



Prediction of attitude toward extramarital relationships based on impulsivity and personality traits

Abolghasem Mehrinejad¹, Farideh Shahabi²

Journal of Research & Health
Social Development & Health Promotion
Research Center

Vol. 8, No.6, Nov & Dec 2018

Pages: 492- 498

DOI: 10.29252/jrh.8.6.492

Original Article

1. **Correspondence to:** Department of Psychology, Faculty of Psychology and Education, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran.

Email: ab_mehrnejad@yahoo.com

2. Department of Psychology, Faculty of Literature and Human Sciences, Islamic Azad University, Shahroud Branch, Iran.

Received: 14 Jan 2016

Accepted: 28 Sep 2016

How to cite this article: Mehrinejad A, Shahabi F. Prediction of attitude toward extramarital relationships based on impulsivity and personality traits. *J Research & Health* 2018; 8(6): 492- 498.

Abstract

Impulsivity is the fundamental aspect of human behavior that has been reflected in principal theories of personality in concepts of traits and sub-traits and considered as a different structure in every person. The aim of this study was to predict the attitude toward infidelity based on impulsivity and personality traits. The research method was correlational. The study population consisted of all those who had referred to family courts, counseling centers and welfare organization of Babolsar city whom 150 participants were selected. Participants responded to NEO personality inventory, attitudes toward infidelity scale, and dickman impulsivity inventory. The results showed that the attitude toward infidelity was correlated negatively with agreeableness, while it was correlated positively with conscientiousness, openness to experience, extraversion, and neuroticism. Results also showed that there was a significant positive correlation between attitude toward infidelity and impulsivity. It was also found that personality traits were significant predictors of attitude toward infidelity and the obtained model gave 0.52 of the variance. The results of this study demonstrated the importance of personality traits for counselors and psychotherapists to evaluate these factors and do all their efforts in order to identify the influencing factors and obstacles.

Keywords: Attitude, Impulsive Behavior, Personality

Introduction

Despite the social and cultural constraints on the relationship with the opposite sex, evidence suggests that this kind of relationship is increasing in the major cities which has given rise the possibility of divorce and consequently has caused to breakdown of the marital relationship [1]. Social pathologists believe that extra-marital relations have increased in recent years, and realizing the fact that one or both spouses have sexual or emotional relationships outside of marriage, creates a backwater of thoughts, feelings and behaviors which can

bring the people on the edge of an abyss. Unfortunately, there is no actual statistic regarding couples with extra-marital relations crisis and related issues. Thus, addressing to the issue of infidelity and its role in social and family problems by different domains of knowledge has become a necessity more than ever.

Extra-marital relations could stem from personal problems such as addiction to sex, the need for excitement and arousal, personality disorders, psychological trauma,

and midlife crisis [2]. Research has also shown that personality styles play an important role in predicting marital relationships [3-7]. Drigotas and Barta [8] have defined the extra-marital relations as passing of the border of marital relationships by entering into physical or emotional intimacy with someone outside the marital relationship.

Recent researches in the field of extra-marital behaviors show that personality traits and impulsivity are among the most important factors which cause committing this kind of behavior and studies conducted by Lalasz and Weigel [9], Barta and Kane [10], and Buss and Shackelford [11] confirm this claim. Studies have also shown that some characteristics such as extraversion, conscientiousness, and adaptability of gender can be predictors of extra-marital relations [12,13]. While some research has suggested the relationship between extra-marital relationships and neuroticism [14], some others have stated that neuroticism could not be considered as a predictor for extra-marital relationships [15].

The term called Impulsivity refers to "tendency to make hasty behavior, lack of prediction or planning, or as behaving or acting without enough thought" [11]. Impulsivity is the fundamental aspect of human behavior that has been reflected in principal theories of personality in concepts of traits and sub-traits and considered as a different structure in every person. While most people are in challenge with impulsive behaviors at certain times, it is assumed that impulsivity as a personality trait enjoys relative stability [11]. Moreover, impulsivity is associated with many behavioral problems and risky behaviors. For example, personal accounts of impulsivity have been associated with excessive drinking of alcohol, smoking, and drug use and have predicted them [16]. Other behavioral problems that seem to be associated with impulsivity are risky sexual behaviors [17].

Considering what was mentioned, the main question of the current study was whether personality traits and impulsivity have predictive effects on attitude towards infidelity or not.

Method

This was an analytical study. The study population comprised 150 people (both men and women) who were selected by convenience sampling method from those who had referred to family courts, counseling centers and welfare organization of Babolsar city, the north of Iran, 2015. Due to the correlation type (regression) of the present study, the sample size consisted of at least 10 participants per each predictor variable [17]. The study inclusion criteria were: referring to family courts, welfare organizations, and counseling centers, and spending a year after the marriage; while the exclusion criteria of the study was presenting incomplete and invalid information.

The measurement instruments of this study were: *Big Five Personality Inventory (NEO)*: NEO-PI-R Personality Inventory that was provided by McCrae and Costa became the successor of the Neo-test (NEO) [18]. It has five subscales of extraversion, neuroticism, openness to experience, conscientiousness, and consistency that each subscale consists of 12 items, and the items are scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The questionnaire also has a short form called (NEO-FFI) which is a 60-item questionnaire to evaluate the big five personality traits [18]. In the validation of Neo-test conducted by Garusi Farshi [19], the correlation coefficient for each of the big five-aspects of personality was reported in range of 0.56 to 0.87. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for each of the factors of neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness was achieved as 0.86, 0.73, 0.56, 0.68, and 0.87, respectively. [19].

DII: It is a self-report questionnaire that has been made to assess both functional and dysfunctional impulsivity. The questionnaire includes 23 questions that will be answered by yes or no [20]. Dickman [21] has reported the Cronbach's alpha for functional impulsivity as 0.83 and for dysfunctional impulsivity as 0.86 [22]. According to reliability analyses,

the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for functional impulsivity subscale were achieved 0.76 and 0.74 in the German and American versions of the instrument, respectively, while for dysfunctional impulsivity subscale, these values were obtained as 0.84 and 0.85 in the mentioned versions, respectively [23]. However, in the American version of the questionnaire, the correlation coefficient between the two subscales was positive ($r=0.23$) but in the Keles et al. study [23], these two subscales were shown to be independent from each other ($r=-0.02$). In the present study, the consistency coefficient of this scale was achieved as 0.82 based on the Cronbach's alpha method.

Attitudes toward Infidelity Scale (ATIS): This 12-item scale has been made by Wheatley [24] to investigate the attitude towards infidelity. These statements include questions such as "disloyalty never harms anyone" and "If I knew that my partner is not informed of the relationship, I had such a relationship". Participants respond to these questions in a seven-point scale (Likert type) from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). For the items with negative wording, the scores would be given in reverse order because higher scores indicate more positive attitudes towards cross-marital relationships. The norm of this scale has been achieved by Habibi, Sayed Ali tabar, and Pooravari [25]. The results of the Wheatley study [24] implied a good validity of this scale for attitude measurement, as the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of internal consistency was measured as 0.80. To determine the reliability

of this scale, Cronbach's alpha coefficient and test-retest method were used. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the ATIS was estimated at 0.71, and the test-retest coefficient of the scale was reported as 0.87 [25]. Validation of this test has been assessed using criterion validity (of divergent) in Iran. For this purpose, the religious orientation questionnaire of Allport was used. Validity of the internal religious orientation was 0.29 and it was 0.16 for the external religious orientation [25].

To analyze the data, the mean and standard deviation, correlation and multiple regression analysis were used. Data analysis software was SPSS 22.

Results

Of the 150 participants in the study, 78 (52%) were female and 72 (48%) were male. In terms of the numbers of marriages, only 12 (8%) were married more than once. The mean age of the subjects was 25.6 with a standard deviation of 7.37 in the age range of 26-53 years. Regarding the education level, 42 participants (28%) had high school diploma certificates, 98 cases (3.65%) were undergraduate and the remaining 10 (7.6%) had a master's degree. For the number of years spent since the beginning of the marriage, 38 participants (3.25%) reported between 1 and 5 years, 36 cases (24%) of participants had selected the option 5 to 10 years, 33 participants (22%) has lived for 10 to 15 years, and the remaining 43 cases (7.28%) had chosen the response of more than 15 years.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of participants according to the gender factor

Variables/Gender	Men		Women	
	M	SD	M	SD
Agreeableness	6.32	2.20	6.60	5.49
Openness to experience	4.15	2.52	4.20	2.37
Extroversion	4.18	2.85	3.97	2.51
Neuroticism	6.87	1.37	4.74	1.41
Conscientiousness	4.78	1.30	5.51	2.54
Attitudes toward Infidelity	11.50	5.54	7.83	3.48
Impulsivity	12.64	3.41	11.72	2.67

Levine's test results showed that none of the variables of the five-factor personality and attitude toward extra-marital relations were

significant ($p>0.05$), as the variances were homogenous.

As can be seen from Table 2, in the five

personality factors, all variables showed a significant relationship with attitude toward infidelity. Of these, attitude toward infidelity was correlated negatively with agreeableness ($p<0.05$) and conscientiousness ($p<0.01$). Negative correlation between the two variables

was indicative of the reverse relationship. Each of the factors of openness to experience ($p<0.05$), extroversion ($p<0.01$) and neuroticism ($p<0.01$) also had a significant positive relationship with the attitude toward infidelity.

Table 2 Pearson correlation matrix between the five factors of personality and attitude toward extra-marital relationships

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Agreeableness	1						
Openness to experience	0.57**	1					
Extroversion	0.27**	0.10	1				
Neuroticism	-0.25*	0.32**	0.21*	1			
Conscientiousness	0.35*	-0.21*	-0.28**	-0.34**	1		
Attitude toward Infidelity	-0.28*	0.24*	0.57**	0.45**	-0.55**	1	
Impulsivity	-0.20*	0.17*	0.36**	0.41**	0.55**	0.59**	1

Using the enter method, the obtained model was significant ($Adj R^2=0.52$ and $F=61.28$). Table 3 provides detailed information of predictor variables which have been included in the model. Extroversion ($Beta=0.34$) and

conscientiousness ($Beta=-0.33$) at $p<0.01$ and neuroticism ($Beta=0.17$) and agreeableness ($Beta=-0.17$) at $p<0.05$ were significant predictors. This model explained 52.7% of the variance ($Adj R^2=0.52$).

Table 3 Regression total score of attitude toward infidelity based on personality traits and impulsivity

Variable	B	S.E.	Beta	t	P	R	Adj R ²	F	p value
The constant value	1.06	0.47	-	2.32	0.02				
Openness to experience	0.02	0.01	0.11	1.64	0.10				
Agreeableness	-0.03	0.01	-0.17	-2.48	0.01	0.74	0.52	28.61	0.0001
Neuroticism	0.05	0.02	0.17	2.01	0.04				
Extroversion	0.13	0.03	0.34	4.25	0.0001				
Conscientiousness	-0.01	0.00	-0.33	-5.40	0.0001				
Impulsivity	0.03	0.02	0.15	1.47	0.14				

Discussion

The aim of this study was to predict the attitude toward infidelity based on impulsivity and personality traits among married persons. The results showed that there was a relationship between impulsivity and attitude toward infidelity. As the results showed, the relationship between impulsivity and attitude toward infidelity was positive and significant which was in line with the study of Shackelford [26] but it was not in consistency with the study of Levine and Jackson [27].

One of the reasons that can justify the finding is that the theoretical principles related to impulsivity and extra-marital relations remind us that abnormal lack of foresight (acting without thinking) can be a predictor of extra-marital

relations, even if people have reported that the behaviors associated with marital infidelity is not preferred by them; because according to the theory of planned behavior [28], it has been predicted that people with low self-control of behavior are less likely to comply with their attitudes and their behaviors. In addition, it is anticipated that the functional impulsivity with low levels of previous thinking, if is under such a condition which leads to favorable results, could not be a predictor of the extra-marital relationship [21]. However, the present study showed an association between extra-marital relationships and impulsivity. An explanation for this finding could be that the mere act without previous thinking, as much as it can

lead to behaviors outside of anyone's control, can push a person to come into the extra-marital relations.

As the results showed, the relationship between personality traits and attitude toward extra-marital relationship was significant and this finding was consistent with those obtained by Lalasz and Weigel [9], Barta and Kane [10], and Bass and Shackelford [11]. The results showed that those who were extroverted had more permissive attitude toward infidelity. In the analysis of the relationship between attitude toward extra-marital relations and openness to experience, a significant positive correlation was observed which was consistent with the findings of researches conducted by Lalasz and Weigel [9] and Rezai [30]. People who have an open spirit, autonomy, curiosity, liberal feedback, and intellectual orientation emphasize to not follow the customs and develop non-partisan attitudes, and they have the need for diversity and broad interests [31]. Thus, it is not surprising that such features make them to adopt more permissive attitude regarding extra-marital relationships.

On the other hand, based on the results of the current survey, there was a significant negative relationship between agreeableness and attitude toward extra-marital relationships which is consistent with the researches of Lalasz and Weigel [9], and Rezai [30]. Also, a significant negative correlation was observed between attitude toward extra-marital relationships and conscientiousness factor which is consistent with the research of Rezai [30]. It means that whatever a character has higher conscientiousness, the likelihood of his/her entrance into the extra-marital relations is lower. As it is known, people with lower conscientiousness are chaotic, have less sense of responsibility, and do not follow certain principles as well as they cannot be prevented from normal impulse. In contrast, those who are conscientious orderly and with perseverance accept their responsibility and try to create a positive and lasting married life [32]. So, they are less looking for problem-solving and if they are encountered problems in the marital relationship, they try to fix it

through other methods [33]; thus, people with this personality trait can be potentially in conflict and post-marital relations. Finally, the current study showed that people with the personality trait of neuroticism, who achieved higher scores in terms of such trait, had more permissive attitude toward extra-marital relationships. This finding is consistent with researches of Lalasz and Weigel [6] and Rezai [30]. Previous studies regarding relationships between the extra-marital relations and the big five personality traits have shown that having high levels of neuroticism or continuous experience of negative feelings by couples towards each other plays very important role in disrupting the couple's marital adjustment [30] and thus paves the way for having such relationships.

Due to cultural and social issues of our country, the study was conducted on a very small sample size, because the people involved in the extra-marital relations were providing false information or they conceal the issue in question due to the concerns regarding possible consequences and lack of trust in the researcher. The study was performed in the city of Babolsar on married men and women. Therefore, the results should be generalized with caution. If possible, it is recommended to repeat such study in the general population, not just in a specific class of the society. It is suggested that to further clarifying the role of personality in the extra-marital relationships, other scales in the field of personality also be implemented. This research was conducted through closed-response questionnaires, while it seems that for obtaining further information regarding individuals' experiences in the field of extra-marital relations, applying other tools such as interview can be helpful. Use of the findings of this study can be helpful in developing and implementing effective preventive and therapeutic interventions for extra-marital relations.

Conclusion

The results of this study showed that the personality factors can predict attitude toward

infidelity, whereas impulsivity cannot predict it. This means that whatever the man personality has lower degrees of agreeableness, probably he/she has equally, more permissive attitude toward extra-marital relationships. In explaining why people who have low agreeableness, at least think to someone other than their spouse without having any sexual relationship with him/her in spite of the desire to have such a relation, possibly we can say that it could be due to the lack of morale and confidence and having a high flexibility which leads to conflict in their marital relationship and thus they feel less commitment toward their marriage. Since they have no sympathy with others, and act according to their wishes, they only want to meet the self-centered sexual impulses, and enter to multiple sexual relationships without being engaged in emotional relationships with that person. Usually, those who have multiple sexual relationships are not involved in any emotional feelings and are far from any sense of responsibility and commitment that has originated from the traits of their incompatible personality.

Acknowledgements

The authors appreciate all persons who participated in this study. This research received no financial support from any organization.

Contribution

Study design: FSH, AM

Data collection and analysis: FSH

Manuscript preparation: FSH, AM

Conflict of Interest

"The authors declare that they have no competing interests."

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this manuscript.

References

1- Mark KP, Janssen E, Milhausen RR. Infidelity in heterosexual couples: Demographic, interpersonal, and personality-related predictors of extradyadic sex. *Arch*

*Sex Behav*201;40(5):971-82.

2- Allen ES, Baucom DH. Adult attachment and patterns of extradyadic involvement. *Fam Process*2004; 43(4): 467-88.

3- Thornton V, Nagurney A. What is infidelity? Perceptions based on biological sex and personality. *Psychol Res Behav Manag*2011; 4: 51-8.

4- Lalasz CB, Weigel DJ. Understanding the relationship between gender and extradyadic relations: The mediating role of sensation seeking on intentions to engage in sexual infidelity. *Pers Individ Dif*2011; 50(7): 1079-83.

5- McKibbin WF, Miner EJ, Shackelford TK, Ehrke AD, Weekes-Shackelford VA. Men's mate retention varies with men's personality and their partner's personality. *Pers Individ Dif*2014;56:62-7.

6- Hughes S. Affairs of the heart: gender, personality, religiosity and parental relationship history as predictors of infidelity. *Dublin Business School*2013

7- Harris LE. Personality Characteristics and Attitudes towards Infidelity In Gay and Lesbian Individuals. Garden City, NY: Adelphi University; 2012.

8- Drigotas SM, Barta W. The cheating heart: scientific explorations of infidelity. *Curr Dir Psychol Sci*2001; 10(5): 177-80.

9- Lalasz CB, Weigel DJ. Understanding the relationship between gender and extradyadic relations: The mediating role of sensation seeking on intentions to engage in sexual infidelity. *Pers Individ Dif*2011; 50(7): 1079-83.

10- Barta WD, Kiene SM. Motivations for infidelity in heterosexual dating couples: the roles of gender, personality differences, and sociosexual orientation. *J Soc Pers Relat*2005; 22(3): 339-60.

11- Buss DM, Shackelford TK. From vigilance to violence: mate retention tactics in married couples. *J Pers Soc Psychol*1997;72(2):346-61.

12- Pinkerton SD, Abramson PR. Implications of increased infectivity in early-stage HIV infection application of a Bernoulli-process model of HIV transmission. *Eval Rev*1996;20(5):516-40.

13- Wiggins JD, Lederer DA. Differential antecedents of infidelity in marriage. *American Mental Health Counselors Association Journal*1984; 6(4): 152-61.

14- Schmitt DP. Are sexual promiscuity and relationship infidelity linked to different personality traits across cultures? Findings from the International Sexuality Description Project. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*2002; 4(4).

15- Shaye A. Infidelity in dating relationships: Do big five personality traits and gender influence infidelity?. Cincinnati: Proquest; 2010. pp: 7-69

16- Messina BG, Silvestri MM, Diulio AR, Murphy JG, Garza KB, Correia CJ. Alcohol use, impulsivity, and the non-medical use of prescription stimulants among

- college students. *Addict Behav*2014; 39(12): 1798-803.
- 17- Deckman T, DeWall CN. Negative urgency and risky sexual behaviors: A clarification of the relationship between impulsivity and risky sexual behavior. *Pers Individ Dif*2011; 51(5): 674-8.
- 18- Costa PT, McCrae RR. The NEO personality inventory manual. Odessa, FL: Psychological Assessment Resources; 1985.
- 19- Garusi Farshi M. New approaches in personality assessment. Tabriz: Jame'eh Pajouh publication; 2001.
- 20- Glass SP, Wright TL. Sex differences in type of extramarital involvement and marital dissatisfaction. *Sex Roles*1985;12(9-10): 1101-20.
- 21- Dickman SJ. Functional and dysfunctional impulsivity: personality and cognitive correlates. *J Pers Soc Psychol*1990; 58(1): 95-102.
- 22- Whiteside SP, Lynam DR. The five factor model and impulsivity: Using a structural model of personality to understand impulsivity. *Pers Individ Dif*200; 30(4): 669-89.
- 23- Claes L, Vertommen H, Braspenning N. Psychometric properties of the Dickman impulsivity inventory. *Pers Individ Dif*2000; 29(1): 27-35
- 24- Whatley MA. Belief in a just world scale: unidimensional or multidimensional? *J Soc Psychol*1993; 133(4): 547-51.
- 25- Habibi, M, Sayed Alitabar SH, Pouravari M. Investigating reliability, validity and factor structure of the attitudes toward Infidelity scale. *Journal of Research and Health*. [In Press].
- 26- Shackelford TK, Besser A, Goetz AT. Personality, marital satisfaction, and probability of marital infidelity. *Individ Differ Res*2008; 6(1): 13-25.
- 27- Levine SZ, Jackson CJ. Eysenck's theory of crime revisited: Factors or primary scales? *Legal Criminol Psychol*2004; 9(1): 135-52.
- 28- Eaves LJ, Eysenck HJ, Martin NG. Genes, culture and personality: An empirical approach. San Diego, CA, US: Academic press; 1989.
- 29- Eysenck SBG, Eysenck HJ. Personality differences between prisoners and controls. *Psychol Rep*1977; 40: 1023-8.
- 30- Rezaei M. The relationship between personality traits and attachment style with a desire to marital Infidelity. [Thesis]. Tehran: Tarbiat Modares University. 2011.
- 31- Barelds DP. Self and partner personality in intimate relationships. *Eur J Pers*2005;19(6): 501-18.
- 32- Karney BR, Bradbury TN. The longitudinal course of marital quality and stability: a review of theory, methods, and research. *Psychol Bull*1995; 118(1): 3-34.
- 33- Shiota MN, Levenson RW. Birds of a feather don't always fly farthest: similarity in Big Five personality predicts more negative marital satisfaction trajectories in long-term marriages. *Psychol Aging*2007; 22(4): 666-75.