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An Analysis of the Causes and Consequences of Women's Infidelity Toward Their Spouses and Preventive Strategies at the Family and Societal Levels

1. Mehdi. Zare¹ : Department of Law, Isf.C., Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran

2. Masoud. Heidari² : Department of Law, Isf.C., Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran

3. Mohammad Reza. Shadman Far³ : Assistant Professor of Department of Law, Faculty of Administrative Sciences and Economics, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran

4. Mahmoud. Ashrafy⁴ : Department of Law, Isf.C., Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran

*corresponding author's email: heidari5525@iau.ac.ir

ABSTRACT

Women constitute one of the most fundamental pillars of the family institution, and deviation on the part of this group can produce destructive and irreparable effects on the family and, consequently, on society. From this perspective, the present study aims to analyze and identify the causes of women's infidelity toward their spouses, to examine its effects on the individual, the family, and society, and to propose strategies to prevent such illicit relationships at both the family and societal levels. This research is descriptive-survey in design and applied in terms of purpose. The study sample was selected through convenience sampling and consisted of 100 women, including women who had committed infidelity and were incarcerated, as well as women who had referred to psychological counseling centers. Data were collected using a questionnaire, and data analysis was conducted using covariance-based statistical methods. Among the most significant and common causes of women's infidelity are marital communication problems, forced marriage, unmet needs, and revenge-seeking. Based on the statistical results, it should be noted that granting the right to divorce as a policy measure may lead to an expansion in the exercise of divorce rights; therefore, instead of using the concept of "granting the right to divorce," the notion of "facilitating the divorce process for women" should be adopted. In certain causes of infidelity, such facilitation can contribute to a reduction in women's infidelity.

Keywords: *Infidelity; right to divorce; granting; facilitation*

Introduction

Communication within the family is of particular importance, as it enables individuals to express their needs and attitudes. Open and honest communication creates a space in which family members can articulate their differences of opinion and also express love, affection, and appreciation toward one another. Through communication, family members can resolve the inevitable problems that arise in all families (1). Disruptions in this type of relationship lead to harms that bring about numerous problems and impose substantial costs on both the individual and society.

Marital infidelity refers to a sexual, emotional, or sexual-emotional relationship with someone other than one's spouse that is concealed from the spouse. Any form of concealment from a spouse regarding extramarital



relationships is considered a form of infidelity, even when an individual shares private information with a third party and hides it from the spouse. In general, marital infidelity refers to any relationship (sexual or emotional) outside the framework of a committed marital relationship, which has a severe impact on the functioning and stability of marriage (2). However, in the present article, infidelity primarily refers to sexual infidelity, which can be understood as a secret relationship in which a married individual engages in sexual relations with someone who is not their legal spouse.

In a study conducted by Janus and Janus, the emotional reactions resulting from the disclosure of infidelity were examined. Victims of infidelity were asked to name the emotional reactions experienced upon discovering the betrayal, which included feelings of rejection and insecurity, helplessness, a sense of humiliation, anger and revenge-seeking, exhaustion, denial, disgust, suicidal and homicidal ideation, anxiety, and others (3). Additionally, through an examination of Islamic texts, certain consequences of illicit relationships can be identified and categorized. Some consequences, such as loss of faith, divine wrath, eternal punishment, and the non-acceptance of prayers, damage an individual's spiritual life. Worldly-life consequences include shortened lifespan, loss of livelihood blessings, and disgrace, all of which undermine an individual's worldly existence. Overall, it can be stated that spousal infidelity leaves destructive personal, familial, and social effects and imposes heavy and irreparable costs on the parties involved, the family, and society (4).

The legislator has granted the right to divorce to men [Article 1133: A man may, subject to compliance with the conditions stipulated in this law and by referring to the court, request a divorce from his spouse], and has recognized this right for women [Note to Article 1133: A woman may also, subject to the conditions stipulated in Articles 1119 and 1130 of this law, request a divorce from the court] upon proof of the fulfillment of certain conditions. However, the parties may stipulate any condition [Article 1119 of the Civil Code: The parties to a marriage contract may stipulate any condition that is not contrary to the essence of the contract, either within the marriage contract or in another binding contract; for example, it may be stipulated that if the husband takes another wife, or is absent for a specified period, or fails to provide maintenance, or attempts against the life of the wife, or engages in conduct that renders cohabitation intolerable, the wife shall be appointed as an agent, with the right of sub-agency, to divorce herself after proving the realization of the condition in court and the issuance of a final judgment] that is not contrary to the essence of the contract, either within the marriage contract or in another binding contract.

The family is a place to which individuals feel a sense of belonging. Anything that creates a rupture within the family threatens this sense of belonging and ignites a profound fear of rejection that penetrates deeply into one's being. Unintended pregnancies are another consequence of illicit relationships outside the marital framework. Such relationships may also lead to the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. The percentage of married individuals who violate marital commitment varies from one study to another. Therefore, the main issue of the present research is to examine the effect of granting the right to divorce to women as one of the strategies for reducing women's infidelity. Through this approach, such women may obtain a divorce and subsequently enter into permanent or temporary marriage with the person of their interest (5).

Theoretical Foundations

In legal terminology, various definitions of "right" have been proposed. For the sake of brevity, only one definition is presented: A right refers to the authority, capacity, or privilege granted to individuals by law or legal rules with

respect to the subject of the right, by virtue of which they may impose their will upon others in their social relations and obligate them to observe and respect that right.

Divorce means the legal termination of marriage and the separation of spouses from one another. Divorce usually occurs when the stability of the marital relationship is undermined and incompatibility and tension arise between the spouses. Social divorce refers to changes in friendships and other social relationships with which a divorced man or woman must deal. Psychological divorce refers to a situation in which an individual severs emotional attachment bonds with their spouse and consents to living alone. A man may, subject to compliance with the conditions stipulated in the law, refer to the court and request a divorce from his spouse, and a woman may also request a divorce under the conditions stipulated in Articles 1119 and 1129 of the Civil Code and Article 1130 of this law. In cases where divorce is requested by the husband pursuant to Article 1133 of the Civil Code, the court shall, on its own initiative or, if deemed appropriate, through arbitrators, attempt to reconcile the spouses and prevent divorce. If such efforts fail, the court shall issue a certificate of impossibility of reconciliation. Therefore, the primary right to divorce belongs to the man; however, the parties may stipulate any condition not contrary to the essence of the marriage contract, either within the marriage contract or in another binding contract, such as appointing the wife as an agent, with the right of sub-agency, to divorce herself upon proof of the realization of the stipulated condition in court and the issuance of a final judgment.

In accordance with the prevailing opinion of Imamiyyah jurists, the Civil Code has granted women the right to divorce in certain cases. Granting the right to divorce to women does not undermine the unilateral nature of divorce; accordingly, either the judge, by virtue of guardianship over a recalcitrant husband, pronounces the divorce formula, or the husband delegates his right to divorce to the wife in the form of agency. The provisions of the Civil Code that grant women the right to file a divorce petition include: absence of the husband, failure to provide maintenance, hardship and distress, stipulations, marriage, and consensual divorce.

The determination of hardship and distress is carried out by the court, and in accordance with the rule that the burden of proof lies with the claimant, the woman must present evidence to establish it. A subtle distinction must be made here: while the burden of presenting evidence lies with the woman, the determination of hardship and distress rests with the court. Thus, the wife is not required to demonstrate her subjective state of hardship and distress to the court; rather, it suffices for her to prove the causes that, according to her claim, have led to hardship and distress. After proving such causes, including failure to provide maintenance or intolerable misconduct by the husband, the court examines, in light of the woman's circumstances and personality and from the perspective of customary standards, whether such factors would ordinarily and habitually result in hardship and distress for a woman with such characteristics. Despite these advantages, the practical application of this provision warrants pause and reflection. Because the foundation of this article is the general concept of "hardship and distress," subjective judgment may play a role in its determination. In other words, judicial discretion in identifying hardship and distress constitutes the gateway for the application of this provision, and such variability is open to criticism. It may be argued that customary standards clarify the instances of hardship and distress, and that judges, being immersed in common custom, can apply a general criterion to the specific circumstances of the applicant wife. While this response is reasonable, it does not fully justify the practical difficulties. Is the judge always successful in determining custom? From whose perspective is custom interpreted—that of the husband or the wife? To what extent gender-based perspectives can be set aside in favor of judicial impartiality remains a subject open to debate.

As observed, the enumerated instances in this provision correspond to the stipulations within the marriage contract that have been incorporated into marriage certificates by the High Judicial Council. Can the revival of Article 1130 of the Civil Code in practice be achieved through such a resolution? Unfortunately, the answer is negative. First, the resolution is recommendatory rather than mandatory, and judges are not obliged to implement it. Second, such an approach is inconsistent with the spirit of Article 1130, which emphasizes generality and adaptability to specific circumstances. Therefore, the question remains: what is the solution?

Definition of Sexual Infidelity and Its Effects:

The form of infidelity addressed in this article is sexual infidelity, which may be understood as a secret relationship in which a married individual engages in sexual relations with someone who is not their legal spouse. The presence of infidelity within marriage invariably causes severe emotional harm to both parties and constitutes one of the most painful experiences that the betrayed spouse may encounter over the course of their lifetime. It is also highly damaging for children. The individual who commits infidelity may experience intense feelings of guilt, which can lead to depression and necessitate therapeutic interventions. Studies indicate that, across different cultures, infidelity is one of the major causes of spousal abuse and spousal homicide, and that female victims are up to six times more likely than other women to suffer from severe depression. Overall, infidelity can produce destructive personal, familial, and social consequences and impose heavy costs. Unintended pregnancy is among the outcomes of infidelity. Among the harmful effects of infidelity on the individual, the family, and society are post-traumatic stress disorder, which manifests in nightmares, sleep disturbances, emotional numbing, and withdrawal from social life; the possibility of transmitting sexually transmitted diseases through intercourse; violence; emotional crises within the family; the spread of emotional divorces; the increase in legal divorces; the collapse of the family structure; children running away from home; the proliferation of sexual disorders and deviance; and identity instability and personality fragmentation, all of which represent only part of the problems that infidelity creates within the family (4).

Methodology

One of the most common research methods in the social sciences, and among the descriptive–analytical approaches, is the survey method. This method is usually conducted on large populations with the assistance of questionnaires, and the researcher seeks to generalize the obtained results to the entire statistical population.

Given the subject and objectives of the present research, and considering that the survey method most effectively enables comparison of variables across different groups and individuals, the present study employs a survey design and uses a questionnaire as the instrument for data collection from 100 women who have engaged in infidelity.

Statistical Population and Research Instrument

The statistical population of this study consists of women who, under circumstances constituting infidelity, have committed infidelity. This group includes female prisoners and women who referred to psychological counseling offices, identified through interviews and questionnaire distribution. The questionnaire was provided to six psychology clinics and administered to female clients who had engaged in infidelity. In addition, by visiting the prison, sampling was conducted through two methods: questionnaires and direct interviews with female prisoners convicted of illicit relationships and spousal homicide.

Questionnaire Reliability

The questionnaire was developed based on the opinions of professors in law and psychology. The concept of reliability concerns the extent to which a measurement instrument yields consistent results under identical conditions. The range of the reliability coefficient extends from 0 (no association) to +1 (perfect association). Various methods exist for measuring questionnaire reliability, including test–retest, parallel forms, split-half, and Cronbach’s alpha. To assess the reliability of the questionnaire in this study, Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was used. This method is applied to compute the internal consistency of measurement instruments, including questionnaires, particularly for tests that measure multiple attributes.

In such instruments, each question may take different numerical values. For the interview component, Cronbach’s alpha requires calculating the variance of the scores of each subset of questionnaire items and the total variance, and then computing the alpha coefficient using the following formula.

$$\text{Reliability coefficient} = \alpha$$

Based on a preliminary study, the reliability of the job satisfaction questionnaire was estimated at 85%, indicating a high level of measurement reliability.

Findings and Results

The infidelity addressed in this article is sexual infidelity, which can be regarded as a secret relationship in which a married person engages in sexual relations with someone who is not their legal spouse.

The reasons for women’s infidelity were then operationalized into nine subscales, and the right to divorce was assigned to each of these nine subscales in order to observe its effect (the table and questionnaire are attached to the study). It should be noted that, in these tables, the number of causes is measured rather than the number of individuals. In this dataset, women reported various reasons for seeking or not seeking divorce, and the causes were categorized accordingly. Thus, it is possible that a woman identified one cause or multiple causes as the reason for her infidelity, and on that basis considered the right to divorce as effective or ineffective in preventing her infidelity toward her spouse.

Hypothesis 1: Facilitating or granting the right to divorce reduces infidelity in relation to causes associated with communication problems with the spouse.

Table 1. Effect of Subscale 1 in Granting the Right to Divorce

Right to Divorce in Relation to Subscale 1 (Communication Problems with Spouse)	Total Percentage	Mean	Percentage
Has an effect	100%	79%	79%
Has no effect	100%	21%	21%

Based on the statistics obtained from women who engaged in infidelity due to communication problems with their spouse, it can be concluded that women who committed infidelity for this reason would not have done so if they had been granted the right to divorce or if the divorce process had been facilitated for them. On this basis, Hypothesis 1 is supported.

Hypothesis 2: Facilitating or granting the right to divorce reduces infidelity in relation to causes associated with unmet needs.

Table 2. Effect of Subscale 2 in Granting the Right to Divorce

Right to Divorce in Relation to Subscale 2 (Fulfillment of Needs)	Total Percentage	Mean	Percentage
Has an effect	100%	27%	27%
Has no effect	100%	73%	73%

Based on the statistics obtained from women who engaged in infidelity due to unmet needs, it can be concluded that women who turn to extramarital relationships due to unmet sexual needs would still engage in infidelity even if they were granted the right to divorce; therefore, such a measure would not reduce infidelity. Accordingly, Hypothesis 2 is not supported.

Hypothesis 3: Facilitating or granting the right to divorce reduces infidelity in relation to revenge against the spouse.

Table 3. Effect of Subscale 3 in Granting the Right to Divorce

Right to Divorce in Relation to Subscale 3 (Revenge-Seeking)	Total Percentage	Mean	Percentage
Has an effect	100%	11%	11%
Has no effect	100%	89%	89%

Based on the statistics obtained from women who engaged in infidelity due to revenge against their husband—most commonly in response to the husband's own extramarital relationship—granting the right to divorce does not appear to have a substantial effect on reducing infidelity in this group. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is not supported.

Hypothesis 4: Facilitating or granting the right to divorce reduces infidelity in relation to novelty-seeking and the spouse's psychological disorder.

Table 4. Effect of Subscale 4 in Granting the Right to Divorce

Right to Divorce in Relation to Subscale 4 (Novelty-Seeking and Psychological Disorder)	Total Percentage	Mean	Percentage
Has an effect	100%	0%	0%
Has no effect	100%	100%	100%

Based on the statistics obtained from women who engaged in infidelity due to novelty-seeking or psychological disorder, it can be stated with certainty that those who pursue extramarital sexual relations due to insatiability or psychological disorder would not change their infidelity behavior even if they had the right to divorce. Thus, Hypothesis 4 is not supported.

Hypothesis 5: Facilitating or granting the right to divorce reduces infidelity due to financial poverty and the husband's addiction.

The financial poverty subscale is divided into two groups: addiction and income generation.

Table 5. Effect of Subscale 5 in Granting the Right to Divorce (Financial Poverty–Husband's Addiction)

Right to Divorce in Relation to Subscale 5 (Financial Poverty–Husband's Addiction)	Total Percentage	Mean	Percentage
Has an effect	100%	88%	88%
Has no effect	100%	22%	22%

Based on the statistics obtained from women who engaged in infidelity due to the husband's addiction, because they experience both financial hardship and emotional deprivation and other unmet needs, they see no reason to continue living with him. Since they find no route to divorce, they resort to infidelity with someone who can fill the void of their needs. Accordingly, having an authorization enabling divorce, based on the large majority of the data, would be effective in reducing infidelity. Therefore, Hypothesis 5, with respect to the husband's addiction, is supported.

Hypothesis 5 (Income Component): Facilitating or granting the right to divorce reduces infidelity due to financial poverty and the husband's lack of income generation.

Table 5. Effect of Subscale 5 in Granting the Right to Divorce (Financial Poverty–Income Generation)

Right to Divorce in Relation to Subscale 5 (Financial Poverty–Income Generation)	Total Percentage	Mean	Percentage
Has an effect	100%	27%	27%
Has no effect	100%	73%	73%

It should be noted that, in this table, the number of causes is measured rather than the number of individuals. Women reported various reasons for seeking or not seeking divorce, and the causes were categorized accordingly. Therefore, Hypothesis 5, with respect to income generation, is not supported.

Hypothesis 6: Facilitating or granting the right to divorce reduces infidelity due to the spouse's strictness.

Table 6. Effect of Subscale 6 in Granting the Right to Divorce

Right to Divorce in Relation to Subscale 6 (Spouse's Strictness)	Total Percentage	Mean	Percentage
Has an effect	100%	67%	67%
Has no effect	100%	33%	33%

Based on the statistics obtained from women who engaged in infidelity due to the husband's excessive strictness—or, in a sense, excessive jealousy—the wife becomes distressed by this issue. Some wish to have the right to divorce in order to escape this situation, while others consider it irrelevant because they refrain from divorce for various reasons such as the husband's financial support, having children, negative family attitudes toward divorce, and similar factors. On this basis, Hypothesis 6 is supported.

Hypothesis 7: Facilitating or granting the right to divorce reduces infidelity in relation to coerced and forced marital life.

Table 7. Effect of Subscale 7 in Granting the Right to Divorce

Right to Divorce in Relation to Subscale 7 (Coerced and Forced Life)	Total Percentage	Mean	Percentage
Has an effect	100%	81%	81%
Has no effect	100%	19%	19%

Based on the statistics obtained from women who engaged in infidelity due to living under compulsion and coercion, it can be stated that if this group had the right to divorce, they would not have engaged in infidelity toward their spouse. Those who are forced into marriage and, due to aversion to the spouse, must endure life with him, or those who were compelled to marry while loving someone else, may experience deprivation of affection and other needs; consequently, they involuntarily compare their spouse with the person they love, the channel of relationship reopens, and the ground for infidelity is created. Likewise, forced marriage at a young age may, over time, due to a lack of love and emotional intimacy in marital life, lead the person to fall in love with someone else. Some respondents stated that with the right to divorce they would not have turned to infidelity, while those who would still engage in infidelity despite having the right to divorce reasoned that there is no certainty the person they love would proceed with marriage after divorce, and that they might lose their financial support. Given the frequency results, Hypothesis 7 is supported.

Hypothesis 8: Facilitating or granting the right to divorce reduces infidelity in relation to communications.

Table 8. Effect of Subscale 8 in Granting the Right to Divorce

Right to Divorce in Relation to Subscale 8 (Communications)	Total Percentage	Mean	Percentage
Has an effect	100%	7%	7%
Has no effect	100%	93%	93%

Based on the statistics obtained from women who engaged in infidelity due to “communications,” the most common form being close familial communications, other examples include communications via telephone, mobile phone, Facebook, the internet, and applications installed on mobile phones. These communication factors increasingly bring individuals closer together in a way that breaks the boundaries of the family environment. Individuals who, for any reason, experience problems with their husband may turn more and more to such means to alleviate loneliness and meet their needs, which in turn increases marital infidelity. In the past, in the presence of marital problems, mediation by elders could, to some extent, resolve the issue; if it did not, the woman would endure it. However, with the emergence of these means of communication, people have become increasingly close and the boundaries of families have weakened.

This dataset also indicated that familial communications can account for a significant proportion of such relationships. In familial relationships, individuals impose far less strictness regarding the spouses’ manner of dress, which may arouse the opposite sex. At the same time, the woman may already be experiencing various problems with her spouse, and all these factors combine to contribute to infidelity. Based on this evidence, Hypothesis 8 is not supported.

Conclusion

The findings of the present study indicate that an unqualified expansion of the right to divorce for women does not necessarily lead to a reduction in marital infidelity and, in certain contexts, may contribute to the weakening of family cohesion. When divorce is framed merely as an easily accessible entitlement, it can undermine marital stability and, indirectly, exacerbate social problems rooted in family disintegration. Consequently, the results support a conceptual and practical distinction between the *granting* of the right to divorce and the *facilitation* of access to divorce mechanisms under specific, demonstrable conditions.

The empirical evidence demonstrates that facilitating the divorce process can be effective in reducing infidelity in particular causal domains, namely communication problems with the spouse, financial deprivation linked to the husband’s addiction, excessive spousal strictness, and coerced or forced marital life. In contrast, facilitation of divorce showed no meaningful impact on infidelity driven by unmet personal needs, revenge-seeking behaviors, novelty-seeking tendencies and psychological disorders, financial insufficiency related to income generation, or expanded communication networks. These findings suggest that women’s infidelity is a multidimensional phenomenon and that legal mechanisms alone cannot uniformly address its underlying causes.

Overall, the study concludes that a targeted and conditional facilitation of divorce, rather than its unconditional expansion, may mitigate some of the harmful personal, familial, and social consequences of infidelity. Such an approach recognizes the complexity of marital relationships and underscores the necessity of integrating legal reform with social, psychological, and cultural interventions to preserve family stability while safeguarding individual dignity.

Recommendations

First, legislators are advised to design legal frameworks that prioritize the facilitation of divorce procedures for women in clearly defined and substantiated circumstances, rather than adopting a generalized policy of granting the right to divorce. Such frameworks should emphasize judicial efficiency, procedural clarity, and protection against prolonged marital harm.

Second, family law policies should adopt a preventive orientation by addressing marital infidelity as a serious threat to family integrity. This requires not only legal regulation but also the incorporation of supportive measures aimed at strengthening marital relationships and reducing the likelihood of relational breakdown.

Third, legislative reforms should seek to limit excessive judicial discretion in divorce cases by establishing clearer statutory criteria and objective standards. This would promote consistency in judicial decision-making and enhance public confidence in the fairness and predictability of family courts.

Fourth, policymakers should invest in systematic social norm assessment and reform, with particular attention to cultural practices that contribute to forced marriages, unequal power relations, and the stigmatization of divorce. Addressing these structural factors is essential for reducing the root causes of infidelity.

Finally, access to affordable psychological and marital counseling services should be expanded. Reducing the financial barriers to professional counseling can encourage early intervention, facilitate conflict resolution within marriage, and ultimately decrease reliance on extramarital relationships as a coping mechanism.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

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

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