

## Severity of Depression and Anxiety in Victims and Non-Victims of Perceived Infidelity

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to investigate the severity of depression and anxiety among victims of perceived infidelity, in comparison to non-victims. 224 participants (working individuals and students) between the age group of 20-35 were included in the study. The Socio demographic data sheet, The Beck Depression Inventory and The Beck Anxiety Inventory were the instruments utilized. The statistical analysis was carried out using SPSS (ver.25), and Mann-Whitney U test was used. The results showed that individuals who have been a victim of infidelity are more likely to show higher severity of depression symptoms and anxiety symptoms compared to the non-victims, and there is no gender difference in severity of depression and anxiety symptoms.

**Keywords:** *Depression, Anxiety, Infidelity*

Infidelity is the physical or emotional betrayal of a romantic relationship, and it frequently causes severe emotional harm. In order to heal, both spouses must examine the circumstances that led to the infidelity and deal with the problematic aspects of the relationship. Trust and intimacy can be restored when both parties are dedicated to mending the relationship. While infidelity might put an end to some relationships, others survive and thrive.

The definition of infidelity may vary from person to person (e.g., one partner may access pornography or other erotic stimuli while the other does not, or one partner may believe that adultery is solely sexual while the other believes that an emotional affair is just as much of a violation).

*Some of the types of infidelity (Fuller, 2022):*

- 1. Physical Infidelity-** Physical infidelity refers to a breach of commitment and trust within a romantic or committed relationship that involves engaging in intimate or sexual activities with someone other than one's partner. This can encompass a range of behaviours, from kissing and sexual touching to engaging in sexual intercourse with another person. Physical infidelity often represents a violation of the agreed-upon boundaries and expectations within the relationship, and it can cause emotional

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distress, turmoil, and relationship issues for those involved. It is one of the common forms of infidelity that can have significant impacts on the emotional and psychological well-being of the individuals and the relationship itself.

2. **Emotional Infidelity**-Emotional infidelity, also known as "emotional cheating," refers to a breach of trust and commitment within a romantic relationship where one person develops a deep and intimate emotional connection with someone other than their partner. Emotional intimacy damages a romantic relationship just as much as physical intimacy.
3. **Cyber infidelity**-Cyber infidelity, also known as "online infidelity" or "digital infidelity," refers to the act of engaging in intimate or romantic activities with someone other than one's partner through online platforms and digital communication. This type of infidelity occurs in the virtual realm, often involving interactions on social media, dating apps, online chat rooms, or through exchanging explicit messages, photos, or videos.
4. **Financial infidelity**- In many partnerships, money can cause conflict. If it gets to the extent of financial infidelity, one partner may lie about their income, their sources of income, their debt, and even if a partner is unaware, one may have hidden cash or bank accounts.
5. **Micro-cheating**- Micro-cheating is a term used to describe a set of seemingly small actions or behaviours that are considered to be on the boundary of infidelity within a romantic relationship. While these actions might not necessarily involve physical intimacy or explicit emotional involvement, they can still raise concerns about loyalty, trust, and the boundaries within a committed partnership. Micro-cheating is often characterized by behaviours that may be subtle, but they still hint at an emotional or romantic interest in someone outside of the primary relationship.

Almost all relationships have transgressions that can range in their severity. But most of them are not done intentionally to hurt the other person. They can be as trivial as forgetting to buy something that is on the shopping list. Even though it can annoy the romantic partner it is mostly forgotten and forgiven. Other transgressions can be of higher severity and it can largely affect the relationship between two individuals. Cheating on your romantic partner or lying about things related to finance are examples of transgressions that are of higher severity, and these things are harder to forget and forgive (Bendixen, Kennair, & Grøntvedt, Bendixen, Kennair and Grøntvedt2018; Sheldon, Gilchrist-Petty, & Lessley, Reference Sheldon, Gilchrist-Petty and Lessley2014). Infidelity in any form is one of the most common reasons of breakup. Although most relationships come to an end as a result of any form of infidelity, it is also important to remember that there are situations in which relationships do not end, and the couples try to solve the issue and move forward.

There are gender differences in forgiving and the type of infidelity the person was involved in. Women tend to be more disturbed by the involvement of their partner in emotional infidelity, while men become more disturbed if their partner has gotten involved in sexual infidelity. This is because most women believe that even though men cannot stay physically loyal, they are more likely to stay emotionally loyal to their partner. (Shackelford T. K., 2002)

In a study conducted by Glass and Wright, men were more able than women to distinguish between love and sex. That is men were clearly able to distinguish between just sex and emotional involvement in extra-marital affairs than women, who believed that both go hand in hand. (Wright, 1985). In a research conducted by Knodel and colleagues, the findings

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indicated that women experience lower levels of sexual desire compared to men. Moreover, women demonstrated a greater ability to manage and control their sexual urges, whereas men were described as having more frequent and challenging difficulties in regulating their sexual impulses, suggesting a perception of greater difficulty in managing their sexual desires.

The results of the extensive study by Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) conclusively demonstrate that there are various views toward infidelity based on the type of relationship. Their research, for instance, reveals that gay men are less anxious about their spouses' nonmonogamy than heterosexual couples are. They also come to the conclusion that there are several varieties of infidelity, and depending on the relationship, some are deemed cheating and others are not.

The emotional landscape of human relationships is intricate and multifaceted, often marked by joy, trust, and companionship. However, within this realm of connection, there also lies the potential for profound emotional turmoil. Infidelity, the breach of trust and commitment within a romantic relationship, has been a recurring theme throughout history, captivating the attention of scholars, psychologists, and individuals alike. Among the numerous outcomes that ensue in the aftermath of unfaithfulness, the intensity of depression among those affected emerges as a profoundly significant and intricate result.

The experience of infidelity is a disruptive force that can shake the very foundations of emotional well-being. Psychological reactions following physical or emotional betrayal often lead to depression. This phenomenon transcends cultural, social, and demographic boundaries, affecting individuals across different walks of life. Understanding the severity of depression among victims of infidelity necessitates an exploration of the emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal dimensions that contribute to this mental health challenge.

Exploration into the intricacies of depression after infidelity reveals insights into the intricate dynamics involving emotions like mourning, wrath, betrayal, and diminished self-worth. The study tries, not only to grasp the psychological toll that infidelity takes on individuals, but also to inform therapeutic approaches and coping strategies that can facilitate healing and resilience. By delving into the nuanced facets of depression in the context of infidelity, we can gain valuable insights into the human capacity for emotional recovery (M. Rosie Shrout a, 2020)

Within the realm of human relationships, the profound impact of infidelity extends beyond the confines of emotional distress, reaching into the realm of mental health. Infidelity, the breach of trust and fidelity within a romantic partnership, has the power to unravel the core foundations of security and stability, leading to a cascade of emotional responses. Among these responses, the severity of anxiety experienced by the victims of infidelity emerges as a crucial and intricate aspect that warrants careful examination.

The disclosure or discovery of infidelity often triggers a tumultuous emotional journey characterized by a complex interplay of fear, uncertainty, and emotional upheaval. Anxiety, a fundamental human response to perceived threats, becomes a prevalent and profound outcome in the wake of such relational betrayals. This phenomenon transcends cultural, societal, and demographic boundaries, impacting individuals across diverse backgrounds. Understanding the severity of anxiety among victims of infidelity requires an exploration of the intricate web of emotions, cognitive patterns, and interpersonal dynamics that contribute to this mental health challenge.

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Scholarly research on the intricacies of anxiety in the aftermath of infidelity offers insights into the multifaceted nature of this experience. Emotions of insecurity, heightened vigilance, and the apprehension of additional betrayal frequently combine to intensify the psychological anguish felt by those affected. The aim of this investigation is not only to fathom the psychological toll of infidelity-induced anxiety, but also to inform therapeutic interventions and coping mechanisms that facilitate healing and resilience. By delving into the nuanced dimensions of anxiety within the context of infidelity, we gain valuable insights into the human capacity to navigate emotional turmoil and cultivate well-being during one's most distressing stages.

This study tries to understand the various factors that are responsible for the severity of anxiety in victims of infidelity, offering a comprehensive view of the emotional landscape that unfurls when trust is shattered. By shedding light on the complex emotions and cognitive responses that define this experience, we hope to contribute to a better knowledge of the human psyche and the strategies that can empower individuals to navigate the path to emotional recovery.

Human relationships, built on trust, companionship, and emotional intimacy, form the cornerstones of our psychological well-being. Yet, within the realm of intimate connections, the specter of infidelity looms as a disruptive force capable of unravelling these foundations. Infidelity, the breaking of trust and also commitment in a romantic relationship, has strong and long-lasting effects on an individual's psychological well-being.

Perceived infidelity involves the suspicion or belief that a partner has been unfaithful, even without concrete evidence. This perception can stem from subtle behavioural changes, communication breakdowns, or personal insecurities. The emotional impact of such perceptions can be comparable to actual infidelity, as trust, a foundational element of emotional security, is threatened. This perceived betrayal often triggers a range of emotional responses, including jealousy, anger, and anxiety, which can collectively influence an individual's mental well-being.

One of the immediate and intense effects of infidelity is the emotional rollercoaster that ensues. Betrayal, hurt, anger, and confusion surge to the forefront of an individual's emotional landscape. Trust, a fundamental element of emotional security, is shattered, leaving individuals grappling with a profound sense of vulnerability. Emotional sentiments of sorrow and bereavement, resembling the mourning process for the demise of a relationship, may transition into anxiety and depression, unraveling the emotional equilibrium of the individual.

Infidelity often triggers a range of cognitive distortions that contribute to the deterioration of psychological well-being. Victims of infidelity may develop negative self-perceptions, questioning their worth and desirability. Intrusive thoughts about the affair, self-blame, and replaying the events can lead to rumination, preventing the healing process from taking place. These thought patterns can fuel anxiety and depression, magnifying the emotional distress caused by the infidelity.

One of the far-reaching consequences of infidelity is the erosion of trust not only in the partner but also in future relationships. The trauma of betrayal can lead individuals to become hyper-vigilant, interpreting innocent actions as potential signs of deception. This heightened

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skepticism can hinder the ability to form new connections and expose individuals to a constant state of anxiety, fearing history might repeat itself.

Infidelity can also greatly affect a person's self-esteem and sense of identity. The comparison between oneself and the perceived "other person" can lead to feelings of inadequacy. The emotional upheaval caused by infidelity can challenge a person's belief of self-worth, leading to downward spiral of self-doubt and diminished confidence. (M. Rosie Shrout a, 2020)

The aftermath of infidelity can lead to complex interpersonal dynamics. While some individuals may choose to confront the issue and work towards resolution, others might opt for withdrawal and isolation. Communication breakdown, resentment, and emotional distance between partners can intensify feelings of loneliness and contribute to a sense of alienation, further impacting psychological well-being.

Despite the profound negative impact, individuals can also experience growth and resilience in the aftermath of infidelity. Seeking professional help, engaging in open communication, and cultivating self-compassion are strategies that can aid the healing process. Over time, individuals might develop a deeper understanding of themselves, their needs, and their boundaries, ultimately contributing to psychological growth.

Infidelity is a seismic event that reverberates through an individual's emotional and mental landscape, leaving scars that are not easily erased. The emotional upheaval, cognitive distortions, and changes in self-perception can collectively erode that person's psychological health. Even though the effects are harsh, it's important to recognize that the impact of infidelity is not deterministic; individuals have the capacity to heal, grow, and reclaim their psychological equilibrium. By understanding the multifaceted ways in which infidelity affects an individual, we can foster empathy and compassion for those navigating the challenging path to emotional recovery.

While both individuals who have perceived infidelity and those who have not can face mental health challenges, differences arise in the nature and intensity of those challenges. Those who perceive infidelity may grapple with chronic stress, hypervigilance, and a sense of betrayal, whereas individuals who have not encountered suspicions of infidelity might experience more stable emotional states. Those who perceive infidelity might have more pronounced cognitive distortions and self-esteem issues, while those who have not might exhibit healthier self-perceptions.

APA Dictionary depression is defined as (APA Dictionary of Psychology) "a negative affective state, that ranges from unhappiness to an extreme feeling of sadness, negative thoughts, and despondency, which all interferes in daily life. Various physical, cognitive, and social changes also tend to occur alongside, which includes altered eating or sleeping habits, lack of energy or motivation, difficulty concentrating or being able to make decisions, and withdrawing from social activities."

According to World Health Organization research issued in 2012, depression is expected to affect 350 million people, making it a major global public health issue. The symptoms of depression can be a loss of interest in previously exciting activities, loss of sleep, loss of appetite, binge eating, feeling hopelessness. (Depression (major depressive disorder) 2022) The person may also experience sleep disturbances like insomnia or sleeping too much. The person may also experience difficulty in thinking, concentrating on one task, making

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decisions and remembering things. The individual may also have unexplained physical problems like headaches, back pain etc.

(Noble, 2005) Depression stands out as a leading cause of disability related to health issues in women. Research studies in epidemiology have demonstrated that the likelihood of women experiencing a major depressive disorder during their lifetime, 21.3%, is almost twice as high as that for men which is 12.7%. This gender discrepancy has been consistently observed across various countries and ethnic backgrounds. Interestingly, when examining depression rates in children, both boys and girls show similar incidence rates. However, this pattern changes as individuals grow older. National data on mental health reveal that differences in depression prevalence between genders start to emerge around the age of 10 and continue until midlife, after which they level off. Consequently, women face the greatest risk of developing depressive disorders during their childbearing years.

(Kilmartin, Depression in men: Communication, diagnosis and therapy 2005) While it's widely recognized that women are diagnosed with depressive disorders at a rate double that of men, certain factors like varying rates of abuse of substances, imprisonment, and notably, suicide, raise questions about the notion that men are less likely to suffer from depression. There may be a distinct "masculine" manifestation of depression that often goes unnoticed and untreated. It is imperative for healthcare professionals to deepen their understanding of cultural masculinity in order to better conceptualize, diagnose, and address this hidden form of a prevalent mental illness in male patients.

Healthcare providers who work with traditionally masculine male patients should make an effort to educate these individuals about the role of masculinity in the context of their mental health issues. They should also pay close attention to aspects related to emotional expression, the tendency for premature termination of therapy, and experiences of grief. This will enable a more comprehensive and effective approach to treating male clients dealing with depression, acknowledging the unique challenges they may face in seeking and receiving help.

The majority of studies on depression and infidelity focuses on heterosexual, married couples' relationships. (Gorman L. &., 2008) According to research, shame or devaluation in these relationships might trigger a significant episode of depression (Cano & O'Leary, 2000; Glass & Wright, 1997). The exposure to her spouse's engagement in extramarital affairs, the prospect of divorce, and instances of physical aggression are identified as primary catalysts for the onset of clinical depression, according to research by O'Leary (2005). Notably, more than 75% of individuals who underwent distressing marital events, such as infidelity, experienced clinical depression. A contributing factor to the heightened vulnerability to depression is that certain women tend to internalize the emotional turmoil stemming from events like infidelity, often blaming themselves or linking the partner's unfaithfulness to personal shortcomings, as indicated by Spring (1996).

The possibility of losing one's partner to a romantic rival not only triggers anxiety but also prompts behaviours such as seeking reassurance and displaying aggression in an effort to prevent the potential loss (Marks & Nesse, 1994). Indeed, research indicates that emotions play a significant role in shaping both cognitive processes and actions (Clore, Schwarz, & Conway, 1994), serving as crucial motivators for adaptive responses to various challenges (Arnocky, Sunderani, Miller, & Vaillancourt, 2012; Maner et al., 2005). Baumeister and Tice (1990) propose that anxiety, evolved to enhance survival and reproductive success, serves the

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purpose of preserving social bonds. They contend that anxiety, in particular, prompts corrective or alternative responses when faced with the potential of being excluded from a social group or relationship, encompassing the imminent risk of losing a romantic partner. (see Buss, 1990). In line with an evolutionary theory of emotion (Cosmides & Tooby, 2000; Haselton & Ketelaar, 2006; Tooby & Cosmides, 1990), experiences of fear stemming from real or perceived infidelity are explored in this study as a potential mediator of the relationship between men's perceptions of their partner's infidelity risk and various forms of aggressiveness toward their romantic partner (physical aggression and harm, psychological aggression, and sexual aggression).

Gleeden, an extramarital dating app, made its debut in India in 2017 and has since garnered a user base of two million people in the entire country. According to a survey of more than 1,500 married individuals conducted by the app, 37% of the respondents believe it's feasible to engage in infidelity while still having feelings for their partner. Interestingly, the incidence of infidelity is remarkably comparable between men and women, with a rate of 59% for men and 53% for women. Furthermore, the survey showed that this trend is consistent not only in major cities but also in smaller towns, with a rate of 58% in cities compared to 56% in smaller towns.

It is a very common issue faced by couples of varying ages like adolescence, young adults, middle aged etc. Knowledge related to such a topic is necessary so as to understand to what extent infidelity can affect a person's mental health. It thus creates a sort of awareness among people about the effects of infidelity on the victim.

Married couples after being a victim of infidelity are more likely to go for couple therapy and other forms of treatment, whereas unmarried couples are not. Also unmarried couples may not know ways to cope with such situations and married couples have higher chances of knowing it. Thus, by doing this research I can suggest therapies or treatments that have proven to work.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

In the study by Leeker and Carlozzi in 2012, there was no observable interplay between gender and sexual orientation in the emotional responses to both physical and emotional infidelity. Irrespective of sexual orientation, women exhibited stronger reactions to both forms of infidelity compared to men. Regarding emotional betrayal, women's responses were similar to men's, but in the context of sexual infidelity, women experienced greater feelings of anger than men. Women felt nearly as humiliated by sexual infidelity as they did frightened and jealous, whereas men were notably less concerned about potential humiliation. In summary, the distress caused by sexual infidelity was more pronounced for both men and women compared to the emotional aspect of infidelity.

In a study conducted by Buss et al., college students were instructed to envision scenarios where their romantic partners were either emotionally connected to someone else or engaged in intense sexual relationships with that individual. Subsequently, participants were asked to identify which scenario caused them greater distress. Findings revealed that merely 17% of women considered sexual infidelity more distressing, contrasting with 60% of men. These results align with evolutionary theory, suggesting that sex-specific selection pressures have shaped distinct responses in men and women towards emotional and sexual betrayals.

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After experiencing romantic betrayal, individuals quickly displayed persistent physical symptoms, including insomnia, weight loss, difficulties in concentration, reduced appetite, and diminished libido, as revealed by the study conducted by Lonergan and c In a study conducted by Roos et al. in 2019, undergraduate students who had experienced romantic betrayal reported experiencing difficulties in breathing, physical tremors, heightened anxiety, and an accelerated heartbeat when reflecting on their past relationships. Results shown by studies done by Shackelford et al. (Shackelford, Leblanc, & Drass, 2000), who found that female participants reported higher levels of sickness and physical illness when asked to imagine their romantic partner being unfaithful in experimental circumstances, provide more evidence for this.

To date, comprehensive exploration of the link between suicidal behavior and relationship-related distress, such as infidelity, has been limited to a singular study conducted by Stephens. The study involved surveying 50 women from the community who had previously attempted suicide, delving into their intimate relationships with men and their tendencies toward suicidality. The findings revealed that spousal infidelity emerged as a significant factor contributing to both suicidal thoughts and actions, alongside factors like abuse, overwhelming affection, and rejection of love. Notably, Stephens (1985) stated that one's age might be the reason for complexity in this relationship. Older participants tended to engage in suicide attempts amid ongoing relationship conflicts, while younger participants were more likely to do so in response to specific adverse events within their romantic relationships. (Stephens, 1985)

Selterman et al. sought to understand the feelings, thoughts, and behaviours of people who engaged in infidelity and proposed that it was influenced by their desire to engage in extramarital relationships. Their findings imply that there are various infidelity typologies, each with its own set of underlying reasons, relationship dynamics, and behavioural effects. (Dylan Selterman, 2020). According to Thompson's deficit theory of infidelity, poor relationships that has high levels of conflict between the partners, low levels of satisfaction, and poor communication are a major contributor to the causes of infidelity. This model, sees infidelity as a sign of the couple's internal, underlying conflicts. In the study conducted by Selterman et al, there were 495 participants which includes 259 women and 213 men. The results showed that most of the participants did engage sexually with their affair partners, but only 53% of them had sexual intercourse.

Up to 22% of people participated in extradyadic relationships, according to Mark et al.'s (2011) study. The study revealed that women's perceptions of sexual compatibility and overall relationship satisfaction were robust predictors of infidelity, while factors such as age, marital status, and the significance of religion did not exhibit any apparent impact on the likelihood of engaging in adultery. Additionally, individuals with a greater tendency to lose sexual arousal when faced with potential threats were found to be less prone to cheating, suggesting a protective factor. Notably, those with arousal issues viewed experiencing sexual difficulties in an extradyadic relationship as less threatening. (Kristen P. Mark, 2011)

A study conducted by Leif Edward Ottesen Kennair and Mons Bendixen in 2018, aimed to investigate how individuals perceive and respond to different types of infidelity (sexual vs. emotional) in romantic relationships. The researchers examined factors that influence breakup likelihood, including perceived threat, blame attribution, and the role of forgiveness. (Bendixen, 2018)



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The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between social media addiction and depression among university students in Afghanistan's Khost province. Using stratified random sampling, 384 students from the three universities Shaikh Zayed, Ahmad Shah Abdali, and Pamir University were given a 46-item self-administered questionnaire. Kimberly Young's Internet Addiction Test (IAT) was used to examine social media addiction, while the Centre for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) was used to assess depression. The Pearson correlation coefficient, simple linear regression, and component analysis were used to investigate the relationship between social media addiction and depression. According to the findings, social media addiction and depression are positively associated, and social media addiction substantially predicts depression. (Furqan Haider, 2023)

Tsaras et al. undertook a study to analyze the prevalence and associated factors of depression and anxiety among mental health nurses working in public psychiatric institutions in order to uncover independent predictors of the risk of mental health disorders. This study involved 110 mental health nurses. Age, marital status, educational achievement (for both depression and anxiety), and work experience (for depression only) were found to be associated factors. Depressed people (52.7%) and anxious people (48.2%) were found to be in the majority. (Tsaras, 2018)

Teel et al. evaluated five online databases in June 2020 for primary papers that found a distinct (dichotomous) difference in depression and anxiety between meat eaters and abstainers. The selection criteria were met by 20 studies with a total of 171,802 participants—157,778 meat eaters and 13,259 meat abstainers. Higher and more positive ratings indicate that meat eaters will have a better experience. To assess the magnitude of the effect between meat eaters and meat abstainers, we utilized bias correction. Meat eating has been associated to lower levels of depression and anxiety when compared to meat abstinence. Compared to vegetarians, meat eaters showed lower levels of anxiety and despair. (Urska Dobersek, 2021)

Suicidality and poor mental health conditions have brought the veterinary business under increased scrutiny, yet little is known about the mental health of veterinarians in Hong Kong. This study looked at the prevalence of suicidality as well as indications of depression and anxiety among Hong Kong veterinarians. Anxiety, depression, and suicidal symptoms were assessed using validated measures. 22.0% identified as being at risk of suicide, 19.6% had recent suicidal thoughts, 29.4% expressed depressed symptoms, 29.4% reported anxiety symptoms, and 23.5% reported both depression and anxiety concurrently. (Camille K.Y. Chan, 2023)

The research conducted by McDaniel et al. investigates the connection between attachment styles and extradyadic involvement (EDI), which refers to acts of infidelity or cheating within romantic relationships. The study introduces a classification system comprising seven distinct categories of EDI and assesses the prevalence of each category among the participants. The results of this research reveal that individuals with insecurities regarding attachments are more likely to engage in multiple affairs. Additionally, the study identifies a specific subgroup characterized by "high attachment anxiety" who are primarily driven by a desire to enhance intimacy through affairs. The research emphasizes the need for a more comprehensive theoretical framework supported by empirical evidence, which could aid clinicians in helping couples understand the underlying motives behind EDI, address current relationship challenges, and develop effective strategies for preventing future betrayals.

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This research conducted by Morillas et al., delves into the various behavioural factors that can contribute to infidelity within romantic relationships. Participants in the study were asked to assess the extent to which they believed they had encountered different behaviours encompassing sexual, technological, emotional, and solitary aspects. The findings of the study reveal that emotional and solitary behaviours were the most frequently reported, while sexual and technological behaviours were less prevalent. The study also delves into the environmental factors that create vulnerabilities for infidelity, including factors like anonymity, accessibility, affordability, and proximity. It's important to note that the research adhered to ethical guidelines and obtained approval from the Ethics Committee at the University of Granada. (Expósito, 2019)

The research done by Nemeth et al., entailed the examination of audio recordings capturing conversations between couples with the aim of identifying immediate triggers and persistent stress factors associated with violent incidents. The research team employed grounded theory as a guiding approach for data analysis, enabling the development of a conceptual framework as key themes surfaced regarding both immediate and ongoing stressors linked to violence. The study revealed that violence often had immediate triggers, particularly stemming from accusations of infidelity, often occurring in the context of alcohol or drug consumption. Persistent stressors in relationships were consistent across couples and included sustained concerns about infidelity, preoccupation with traditional gender roles and religious expectations, substance abuse, and mental health issues. The research further implemented cross-validation strategies to enhance the credibility of data interpretations.

Shrout and Weigel in 2020 did a research that delves into the consequences of a partner's infidelity on an individual's mental well-being and identifies personal factors that can mitigate the extent of its impact. The study explores the connections between adverse cognitive assessments, stress related to infidelity, and mental health consequences. It also investigates how an individual's self-esteem can moderate these relationships. The findings indicate that attributing causation and blame to the unfaithful partner is associated with detrimental effects on mental health. However, self-esteem serves as a protective factor within these connections, ultimately mitigating the impact of a partner's infidelity. The research underscores the importance of understanding the cognitive assessments and personal characteristics following infidelity, as they can play a role in lessening its adverse effects on mental health.

The article published by Fish et al., (Fish, 2012) explores the connection among adult attachment styles, differentiation, and instances of infidelity in relationships. It provides insights into the four distinct adult attachment styles and their influence on relationship dynamics. The article also details the two dimensions of attachment, namely anxiety and avoidance, which serve as metrics for assessing attachment patterns. The research outcomes reveal a noteworthy correlation between attachment anxiety, avoidance, differentiation, and infidelity. The article concludes by delving into the practical implications of these findings in a clinical context and underscores the importance of therapists addressing these issues when conducting couples therapy.

A study conducted by Dermitas et al. (Toplu-Demirtaş, An Attachment Theory Perspective) focuses on the creation of a measurement scale designed to gauge the intentions of emerging adult students regarding infidelity in their relationships. The study involved the adaptation of an existing scale and the implementation of cognitive interviews to verify its reliability. Additionally, the research unearthed a notable occurrence of cyber abuse perpetration among

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the participants and emphasized the significance of evaluating attachment anxiety, as well as unhealthy beliefs and expectations within relationships. The study recommends that mental health professionals collaborate with clients to alleviate feelings of insecurity and cultivate trust in their relationships. However, it's important to acknowledge the study's limitations, and further research is necessary to establish cause-and-effect relationships and address potential reporting biases.

This study explores the widespread existence of temptation in contemporary social interactions, encompassing the allure to participate in acts of infidelity. The primary focus of this investigation is to explore a specific factor that may increase an individual's susceptibility to being unfaithful within a relationship: their dispositional avoidant attachment style.

The authors Dewall et al, hypothesize that individuals characterized by avoidant attachment styles may exhibit a reduced resistance to the temptations of infidelity, primarily because they tend to have lower levels of commitment within their romantic relationships. This hypothesis was substantiated through eight separate studies.

The findings indicate that individuals with high levels of dispositional avoidant attachment, in contrast to those with low levels, tend to hold more lenient attitudes toward infidelity. They also show a bias in attention toward other attractive partners and express greater interest in meeting potential alternatives to their current partners. Additionally, they tend to view these alternatives more positively and engage in infidelity over time. This inclination is linked to their lower levels of commitment within the relationship. In summary, avoidant attachment is linked to a wide range of responses that signify an interest in alternative partners and a proclivity for engaging in infidelity. This connection is primarily influenced by the individual's diminished commitment to their current relationship.

This research paper published by Weiser et al, delves into the exploration of personality traits exhibited by individuals involved in acts of infidelity. The study employed two questionnaires as assessment tools to gauge the personality traits and attachment styles of the participants. The findings of the study revealed a notable correlation between individuals characterized by insecure attachment and their likelihood of becoming involved in infidelity partnerships. To gain further insights, the research also applied cluster analysis to create personality profiles, aiming to examine how these profiles might be connected with the experiences of individuals engaging in infidelity partnerships. In summary, the study emphasizes the need for further investigation to gain a deeper understanding of the individuals who choose to become infidelity partners, as well as the factors that lead them to enter and remain in such relationships. (Dana A. Weiser a, 2015)

The article by Shimberg et al, mention about the topic of infidelity within the college student population and addresses the role of clinicians in educating these individuals about cultivating healthy relationships founded on principles of trust, sensitivity, empathy, and honesty. (Shimberg, 2015). Furthermore, the article examines the investigation of personality characteristics associated with infidelity, including traits such as narcissism and avoidant attachment. The article proposes that a comprehension of these traits can assist clinicians in differentiating between students who may have a predisposition toward infidelity and those who are inclined to remain faithful in their relationships.

The research done by Buunk et al., delves into the complexity of jealousy as an emotion, emphasizing that it's a composite emotional experience influenced by the specific aspects of a

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given situation upon which individuals concentrate. The emotional landscape of jealousy combines fundamental emotions like anger, sadness, and fear, with the dominant emotion being dictated by the specific situational focus. (Buunk, 2004) Furthermore, the text explores how responses to jealousy can vary contingent on the type of infidelity involved. Emotional infidelity tends to trigger feelings of threat, while sexual infidelity predominantly arouses emotions of betrayal and anger. This study provides valuable insights to the field of jealousy research by illustrating that different situations provoking jealousy elicit distinct emotional reactions.

The majority of people agree that romantic relationships have a substantial influence on how we feel. For example, when we married, we are usually happier, but when we divorce, we are unhappy. Previous research, on the other hand, concentrated on changes in cognitive but not affective well-being in response to favorable and bad relationship conditions. Subjective well-being, according to set-point theory, may fluctuate swiftly in such conditions but rebound in the long run. Using data from the Socio-Economic Panel Survey (SOEP), we examined changes in life satisfaction, happiness, sadness, anxiety, and anger five years before and five years after moving in with a partner (N = 4,399), marriage (N = 3,731), separation (N = 3,538), and divorce (N = 1,103). Life satisfaction and happiness increased slightly prior to moving in and getting married. The events of a love relationship. In the event of marriage, these effects subsided after a year. Divorce and separation were associated with much greater impairments to well-being (especially a marked rise in dissatisfaction), which peaked just before and after the event and diminished in the years that followed. Changes in fury and anxiety were rather mild. Our results suggest that romantic relationship events affect affective well-being in addition to life satisfaction. These changes are more noticeable for happiness and despair during the event, but they eventually return for other dimensions of well-being. As one of the first experiments, we show that set-point theory applies not only to cognitive but also to affective well-being in the context of romantic relationship events. (Asselmann, 2023)

Identity construction, gradual distancing from parents, relational interest in peers, and body changes that include sexuality difficulties are all characteristics of adolescence. Attachment patterns play a critical role in this process, and when they are problematic, they can result in internalizing and externalizing difficulties. Females frequently express their relational troubles through internalizing expressions, while males express them through externalizing expressions. Furthermore, given the sexual development involved in this life stage, psychological symptoms may alter teenagers' experience of sex and performance. The goal of this research is to look into the role of internalizing and externalizing symptomatology in mediating the relationship between attachment patterns and sexual and psychological characteristics. Furthermore, we evaluated the moderating influence of birth sex on this mediation model. The study included 493 teenagers (38.3% males; Mage = 16.51; SD = 1.17). Internalizing symptomatology has a strong mediation effect on the connection between attachment and sexual anxiety, according to the findings. Furthermore, assigned-at-birth sex has a considerable moderating effect on this effect. These findings demonstrate that attachment patterns can alter adolescents' perceptions of sex during adolescence. Symptomologic expression influences the relationship between these two psychological dimensions. (Environ, 2022)

COVID-19's pathogenicity has been particularly troublesome in nations such as Spain. As a result, the government decided that the populace should be quarantined at home in order to slow the spread of the disease and prevent the health system from collapsing. Taking this into

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account, this study examined the changes in intimate relationships that happened during lockdown in terms of dyadic adjustment, conflict, and relationship quality, as well as their link with anxiety symptoms. Method: A cross-sectional questionnaire-based study with persons aged 20 to 67 in Spain was conducted. Each participant completed self-report measures of anxiety (State-Trait Anxiety Inventory state and trait subscales), dyadic adjustment (Dyadic Adjustment Scale), relationship conflict and quality, and sociodemographic characteristics. The findings revealed substantial levels of state anxiety, which were linked to poorer dyadic adjustment and a decline in the perceived quality of relationships since the start of lockdown. During social isolation, increased partner conflict appears to be an important predictor of dyadic adjustment and relationship quality. Conclusions: According to this study, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the mental health of the community, particularly women. This conclusion is linked to issues with one's cohabiting partner (e.g., poorer dyadic adjustment), but the most determining element appears to be the relationship's previous status. (Rodríguez-Domínguez 2022)

Being in prison can have a lot of effects on a person's life, like their money, health, education, job, and family connections. When people are in prison, it's hard for them to keep close relationships with their romantic partners. We looked at data from a study about families and prison to see how a stable childhood influences how adults form romantic bonds. We also looked at how PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) and depression, which are common in people who've been in prison, affect romantic relationships. We found that PTSD and depression have a significant impact on how men and women connect romantically. Having a stable childhood seems to make it easier for adults to form strong romantic bonds. Yet, the findings were less definitive concerning the stability of their partners' childhoods. This research has important implications for helping people in the justice system and their romantic relationships. We need more studies and efforts to improve the lives and connections of those who have been involved with the justice system, considering factors like depression and PTSD. (Eman Tadros PhD, 2022)

We looked at how happy and satisfied young adults (between 18 and 25 years old) are in their dating relationships, and how it relates to feeling sad or having symptoms of depression. We wanted to see if the length of the relationship and how connected and committed they felt to their partner made a difference. Overall, we found that if the relationship is good and satisfying, it's linked to fewer symptoms of feeling down or depressed. This connection was stronger for young women compared to young men, similar to what's been seen in married adults. For guys, having a good relationship was more important in longer and more connected relationships. But for women, it was important in all kinds of relationships, and especially when they felt more committed. Surprisingly, shorter relationships for women were linked to a stronger connection between being happy in the relationship and having fewer symptoms of depression. In summary, having a good and satisfying romantic relationship is crucial for the emotional well-being of young adults, especially for young women, and it shows that there are differences between men and women in how relationships affect them during this stage of life. (Whitton, 2012)

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Research Design*

Comparative research design with a quantitative approach would be used for finding the difference in severity of depression and anxiety symptoms among victims and non-victims of perceived infidelity among adults. This type of design is used for analyzing and comparing

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two or more ideas, without manipulating the independent variable. The tools used in the research were two questionnaires that were circulated online to collect data.

### *Statement of the Problem*

To study the difference in severity of anxiety and depression in victims and non-victims of perceived infidelity.

### *Objectives of the Study*

1. To understand if there is a difference in the severity of depression symptoms between betrayed and non-betrayed individuals
2. To understand if there is a difference in the severity of anxiety symptoms between betrayed and non-betrayed individuals
3. To study gender difference in severity of depression symptoms
4. To study gender difference in severity of anxiety symptoms

### *Hypothesis*

- H1 Individuals who have been a victim of infidelity are more likely to show higher severity of depression symptoms compared to those who have not
- H2 Individuals who have been a victim of infidelity will exhibit higher levels of anxiety symptoms compared to those who have not
- H3 There is no gender difference in severity of depression symptoms
- H4 There is no gender difference in severity of anxiety symptoms

### *Operational Definition*

- **Perceived Infidelity-** the situation in which one partner perceives that the other partner (in a marriage or intimate relationship) to be involved in sexual, emotional cyber and micro infidelity other than the partner, spouse, girlfriend or boyfriend
- **Depression-** In this study it is referred to how much an individual feels discontent and dissatisfied in life. The questionnaire in this study measures the severity of various depression symptoms.
- **Anxiety-** In this study it refers to an individual's excessive worry especially towards getting into a new monogamous relationship. These individuals may experience fear and loss of trust in new relationship.

### *Variables*

The study was aimed to conduct with the demographic variables such as age, gender, occupational status, independent variables such as Perceived Infidelity in adults and the dependent variable including Depression and Anxiety.

### *Sample*

The study was conducted on adults of age ranging from 20-35 years, having 224 participants. The participants of the sample were from across India, working individuals and students. Convenience sampling technique was used in selecting the participants for the research. This means that the participants were selected based on convenience and ease for the researcher to access.

### *Inclusion Criteria*

1. Individuals between the age of 20 and 35 were included in the study.
2. People who have been in a relationship were included

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3. Relationship types other than monogamous relationships (open relationship, polyamorous relationship etc) will be excluded.
4. All gender participants were included

### **Exclusion Criteria**

1. Individuals below the age of 20 and above the age of 35 were excluded
2. Individuals who have not been in a relationship before were excluded
3. Individuals who could not comprehend English were excluded from the study.

### **Assessment Tools**

#### **Demographic Details**

Demographic details like age, gender, and occupation status were collected for the study.

#### **The Beck Depression Inventory**

Introduced in 1961, the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) is widely utilized for screening depression and assessing the behavioural signs and severity of depressive symptoms. Applicable for individuals aged 13 to 80, this inventory comprises 21 self-report items answered through multiple-choice response formats. Administering the BDI typically takes around 10 minutes. Psychiatrist Aaron T. Beck first developed the Beck Depression Inventory. Each response is assigned a scale value ranging from 0 to 3. Scores between 0 and 9 suggest the absence of depression, 10-18 indicate mild to moderate depression, 19-29 signify moderate to severe depression, and 30-63 indicate severe depression.

#### **The Becks Anxiety Inventory**

The Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), introduced in 1961 by psychiatrist Aaron T. Beck, is widely used to screen for depression and assess the behavioural signs and severity of depressive symptoms. It is suitable for individuals aged 13 to 80 and consists of 21 self-report items with multiple-choice response formats. Administering the BDI typically takes about 10 minutes. Each response is assigned a scale value from 0 to 3. Scores ranging from 0 to 9 suggest the absence of depression, 10-18 indicate mild to moderate depression, 19-29 signify moderate to severe depression, and 30-63 indicate severe depression.

### **Procedure**

Two questionnaires were sent through online platforms to participants. The participants were asked to fill the form and were given the instruction that they could discontinue filling the form at any point they started to feel uncomfortable. Instructions were given that they should read the questions carefully and not to skip any questions. All the questions were to be responded to truthfully and according to one's personal experience only.

### **Ethical Consideration**

The participants were informed that it was voluntary participation and their responses will be kept confidential. They were ensured that the data collected was only used for post-graduation dissertation purpose only.

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION****Table 1: Shows the Mann Whitney test with mean, SD and mean rank and assumption significance value of depression and anxiety levels between people who have been cheated and not been cheated**

Variables	N	Mean	SD	z	p
Depression	224	20.72	15.21	-1.00	.000
Anxiety	224	15.12	11.91	-1.00	.000

\* $p < 0.05$ 

Table 1 shows the results of mean, standard deviation and Mann-Whitney U test among the individuals who have been not have not been a victim of perceived infidelity. The result shows that there is a significant difference in depression and anxiety levels among victims and non-victims of perceived infidelity.

**Table 2: Shows the Mann Whitney test with mean, SD and mean rank and assumption significance value of depression and anxiety values between male and female population**

Variables	Male			Female			Z	p
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD		
Depression	130	15.76	11.84	94	14.24	12.01	-.31	.253
Anxiety	130	21.12	15.71	94	20.18	14.55	-1.14	.761

\* $p > 0.05$ 

Table 2 shows the result of mean, standard deviation and Mann-Whitney U test for gender differences for depression and anxiety levels. The results show that there is a significant difference in level of depression, but no significant difference in level of anxiety between males and females.

The study conducted on the topic “Severity of anxiety and depression in victims and non-victims of perceived infidelity”, a comparative approach with a quantitative methodology, provides a structured framework to analyze the severity of depression and anxiety symptoms among victims and non-victims of perceived infidelity. Here comparison of two distinct groups without manipulating any variables, showed existing differences in psychological outcomes. Beck Depression Inventory and the Beck Anxiety Inventory Questionnaires were sent through online for data collection offering a standardized method, ensuring consistency and comparability in responses among the adults ranging from 20-35 years. A sample of 224 were taken based on whether they’ve had a previous romantic relationship or not. Those who have not been in a relationship, were excluded from the study. The individuals could be currently having any relationship status.

The Mann-Whitney U test results according to table 1 indicate a significant difference in depression and anxiety levels between individuals who have been cheated and those who have not. The mean rank for depression is higher among individuals who have been cheated (93.86) compared to those who have not (131.14), with a highly significant p-value of .000. Similarly, for anxiety, the mean rank is higher among individuals who have been cheated (89.32) compared to non-cheated individuals (135.68), with a significant p-value of .000. These results suggest that individuals who have experienced perceived infidelity exhibit significantly higher levels of both depression and anxiety compared to those who have not. The findings from Table 1 affirm the initial hypotheses, indicating that individuals who have experienced perceived infidelity indeed exhibit higher levels of depression and anxiety. Thus,



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existing literature suggests that relationship infidelity can have detrimental effects on mental health, leading to increased emotional distress and psychological symptoms.

The Mann-Whitney U test results for gender difference in depression levels shows significant difference. The mean ranks for males and females for depression are 116.70 and 106.69 respectively, with a p-value of 0.253. The Mann-Whitney U test results for gender differences in anxiety levels shows no significant difference. The mean ranks for males and females for anxiety are 113.62 and 110.95 respectively, with a p-value of 0.761. Since table 2 shows a significant difference in depression levels between males and females, it suggests that in the context of perceived infidelity males and females are not equally susceptible to experiencing emotional distress.

A lower mean rank generally indicates a higher level of the measured variable. In this case, individuals who have been cheated on have a lower mean rank (93.86) compared to those who have not been cheated on (131.14). Therefore, individuals who have been cheated on tend to have a higher level of depression based on the mean rank values. For anxiety levels, the mean rank for those who have not been cheated on is 135.68 and for those who have been cheated on is 89.32. This means that victims of infidelity have a higher level of anxiety than non-victims.

In the case of gender differences, females have a higher level of depression than males as the mean ranks show 116.70 and 106.69 for males and females respectively. As in the case of anxiety, females have a higher level of anxiety as compared to males as the mean ranks are 113.62 and 110.95 for males and females respectively.

A study conducted by Roos et al, showed that those who have been subjected to betrayal by their romantic partners, had trouble breathing, physical trembling, intense anxiousness and a racing heart. Thus, the hypothesis **H1: Individuals who have been a victim of infidelity are more likely to show higher severity of depression symptoms compared to those who have not** and the hypothesis **H2: Individuals who have been a victim of infidelity will exhibit higher levels of anxiety compared to those who have not**, have both been accepted. Another study conducted by Shackelford et al, showed that females participants were more affected by being cheated on and showed a higher level of sickness and physical illness when requested to imagine their partners being unfaithful. Thus, the hypothesis **H3: There is no gender difference in the severity of depression symptoms** and **H4: There is no gender difference in the severity of anxiety** have been accepted.

A study conducted by Stephens showed that infidelity committed by spouse led to suicidality and suicidal ideation, adding on to abuse, smothering love, and rejection of affection. Stephens also found that there can be variations in the way a person reacts depending upon their age. Older participants attempt suicide as a result of ongoing disagreements, where as younger ones would attempt suicide due to specific unpleasant occurrences in their romantic relationship.

(Environ, 2023) Women who faced the prospect of their marriage breaking down or their husband being unfaithful were six times more prone to being diagnosed with a major depressive episode compared to those who hadn't encountered such circumstances. Additionally, these women were more inclined to report increased symptoms of generalized depression and anxiety.

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Numerous studies have consistently linked gender to infidelity, highlighting that men are often identified as more prone to engaging in such behaviour compared to women. This alignment with an evolutionary perspective suggests that infidelity may contribute to genetic success for men. Research indicates that men are generally better at separating love from sexual activity, displaying a greater desire and willingness to participate in infidelity. However, recent findings suggest a diminishing gender gap in marital infidelity rates, especially among individuals under the age of 40-45, with reports indicating similar rates for both men and women. Additionally, there is evidence suggesting a higher likelihood of women engaging in infidelity if they are unhappy in their primary relationship. (Fincham, 2017)

### CONCLUSION

The study showed that there is a significant difference in the depression and anxiety levels of non-victims and victims of infidelity, both being higher for the latter group. The study also shows that there is a significant difference in the severity of depression symptoms between males and females, showing that it is higher for females. Whereas, in the case of severity of anxiety symptoms, there is no significant depression between males and females. Finally, this study sheds insight on the complex relationship between infidelity and mental health, namely the impact on depression and anxiety. The findings emphasize the need of evaluating infidelity as a potential source of increased distress. Women who have faced marital dissolution or infidelity from their partner have a significantly higher vulnerability to major depressive episodes, as well as heightened symptoms of nonspecific depression and anxiety. These findings not only add to the existing body of information on the psychological effects of infidelity, but also highlight the necessity for specialized therapies. Addressing emotional management and providing individuals with constructive coping skills becomes critical, especially in the aftermath of infidelity.

Infidelity in romantic relationships, as common as it is today, leads to extremely negative effects on humans and thus is an important topic to have adequate amount of knowledge about. Knowing individuals who have been a victim of infidelity in their current or past relationships, and knowing what they are going through allows us to empathize with them and help them out by seeking professional help as it may be necessary for them to heal, and get back on track.

The results of this study may also help individuals to understand that their feelings are valid and also gain a sense of universality, which may be the first step towards healing. This research also provides information to the abusers regarding what they may have done, or are doing towards their romantic partner.

As this study also mentions briefly about the symptoms of depression and anxiety, it enables individuals to understand another person who may be in need of help from their verbal and non-verbal cues and behaviour.

Findings of this research could encourage clinical psychologists and counsellors to provide skills that could help individuals to effectively cope with symptoms of depression and anxiety, and also help them to regulate their emotions.

#### *Limitations*

1. A broader range of ages and cultural backgrounds would provide a more comprehensive perspective on the topic.

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2. Self-report questionnaires, while valuable, can be influenced by social desirability bias or subjective interpretation. Combining quantitative data with qualitative methods like interviews could offer a deeper understanding of participants' experiences.
3. A longitudinal approach, tracking individuals' experiences over time, could offer insights into the long-term effects of perceived infidelity on mental health
4. It was difficult to find the sample size as it required them to be in or previously in a romantic relationship
5. Study was limited to only Indian population
6. It was conducted on only those who could read and write English

### *Implications*

1. In Clinical Interventions, the findings highlight the need for tailored psychiatric therapies for infidelity victims, taking into account the elevated levels of anxiety and despair associated with such situations. Mental health professionals ought to consider incorporating specialized counselling and therapeutic approaches in order to address the unique difficulties that these people face.
2. According to the study, relationships need to take proactive measures to reduce the negative impact of infidelity on mental health. To reduce the risk of emotional pain associated with infidelity, initiatives like couples counselling and educational programs should place a high priority on improving communication skills, establishing trust, and resolving relationship issues early on. This can be a preventive measure in mental health care settings.
3. For Public Awareness and Education this study emphasizes how important it is to launch public awareness efforts and educational programs to educate people about the possible psychological effects of adultery. Raising awareness can help people make better decisions in their relationships and foster a caring environment for individuals who have been the victim of infidelity.
4. Policy Implications: Since adultery is a potential trigger for elevated melancholy and anxiety, the research may have consequences for legislation pertaining to mental health support. This might result in the creation of laws guaranteeing mental health care for those coping with the fallout from adultery.
5. Further Research Directions: The discovery creates opportunities for more investigation into the processes via which adultery raises anxiety and despair. Examining variables like resiliency, coping mechanisms, and the length of emotional recovery can yield a more thorough knowledge and direct the creation of solutions that are more focused.
6. Relationship Education Programs: The results point to the possible advantages of including relationship education courses that particularly address the psychological fallout from adultery. These programs could promote emotional well-being by giving people and couples the skills they need to deal with the difficulties brought on by betrayal.
7. Support Networks: Given that infidelity victims are more likely to experience mental health issues, there is a need to strengthen support networks. People who are suffering with the fallout from infidelity can greatly benefit from the understanding and emotional support that friends, family, and community services can offer.
8. Impact on Overall Well-Being: The research underscores the interconnectedness of mental health and relationship experiences. Policymakers and practitioners should consider a holistic approach to well-being, acknowledging the intricate interplay between relationship dynamics and mental health outcomes.

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