



Full Length Research Paper

Mutual relationship pathology between couples, after husband's infidelity, among the traumatic women In Isfahan

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This study was designed to investigate the mutual relationship pathology between couples, after husband's infidelities, among the traumatic women in Isfahan, using a qualitative and phenomenological method in 2012 -2013. Based on a purposive sampling method, 10 cases were selected from the women traumatized from husbands' infidelities. To identify interactive traumas of the inter-relationship, based on existent documents, a semi- structured interview was designed. Then the data was analyzed by classification methods and second data organization. The results showed that interactive traumas in couples, after infidelities, comprise 21 main categories. These traumas, before infidelities, are classified in 4 main areas as follow: intrapersonal traumas, interpersonal traumas, meta-personal traumas and special meta-personal traumas.

Key words: Interactive relationship pathology, infidelity, the traumatic women.

INTRODUCTION

The growing problem of extra-marital sexual relationships, as one of the harmful factors in structure

and stability of the family, has attracted the attention of many scientists and researchers. Infidelity often occurs

through extra-marital relationships and it is due to meeting emotional needs. Actually infidelity is, crossing the border of the marital relationship and making a physical or emotional intimacy with someone outside the relationship (Drigotas and Barta, 2001). Brown, 2001, also argues that marital abjuration is a kind of sexual-emotional conflict with someone other than one's own partner. Moreover, the husband tends to hide such a conflict from his wife; actually the main feature of the conflict is being mysterious. The definition used for marital abjuration is based on what the couples think, of the concept of marriage. Sometimes it is possible that one of the couples does not have any feelings of desire, intimacy and sexual tension toward his/her partner while such feelings exist toward another person (Pittman, 1989). Such situations may be indicative of marital abjuration. Especially when it leads to breaking marital agreements and threatening the initial relationship. Other researchers consider abjuration to be something more than just a sexual intercourse. The emotional abjuration is described as spending time with someone other than their own partner, for being harmful in some ways, while there is no sexual intercourse between them. However, the sexual abjuration is defined as having sexual intercourse with someone other than one's partner, which is due to the same tendencies and mere physical attractiveness. Such descriptions make it easier to understand the components of abjuration (Nannini and Myers, 2000). The percentage of married trespassers varies from study to study. An explanation for such a discrepancy could perhaps be an innate conservatism of the respondents, while answering the questions. The study conducted by Glass and Wright, in 1992, with the purpose of estimating the amount of abjuration, showed that about 11.6 to 50 percent of women and 22.7 to 50 percent of men had extra-marital involvements, up to that time. It seems that the frequency of abjuration is rising (Gordon, Baucom and Snyder, 2008). By presenting large samples in the previous studies, almost 22 to 25 percent of men and 11 to 15 percent of women confessed to have

been, at least once, entered into sexual intercourses in extra-marital involvements (Gordon et al., 2008). Furthermore, the samples presented in national studies of western countries, have shown that between 5.1 to 6 percent of married people have annually entered into sexual intercourses in extra-marital involvements (Whisman and Snyder, 2007). Despite negative opinions and attitudes of the individuals toward extra-marital involvements and the consequences, such involvements happen to both men and women. Also, the incidence rate of extra-marital involvements varies based on its sampling and definition, and it changes from about 12 to 75 percent, for married people who have faced such involvements, at least once (Allen and Baucom, 2004). Many studies have shown that the reaction to infidelity of the partner is similar to Post Traumatic Stress Disorders (PTSD), such as symptoms of shock, confusion, anger, depression, damaged self-esteem, and lowered self-confidence in personal and sexual issues (Stefano and Oala, 2008). Among other consequences of infidelity, one can point to issues like mayhem, killing the partner, and committing suicide (Shakelford, Buss and Weekes-Shakelford, 2003). Marital abjuration causes severe emotional consequences in couples (Bennet et al., 2002). One of the most common types of abjuration is trauma (Lusterman, 1998).

The traumatic partner, often experiences feelings of anger, low self-esteem, depression, helplessness, and of being suppressed. The trespassers, on the other hand, feel ashamed, guilty, hesitated, angry, and frustrated (Cano and Oleary, 2000). Mental rumination is one of the important things experienced by the traumatic partner, which could be so severe and uncontrollable that even interfere with daily functions and concentration of the individual (Spring, 1996). It is also possible for feelings of shock, disbelief and denial, to replace such emotions (Rosenak and Harnden, 1992). The most common behavior pattern in response to abjuration is avoidance. Since the traumatic partner becomes highly sensitive, and avoids his/her partner, seeking to uncover the hidden

relationship (Westfall, 1998). Other behavioral responses include vigilance, obsessive questioning, and other punitive and negative exchanges (Reibstein and Richards, 1993). In addition to the consequences mentioned, divorce is a clear and understandable response to the extra-marital involvements. Moreover, it is more likely for an initial marital relationship to break down, when the hidden relationship of the partner is discovered, rather than when the trespasser himself/herself reveals the hidden matter (Afifi, Flato and Weiner, 2007). A major cognitive response, which is expressed in the early discovery of extra-marital involvement, is a change made in individual's belief toward the partner and also in their relationship. Thus, the individual can no more trust in his/her partner and he/she cannot feel safe in relation to the partner (Glass and Wright, 1997). The researchers found that after abjuration, couples would face some traumas. Many studies have been conducted in regard of traumas in couples' relationships. Whisman, Dixon and Johnson (1997), have considered physical abuse, in a category of marital problems, as a factor with the most beneficial effect on relationships. Amato and Rajers (1997), argue that marital problems, which have been mentioned most, include problems in communication, general incompatibility, infidelity, lack of sufficient time spent at home, and disagreement over financial matters. Douglass and Douglass (1995), found that the most common problems mentioned by couples are about wife's temper, husband's temper and resolving opinion differences. They also reported that some marital problems are at high risk of divorce. Such problems include lack of companionship, sexual infidelity, dishonesty on side of the husband, and lack of love and affection. Therefore, it is more necessary and important for different fields of science to study infidelity and its role, in causing problems in families and couple interactions. Discovering interactive traumas, after abjuration, could be a way of solving therapeutic interventions for improving couple communication. Most of the studies conducted in

regard of marital abjuration, have been descriptive and have investigated more, the students' attitudes toward the factors, consequences and definitions of abjuration. Moreover, the number of such studies is limited in Iran. However, marital abjuration should be investigated based on the attitudes and beliefs of individuals who are somehow involved in it. According to whatever mentioned, seemingly, a qualitative study needs to be conducted in order to investigate couples interactive pathology after abjuration, so that to provide preventive and therapeutic strategies. Thus, the present study aims to explore the traumas which couples interactions after abjuration would encounter.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Due to its nature, this study is a qualitative one. Also, because of the phenomenon of interest, which is abjuration on the side of husband, a phenomenological approach was used in this study. Phenomenology points out to the understanding of structures or the constructs which people use every day in order to make sense of their lives (Ritchie and Lewis, 2004). Moreover, the setting of the interviews were chosen by the participants, themselves. So, they had the option of choosing a place where they felt more comfortable.

Population and Participants

The population, in the study, included all women of Isfahan whose partners had abjured in the course of their life together, in years 2012-2013. Inclusion criteria included women who were suffering from abjuration and were willing to participate in the study. Also, they were able to provide the desired information. Moreover, the sampling was performed purposefully. The data was collected through a semi-structured interview, in which core research questions were posed. Furthermore,

participants were interviewed in settings that they wished for and where they felt more comfortable, such as in a park. Data collection continued until data saturation was achieved, and in the end, the number of participants increased to ten. The in-depth interviews with open questions, were done, in a quiet and calm environment, in the mean time of four hours. All interviews were recorded on an audio device, and then were transcribed word by word. Data analysis was conducted based on coding and categorizing interviews, and resulted in extracting 152 codes. In order to validate coding, three family therapy experts were asked to express their opinions. Next, after reading out the codes repeatedly, primary concepts and categories were placed within the thematic clusters and thereof the secondary categories were obtained. Finally, combining all the evolved opinions into a comprehensive description, the obtained categories, among all detailed phenomena in question, were placed within the general and fundamental concepts. The accuracy of certainty and validity of the findings evolved, were obtained through re-referring to participants, providing comprehensive descriptions and making necessary changes if needed. Furthermore, in order to enhance the ability of transferring the findings to other situations and groups, in this study, the maximum diversity of the participants was used. Ethical considerations of the study include: obtaining informed consent from research participants and recording their interviews, not inserting the interviewees' names, bailment in transferring the interviews from recorded format to the written one, respecting the confidentiality and privacy of information, and retaining the right to withdraw at any stage of the study.

FINDINGS

The research participants consisted of ten women, suffering from their husband's infidelity, with the range of 23-50 years old. Four of the participants were employees

and six of them housewives. One with a master's degree, three bachelors, one associate degree, three diplomas and one junior high school. Among the interviewees, one has been subjected to partner abjuration for thirteen years, one for ten years, two for five years, two for four years, three for two years and one for a year. Except for one, all the interviewees were still living with their husbands. Data analysis was performed using the method of codification and categorization. Among the total findings of the study, 125 conceptual codes and 21 sub-categories were extracted, which were placed in four main areas. Table 1 shows the extracted codes and sub-categories of each domain.

Domain One: Intrapersonal Traumas

One of the main domains extracted from the descriptions of the interviewees, was interpersonal trauma. The results indicated that, women affected by infidelity on the side of their husbands, were subjected to such interpersonal trauma after the abjuration. For example, such women had problems regarding appearance, physical and mental problems, drug abuse and sexual problems. One of the participants' statements about problems regarding appearance includes:

"I was overeating, when found out that my husband betrayed me, and I gave up sports. So I got fat day by day."

One of the other categories, extracted from the interviews, includes:

"I cried so much that I got terrible headaches. Some months later, my doctor prescribed antidepressant and sedative drugs for me."

Drug abuse was another category of this domain:

"When my husband realized that his infidelity had been revealed, he intentionally smoked and consumed opium

Table 1. The extracted concepts from analized interviews with study participants

M a i n D o m a i n	S u b - c a t e g o r i e s	E x t r a c t e d C o d e s
Intrapersonal Traumas	Problems regarding appearance Physical and mental problems Drug abuse Sexual problems	1 c o d e 3 codes 7 codes 23 codes
Interpersonal Traumas	Communication problems with the partner Communication patterns House management issues Emotional problems Behavioral problems with the pa Wrong thoughts and beliefs Annoying habits and traits Differences in couples' personal Differences in religion Issues related to childbearing Unfaithfulness Dependence on others	2 8 c o d e s 7 codes 28 codes 23 codes 80 codes 35 codes 92 codes 11 codes 10 codes 3 codes 34 codes 10 codes
Extra-personal Traumas	L e i s u r e t i m e Cultural differences Employment and economic pro Issues related to paternal relativ	5 c o d e s 4 codes 24 codes 20 codes
Special Extra-personal Traumas	Issues regarding childre n	1 0 c o d e s

at home. And because he had got depressed, his consumption had increased."

The statements of interviewees about sexual subjects indicated serious trauma in this category, as well:

"I don't care too much to have sex with my husband as before, because I was no more given pleasure. I always think how he could have had sex with a third person."

Domain Two: Interpersonal Traumas

One of the other main domains extracted from the interviews, was interpersonal traumas. The results of this domain were placed in twelve categories, including: communication problems with the partner, communication patterns, house management issues, emotional

problems, behavioral problems with the partner, interpersonal thoughts and beliefs, annoying habits and traits, differences in couples' personality traits, differences in religion, issues related to childbearing, unfaithfulness, and dependence on others. As interviewees have said, communication problem with the partner was considered to be one of the most important factors, predicting husbands' infidelities:

"Since my husband has betrayed me, we don't sympathize much with each other. We even don't try to understand each other's feelings. Whenever we talk, all said, is misunderstood by the two of us, and most of the times it leads to an argument."

The existence of the wrong communication patterns also played an important role in causing problems:

"I always check my husband to see where he goes and what he does. Every night I check his cellphone to see whom he's called to."

According to the interviewees, house management issues were of the important factors causing problem and traumas in families:

"In our house, there's a patriarchal atmosphere. I don't even have the power to decide. My husband says the last word all the time. He never consults me."

One of the others, was the interpersonal traumas of emotional problems:

"I pick on my husband too much, recently. On the other hand, he disrespects and insults me a lot. I criticize him ironically, and in return, he threatens and makes fun of me."

One of the other components of interpersonal traumas was wrong thoughts and beliefs:

"I'm sure my husband would betray me again, since he's done it once."

Annoying habits and traits was also a subset of interpersonal traumas:

"Since my husband has betrayed me, I suspect him a lot. I always talk about him to others. He also backbites me to his family."

Among the traumatic components in this domain, was the

difference in couples' personality traits:

"Though my husband is so disciplined, I'm so indifferent in doing things. He is outgoing and sociable while I prefer to be alone and not to be in contact with anybody." Differences in religion were among the subsets of interpersonal traumas:

"My husband blames me for being religious. Also, he makes fun of me if I wanted to attend religious ceremonies and believes such places are for idle people." Issues related to childbearing were also one of the interpersonal traumas:

"My third child was born, unwanted, at the height of my husband's infidelity. My husband and I disagreed, even, in upbringing our first two children. Now, having a third child, in that situation, was a real disaster."

The results of the interviews, with the participants, also indicated that there had been signs of unfaithfulness in their husbands even before the abjuration:

"My husband has got used to paying so much attention to other women. If he saw a woman on the street and he came to like her, he would start a conversation with her, making any sort of excuses. He even expressed his feelings to other women, at my presence."

Most of the interviewees stated that they have become too dependent on their parents:

"I can't stand staying away from my parents. I go to see them, almost every day, since they were the only ones who supported me in time of my husband's infidelity."

Domain Three: Extra-personal Traumas

Among the main domains of the statements of interviewees, were extra-personal traumas, which included four categories: leisure time problems, cultural differences, employment and economic problems, and issues related to paternal relatives, other relatives and friends.

Some of the interviewees had disagreements, with their husbands, in issues about leisure times:

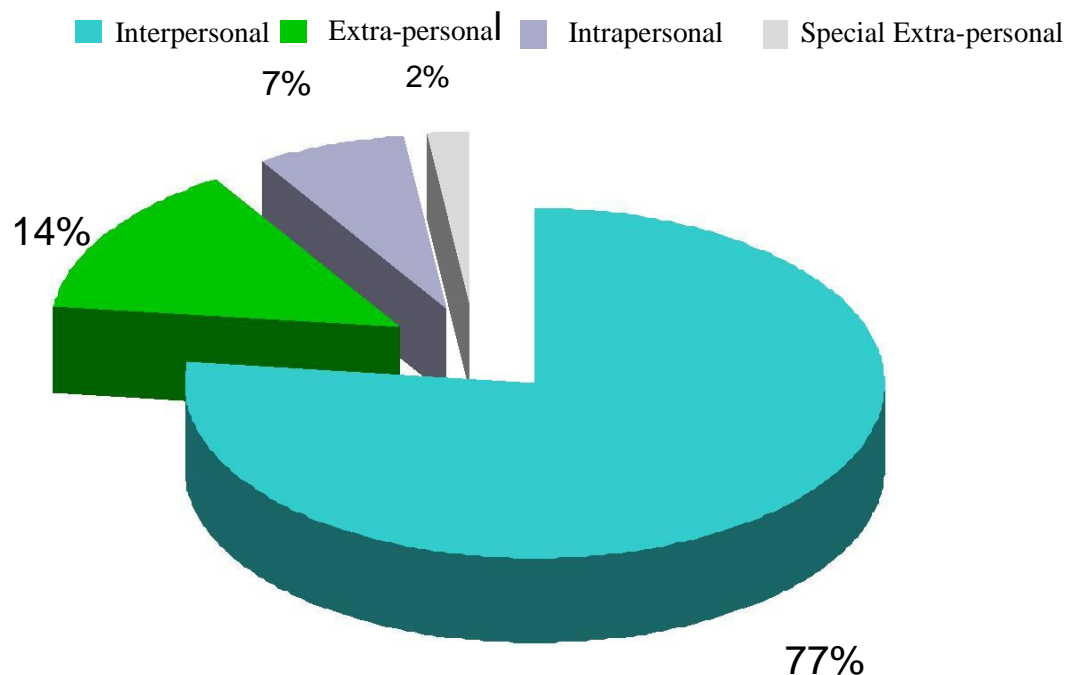


Figure 1. Prioritizing the interactional pathologies in couples' relationships after abjuration

"Recently, my husband and I have fun separately. For example, I would like to visit an art museum, while my husband prefers to go jogging and mountain climbing with his friends."

Cultural differences, were one of the other categories of extra-personal traumas:

"Rural nature of my husband and urban nature of me, have caused us to have different customs and rituals, of which neither of us could stand."

One of the extra-personal traumas includes employment and economic problems:

"When it was his hidden relationship with other women was revealed, my husband was fired from his office. He has changed his job several times up to now. His job instability was the last straw."

Issues related to paternal relatives, other relatives and friends, was also in the domain of extra-personal traumas:

"Though my husband spends most of his time with his friends, when my parents come to our home he pays no attention to them and leaves home. Then he calls and says he would be back after my parents left."

Domain Four: Special Extra-personal Traumas

The other main concept, extracted from interviews with the participants, was special extra-personal traumas, which, in this study, issues regarding children were assigned to:

" When my son realized that his father had betrayed me, he faced a serious academic failure. As the argument between my husband and I got more serious, my son would also encounter behavioral and disciplinary problems at school. He would sometimes unify with his father against me."Figure 1

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The conceptual map, presented in the study, included four main concepts and twenty-one sub-concepts. These concepts and sub-concepts were in relation to identifying the interactive traumas of couples' relationships after husband's infidelity. Most of the issues that women, subjected to their husband's infidelity, expressed, in this study, were interpersonal traumas. The communication problems with partner accounted for most traumas in this domain. The results of the study are consistent with the findings of Boisvert and Ladouceur, 1995, in regard of communication problems and their importance in the survival of couples' relationships. Young and Long (1998), also have mentioned that 78 percent of marital conflicts are due to communication problems. Moreover, in the category of extra-personal traumas, employment and economic problems were in priority. Employment factors included issues related to unemployment, bankruptcy, job instability, unfavorable conditions in the workplace, workload and the fatigue, job stress, job inaction, and women's career. The findings of this study are consistent with other studies (e. g Pham, Shackelford and Sela, 2013; Pham and Shackelford, 2013a; 2013b). According to Treas and Giesen (2000), the high level of interaction with others in the workplace provides the opportunity of abjuration. Sexual problems were placed in priority, in the category of intrapersonal traumas. Levenson, Carstensen and Gottman (1993), reported sexual issues as the most common problems experienced by couples. They believe that sexual intercourse is something more than just a physical need. Sexual intercourse is so important for a lasting satisfaction of marital life, and it has a symbolic value of a strong, successful marriage. That is because; it reinforces the bond between individuals. In this study, sexual problems, after the infidelity, included:

1. Lack of proper emotional relationship before and after sexual intercourse
2. Aggressive sex on side of the husband (due to

unconventional marital relations)

3. Early and delayed ejaculation of the man
4. Cold quirk women
5. Male impotence
6. Having an uniform and boring sex
7. Disagreement in the frequency of sexual intercourse

The category of special extra-personal traumas included issues regarding children to which ten codes were belonged. Those codes included academic, behavioral and ethical problems of children (7 cases), mental illnesses (intellectual-practical obsessions in children) (one case), child's disagreement with parents (one case), and child and father unification against the mother (one case). In Levenson et al. (1993), issues regarding children were one of the five common problems among couples. Generally speaking, in the present study, intrapersonal traumas point to traumas which are affected by personal traits, mental problems and physical structure and function, either in one or both of the couples. The interpersonal factor, on the other hand, refers to traumas which occur in the relationship between couples. However, the extra-personal factor points to traumas which are due to environmental and extra-marital factors; but it influences the relationship between couples either directly or indirectly. That is while, the special extra-personal factor refers to traumas by which special families or individuals are affected. Finally, identifying the traumas after abjuration, indicates the demanding need of couples to a careful attention for solving marital problems and improving the quality of life. One can prevent abjuration by planning, making proper interventions, and providing management strategies. Moreover, we can establish family-oriented training classes in order to teach young couples or those about to getting married, effective partner communications.

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