

## Relationship between Religious Commitment and Other Factors Related To Tendency toward Extra-Marital Affairs among Married Students

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### Abstract

**Background and Objectives:** Extra-marital affairs as one of the covert social problems are among issues with a wide range of disastrous consequences for family and social institutions. Therefore, determining the factors associated with the tendency toward such relationships is of great importance. We aimed to study the tendency toward extra-marital affairs and some related factors among married students.

**Methods:** A cross-sectional study of 250 students of Tabriz University of Medical Sciences was performed. The participants were chosen through the convenience sampling method. The data collection tools included the Religious Commitment Inventory-10 (Worthington et al.), NEO Personality Inventory, inclination toward extra-marital affairs by Whatley, and the social reflexivity scale (Kharmour and Afrasiabi). To analyze the data, Pearson correlation coefficient, t-test, and multivariate regression were run.

**Results:** We found a negative correlation between religious commitment and tendency toward extra-marital affairs ( $P=0.000$ ,  $r=-0.37$ ). However, the extent of modern media usage and social reflexivity and inclination toward extra-marital affairs were positively correlated ( $P=0.000$ ,  $r=0.42$ ). Moreover, extroversion, openness to experience, adaptability, and conscientiousness were negatively correlated with inclination toward extra-marital affairs. Finally, neuroticism was positively correlated with inclination toward extra-marital affairs ( $P=0.001$ ,  $r=0.18$ ).

**Conclusion:** By promoting media literacy among students regarding the proper use of the modern media, as well as strengthening religious and indigenous values and traditions, the inclination of married students towards extra-marital affairs can be greatly reduced.

**Keywords:** Social Reflexivity, Religious Commitment, Communication Media, Extra-Marital Affairs, Personality Characteristics.

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### Introduction

Extra-marital affairs in contemporary societies is among the most common phenomena that is growing in prevalence and is the most common issues leading to treatment-seeking behavior among couples (1,2). Extra-marital affairs are relationships outside the realm of marriage, in which a romantic or illegal relationship or love affair with the opposite sex is established (3). In addition, extra-marital affair is a phenomenon often associated with the satisfaction of one's emotional or sexual needs through relationships outside marital relations. This type of relationship is not necessarily a simple sex, but the basis of these kinds of relationships is secrecy (4). In extra-marital affairs, therapists emphasize on the two

concepts of infidelity and betrayal. Infidelity denotes all behaviors and practices of a married person with the opposite sex outside the realm of family, insofar as it leads to a friendly, close, emotional, and romantic connection, in such a way that the relationship excites certain emotions in the individual. Betrayal involves sexual intercourse of a married person with the opposite outside the realm of marriage (other than the spouse) (5). Several international studies have been carried out on extra-marital affairs, and various factors have been proposed to be at play in this regard. The following are among the most important studies performed on this issue. Giesen and Treas showed that those with more open attitudes toward extra-marital affairs are more

likely to become involved in them (6,7). Cohen claimed that infidelity is observed less in those with secure attachment style compared to those with insecure attachment style.

Bakoom and Alein argued that specific attachment styles such as anxious and dismissive attachment styles are more associated with motivation for betrayal (8). Mark et al. showed that couples experiencing less satisfaction with their sexual relationship are more prone to extra-marital affairs (9). Nowak et al. concluded that the level of love and lack of sexual attraction are the most important predictors of extra-marital affairs (10). Moreover, Shaye presented a positive correlation between extroversion and marital infidelity and a negative correlation between conscientiousness and marital infidelity (11).

In Iran, studies have been conducted on extra-marital affairs, most of which investigated the link between this type of relationship and attachment styles (5,12), satellite networks and virtual social networks (13,14), premarital sexual relations (15), early maladaptive schemas (16), self-esteem and narcissism (8), spiritual and moral intelligence (17), religiosity, marital conflicts, viewing vulgar films (18), accountability, depression, aggression, phobia, and psychosis (19).

Several studies have been conducted on the causes of extra-marital affairs. Students are among the most important strata of the society, who use modern media such as the Internet and virtual social networks due to their presence in universities and whose thoughts and perspectives are constantly exposed to social reflexivity. With this background in mind, we sought to investigate the tendency of married students of Faculty of Medicine, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, toward extra-marital affairs and some of its associated factors (religious commitment, personality characteristics, use of modern media, and social reflexivity).

## Methods

A cross-sectional study was carried out in 2017. The target population consisted of married students of Tabriz University of Medical Sciences (n=650). Based on Lin's

table and the confidence level of 95%, the standard sample size was determined to be 250. Overall, 250 medical students (female: 125, male: 125) were selected through the convenience sampling method and in accordance with the available resources. Questionnaires were used for data collection. Regarding ethical considerations, the research objectives were explained to the respondents, an informed consent form was obtained from them, they were ensured that they would not face any difficulties due to completing the questionnaires, and the questionnaires do not include names and confidentiality terms are respected. To analyze the data, Pearson correlation coefficient, t-test, and regression were run in SPSS, version 21.

**Religious commitment scale:** This scale was designed by Worthington et al. in 2003 and includes 10 items evaluating the level of religious commitment (20). This scale contains two the subscales of interpersonal and intrapersonal religious commitment. This scale is rated using a 5-point Likert scale evaluating the extent of agreement or disagreement of the respondent with each item. Shafiee Arabi et al. calculated the Cronbach's alpha of the questionnaire at 0.93. In addition, the test-retest reliability of the scale with a three-week interval was 0.87 (21). We estimated the Cronbach's alpha reliability of this scale to be 0.92.

**Personal characteristics scale:** the NEO inventory is one the newest questionnaires evaluating personality constructs based on factor analysis. NEOPI-R is a substitute for NEO devised by Costa and McCrae in 1985. This scale contains five main personality factors with six characteristics in each factor, in other words, it evaluates 30 characteristics and provides a comprehensive evaluation of personality. This questionnaire has a short form (NEO-FFI), including 60 items for the evaluation of five main personality factors. Its answer sheet is designed based on a 5-point Likert scale (i.e., completely disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, completely agree). The scoring of the short form (NEO-FFI) is not similar for all the items. That is to say, scoring of some items of the short form is based on

completely disagree (4), disagree (3), neutral (2), agree (1), and completely agree (0). However, in some other items, scoring is the opposite of what was mentioned (22).

The NEO-FFI was piloted on 208 American students by Costa and McCrae with a three-month interval and the validity coefficients of 0.75-0.83 were obtained. The long-term validity of this scale was evaluated. A 6-year longitudinal study on neuroticism, extroversion, and openness to experience attained the validity coefficients of 0.68-0.83 in their individual and couple reports. The validity coefficients of the adaptability and conscientiousness factors at a 2-year interval was 0.63-0.79. The NEO inventory was standardized by Garrussi Farshi on 2000 students of Tabriz and Shiraz universities and the medical universities of these cities. They calculated the correlation coefficient of the five main dimensions at 0.56-0.87. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients of neuroticism, extroversion, openness, adaptability, and conscientiousness were respectively 0.86, 0.73, 0.56, 0.68, and 0.87. They also established the construct validity and reliability of the scale using factor analysis, yielding five main personality factors. In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the five factors of neuroticism, extroversion, openness to experience, adaptability, and conscientiousness were 0.83, 0.74, 0.80, 0.78, and 0.75, respectively.

The social reflexivity scale: for evaluating social reflexivity, a scale designed by Kharmour and Afrasiabi (23) was used. To operationalize this variable, six items rated using a Likert scale were employed, and its reliability was reported to be 0.78. In our study, its reliability was estimated at 0.77.

The extent of modern media usage: to operationalize the variable of the extent of modern media usage (the Internet, virtual social networks, and satellite networks), the number of hours an individual uses the modern media was enquired.

Tendency toward extra-marital relations scale: This scale was devised by Whatley in 2006 to investigate tendency toward extra-marital affairs. This scale contains 12 items rated using a 7-point Likert scale (extremely

agree to extremely disagree). The findings of Whatley indicated desirable validity of this scale, such that the Cronbach's alpha obtained by internal consistency coefficient was 0.80 (24). Sayed Alitabar et al. confirmed the reliability of this scale through factor analysis, and this scale could predict 29.24% of the variance in tendency toward extra-marital affairs (14). We obtained a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.77 for this scale.

## Result

Analyses showed that 59.2% of the participants were male. They were within the 22-36 age bracket, most of whom were aged 22-26 years (Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Variable	Groups	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	148	40.8
	Male	102	59.2
Age	22-26	129	47.6
	27-31	81	3.24
	32-36	50	20

Other descriptive findings showed that the mean score of inclination toward extra-marital affairs among the respondents was  $34.44 \pm 10.85$  (minimum=12, maximum=84). We noted a significant difference between women and men regarding tendency toward extra-marital affairs ( $P=0.000$ ,  $P=0.60$ , respectively), that is, the mean score of tendency toward extra-marital affairs among men (38.90) was significantly higher than among women (28.25).

The information presented in Table 2 reveals a significant negative correlation between religious commitment and tendency toward extra-marital affairs, such that increased religious commitment reduced tendency toward extra-marital affairs. However, there was a significant positive correlation between social reflexivity and the extent of modern media usage (i.e., satellite networks, the Internet, and virtual social networks) with tendency toward extra-marital affairs. Also, we found a significant negative correlation between extroversion, personality characteristics, openness to experience, adaptability, and conscientiousness and tendency toward extra-marital affairs.

Furthermore, there was a significant positive correlation between the personality characteristic of neuroticism and tendency toward extra-marital affairs.

Table 2. The correlation of independent variables with tendency toward extra-marital affairs

Variables	Pearson correlation	P-value
Religious commitment and inclination toward extra-marital affairs	-0.37	0.000
Modern media and inclination toward extra-marital affairs	0.42	0.000
Reflexivity in social relationships and inclination toward extra-marital affairs	0.40	0.000
Neuroticism and inclination toward extra-marital affairs	0.18	0.001
Extroversion and inclination toward extra-marital affairs	-0.32	0.000
Adaptability and inclination toward extra-marital affairs	-0.26	0.000
Openness to experience and inclination toward extra-marital affairs	-0.15	0.002
Conscientiousness and inclination toward extra-marital affairs	-0.36	0.000

Table 3 exhibits the multivariate regression model for tendency toward extra-marital affairs among the respondents. The multiple correlation coefficient was 0.60, indicating that the independent variables are simultaneously 0.60 correlated with tendency toward extra-marital affairs. The coefficient of determination was also calculated at 0.36, that is, 36% of the variations in tendency toward extra-marital affairs can be explained by dependent variables.

Table 3. Multivariate regression model for tendency toward extra-marital relations among the students

Independent variables	Beta	T	Sig
Religious commitment	-0.30	-4.88	0.000
Reflexivity in social relationships	0.32	5.10	0.000
The use of modern media	0.33	5.21	0.000
Conscientiousness	-0.28	-4.30	0.000
Openness to experience	-0.13	-2.21	0.004
Adaptability	-0.20	-3.77	0.000
Extroversion	-0.25	-4.01	0.000
Neuroticism	0.16	2.68	0.001

R=0.60, R<sup>2</sup>=0.36, F=62.87, p<0.001

The standard effect sizes presented in the table demonstrate that the strongest predictors of tendency toward extra-marital affairs were respectively as follows: the modern media (0.33), social reflexivity (0.32), religious commitment (-0.30), conscientiousness (-0.28), extroversion (-0.28), adaptability (-0.20), neuroticism (0.16), and openness to experience (-0.13).

## Discussion

The descriptive findings indicated that the mean score of tendency toward extra-marital affairs among married students of Faculty of Medicine, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences is lower than the average. This finding was in line with the results of Hojjatakhah et al. and Abdolmaleki et al., who showed that their subjects had low tendency toward extra-marital affairs (4,12).

We also found a significant difference in the mean score of tendency toward extra-marital affairs between the two genders, such that the mean tendency of men was greater than that of women. This finding was congruent with the findings of Abdolmaleki et al., Glass and Wright, Liu, Blow, and Hartnett. According to the results of these studies, men tend to pursue physical and sexual pleasure more than women, which is why they tend to establish new relationships and experience the excitement of new sexual relationships (4,25-27).

Other findings suggest a significant negative correlation between religious commitment and tendency toward extra-marital affairs. This result was in line with the findings of Epder and Mardani who showed that religious people have a more negative attitude toward sexual relationships outside the realm of marriage (18). It can be argued that religiosity has always been a barrier to the satisfaction of sexual instincts outside legal and social frameworks, such that religiosity delays the timing of sexual initiation, condemns illegal sexual relations, and encourages individuals to adherence to marital obligations.

A significant positive correlation was also found between the extent of modern media usage (satellite networks, the Internet, and virtual social networks) and tendency toward extra-marital affairs. This finding is similar to those of Abdolmaleki et al., Ajam, Epder and Mardani, Fathi et al., and Farahmand et al., who demonstrated that the modern media (satellite networks and cyberspace) are among the factors affecting sexual relations and tendency toward extra-marital relations (4, 13, 18, 28, 29).

Moreover, social reflexivity and tendency toward extra-marital relations were positively correlated. This finding is contradictory with the results of Abdolmaleki et al. and in alignment with the outcomes of Farahmand et al. (4, 29). It can be stated that the use of modern media has familiarized individuals with other countries' values and cultures, particularly the European and American countries. In many cases, western values and cultures are contradictory with our traditional values, leading to adverse consequences.

If these contradictory values are not instilled in the personality of individuals, they will face bafflement and crisis in finding a yardstick for their attitudes and practices, and dissatisfaction with marital relationship might lead them toward extra-marital affairs. Moreover, the modern media that are the main tools of modernization and globalization lead to reflexivity in social relations. Reflexivity means that the individual is forced to constantly contemplate their life conditions. In the process of reflexivity, the role of traditional models in directing individuals' actions has become less important, and in light of new information, individuals re-interpret their actions (such as sexual actions).

Our findings also indicated an inverse correlation between extroversion, openness to experience, and conscientiousness and tendency toward extra-marital affairs. Nonetheless, the correlation between neuroticism and tendency toward extra-marital affairs was positive. This finding is consistent with the results of Hojjatkah et al., Schackelfor and Buss, and some of the findings of Shaye (11, 12, 30).

In fact, tendency toward extra-marital affairs is enhanced by low adaptability, low extroversion, low openness to experience, low conscientiousness, and lack of emotional compatibility with the spouse. Among these factors, low conscientiousness and low adaptability had a stronger correlation with tendency toward extra-marital affairs.

However, regarding the positive correlation of neuroticism and tendency toward extra-marital affairs, it can be mentioned that those with higher scores in neuroticism, have a

higher tendency toward having facile attitudes toward sexual relation outside the realm of marriage to combat this feeling (12).

This study had some limitations that are worth mentioning. The study samples included married university students, thus, the results cannot be extrapolated to other individuals and social classes. Due to limitation in finding participants, the respondents were chosen disregarding their socio-economic status. We suggest performing similar studies among other social classes and groups considering participants' socio-economic status. Of other limitations of this study was the sensitiveness of the issue of extra-marital relations; thus, some of the items of the questionnaire might have not been answered correctly and the respondents might have underestimated their tendency toward these relations.

## Conclusion

The results showed that tendency toward extra-marital affairs is influenced by various individual, social, and cultural factors. Among these factors, the present study revealed that the use of modern media (satellite networks, the Internet, and virtual social networks), reflexivity in social relationships, and religious commitment play a major role in tendency towards extra-marital affairs. Further, personality characteristics can be also influential in this regard. Therefore, by boosting media literacy regarding the proper use of modern media and reinforcing religious and indigenous values and traditions, it would be possible to remarkably reduce tendency toward extra-marital affairs.

## Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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