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The Effectiveness of Supportive Psychodynamics on Self-Differentiation and Kinship Center Attachment in Women Affected by their Husband's Extramarital Affairs

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Abstract

Purpose: The family is the most important fundamental unit of a society. A healthy and vibrant society depends on healthy families. The consequences of any threat to the family center are visible in society. Extramarital affairs are considered one of the most important factors threatening the performance, stability, and continuity of a marital relationship, which can threaten the foundation of the family and lead to disruption of balance and ultimately divorce. This study aimed to explain the effectiveness of supportive psychodynamics on self-differentiation and Kinship Center Attachment in women affected by their husband's extramarital affairs.

Method: The present study was applied in terms of purpose and quasi-experimental in terms of method (pre-test, post-test with control group). The statistical population included 120 women affected by their husband's extramarital affairs in Qom. From the population, 60 people were selected by simple random sampling and and the Self-Differentiation and Kinship Center Attachment questionnaires were distributed among them. Then, 30 people who had obtained lower scores were selected as a sample, and out of these 30 people, 15 people of them were randomly assigned to the experimental group and 15 people to the control group. The measurement tools in this research question were the Self-Differentiation Questionnaire by Skorn and Friedlander (1989) and the Kinship Center Attachment Questionnaire (KCAQ) - Child Attachment in the Middle Ages by Halpern and Kappenberg (2006). In order to examine and analyze the data collected in this study to achieve the research objectives, descriptive statistics (frequency calculation, percentage) and inferential statistics (Levin's test for homogeneity of variances and analysis of covariance) were used, and all calculations were performed with the help of SPSS version 26 software.

Results: The findings showed that supportive psychodynamics had a significant effect on self-differentiation and Kinship Center Attachment in women affected by their husband's extramarital affairs ($P<0.05$). The results indicated that supportive psychodynamics was able to significantly strengthen self-differentiation and Kinship Center Attachment in women affected by their husbands' extramarital affairs.

Conclusion: Supportive psychodynamic therapy was able to significantly improve self-differentiation and Kinship Center Attachment in women affected by extramarital relationships. These findings indicate the need to pay attention to supportive psychotherapy interventions and expand further research in this area.

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Introduction

One of the challenges that many couples face is cheating in a relationship, and the biggest cheating act between a couple is dealing with infidelity. Infidelity is a breach of trust, a lack of loyalty, and a lack of moral commitment to one's spouse; for this reason, it is the most painful human experience, and the damage it causes leaves deep effects on the psyche of individuals. Children, family members, spouses, and even the person involved in the extramarital affair and their loved ones

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are also harmed (1). Extramarital affairs mean the existence of an emotional connection outside the framework of moral, religious, legal, and cultural rules governing society, which leads to the violation of the couple's commitment to each other; for example, extramarital affairs can range from behaviors such as chatting, emailing, cheating, watching porn to physical and sexual intimacy; Therefore, any behavior that, from the perspective of individuals, leads to a violation of the marriage contract between two people can be classified as extramarital affairs. Marital relationships consist of three pillars: commitment, attraction, and understanding. Commitment is the most important distinction between marital and extramarital relationships. In fact, commitment is the degree to which individuals have a long-term view of their marriage, make sacrifices for their relationship, take steps to maintain, strengthen, and solidify their union, and remain with their spouse even when their relationship is not rewarding. Research has shown that people's attitudes are an important variable in the area of infidelity. People who have a more permissive attitude towards infidelity are more likely to cheat (2). Considering these materials, this study aims to examine the effectiveness of supportive psychodynamics on self-differentiation and Kinship Center Attachment in women affected by their husband's extramarital affairs. For the purpose, the problem, importance, and necessity of the study were first stated, then the objectives and hypotheses of the study were stated, and then the conceptual and operational definitions of the research variables were discussed.

Statement of the problem

Extramarital affairs have been identified as the most important cause of separation in 160 different cultures around the world, as they involve a number of behavioral elements such as inappropriate emotional and sexual needs, opportunism, irresponsibility, and intentional deception, which are not easy for people who are involved in this issue to accept (1). It is also a means by which the person reveals the darker, more problematic side of their personality without committing any overt transgression. The most important assumption in a marital relationship is exclusivity, the belief that both people are emotionally and sexually committed to each other. However, extramarital affairs and infidelity are on the rise in today's societies. The issue of marital infidelity and extramarital affairs is also a concern in Iranian society and is associated with instability in relationships and a high divorce rate (2).

One of the factors that affects couples' relationships is self-differentiation. Self-differentiation, which is the ability of an individual to separate themselves from others on a cognitive and emotional level, results from the ego's capacity for social action and provides the capacity to think in such a way that the individual does not automatically respond to internal or external emotional pressures. Thus, the ability of individuals to be flexible and act wisely, especially in the face of anxiety, has been defined (3). In fact, self-differentiation is the ability to gain emotional control while remaining within the emotional atmosphere of the family. This concept expresses the degree to which an individual is able to think realistically about emotional issues in the family. Differentiation includes an intrapersonal capacity to differentiate thinking and feeling, as well as an interpersonal ability to maintain independence within the context of deep relationships with important people in one's life (4).

Another variable that can affect marital relationships is Kinship Center Attachment. Kinship Center Attachment refers to the relationships that form between children and their primary caregivers during childhood and are examined in the middle years, for example, during preschool and elementary school. These relationships influence patterns of interactions and expectations in an individual's future relationships, especially romantic ones.(5) In general, Kinship Center Attachment involves experiences and patterns of secure or insecure attachment that are formed in childhood and that influence an individual's behaviors and emotions in adulthood. Attachment is a two-way process of emotional-affective communication that affects the child's psychological, physical, and cognitive development, and is the basis for the child's trust and distrust, shaping how the child relates to the world and determining how they learn and communicate throughout life. On the other hand, attachment is a stable emotion that causes family bonding, child support, independence, appropriate peer relationships, and parental roles (6).

Supportive psychodynamics is a type of psychotherapy that may affect self-differentiation and Kinship Center Attachment. Supportive psychodynamic therapy helps individuals identify, understand, and manage their psychological problems through the support, guidance, and interactions of a therapist. This treatment method focuses on strengthening the individual's abilities to cope with life's challenges, develop healthy relationships, and improve quality of life (7). In supportive psychotherapy, the therapist plays a supportive and guiding role, helping the person to better understand themselves, their feelings, and their thoughts. The therapist also helps the person to use coping skills to manage their stress and anxiety and improve their relationships with others. This type of therapy is suitable for people who are struggling with mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, post-

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traumatic stress disorder, and other similar problems. Supportive psychotherapy can be used independently or in conjunction with other treatments such as medication (8). Due to maternal affection and cultural, economic, and social issues, women endure all difficulties and problems, and in some cases, even after their husband's extramarital affairs, they are not willing to leave their married life, which leads to psychological, personal, and social problems in them. According to the results of a study, the moment women affected by extramarital affairs find out about their spouse's infidelity, they feel defeated and have disappointing thoughts (9). Women affected by extramarital affairs blame themselves because they consider themselves to be at fault for the infidelity, and as a result, this leads to a decrease in self-esteem and self-worth, and a negative view of themselves in these women. Therefore, rejection by a loved life partner on the one hand and low self-esteem on the other can lead to feelings of loneliness in women affected by extramarital affairs (10). Now, given that previous research literature has not examined the effectiveness of supportive psychodynamics on self-differentiation and Kinship Center Attachment in women affected by their husband's extramarital affairs, and also given that the results of this study can be used by counseling centers, psychologists, psychotherapists, and families, conducting this study is necessary and important. Now, given that previous research literature has not examined the effectiveness of supportive psychodynamics on self-differentiation and Kinship Center Attachment in women affected by their spouse's extramarital affairs, there is a research gap in this regard. Therefore, the main concern of this study is to answer the question: Does supportive psychodynamics have an effect on self-differentiation and Kinship Center Attachment in women affected by their spouse's extramarital affairs? The following are some of the studies conducted on the research topic:

Table 1. Studies conducted on the research topic

Author	Year	Research title
Zanganeh and Alyasin (11)	2023	The effectiveness of mindfulness-based schema therapy on self-differentiation in women affected by their spouse's infidelity
Kashfi and Ozkhosh (12)	2023	The effect of short-term intensive dynamic psychotherapy on self-differentiation and attachment behavior in marital relationships of women with a tendency to break marital covenants.
Ranjebar Bahadori, Taklavoi, Kazemi (13)	2021	The effectiveness of short-term psychodynamic therapy on emotional expression and differentiation of betrayed women
Amani and Mahdi (14)	2019	The lived experience of women affected by their husband's extramarital affairs in Sanandaj city
Saleh, Samarain (15)	2024	Predicting the tendency towards extramarital relationships based on early maladaptive schemas and attachment styles in women demanding divorce
Al-Huzil and Basr (16)	2024	Sharing your spouse: Adult attachment styles and emotional responses of Israeli-Arab Bedouin women to potential polygamous marriage.
Chavanu and Viaspandi (17)	2023	Sharing your spouse: Adult attachment styles and emotional responses of Israeli-Arab Bedouin women to potential polygamous marriage.

Now, given that there is a lack of scientific efforts to determine the effectiveness of supportive psychodynamic therapy on self-differentiation and attachment relationships in women affected by their spouse's extramarital affairs, Therefore, in line with the research conducted and considering the materials presented, this study intends to test the following hypotheses to achieve this goal:

- Supportive psychodynamics is effective in promoting self-differentiation in women affected by their husband's extramarital affairs.
- Supportive psychodynamic therapy is effective on Kinship Center Attachment in women affected by their husband's extramarital affairs.

The Method of Research

The present study was applied in terms of purpose and quasi-experimental in terms of method (pre-test, post-test with control group). The statistical population included 120 women affected by their husband's extramarital affairs in Qom. 60 people were selected from the population by simple random sampling and self-differentiation and Kinship Center Attachment questionnaires were distributed among them. Then, 30 people who had obtained lower scores were selected as a sample, of which 15 were randomly assigned to the experimental group and 15 to the control group. In order to collect the information required to test the research hypotheses, appropriate and proportionate measurement tools, which were standard questionnaires, were used. The measurement tools in

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this research question were the Self-Differentiation Questionnaire by Skorn and Friedlander (1989) and the Kinship Center Attachment Questionnaire (KCAQ) - attachment of children in the middle period by Halpern and Kappenberg (2006). In order to examine and analyze the data collected in this study to achieve the research objectives, descriptive statistics (frequency calculation, percentage) and inferential statistics (Levin's test for homogeneity of variances and analysis of covariance) were used, and all calculations were performed with the help of SPSS version 26 software.

Findings

First, the assumptions of data analysis were examined. Based on the findings in the table, the results of the Shapiro-Wilk test showed that the distribution of research variables in both experimental and control groups was normal in the pre-test and post-test stages. Then, the assumption of homogeneity of variances was examined and we concluded that the variance of the research variables in the groups is equal and homogeneous. Now, considering that the significance number is greater than 0.05 in all research variables, then in examining the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes, we concluded that the significance number is greater than 0.05 and therefore the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes has been met. Then, the results of the M-box test showed that the covariance matrix of the components of these variables in the two groups was equal. Also, the Levine test was used to compare the variances of the two groups, and the non-significance of the Levine statistic showed that the variance of the dependent variable in the experimental and control groups was equal. For the test, univariate analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used, observing the assumptions of parametric statistics.

Table 2. Results obtained from the study of interaction and between-subject effects

Variable	Source of changes	Sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	Mean squares	F-statistic	Significance level	Eta squared
Self-Differentiation	Test effect	409.160	1	409.160	13.212	0.001	0.329
Kinship Center Attachment	Test effect	681.477	1	681.477	46.565	0.000	0.633

According to Table 2, it was found that there was a significant difference between the control and experimental groups in the post-test stage regarding self-differentiation, and the effect of the interventions on this variable was 32.9%. In other words, supportive psychodynamics has had an effect on self-differentiation in women affected by their husband's extramarital affairs, and accordingly, the hypothesis is confirmed. It was also found that in the case of Kinship Center Attachment, there was a significant difference between the control and experimental groups in the post-test phase, and the effect of the interventions on this variable was 63.3%. In other words, supportive psychodynamics had an effect on Kinship Center Attachment in women affected by their husband's extramarital affairs, and therefore this hypothesis was also confirmed.

Discussion

The aim of the present study was to investigate the effectiveness of supportive psychodynamic therapy on self-differentiation and attachment relationships in women affected by extramarital affairs. For this purpose, univariate analysis of covariance (ANCVA) was used, observing the assumptions of parametric statistics, and the results showed that there was a significant difference between the control group and the experimental group in the post-test stage regarding self-differentiation and the relationship between attachment.

This finding is consistent with the results of previous studies. For example, in the study by Zanganeh and Alyasin (11), it was shown that mindfulness-based schema therapy significantly increased the self-differentiation of women affected by infidelity. Also, in the study of Ranjbar Bahaduri, Taklovi, and Kazemi (2021), it was found that short-term psychodynamic therapy increased emotional expression and differentiation in betrayed women. In the study of Amani et al. (14), it was also stated that betrayal can have widespread negative consequences on the affected women and the entire family, and that understanding the needs and psychological states of betrayed women can play a role in improving the relationship and reducing destructive behaviors. Also, the research of Saleh et al. (15) showed that early maladaptive schemas can explain changes in tendencies towards extramarital relationships.

Conclusion

In explaining the findings, it can be said that self-differentiation reflects an individual's ability to distinguish between rational and emotional processes and avoid automatic obedience to emotions. According to Bowen's systems theory, self-differentiation at the

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intrapersonal level refers to a person's ability to separate feelings from thoughts and to prioritize in emotional situations. At the interpersonal level, differentiation refers to a person's ability to maintain autonomy while remaining intimate with others. Dedifferentiation occurs when people are unable to distinguish feelings from thinking and become immersed in their emotions.

Supportive psychotherapy is often used in patients with chronic disorders and aims to maintain ego function and enhance coping strategies. In this approach, treatment does not focus on personality change through deep insight, but rather on symptom reduction and enhanced coping as the end point of treatment (8). Based on this approach, it is expected that treatment can strengthen the defense and emotional mechanisms of women affected by betrayal and improve their differentiation and quality of attachment; the results of the present study also confirm this.

The results of the study showed that supportive psychodynamic therapy significantly improved self-differentiation and attachment relationships in women affected by extramarital affairs. These findings confirm the importance of using supportive psychodynamic interventions in improving the psychological consequences of infidelity. However, the study had some limitations, including the lack of control over the participants' social, educational, and economic status and the use of a questionnaire as a data collection tool. Based on the results, it is suggested that therapists use supportive psychodynamics to improve differentiation and attachment relationships in women affected by infidelity. Also, conferences and specialized meetings should be held on extramarital relationships to improve the knowledge of specialists. In premarital counseling centers, the degree of differentiation and quality of attachment of clients should be assessed and, if necessary, supportive psychodynamic therapy should be provided. It is suggested that future research examine the effects of variables such as gender and age on the effectiveness of different interventions. In addition, the effectiveness of supportive psychodynamics should be studied in other regions of the country and with larger samples.

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Ethical Consideration:

The research data and literature have not been copied from any worksauthor upon reasonable request.

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