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## Research Paper

# The Role of Cognitive Flexibility and Religious Coping Strategies in Predicting Divorce of Women with Betrayal Experiences



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### ABSTRACT

**Objective** Marital infidelity is a very painful phenomenon that can lead to divorce. This study was conducted with the aim of the role of cognitive flexibility and religious coping strategies in predicting the desire for divorce of women with experience of infidelity.

**Methods** The research method was descriptive-correlation. The statistical population included all women with experience of infidelity and referring to Rah-e-Naw counseling center in Birjand in 2020 that 89 people were selected by convenience sampling. The instruments used were Divorce Attitude Questionnaire (DTS), Cognitive Flexibility Questionnaire (CFI) and Religious Coping Questionnaire (RCOPE). Pearson correlation test, multiple regression and SPSS-22 software were used to analyze the data.

**Results** The results of the correlation test showed that there is a negative and significant relationship between the desire for divorce with cognitive flexibility and positive religious confrontation and a positive and significant relationship between the desire for divorce and negative religious confrontation.

**Conclusion** Also, the results of regression analysis showed that cognitive flexibility and religious coping strategies together explain 34.8% of the variance of the desire to divorce. According to the findings, education and intervention in improving cognitive flexibility and religious coping strategies can be suggested as an effective method to reduce the desire for divorce.

## 1. Introduction

Marital infidelity is a difficult and unbearable situation for many couples that can cause them a lot of trouble. Infidelity is a painful thing that unfortunately

happens suddenly in different societies and puts couples in a state of confusion, sadness, depression, anger and surprise (Hall and Fincham, 2009)

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It can be said that infidelity is defined as a violation of commitment and going beyond marital boundaries and is mainly divided into three types of emotional infidelity, sexual and emotional-sexual infidelity (Zare, 2011). Marital infidelity has a different prevalence in different societies and is based on gender, which may be due to the different definitions that come from it. However, infidelity is very common and can occur in an average of 25% of couples, in which men are more likely to be unfaithful than women (Blow and Hartent, 2005; Zare, 2011).

Given that infidelity is considered a violation of the rules and framework of marriage, its occurrence can lead the relationship to coldness and reduce intimacy and thus increase the likelihood of divorce (Labrecque and Wisman, 2020). Tuelo Masillo (2019) based on his research showed that marital infidelity can cause problems such as domestic violence, marital boredom, substance abuse, child abandonment, unemployment and sexually transmitted infections, which can lead to the breakdown of marriage. A successful marriage is the process by which a couple builds a privacy for their marriage and follows rules of that privacy (Yousefi Mardani, Fallahian & Mikaeili, 2019). Allen and Atkins (2012) showed in their research that when couples engage in marital infidelity, more than half of them tend to separate and divorce; Thus, the desire for divorce is one of the destructive effects of marital infidelity. The purpose of the desire for divorce is the degree of desire and interest of the couple to separate and break off the marital relationship. This concept has three dimensions: cognitive, emotional and behavioral. Its cognitive dimension includes the person's perceptions of divorce, the emotional dimension includes the person's negative and positive feelings and emotions towards divorce, and the behavioral dimension indicates the person's readiness to divorce (Yousefi, 2011).

Unfortunately, divorce has devastating consequences and can reduce the health of spouses, children, relatives and friends, and even society (Kalmijn, 2010; Weaver and Schaffield, 2015). People who end their relationship may experience behavioral, cognitive, and emotional problems and may not be able to calm down for a long time and perform well in various areas

(Sharma, 2011). Various personal, marital, social, cultural, economic, etc. factors can cause divorce, but what is important is to always consider the factors that affect divorce, because due to life changes, some of these factors may lose their power or Even other emerging factors can lead to divorce (Mohlatlole, Sithol and Shirini, 2018; Osafo, Opong Asant, Ampumah and Osi-Tutu, 2021). However, in situations where the desire for divorce is due to infidelity, some factors may play a role in preventing divorce, and it is necessary to examine these factors to deal with such a divorce.

When infidelity occurs, a person may become confused and go through different thoughts in his head. The person may try to think the relationship is over by growing and chewing on irrational thoughts and pessimism and anger. these people may have strong thoughts in their minds and may not be willing to adapt to the situation at all. In such a situation, the betrayed person is in no way willing to cooperate and forgive his spouse and does not try to show some flexibility (Williams, Belkin and Chen, 2020; Katovsich, 2007). Timm and Blow (2018) believe that couples must-have resources to maintain and grow a relationship in which infidelity has occurred. One of these very powerful sources is cognitive flexibility, the existence of which can be very helpful in improving the relationship (Shahabi, Shahabi and Forouzandeh, 2020). Cognitive flexibility is a broad term and generally refers to our ability to adapt to a changing environment (Archambeau and Giovers, 2018). This concept expresses the ability of individuals to change different mental arrangements, tasks, or strategies to adapt to a changing environment (Dennis and Vanderwall, 2010). In situations where a person has to be flexible to cope with changes in the environment but is unable to do so, cognitive flexibility arises; he tries to adapt cognitively to his environment and perform adaptive processes. An example of this flexibility occurs when a person has already taken action and been effective but is now ineffective in new situations; Therefore, one tries to be cognitively flexible (Sanagavi Mohair and Mirshakari, 2018). Research shows that the existence of cognitive flexibility can play a very positive role in married life and improve and heal the wounds of couples (Khorshidi and Dasht Bozorgi, 2019).

Willoughby (2015) in his research showed that cognitions and beliefs of individuals can largely explain the stability and satisfaction of the relationship. In this regard, Shafiei, Basharpour and Heidari Rad (2016) showed that women who had experienced divorce had low psychological flexibility compared to women without experience of divorce. Betrayal is very painful and may cause the suffering of the betrayed person (Darab, Bahrami, and Etemadi, 2020). To deal with this suffering, a person may come up with strategies to regain his composure and maintain his married life. In religious communities, individuals may use religion-based strategies to try to avoid, or even better adapt to life after divorce (Simonik & Klobokar, 2017). The religious confrontation that individuals use in the face of the stressful conditions of betrayal may have different consequences. Religious coping is religion-based cognitive, emotional, or behavioral techniques for coping with stress that can have different approaches as well as positive and negative dimensions (Tix and Fraser, 1998). Religious coping strategies often come directly from a person's religious belief system and help them make sense of stressful situations and events (positive and negative) interpretations (Lynn Gall and Cornbelt, 2002). Using religious coping strategies can help couples cope better with life's problems and thus reduce the harms of marriage (Webb et al., 2010). Religion can provide a framework for understanding emotional and physical suffering and facilitate endurance or acceptance of stressors (Pargament, 1997). Research shows that the existence of religious beliefs and confrontations can increase love and commitment between couples and thus enable couples to form a stable and satisfying relationship (Jenkins, Friedman, Lee, Mugley and McHale, 2021; Salimi, Javadan, Zarei and Najarpourian, 2019). Salimi et al. (2017) in another study showed that religion and the behaviors and practices resulting from it have a prominent role in marital relationships and can promote marital health. Olson, Marshall, Goddard, and Scheram (2015) showed that when couples have religious beliefs and engage in religious confrontation based on these beliefs, they can prevent the breakup and coldness of marriage by improving their relationship.

According to the above, infidelity can have a devastating effect on the relationship and can lead to

the growth of divorce. Divorce, in turn, has many disadvantages, which unfortunately the rate is increasing in the country, so that, for example, in the period of 10 years and from 2007 to 2017, the divorce rate has increased from 8.4 to 3.4; Thus, almost one out of every eight marriages of a divorce in 2007, its rate has reached the rate of one out of every three marriages of a divorce in 2017, which highlights the need to study different aspects of this phenomenon (Salimi et al., 2019). Therefore, the present study was conducted to investigate the effective factors in divorce to create positive steps to deal with it, to investigate the role of cognitive flexibility and religious coping strategies in predicting the divorce desire of women with infidelity. Given the harm that divorce can do, it seems necessary to find factors that can reduce the desire for divorce in betrayed women. It seems that the existence of cognitive flexibility and religious confrontation can play a prominent role in reducing the desire for divorce, which needs to be examined; Because by knowing the extent and manner of the role of these factors, trainings and interventions can be used for betrayed people.

## 2. Materials and Methods

In this research, descriptive and correlational methods were used. The statistical population of the study included all women who were referred to the Rah-e-Naw counseling center in Birjand in 1399 due to infidelity. According to Gall, Borg and Gall (1996) in regression analysis and based on a rule of thumb for each predictor variable, at least 15 people should be added to the sample size. In this study, there were three predictor variables and at least 45 people should be selected as a sample; however, to increase the statistical power of the research and reduce the error, 89 women were selected by available sampling and responded to the research tools. For the study, among the women who came to Rah-e-Naw counseling center in Birjand to receive marital counseling, those whose reason for referral was infidelity and related marital turmoil were selected as the research sample. These people generally had marital problems due to the infidelity of their spouse and had referred to a counseling center for help and deciding on their married life and the future of their relationship. Therefore, samples were selected based on the inclusion and exit criteria of the study.

The method of performing and analyzing the data was that after selecting and confirming the subject, the necessary information, as well as the confidentiality of the research, were explained to the samples, and then after verbal consent, the research tools were given to them. Inclusion criteria included being a woman, being married and not having a legal divorce, having an experience of infidelity, living in Birjand, and having a desire and commitment to participate in the research. It was research.

**Divorce Inquiry Questionnaire (DTS):** The Divorce Inquiry Questionnaire was developed by Roosevelt, Johnson, and Moro (1986) with 28 questions to assess individuals' desire for divorce. Each item is scored on a 7-point scale from Never (Score 1) to Forever (Score 7), The scores range from 28 to 196 and with a high score indicating a high degree of desire for divorce. The tool had four subscales: tendency to go out, unwillingness to be careless, lack of expression of feelings, and lack of loyalty. The alpha coefficient obtained by the designers of this questionnaire is for the dimension of exit (0.91), for the dimension of negligence (0.86), expression of emotions (0.76) and loyalty (0.63). In internal validation, Davoodi, Etemadi and Bahrami (2009) while confirming the content validity, reported the alpha coefficient of the mentioned subscales as 0.89, 0.72, 0.90 and 0.86, respectively, and for the whole questionnaire as 0.88. In the present study, the total alpha coefficient of the questionnaire was 0.88.

**Cognitive Flexibility Questionnaire (CFI):** The Cognitive Flexibility Questionnaire was developed by Dennis and Vanderwall (2010) with 20 items. The tool scores based on a 7-point Likert scale from strongly disagree (score 1) to strongly agree (score 7) and measures three aspects of cognitive flexibility: a) the desire to perceive difficult situations as controllable situations (perception of controllability), b) Ability to understand several alternative justifications for human life events and behavior (perception of behavior justification) and c) Ability to create multiple alternative solutions to difficult situations (perception of different options). The scores of this questionnaire

are between 20 and 140, and higher scores mean more cognitive flexibility. In domestic studies, Kheyrollahi, Jafari, Ghamari, and Babakhani (2019) while confirming the content validity of this tool, reported Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.86. Shareh, Farmani and Soltani (2014) in validating this questionnaire showed that it follows a three-factor structure and has a good construct validity. In their study, the total retest coefficient of the scale was 0.71 and Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.90. In the present study, the total alpha coefficient of the questionnaire was 0.85.

**Religious Coping Questionnaire (RCOPE):** The 14-item Religious Coping Questionnaire was developed by Pargament, Quing, and Perez (2000), with seven items related to positive coping strategies and seven items related to negative coping strategies. The Likert scoring method has four options from no way (zero point) to very high (3 points). The range of scores for each of the positive and negative religious coping strategies is between zero and 21, and higher scores in positive strategies mean positive religious coping and higher scores in negative strategies mean negative religious coping. Pargament et al. (2000) reported Cronbach's alpha coefficient of subscales above 0.80. In internal validation, Shahabizadeh and Mazaheri (2012) while confirming the content validity using factor analysis confirmed the existence of two factors of positive religious coping strategies and negative coping strategies and Cronbach's alpha coefficient of positive strategies 0.95 and negative strategies 0.93 reported. In the present study, the alpha coefficient of positive strategies was 0.83 and for negative strategies was 0.79.

To analyze the research data, descriptive index of mean and standard deviation were used and at the inferential level, Pearson correlation test and multiple regression were used simultaneously. Data were also analyzed by SPSS-22 software.

### 3. Results

In this study, the mean and standard deviation of the age of the samples were 34.96 and 8.81 and their marriage duration was 11.74 and 7.24.

**Table 1. Descriptive indicators of research variables**

Variables	Components	Mean	Standard deviation	Maximum	Minimum
Desire to divorce	The desire to get out	32.54	9.68	46	16
	Reluctance to be careless	29.08	8.19	41	14
	Lack of expression of emotions	30.22	9.41	45	16
	Lack of loyalty	28.24	8.10	42	15
	Desire to divorce	120.08	24/98	161	55
Cognitive flexibility	control-ability	34.42	7.51	51	11
	Perception of different options	50.63	11.32	61	17
	Perception of behavior justification	8.51	2.43	12	4
	Cognitive flexibility	93.56	17.83	125	35
Religious confrontation	Positive religious confrontation	11.04	2.87	16	2
	Negative religious confrontation	11.67	3.09	17	3

The table above shows the results of descriptive indicators of research variables.

Before performing the regression, the assumptions of normality of research variables and normality of distribution of error values were checked using skewness and elongation tests as well as multiple nonlinearity using tolerance coefficient test, the results

of which confirmed the assumptions. According to the results of Pearson correlation analysis, there is a significant correlation between the desire for divorce and cognitive flexibility with a value of -0.373, positive religious confrontation with a value of -0.473 and negative religious confrontation with a value of 0.277 (P <0.001).

**Table 2. Correlation matrix between research variables**

Variables	1	2	3	4
<b>1. Desire to divorce</b>	1			
<b>2. Cognitive flexibility</b>	-0.373 *	1		
<b>3. Positive religious confrontation</b>	-0.473 **	0.182	1	
<b>4. Negative religious confrontation</b>	0.277**	-0.065	-0.149	1

P < 0.05 \*\* ,P < 0.01 \*

**Table 3. Multiple regression analysis summaries**

Predictive variables	Standard beta	Beta	Standard error	T	Significance
<b>Cognitive flexibility</b>	-0.289	-0.405	0.125	-3.24	0.002
<b>Positive religious confrontation</b>	-0.390	-3.39	0.782	-4.33	0.001
<b>Negative religious confrontation</b>	0.200	1.61	0.716	-2.25	0.027
<b>R= 0.590</b>		<b>R<sup>2</sup>= 0.348</b>		<b>P &lt; 0.001</b>	<b>F= 15.10</b>

Considering that the significance level of the predictors of cognitive flexibility and positive and negative religious coping strategies is less than 0.05, it can be said that the regression model is significant (F = 15.10, P <0.001) and these three variables can be 34.8%. Explain the desire for a divorce from variance.

According to beta coefficients, cognitive flexibility with -0.289, positive religious confrontation with -0.390, and negative religious confrontation with 0.200 have an important role in predicting the tendency to divorce.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the role of cognitive flexibility and religious coping strategies in predicting the desire for divorce of women with experience of infidelity. The results showed that there is a negative and significant relationship between cognitive flexibility with the tendency to divorce women with experience of infidelity and cognitive flexibility can significantly predict the desire for divorce. Accordingly, the tendency to divorce is expected to decrease as cognitive flexibility increases. Consistent with this study, Shara and Ishaqi Thani (2015) showed that cognitive flexibility can positively predict marital satisfaction. Khorshidi and Dasht-e Bozorgi (2019) also showed that cognitive flexibility can reduce marital burnout; Therefore, according to the findings of this study and other studies, it seems that cognitive flexibility has a prominent role in marital life and can strengthen the marital relationship. In situations where the marital relationship is strained due to, when the couple has good cognitive flexibility, they may adapt to this painful event and suffer less from it. when a person uses cognitive strategies to change behavior and adapt to the environment, he/she uses flexible cognition. The relationship between couples also contains various complex and challenging situations that require the use of a flexible cognitive model (Shareh and Ishaghi Pani, 2018). Cognitive flexibility is a very powerful resource that helps couples not lose because of infidelity and therefore can deal with such a situation properly (Shahabi et al., 2020). This capacity and cognitive ability help the woman who has been betrayed not to give in to this situation and as a result not to move towards divorce too soon. a person goes to divorce when he cannot stand such a situation; Thus, cognitive flexibility helps them to better cope with adultery and thus deal with it more constructively.

Other results of this study showed that there is a significant relationship between religious coping strategies and the desire to divorce women with experience of infidelity, and positively negative religious strategies and negative religious strategies can positively predict the desire for divorce in women with infidelity. Accordingly, when women with experience of infidelity use positive religious coping strategies, they are expected to be less inclined to divorce, and women who use negative strategies are expected to increase their desire for divorce. This

finding is consistent with some studies (Jenkins et al., 2021; Salimi et al., 2019). Nemati, Imanzadeh, Forouhi, Mahdavi, and Afshin (2019) showed in a study that religious coping strategies can predict marital satisfaction in women, but showed that negative coping strategies also have a positive relationship with marital satisfaction, which is somewhat inconsistent with the research findings. is present. In explaining this finding, we can refer to the research sample because, in this study, the studied sample has special and painful conditions and strategies that are not effective may increase the desire for divorce. In a situation where a person suffers from a lot of unhappiness and confusion due to infidelity and as a result, tends to divorce, if he uses effective and positive religious confrontation strategies, he may be able to calm down to some extent and face such a challenge with the help of God Almighty. And therefore, try to take steps to improve the relationship, not try to eliminate the relationship. When people use effective religious strategies, they can change their view of the situation and even consider it a divine test, and try to avoid divorce because it is commanded to maintain a married life. It seems that the use of effective and effective religious coping strategies can increase a person's tolerance, patience and resilience against infidelity (Webb et al., 2010). As Pargament (1979) argues, religion can provide a framework for understanding emotional and physical suffering and facilitating endurance or acceptance of stressors; Therefore, the use of effective religious confrontations can increase forgiveness and thus reduce the desire for divorce by reducing the pain and suffering of infidelity and also creating a space for the couple to think and interact more.

In general, the results of this study showed that cognitive flexibility and the use of positive religious coping strategies and therefore less use of negative religious strategies can reduce the desire for divorce in women victims of infidelity. Cognitive flexibility and the use of effective religious strategies can create an environment in which the victim can better regain his or her peace of mind and move less toward divorce by adapting to adultery. Therefore, it is suggested that planners, counselors, and family and marriage specialists pay attention to this important issue and try to help improve cognitive flexibility and religious coping strategies in couples by taking interventions.

However, this research, like other researches, has limitations and problems; Since, in addition to betrayal, other factors may also play a role in referring people to the counseling center, and also because the number of samples was small, the random sampling method was not used in selecting divorce applicants, only a questionnaire was used to collect information and also the biases in response to the questionnaire; Care must be taken in generalizing the results. Given the prevalence of divorce and its problems, it is suggested that more research be conducted more extensively and by examining the causal factors that can lead to divorce. Researchers can also test models for the role of cognitive flexibility and religious coping strategies in increasing forgiveness and positive interactions in couples, as well as its effects on reducing the desire for divorce and improving marital satisfaction. It is hoped that this research will take a small step towards combating divorce.

## 5. Ethical Considerations

### Compliance with ethical guidelines

All ethical principles are considered in this article. The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and its implementation stages. They were also assured about the confidentiality of their information and were free to leave the study whenever they wished, and if desired, the research results would be available to them.

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### Authors' contributions

All authors have participated in the design, implementation and writing of all sections of the present study.

### Conflicts of interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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