

Validation of the Emotional Responses to Sexual Infidelity Scale in Individuals Affected by Sexual Infidelity

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The aim of the present study was to validate the Emotional Responses to Sexual Infidelity Scale in individuals affected by sexual infidelity.

Methods: This research employed a descriptive-analytical validation approach. The statistical population comprised individuals affected by sexual infidelity by their spouses, who sought assistance from psychological counseling centers and the Dispute Resolution Council in the city of Gorgan in 2023. A sample of 415 individuals was selected using a sample size estimation method. Data were collected using the Emotional Responses to Sexual Infidelity Scale developed by Turliuca & Scutarua (2014). After evaluating content validity, exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were performed to assess construct validity. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to examine reliability, and Pearson's correlation coefficient test was applied for further investigation of the main research variables. Analyses were conducted using SPSS and AMOS24 software.

Findings: Confirmatory factor analysis findings demonstrated that the single-factor model of the Emotional Responses to Sexual Infidelity Scale exhibited good fit, based on the following indices: RMSEA = 0.05, CFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.91, and IFI = 0.92. The reliability of the 27-item Emotional Responses to Sexual Infidelity Scale was determined to be 0.81 based on Cronbach's alpha. The content validity of the questionnaire exceeded 0.99. Bartlett's test yielded a chi-square value of 748.65, degrees of freedom of 105, a significance level of 0.001, and KMO = 0.77.

Conclusion: The results indicate that the present scale has favorable psychometric properties for use in the Iranian population of individuals affected by sexual infidelity. It can be employed as a reliable instrument in future research and diagnostic contexts.

Keywords: Reliability, Sexual Infidelity, Validity, Emotional Responses, Validation.

1. Introduction

One of the most detrimental factors affecting the structure and stability of the family is the increasing issue of extramarital relationships (Jafari-Nasab et al., 2021). After physical violence, infidelity is the most harmful and destructive event in marriage, potentially leading to harm for both parties involved in the infidelity and ultimately resulting in divorce (Warach & Josephs, 2021). Infidelity refers to crossing the marital boundaries by establishing physical or emotional intimacy with someone outside the marriage (Cornish et al., 2020). Marital infidelity encompasses any breach of the marital relationship through physical, sexual, or emotional intimacy with an individual outside the marriage. Sexual infidelity specifically refers to engaging in complete sexual intercourse with someone other than one's spouse (Brewer et al., 2023). Emotional infidelity includes forming an emotional and intimate connection, such as spending shared moments and engaging in intimate conversations, with someone outside the marriage. Physical infidelity involves bodily contact, including touching sexual areas of the body, with someone other than one's spouse (Swets & Cox, 2023).

Extramarital relationships significantly impact the functionality and stability of a relationship, disrupting its foundational rules and undermining the trust on which it is built (Sungur, 2021). Research on the attitudes of men and women toward extramarital relationships indicates that despite the negative perspective of both genders on this issue, marital infidelity occurs frequently among both groups. Women often engage in relationships that involve emotions and feelings, while men tend to prioritize sexual relationships (Millar, 2017).

When infidelity occurs, the betrayed individual faces a dilemma: on one hand, it destroys the family and may result in losing a spouse who they might still love; on the other hand, resolving the conflict means living with the emotional wounds of infidelity and the risk of it happening again (Stamps, 2020). The consequences of marital infidelity for the betrayed spouse include severe physical and psychological distress, persistent preoccupation with understanding the reasons behind the incident, disruption of the relationship with the unfaithful spouse, and grief and regret, particularly for women (Khamsean et al., 2021).

The revelation of marital infidelity can have devastating effects on the personality, physical health, and psychological well-being of individuals affected by it. These issues include difficulty in emotion regulation, anxiety, depression, and

stress (Ranjbar-Bahadari et al., 2022). Other studies have shown that the response to spousal infidelity can resemble post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, including shock, confusion, anger, depression, damage to self-esteem, and reduced confidence in personal and sexual matters. It may also involve severing relationships with others and experiencing emotional difficulties (Barraca & Polanski, 2021). Such cognitive-emotional problems can lead to negative behavioral responses by the victim (Filimon et al., 2021).

Recent psychological studies suggest that emotions can influence both the thinking process (how individuals process social information) and the content of thought, judgments, and behaviors, ultimately impacting human well-being (Kumari, 2020). In the context of couples, it seems that instead of expressing strong emotions, individuals tend to convey less threatening emotions. Troubled couples often find themselves trapped in rigid patterns and repetitive interaction cycles that they reinforce themselves, leading to further distress and unresolved issues. This dynamic is also evident in cases of infidelity (Lonergan et al., 2022).

Ruan et al. (2020) demonstrated that emotional expression in betrayed individuals is strongly linked to heightened stress and negative emotions such as fear and anger, and they struggle with stress management and emotion regulation (Ruan et al., 2020).

It is important to note that marital infidelity is not exclusive to troubled couples; it can also occur among spouses with healthy and satisfactory relationships. However, couples in troubled and unsuccessful marriages are more vulnerable to infidelity (Elahi Nouri et al., 2022). A significant relationship exists between infidelity and divorce, with some studies citing infidelity as a cause of divorce. Surveys of divorced individuals have also revealed that sexual infidelity was a reason for their separation (Garza, 2020).

The consequences of marital infidelity for the betrayed spouse include a wide range of negative emotions and behaviors, such as anger toward the spouse, depression, suicidal ideation, chronic anxiety, post-traumatic stress symptoms (Khosravi et al., 2019), feelings of shame, humiliation, detachment, difficulties with concentration, persistent rumination, and impaired daily functioning. Other outcomes may include physical violence, spousal murder, or suicide attempts (Fife et al., 2020).

Given that the family is the fundamental unit of society, influencing individuals' growth and integration into the community, the health of the family undoubtedly impacts

societal well-being. Considering the consequences of marital infidelity on marriage and family, studies of this nature are essential. Therefore, the present research focuses on validating the Emotional Responses to Sexual Infidelity Scale in Iran to provide a tool for studying this phenomenon, raising awareness about it, and offering solutions to reduce its prevalence and adverse effects. Thus, the current study aims to validate the Emotional Responses to Sexual Infidelity Scale for individuals affected by sexual infidelity.

2. Methods

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The research method used in the present study was descriptive and correlational, and it falls under the category of applied research. The statistical population of this study consisted of individuals who had experienced sexual infidelity by their spouses and sought assistance at psychological counseling centers and the Dispute Resolution Council in the city of Gorgan in 2023. The sample size was determined using the approximate sample size formula from the scale development guidelines. Accordingly, 415 individuals were selected using a convenient sampling method to complete the questionnaire. The inclusion criteria for the study were willingness to participate, at least a high school diploma, the first experience of sexual infidelity being revealed by the spouse, and the exclusion criterion was the presence of a compromised questionnaire.

To prepare the Persian version of the Emotional Responses to Sexual Infidelity Scale for the Iranian sample, a back-translation method was used. The English version of the questionnaire was first translated into Persian, and to ensure linguistic and conceptual equivalence, it was then retranslated back into English by another bilingual individual. Differences between the English and Persian versions were reviewed and minimized through a repeated review process. The final version was approved by five faculty members from the Department of Psychology and Education, as well as one professor from the Department of English Translation. In a pilot study, the translated scale was administered to a sample of 30 individuals affected by sexual infidelity. After collecting the responses, unclear or ambiguous items were rewritten and replaced with the closest equivalent terms. The final version of the scale was administered to 430 individuals, 15 of whom provided incomplete responses, and therefore, their data were excluded from the analysis. Ultimately, 415 questionnaires were included in the analysis. Ethical research standards,

including obtaining informed consent from participants and maintaining the confidentiality of their information, were adhered to throughout the study.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Emotional Responses

The Emotional Responses to Sexual Infidelity Scale (ERSIS) was developed by Turliuca & Scutarua in 2014 to measure emotional responses to sexual infidelity. In this scale, Turliuca & Scutarua (2014) selected a set of emotional responses related to sexual infidelity based on the emotional response list to infidelity (Shackelford & Buss, 2000) and created one item for each response. The initial version of the scale had 32 items. Based on the factor analysis results, five items with factor loadings less than 0.40 were removed to improve clarity, and the final version of the scale was reduced to 27 items. The items of this scale (27 items) were grouped into 11 factors, which explained 62.64% of the total variance (Turliuca & Scutarua, 2014). The final version of the Emotional Responses to Sexual Infidelity Scale, consisting of 27 items, was administered to 620 men and women with an average age of 28 years who had experienced sexual infidelity within their marriage. The scoring method for the scale follows a Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. The scale consists of seven subscales: sadness, horror, anger, pain, fear, jealousy, and guilt. Sadness includes items 9, 10, 12, 15, and 18; horror includes items 5, 7, 11, 19, and 24; anger includes items 3, 4, 14, and 21; pain includes items 1, 2, 17, and 26; fear includes items 22, 23, and 27; jealousy includes items 6, 8, and 16; and guilt includes items 13, 20, and 25. The total score range for this scale is from 27 to 135, with a cutoff score of 60. Higher scores indicate stronger emotional responses to sexual infidelity. To assess the content validity of the scale, exploratory factor analysis was used. The analysis, employing principal components and Varimax rotation, yielded a KMO value of 0.73, and Bartlett's test resulted in a chi-square value of 4365.77 ($\chi^2 = 4365.77$, $p < 0.001$). The convergent validity of the Emotional Responses to Sexual Infidelity Scale was examined by correlating the scores of this scale with the Marital Infidelity Questionnaire (Drigotas et al., 1999) and the Interpersonal Jealousy Scale (Mathes & Severa, 1981), revealing significant relationships between the scores of the two instruments, indicating strong convergent validity. The reliability of the Emotional Responses to Sexual Infidelity Scale was calculated using

Cronbach's alpha. The alpha coefficient for the entire scale was 0.85, and for the subscales, the values were as follows: 0.91 for sadness, 0.88 for horror, 0.87 for anger, 0.87 for pain, 0.79 for fear, 0.89 for jealousy, and 0.79 for guilt.

2.3. Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study was conducted in several stages to assess the reliability and validity of the Emotional Responses to Sexual Infidelity Scale (ERSIS). First, descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were calculated for all subscales of the ERSIS to provide an overview of participants' emotional responses to sexual infidelity. Next, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's test of sphericity were used to assess the adequacy of the sample for factor analysis. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was then performed to test the hypothesized factor structure of the scale and to examine the model fit using indices such as the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). Internal consistency

reliability for the subscales and the full scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Additionally, content validity was evaluated through expert reviews and the Content Validity Index (CVI), while construct validity was confirmed through factor loadings and model fit indices. All analyses were conducted using appropriate statistical software (e.g., SPSS or AMOS), with statistical significance set at $p < 0.05$.

3. Findings and Results

The demographic findings revealed that the mean age of the participants in the study was 31.5 years ($SD = 2.45$). Among the participants, 59.3% were women and 40.7% were men. In terms of education, 42.5% had a high school diploma, 18.2% had an associate degree, 31.1% had a bachelor's degree, 5.3% had a master's degree, and 2.9% had a doctoral degree. The descriptive indices for the emotional responses to sexual infidelity variable in the sample group are presented in [Table 1](#).

Table 1

Descriptive Indices for the Emotional Responses to Sexual Infidelity Variable

Variable	Number of Items	Mean	Standard Deviation
Sadness	5	21.16	4.68
Horror	5	16.83	4.41
Anger	4	19.27	4.92
Pain	4	13.41	3.25
Fear	3	14.01	3.48
Jealousy	3	13.86	3.62
Guilt	3	8.19	2.96

Considering the scoring method for the items, the higher the mean of the variables, the higher the level of that variable. Therefore, the variable "Sadness" with a mean score of 21.16 represented the highest emotional response to

sexual infidelity. The results of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test to assess sampling adequacy for exploratory factor analysis were confirmed and indicated that the data were suitable for factor extraction.

Table 2

KMO and Bartlett's Test of the Emotional Responses to Sexual Infidelity Scale

Statistic	Value
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)	0.770
Bartlett's Chi-Square	748.65
Degrees of Freedom	105
p-value	0.001

Based on the results of [Table 2](#), the KMO index and Bartlett's test indicate that conducting factor analysis is justified. The results of the exploratory factor analysis and

the items of the questionnaire with their factor loadings are presented in [Table 3](#).

Table 3

Factor Loadings of the Emotional Responses to Sexual Infidelity Scale

Items	Sadness	Horror	Anger	Pain	Fear	Jealousy	Guilt
1	I feel abandoned by my partner.	0.42					
2	I currently feel lonely.	0.38					
3	I get angry when my partner tries to explain the situation.		0.49				
4	I feel irritable when I recall that moment.		0.51				
5	I am astonished by my partner's behavior.	0.54					
6	I feel humiliated by my partner.		0.59				
7	I feel confused when I think about the future.	0.39					
8	I felt deceived from the beginning of the relationship.		0.41				
9	I feel hopeless when I think about the future of our relationship.	0.50					
10	I feel discouraged by everything that has happened around me.	0.63					
11	I feel hopeless about my partner's outlook on the future.	0.44					
12	I consider myself a pessimist who will struggle to overcome this moment.	0.38					
13	I feel guilty about my reaction to this situation.						0.55
14	My partner and I have become enemies.			0.60			
15	I feel upset by the reaction of those around me in this situation.	0.41					
16	Every time I recall specific details, I feel jealous.						0.39
17	I feel ignored by my partner.	0.61					
18	Every time I think about this situation, I feel sadness.	0.57					
19	I feel inferior when comparing myself to the alternative.	0.35					
20	I hate myself because I didn't know how to deal with this situation from the beginning.			0.56			
21	I have been hurt by my partner in this situation.			0.57			
22	I feel tense when my partner discusses with someone of the opposite sex.		0.57				
23	Every time someone gets too close to my partner, I feel anxious.		0.49				
24	My partner's choice affects me.	0.41					
25	We are equally responsible for this situation.						0.42
26	I currently feel empty inside.	0.45					
27	I get anxious during open discussions with my partner.		0.43				

To identify the factors constituting each construct, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was employed. The results of the CFA for the constructs of the study, shown in Table 3, indicate that all the constructs were statistically significant at a 95% confidence level and contributed meaningfully to the measurement of their respective

constructs. Based on the factor loadings, the higher the factor loading, the greater the contribution to measuring the corresponding construct.

Table 4 shows the correlation results between the factors of the questionnaire.

Table 4

Correlations Between the Factors of the Emotional Responses to Sexual Infidelity Scale

Components	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Sadness	1						
Horror	0.49	1					
Anger	0.53	0.49	1				
Pain	0.64	0.71	0.69	1			
Fear	0.51	0.74	0.45	0.57	1		
Jealousy	0.61	0.63	0.66	0.52	0.49	1	
Guilt	0.68	0.58	0.50	0.69	0.55	0.72	1

Based on the correlations derived from the internal consistency of the components of the Emotional Responses to Sexual Infidelity Scale, it can be concluded that the questionnaire possesses the necessary internal consistency.

Table 5 presents the overall goodness-of-fit indices for the confirmatory factor analysis of the Emotional Responses to Sexual Infidelity Scale.

Table 5

Overall Goodness-of-Fit Indices for the Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Emotional Responses to Sexual Infidelity Scale

Index Type	Goodness-of-Fit Indices	Calculated Value
Relative	Chi-Square	81.23
	Degrees of Freedom	65
	p-value	0.08
	Relative Chi-Square	1.22
Incremental	Incremental Fit Index (IFI)	0.92
	Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	0.91
	Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.92
	Bentler-Bonett Normed Fit Index (NFI)	0.74
	Relative Fit Index (RFI)	0.65
Parsimonious	Parsimonious Normed Fit Index (PNFI)	0.56
	Parsimonious Comparative Fit Index (PCFI)	0.70
Error	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	0.05

The results from Table 5 indicate that the p-value of the Chi-Square test is 0.08, which is not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$), suggesting a good overall fit for the confirmatory factor analysis. The IFI and CFI indices, which are considered good when their values exceed 0.90, yielded values of 0.92 in this study, further confirming a good fit of

the confirmatory factor model. Additionally, the RMSEA index, calculated at 0.05, which is below the threshold of 0.08, indicates a good overall fit of the model.

Table 6 presents the reliability coefficients of the Emotional Responses to Sexual Infidelity Scale, calculated using Cronbach's alpha.

Table 6

Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients for the Emotional Responses to Sexual Infidelity Scale

Components	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
Sadness	5	0.73
Horror	5	0.74
Anger	4	0.78
Pain	4	0.71
Fear	3	0.75
Jealousy	3	0.78
Guilt	3	0.71
Total Scale	27	0.81

The overall reliability of the Emotional Responses to Sexual Infidelity Scale in this study, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, was 0.81, indicating adequate internal consistency for the items. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the scale demonstrates adequate reliability.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Marital infidelity is associated with various negative consequences for individuals, marital relationships, and their children. It also causes damage across all dimensions of personal, familial, social, and spiritual aspects (Selterman et al., 2020), and creates a context for a range of emotional responses, including depression (Amer, 2018), anxiety and worry (Shrout & Weigel, 2017), guilt and self-blame

(O'Connor & Canevello, 2019), pessimism and distrust (Warach & Josephs, 2021). These factors must be taken into account. This article, aiming to validate the Emotional Responses to Sexual Infidelity Scale in individuals affected by sexual infidelity, seeks to introduce this tool to researchers in the field of psychology and encourage further research in this area. To this end, the questionnaire was translated into Persian, and after ensuring the accuracy of the translation and face validity, content validity was examined using the Content Validity Index (CVI) to ensure that the items were designed in the best possible way to measure the content. Furthermore, the Content Validity Ratio (CVR) was used to confirm that the most relevant and correct content had been selected, which was validated by the experts' opinions. For assessing construct validity, confirmatory

factor analysis was applied. After examining the overall model fit, the factor loadings were evaluated.

The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which showed high internal consistency for both the entire questionnaire and its subscales. The internal consistency coefficients for the factors of sadness, horror, anger, pain, fear, jealousy, and guilt were 0.73, 0.74, 0.78, 0.71, 0.75, 0.78, and 0.71, respectively, and the overall reliability coefficient for the scale was 0.81. This study demonstrated that the translated version of the Emotional Responses to Sexual Infidelity Scale (ERSIS) is a valuable tool for assessing emotional responses to sexual infidelity, and it can be used by psychology professionals in interpreting the consequences of sexual infidelity. Despite the need for further studies on this tool and similar instruments, it is hoped that the Persian version of the ERSIS can serve as a useful tool for researchers in psychology and other interested scholars.

5. Suggestions and Limitations

It is worth mentioning that, like other studies, this research has certain limitations that may affect the generalizability of its results. For instance, the time elapsed since the disclosure of the sexual infidelity was not considered in this study. Future research could evaluate the impact of the duration of infidelity disclosure between couples. Overall, the results of the present study indicate that the mentioned questionnaire can be used for research and educational purposes in communities affected by sexual infidelity. It is suggested that this study be conducted in other cultural and social areas to better understand the factor structure of the questionnaire in the Iranian population.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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