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Prediction of Attitudes Toward Marital Infidelity based on Sense of Coherence among Married Women

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Marital infidelity attitudes refer to any inclination or perception toward violating marital commitment by establishing physical, sexual, or emotional intimacy with someone outside the marriage. The present study aimed to predict attitudes toward marital infidelity based on sense of coherence among married employed women in Shiraz.

Methods and Materials: This research was applied in purpose, descriptive in method, and correlational in design. The statistical population included all married employed women in Shiraz in 2024, among whom 388 participants were selected through convenience sampling. The participants completed the Wattley Attitude Toward Infidelity Scale (2008), and the Sense of Coherence Scale by Flensborg-Madsen, Ventegodt, and Merrick (2006). Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26 through Pearson correlation and multiple regression (simultaneous method).

Findings: Results showed a significant negative relationship between sense of coherence, its components (comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness) ($P<0.01$). Moreover, results of multiple regression analysis indicated that sense of coherence significantly predicted attitudes toward marital infidelity. Specifically, sense of coherence accounted for 8% of the variance, and both variables together explained 18% of the variance in attitudes toward marital infidelity.

Conclusion: These findings highlight the importance of psychological factors such as sense of coherence in predicting marital behaviors. It is therefore recommended that counseling and educational programs for married employed women focus on enhancing self-awareness, and stress-coping skills to strengthen marital relationships and reduce the likelihood of infidelity.

Keywords: Attitude Towards Marital Infidelity, Sense of Coherence, Marriage, Women.

Introduction

Marriage functions as the cornerstone of social relations, shapes the life course of families, and contributes to the overall peace and stability of societies (Haryanto et al., 2024). Marital infidelity, by a broad definition, is a breach of the relational commitment between two people that leads to the formation of degrees of emotional and physical intimacy with someone outside that relationship (Asadu & Egbuche, 2020), and it can produce wide-ranging negative consequences including reduced trust, increased tensions, family conflicts, and even the disintegration of the family system (Kamali et al., 2020). It has been reported that approximately 21% of men and 11% of women commit marital infidelity at some point in their lives (Hajjabari et al., 2023). Although precise statistics on the rate of marital infidelity in Iran are not available, according to some figures around 80% of divorces occur due to infidelity Bahonar et al., (2024) and 50–65% of couples' therapy cases relate to issues associated with extramarital relationships (Gorjian Mehlabani et al., 2023).

In Iran, official reports indicate that roughly 15% of women participate in the labor market, a large proportion of whom are married. Estimates suggest there are about six to seven million employed married women in the country. This group, because they simultaneously face occupational and family roles, experience additional stresses that may make them more vulnerable to marital conflict and even to more permissive attitudes toward infidelity. Employed women are exposed to greater risk due to the dual pressures of work and family responsibilities (Attaran et al., 2023). Employed women, because of role conflict between work and family, are more susceptible to emotional strain, reduced marital satisfaction, and decreased marital commitment (Ramadoss & Rajadhyaksha, 2012).

Attitude toward marital infidelity is an important predictor of the propensity to engage in it, because beliefs and values either encourage or discourage participation in extramarital relationships (Habibi et al., 2019). Lax sexual attitudes have been identified as a significant factor associated with infidelity-related behaviours, suggesting that individuals with more permissive views of sexual relationships are more likely to engage in extramarital affairs (Șerban et al., 2022). Attitudes toward infidelity can be shaped by various factors, including personal experiences and cultural norms (Deniz & Baltacı, 2023; Yousef Pouri & Bahrami, 2023). Moreover, men and women often react differently to emotional versus sexual infidelity, with men typically more distressed by sexual infidelity and women more distressed by emotional infidelity (Kato, 2021).

Studies have shown that individuals with a strong sense of coherence are better equipped to manage stress and complex life situations, which in turn enhances moral decision-making (Eriksson, 2016). Women who possess a strong sense of coherence are less likely to engage in or tolerate infidelity (Moghadamnia & Soleimani Farsani, 2023). Sense of coherence is defined as an individual's ability to comprehend a particular situation and to use available resources effectively through adaptive coping strategies (Navarro Prados et al., 2022). Sense of coherence explains why some people do not lose their health when facing stressful situations and instead bolster personal resources to prevent psychological and physical disorders (Ruiz-Frutos et al., 2021). According to Antonovsky's conceptualization, the construct comprises three components: comprehensibility (cognitive), manageability (instrumental), and meaningfulness (motivational). These together translate into two fundamental elements of stress management: an orientation toward acceptance and problem-solving, and the ability to utilise available resources (Navarro Prados et al., 2022). Individuals with a high sense of coherence can accurately appraise their environment and recognise that the challenges they face are worth effort and work (Konaszewski et al., 2021).

Overall, marital infidelity is one of the important and challenging issues in contemporary societies that has deep effects on the stability and psychological health of spouses, and attitudes toward infidelity are an important indicator for predicting the propensity to engage in it. Employed married women, because they face occupational and family stressors, may encounter greater challenges in emotion regulation and in maintaining marital commitment. Although numerous

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studies have examined factors influencing attitudes toward marital infidelity, the relationship between meta-emotion with attitudes toward infidelity has not been addressed in this population. Therefore, the main question of this study is whether meta-emotion can predict attitudes toward marital infidelity among employed married women.

Methods and Materials

Study Design

The present study employed a descriptive–correlational research design aimed at examining the relationship between the psychological variables of sense of coherence and meta-emotion with attitudes toward marital infidelity among employed married women. The statistical population consisted of all employed married women in Shiraz, aged 18 to 45 years, in the year 2024. Based on Morgan's table, a sample of 384 participants was determined, and with an additional 5% to account for potential outliers or unusable data, the questionnaire was distributed among 404 women. Ultimately, the data from 388 participants were included in the final analysis. A convenience sampling method was used.

Inclusion criteria were: being a woman, being married, having at least three years of shared married life, being 18 to 45 years old, having at least a high-school diploma, visiting counseling centers with complaints related to marital conflicts, absence of any acute psychological disorder or long-term psychiatric medication use, no history of divorce, and providing informed consent to participate. Participants who reported active extramarital relationships during the study, provided incomplete questionnaires (missing more than 20% of items), or were unwilling to continue cooperation were excluded. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 26.

Attitude Toward Infidelity Scale: Attitude Toward Infidelity Scale: The Attitude Toward Infidelity Scale (ATIS) was developed by Whatley (2006) to assess individuals' attitudes, feelings, and evaluations regarding marital infidelity. The scale consists of 12 items scored on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicate a more accepting or positive attitude toward infidelity. Some items are reverse-scored, and the total score ranges from 12 to 84, with 48 representing a neutral position between rejection and acceptance of infidelity. Whatley reported acceptable reliability and validity for the original scale, with Cronbach's alpha around .80. In Iran, Habibi, Sayed Alitabar, Pouravari, and Salehi (2019) examined the reliability, validity, and factor structure of the Persian version of the scale among 528 married participants referred to counseling centers in Tehran. Their results confirmed a one-factor structure and showed acceptable psychometric properties, including Cronbach's alpha of .71 and test–retest reliability of .87.

Sense of Coherence Questionnaire (SCQ): The Sense of Coherence Questionnaire, also known as the Orientation to Life Questionnaire, was originally developed by Antonovsky (1987) to measure individuals' global orientation toward life. The original version consists of 29 items and assesses three components: comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness. Antonovsky also developed a shorter 13-item version. The original 29-item form includes 11 items for comprehensibility, 10 items for manageability, and 8 items for meaningfulness, with responses scored on a seven-point semantic differential scale. Later, Flensborg-Madsen, Ventegodt, and Merrick (2006) proposed an amended version of Antonovsky's scale, known as SOC II, based on the same three theoretical components. This version included 35 items categorized into comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness, and the authors reported Cronbach's alpha of .874 for the scale. In Iranian studies, the Sense of Coherence Scale has also been used among different populations; however, the exact source attributed to Babayi (2014) should be checked against the original Persian study before being cited. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was calculated as .71.

Findings and Results

The mean age of participants was approximately 31 years, with ages ranging from early adulthood to middle age. The largest proportion of respondents fell in the 26–35 age group. Regarding education, the majority held a bachelor's degree, while smaller proportions had high-school diplomas or postgraduate qualifications. On the family dimension,

most participants had one or two children, and a large share of the sample were in the early to middle years of married life. Taken together, these demographics indicate that the study sample was composed mainly of young to middle-aged married women with relatively stable family situations.

Concerning occupational and economic characteristics, most respondents worked in administrative or educational sectors and were primarily employed in the public sector. The majority held formal contracts and reported working hours within a standard range. In terms of economic status, a substantial portion of the sample reported a monthly income in the 10–20 million Toman range, indicating a predominantly middle socioeconomic level. More than half of respondents owned their homes, while the remainder were renters. Overall, the sample displayed relative occupational and economic stability and represented a socioeconomically diverse but largely middle-class group. Prior to conducting parametric analyses, normality of the study variables was assessed by examining skewness and kurtosis and by performing the Kolmogorov–Smirnov (K–S) test. Table 1 presents means, standard deviations, skewness, kurtosis, K–S statistics and K–S p-values for the key variables.

Table 1

Means, standard deviations, skewness, kurtosis and K–S test results for study variables

Variable	Dimension	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	K–S statistic	K–S p
Sense of coherence	Meaningfulness	**19.68**	4.10	−0.050	−0.460	0.073	0.200
	Comprehensibility	**23.18**	4.10	−0.061	−0.621	0.060	0.200
	Manageability	**35.57**	5.18	−0.157	0.046	0.067	0.200
	Total	**78.54**	8.65	−0.069	−0.122	0.065	0.200
Attitude toward infidelity		**43.61**	9.40	0.062	−0.242	0.071	0.200

Note. Means and SDs reported as in the original dataset. K–S p-values for all variables are > .05; therefore normality cannot be rejected and parametric tests are appropriate. To examine multicollinearity and the linear relations among predictors (a regression assumption), correlations and variance-inflation factors (VIFs) were inspected. The correlation matrix is shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Correlation matrix

Variable (1) Attitude	(2) SOC	(3) Meaningfulness	(4) Comprehensibility	(5) Manageability	(6) MES total	(7) MES negative	(8) MES positive
1. Attitude toward infidelity	—						
2. Sense of coherence	−0.284	1.000					
3. Meaningfulness	−0.191	0.566	1.000				
4. Comprehensibility	−0.200	0.719	−0.561	1.000			
5. Manageability	−0.104	0.424	−0.345	−0.206	1.000		

As Table 2 indicates, none of the predictor variables—except for the overall sense-of-coherence score and its subscales—showed strong intercorrelations, reducing concern about extreme multicollinearity from pairwise correlations. Because including the overall SOC score together with its subscales in one model could induce multicollinearity, predictors were examined in two separate regression models. VIFs for the predictors in each model are shown in Table 3.

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Table 3

Variance-inflation factors (VIFs) for predictors

Model	Criterion variable	Predictors entered	VIF
1	Attitude toward infidelity	Sense of coherence (total)	1.03
2	Attitude toward infidelity	Meaningfulness	1.59
		Comprehensibility	1.54
		Manageability	1.18

VIF values for all predictors were well below the common threshold of 10, indicating no serious multicollinearity. (Tolerance values likewise did not approach zero.) Durbin–Watson statistics were computed to assess independence of residuals. The Durbin–Watson statistic was approximately 2.01 for Model 1 and 2.11 for Model 2, both within the acceptable range (≈1.5–2.5), supporting the independence of errors assumption. The standardized and unstandardized regression coefficients for Model 1 (predicting attitude toward infidelity from total SOC) are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Regression coefficients — Model 1 (Attitude toward infidelity)

Predictor	B (unstandardized)	SE B	Beta (standardized)	t	p
Constant	47.557	5.57	—	8.53	.001
Sense of coherence (total)	−0.36	0.05	−0.33	−6.90	.001

Model 1 explained approximately 14.3% of the variance in attitude toward infidelity ($R^2 \approx 0.143$). Both predictors made statistically significant contributions ($p < .05$). Sense of coherence had a negative association with permissive attitudes toward infidelity (standardized $\beta = -0.33$), indicating that higher SOC is associated with less accepting attitudes. Table 5 summarizes the simultaneous multiple regression ANOVA for Model 2, which included SOC subscales as predictors.

Table 5

Regression ANOVA and model fit — Model 2

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2
Regression	14413.52	5	2882.70	**55.62**	.001	0.649	0.421	0.414
Residual	19798.48	382	51.82					
Total	34212.00	387						

Model 2 was statistically significant ($F(5, 382) = 55.62$, $p < .001$), and the set of predictors accounted for about 42.1% of the variance in attitudes toward infidelity ($R^2 = .421$, adjusted $R^2 = .414$). This indicates a substantially better overall fit than Model 1 when decomposing SOC into subcomponents. The regression coefficients for Model 2 are reported in Table 6.

Table 6

Regression coefficients — Model 2 (Attitude toward infidelity)

Predictor	B (unstandardized)	SE B	Beta (standardized)	t	p
Constant	**75.39**	14.50	—	14.65	.001
Meaningfulness (SOC)	**−0.54**	0.11	**−0.23**	−4.86	.001

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Comprehensibility (SOC)	**−0.55**	0.08	**−0.30**	−6.27	.001
Manageability (SOC)	**−0.49**	0.06	**−0.32**	−7.65	.001

In Model 2, all predictors were significant at $p < .001$. The strongest negative predictor of permissive attitudes toward infidelity was manageability (SOC subscale; $\beta = -0.32$), followed closely by comprehensibility ($\beta = -0.30$) and meaningfulness ($\beta = -0.23$). These negative betas indicate that higher scores on SOC components are associated with less permissive attitudes. Summary interpretation. Sense of coherence—both as a total construct and across its subcomponents—consistently predicted lower acceptance of marital infidelity. Model 2, which separated SOC into subscales, provided a stronger explanatory power (≈42% variance explained) than the model with total scores only (≈14% variance explained), indicating the importance of examining specific facets of these psychological constructs when predicting attitudes toward infidelity.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to predict attitudes toward marital infidelity based on sense of coherence among employed married women. The results indicated that sense of coherence predicted significant variance in attitudes toward infidelity. Beta coefficients showed that sense of coherence was a significant negative predictor. The finding regarding the predictive role of sense of coherence aligns with prior work (Antonovsky, 1987; Betke et al., 2021; Moksnes, 2021), which has shown that high coherence reduces the likelihood of favourable attitudes toward risky behaviours such as infidelity.

Marital infidelity is a serious threat to family relationships and marital life and has long attracted the attention of psychologists and sociologists. Individuals' attitudes toward infidelity are among the most important antecedents of its occurrence: a permissive attitude can increase the likelihood of infidelity, whereas a negative attitude can act as a deterrent. Therefore, identifying variables that predict attitudes toward marital infidelity is of considerable importance (Nafisa & Ratnasari, 2022).

One such variable is sense of coherence. In Antonovsky's sense-of-coherence theory, coherence helps individuals perceive the world as comprehensible, meaningful and manageable. This orientation enables adaptive responses to life problems and crises and helps avoid maladaptive behaviours such as a tendency toward infidelity (Betke et al., 2021). Sense of coherence—especially the manageability component—helps women mobilize internal resources (e.g., self-efficacy) and external resources (e.g., social support) and to apply adaptive coping strategies when facing challenges. In such circumstances, infidelity is not seen as a "solution" but as a harmful behaviour that threatens the family foundation (Heydarian et al., 2022). Moreover, comprehensibility and meaningfulness render events predictable and valuable for women, making married life an integral part of identity and purpose; this strengthens negative attitudes toward infidelity (Betke et al., 2021).

Given the roles of sense of coherence, this psychological constructs appear to operate synergistically. Sense of coherence helps individuals perceive situations as meaningful and manageable. In the absence of either factor, the likelihood of a permissive attitude toward infidelity increases.

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. First, because of time and operational constraints the sampling was convenience-based, so generalisation to the wider population of employed married women should be made cautiously. Second, the use of self-report instruments may be subject to biases such as social desirability or response inaccuracy. Third, some potentially important covariates—such as socioeconomic status, attachment style, and religious or cultural beliefs—were not controlled for and could influence the results. In addition, conducting the study in a single city (Shiraz) at one point in time introduces geographic and cultural limits; results may differ in other regions. Response conditions and context may also have affected data precision. Moreover, due to the descriptive–

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correlational design, observed relationships do not permit causal inferences. Finally, the sensitive nature of marital infidelity may have led some participants to respond cautiously or to conceal information. Given these limitations, future research is recommended to use random sampling methods, longitudinal or experimental designs, and mixed methods (including interviews and observation), and to examine cultural, economic and personality mediators to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the relations among sense of coherence, and attitudes toward marital infidelity.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Ethical considerations in this study were that participation was entirely optional.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contribute to this study.

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