family can pose complicated problems. Meanwhile, people’s judgment about the ethics exerts significant effects on the quality and success of their marital relationships.

Research findings indicate that ethical commitment leads to the stability and consistency of marital relationships. Taniguchi Freeman, Taylor & Malaren (2006) indicated that individuals who score higher on the variable of integrity than their husband have fewer tendencies for extramarital relationship. However, individuals who scored the same on responsibility had higher tendency for fidelity. Research indicates that half of men and one-third of women who have got involved with extramarital relationship are satisfied with their marital life (Fricker, 2006). Therefore, even individuals who are satisfied with their marital life may also seek extramarital relationships (Allen et al, 2005). The need for variety, wide-range interests, curiosity and lack of compliance with specific traditions cause them to develop such tendencies (Tafoya & Spitzberg, 2007). Individuals involved in extramarital affairs are usually more extroverted and have less integrity, more sexual infidelity, less conscientiousness, adjustment and integrity and less spiritual compliance with their spouses (Fisher and Aron, 2010; Shackelford, 2003).

The results of structural model in this research in the absence of moral intelligence indicates that environmental factors (personal, family and social) have significant and direct impact on married women’s tendency for extramarital relationships. The entrance of moral intelligence
as a mediator decreased the relationship between the predictive variables of personal and family factors with the criterion variable. Findings indicated the impact of this factor on family and personal factors and not on social factors. Therefore, moral intelligence doesn’t have a mediating role in terms of social factor.

This finding is in line with the result of the research done by Thompson (1983). He concluded that moral intelligence has higher predictive value in predicting the extramarital relationship as compared to marital satisfaction, gender and social background. The result of the research by White and Hurst (1969, cited in Oppenheimer, 2007) indicated that individuals with extramarital relationships have higher levels of self-alienation and there is significant relationship between feeling of powerlessness, meaninglessness, social isolation, lack of confidence, feelings of incompetence and extramarital relationships. In the explanation of the findings of the present research, it can be concluded that women who act upon spiritual and ethical principles in their daily interactions attempt to have their family’s satisfaction and consider these principles as a key criterion in their interactions. It’s obvious that such ethics can act as a strong shield against problems. Individuals who are familiar with spiritual tendencies and humane teachings have meaning in their life and are committed to that. These individuals refer to superior humane issues and act upon them in their lives. Therefore, it can be claimed that the filter of spiritual foundations determines the women’s actions in many family and social situations which itself increases the marital adjustment.

Theorists such as Glaser, Rogers, Perez and Adler have emphasized on human’s responsibility. According to Adler, humans are the creators not the victims of their emotions. This doesn’t mean that both sides are equally responsible for extramarital relationships. The goal is that each couple considers himself or herself as responsible for the situation that has given rise to extramarital relationships. Delegating the responsibility to the next person doesn’t work in the violation of marital oath. Awareness of couple’s ethical features, personal and family characteristics prior to marriage evaluate the fundamental reasons in individuals’ tendency toward extramarital relationships show that these factors can be effective in the level of satisfaction with marital relationship. The difference in moral intelligence and personal and family factors are important factors that affect emotional and sexual relationship in couples.

Finally, it should be noted that moral, social and personal characteristics are a combination of factors that are effective in the explanation of extramarital behaviors. Other factors such as social features, beliefs, common and personal religious values, the degree of satisfaction, the level of commitment to marital life should all be brought to light. Due to the adverse legal and social consequences of marital infidelity especially for women, the taboo of sex in society, bringing up such subjects is not welcome and curiosity in this regard is considered the violation of privacy. Authorities’ lack of cooperation due to the high sensitivity of this issue and participants’ worry about the disclosure of personal information are some of the limitations of the present research. Given the obtained results, counselors and psychologists are recommended to enhance spiritual and moral intelligence in the prevention and treatment areas with regard to the existing capacity.
References


