

THE CHEATING HEART: PHENOMENOLOGY OF WOMEN WHO DECIDED TO HAVE MARITAL INFIDELITY

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Abstract

Infidelity in marriage is a complex process. People have different reasons for deciding to have a relationship outside of marriage. This study aims to investigate the reasons of married women for having marital infidelity and explore the risk factors that cause it. This research was conducted using a qualitative approach with phenomenology as the method. Three women who have had marital infidelity are willing to be subjects in this study. Data was collected by using open interview and observation methods. As a result, failed conflict resolution, different communication styles, low-quality time, low intimacy, unfulfilled expectations from partners, and the absence of protective factors are factors that cause women to have an affair.

Keywords: cheating; infidelity; marriage; phenomenology

INTRODUCTION

Both biological and psychological needs of humans must be fulfilled to survive. One of the most important needs to be fulfilled in the hierarchy of human needs is love. Maslow (Feist & Feist, 2018) explained that the human need to be loved is manifested in several ways, such as the urge to make friends, the desire to have a partner and children, and the need to be attached to a family, neighborhood, or nation. Furthermore, Maslow stated that this need also including aspects of sexual relations and interpersonal relationships. Then, these needs are manifested, one of which is in the form of marriage. Olson et al. (2011) defines marriage as a legal commitment between two people to share physical and emotional closeness, share various tasks, and economic resources.

Individuals reason to commit in a marriage, as described by Olson et al. (2011), is to complement each other. Complementing each other allows couples to share the journey of life. Then, the second reason is love and intimacy. The third is a supportive partner. Marriage provides an opportunity for a person to develop as a human being through a relationship with a supportive partner. Another reason is also due to fulfilling

biological needs, particularly sexual needs. Marriage is considered a stable source of sexual satisfaction for married couples (Apostolou & Wang, 2021; Fye & Mims, 2019; Gray & Garcia, 2013). In addition, one of the classic reasons to get married is to have children. Some parents consider that having children is challenging, frustrating, but at the same time very enjoyable (Nelson et al., 2013).

Everyone has their own expectations in their marriage (Watkins & Boon, 2016). The fulfilled expectations become a standard for assessing the level of quality of the marital relationship. Individuals who feel the quality of marriage is in line with their expectations will feel satisfaction. On the other hand, individuals who feel that the quality of their marriage has not matched their expectations tend to feel dissatisfied and are very vulnerable to infidelity (Shackelford et al., 2008). One of the parameters for the quality of the marital relationship is intimacy (Karimi et al., 2019; Pizarro & Gaspay-Fernandez, 2015). In addition, communication, conflict resolution, availability of free time, relationships with family and friends of a partner are also indicators of individual satisfaction in a marriage (Hawkins et al., 2012; Karimi et al., 2019). Furthermore, the

relationship between marriage and the level of subjective well-being depends on the quality of the relationship. Individuals who engage in distressed marriages are more likely to report symptoms of depression and poorer health than those in happy marriages (Donoho et al., 2013; Liu & Waite, 2014).

If the partner does not provide enough attention or intimacy that is needed, it will lead to an increased risk of marital infidelity. Infidelity can be categorized as emotional, sexual, or a combination of both. Sexual infidelity involves sexual intercourse, whereas emotional infidelity does not require sexual intercourse but develops a strong emotional bond with someone other than the partner (Thornton & Nagurney, 2011). However, several qualitative studies explain that it is not necessary to distinguish meaningfully between sexual and emotional infidelity because the impact is the same, causing significant trauma to the concept of relationship (Moller & Vossler, 2015). Marital infidelity can have a negative impact on marriage and can lead to divorce (Julianto & Cahyani, 2017; Scott et al., 2013). Furthermore, emotional and sexual infidelity also occurs as a result of mediation from the development of the internet (Cravens et al., 2013; Cravens & Whiting, 2016) because infidelity actors believe that they can easily change their current partner and do not need to put too much effort into maintaining their relationship.

Infidelity is divided into several forms. The classification is based on the level of emotional involvement of the cheating partner (Subotnik & Harris, 2005). Furthermore, Subotnik and Harris (2005) describe that the forms of infidelity include serial affairs, flings, romantic love affairs, and long-term affairs. The degree of intimacy varies from the lowest (i.e., serial affair which is usually a repeated one-night stand with different partners to get pleasure for a moment). Although it does not involve deep emotional involvement with the affair partner, this does not mean that this affair is not dangerous. The absence of commitment to a cheating partner

also indicates a lack of commitment to marriage. The second form of infidelity is a flings affair, which is an affair that lasts for months but only happens once and involves a low emotional level. Next, the third form of infidelity is a romantic love affair that involves a deep emotional connection and affects the whole life of the individual who does the affair. Often individuals think to end their marriage due to this infidelity (Zapien, 2016). The last form of infidelity is a long-term affair that involves the deepest emotional involvement, occurs over many years, and is known by their partner. Furthermore, recent research by Thompson and O'Sullivan (2017) state that infidelity consists of several forms such as sexual/explicit behavior, technology/online behavior, emotional/affectionate behavior, and solitary behavior. However, any form of infidelity violates the commitments of the existing relationship and can have a destructive effect on both partners.

Infidelity can occur in many romantic relationships regardless of gender (Mark et al., 2011). The data show that infidelity in marital relationships occurs around 20-25% with details of 22-34% who do it are men and 11-24% are women (Allen et al., 2005). More specifically, when infidelity is defined as having sex outside of marriage, men engage in extramarital sex more often than women (Fincham & May, 2017; Thompson & O'Sullivan, 2016). Everyone who does an affair has their reasons for doing it. The most mentioned motive for men is the opportunity, while women explained it is because of an unhappy relationship (Scheeren et al., 2018). Being unfaithful to one's partner and being dissatisfied with the marital relationship are predictive variables for infidelity (Leonidou et al., 2017). To explain the complexities of infidelity, it is important to understand what goes on in a marriage, and what predisposing factors can lead a person to decide to have an affair.

Allen et al. (2005) explain four domains to consider when investigating the potential causes of infidelity, including the

intrapersonal domain, the quality of the partner, the quality of marital relationships, and external factors such as culture, work environment, and peers. Friends who are involved in infidelity can also encourage someone to have an affair. Opening opportunities and access to the internet as a means of communication can also increase a person's motivation to commit infidelity (Thompson & O'Sullivan, 2016). When problems arise from these four domains, it can be a risk factor in marriage because it can open up opportunities for someone to have an affair.

Another factor that causes someone to have an affair is due to hatred towards a partner who has also had an affair (Williams & Hickie, 2011). The desire for revenge appears as compensation for what the partner has done. Then, feelings of loneliness and the fulfillment of individual expectations when establishing relationships with other partners also cause someone to have an affair (Blow, 2008). Another factor that leads women to commit infidelity is work. Women who work outside the home have a greater chance of forming opposite-sex relationships than women who stay at home. In addition, when women achieve better economic independence, marital instability tends to increase (Zhang et al., 2012).

Mong et al. (2014) explored the risk factors for women to commit marital infidelity are due to lack of quality time with partners, lack of attention from partners, lack of intimacy, and ineffective communication. However, this research is limited to the Caucasian cultural context, so it is possible to have different meanings of infidelity in the Indonesian context. Boon et al. (2014) stated that culture and social norms also determine the involvement and attitudes of a person in an affair. Individuals who are in western culture are considered to have free views for their actions, including infidelity. In contrast, individuals in conservative cultures such as Indonesia are considered more afraid to do inappropriate things against societal norms.

Based on the explanations above, this study aims to understand the reasons and meanings of women who commit infidelity in their marriages.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with phenomenology as the method. Through a qualitative approach, a phenomenon is explored through the unique life experiences of each subject, so that an understanding of the complexity of the existing phenomena can be obtained (Smith & Osborn, 2003). This approach involves personal views of the world and interpretations of the events it encounters. Researchers do not make right or wrong conclusions merely try to understand what individual reason about a phenomenon. It is in accordance with the purpose of phenomenology itself, which is to return to its own reality (Creswell, 2013).

According to Smith and Osborn (2003) phenomenology tries to uncover and understand a phenomenon and its unique context, experienced by individuals to the level of the individual's beliefs. The process must be based on the point of view, paradigm, and direct views of the subject who experienced it firsthand. In other words, phenomenological research investigates to find the psychological meaning of an individual's experience of a phenomenon through in-depth research, in the context of the daily life of the subject under study.

The research process needs careful and comprehensive preparation to gain the full trust of the subject so that closeness and the data needed can be obtained. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), two things that are the focus of phenomenological research are textural description (what is experienced by the subject about a phenomenon) and structural description (how subjects experience and interpret their experience). This description contains a subjective aspect. This aspect involves opinions, judgments, feelings, expectations, and other subjective

responses from the subject related to the experience.

According to Esterberg (2002), there are three ways to collect qualitative data. It includes observation, interviews, and unobtrusive (analyzing text and material artifacts). This present study was conducted using observation and open and in-depth interviews, allowing the subject to describe the processes of their marriage life before and after engaging in infidelity. It enables the identification of patterns and themes experienced by the subject.

The subjects in this study were three women who had an affair in their marriage. The demographic characteristics of the research subjects can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Research Subjects

Subject ^a	Age	Marital Status	Occupational Status
AA	45	Divorced	Employed
XX	24	Divorced	Unemployed
WW	32	Not Divorced	Employed

Note.

^aAll subjects are female.

Subject selection was carried out by selecting samples that matched the research criteria, including women who had had an affair in their marriage and were willing to participate in this study without coercion. Previously, the subjects had filled out informed consent and expressed their willingness to become research subjects. The researcher and the subjects developed an empathetic relationship, in which the subject is seen more as a teacher and the researcher as a person trying to hear and understand the subject. The data was collected using observation and open interviews. The interview was conducted three times for each subject with a duration of approximately 45 minutes/interview. It started by asking questions to build a rapport with the subject first to asking details such as the year

and how the subject's affair happened. During the interview process, the researcher always made field notes. When asking questions and listening to the answers from each subject, the researcher noted body gestures, facial expressions, and the surroundings where the interview was conducted.

The data obtained through the interviews is in descriptive form. Based on this descriptive data, content analysis was then carried out and coded into themes and categories. To achieve the credibility of the research, the researcher did re-validation. The researcher asked the subject to evaluate whether there were statements from the subject that were not in accordance with the facts and were incomplete, which the subject could confirm afterward. Through this checking process, it is expected that this research can be trusted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of interviews and observations with three subjects in this study, we obtained several themes regarding the subject's decision to have an affair in their marriage. Those themes are unresolved conflict, lack of intimacy, ineffective communication, low-quality time, and unfulfilled expectations from their partner.

Unresolved Conflict

The three subjects in this study experienced unresolved conflicts with their partners. Unresolved conflict in AA and her husband is related to religious differences and it makes them difficult to obtain marriage approval from her family. When AA got married, AA's husband decided to change his religion to get the blessing of AA's parents. But after that, both had planned to confess to AA's family that AA's husband had returned to his original religion. However, AA often delayed explaining this to her family, thus making her husband annoyed and demanding the promise repeatedly. AA found it difficult to explain to her family because AA felt that her family would be very disappointed, so in the end, AA chose to remain silent. The situation was

worsened when the AA's husband had begun to be unwilling to visit the AA's family home because he thought he should do religious rituals by the AA's family. Then it led to conflicts and debates between AA and her husband that led to blaming each other. AA's husband felt that the condition of their marriage became worse because AA did not dare to tell the truth to the family regarding the process of returning to his original religion, while AA felt that her husband was too demanding and did not understand her condition. Besides, this became more problematic because AA also wanted her husband to do religious rituals of her beliefs when attending family events (such as attending prayers, reciting the Koran, and fasting).

"I know my family won't be able to accept that easily, and on the other hand, I hope that my husband can at least be tolerant. What's so hard about pretending? He met with my family at least a day, a maximum of two days. It's just following religious rituals like that.... We both make sacrifices, but in the end, we both don't take the problem seriously and we just think that time will run it, solve it, or whatever.... Over time, we have become distant [in a relationship]" (AA_BR211).

While on Subject XX, she mentioned that her husband had a secret related to his past. XX feels uncomfortable because her husband has not been honest with her about his past and makes XX try to find out by stalking her husband's social media platforms. XX found out all the information about her husband's past for about three months. As expected, her husband had a bad past and was involved with several women even a few weeks before they got married. The resolution of the problem between the two was not finished and ended in an argument.

"Finally, I wanted to know more, and it turned out that my husband chatted with an open BO girl (booking out) and with his ex, too. They've had sex before. I feel like

my life is ruined and I didn't think it had to be like this. I finally asked him why he did that, but his answer never relieved me... He seemed to stay away every time we discussed this matter. I'm tired" (XX_BR131).

Unresolved conflict also happens in WW's marital relationship, related to financial problems. Before marriage, she was a high-paying career woman. She decided to quit her job when she married her husband because she wanted to serve as a good wife and mother. The marriage relationship went smoothly for eight years of marriage. There were no significant problems. Until the ninth year of marriage, household problems emerged due to financial. WW's husband was fired from his job so that the family's finances became unstable. The husband, who was initially able to afford the needs of the family, could no longer afford to provide a decent living. At first, these problems were meaningless and were faced together. However, the situation did not improve until WW finally decided to return to work.

"I don't work, neither does my husband. Then we were confused about how to pay for our daily needs, so I thought I had to go back to work, even though my husband seemed to refuse and made him cold to me. The house doesn't feel warm anymore [the vibe] because we don't talk to each other all the time. When I talk about my intention to go back to work, he tends to avoid it and doesn't want to talk about it, so the problem is not resolved" (WW_BR244).

From the explanation above, conflict resolution needs to be done immediately so that the problem is resolved and does not get worse because it will create a distance between husband and wife and reduce individual satisfaction with their married life. This is in line with what was explained by Hawkins et al. (2012) and Karimi et al. (2019) that if conflicts that arise in marriage are not resolved immediately, they will spread to

other aspects such as decreased intimacy and satisfaction with marriage, particularly if the problem has been going on for years.

Ineffective Communication

The unresolved problems made the relationship between the three subjects and their partners worse. In AA's case, the problem related to religious differences remained for a long time and influence their communication. AA and her husband became less intense in communicating, only for matters related to children or household expenses. The communication that occurs is becoming more and more numb day by day. Moreover, both of them are also busy working so that they don't have enough time to be together. It is getting worse. Even AA's husband has started to use violence, both verbally and physically. AA explained that previously when she came home from work, they had a fight, and there was physical violence such as being pushed and slapped and verbal violence such as swearing. AA regrets that this has to happen. AA admitted that previously, their communication was quite conducive and comfortable when they discussed matters related to other issues outside their relationship, such as current news, politics, social issues, ideology, and others. They can even spend hours discussing these topics. AA has tried to ask her husband to discuss what problems are going on in their marriage, but it did not happen because the communication between them is already not good. AA considered that their communication way is also influenced by the ethnic differences between the two. AA assumes that her husband doesn't want to be clearly in communicating with her and tends to just mumble in his mind. Her husband's attitude often made AA annoyed and disappointed, and she was tired of trying to start a discussion.

“There is no more communication between husband and wife except for trivial things, such as monthly expenses. So, it's not an intimate thing to talk about.

He's not a straightforward person, so he's a bit of a “contemplating” person. He's the type who doesn't say anything about it openly, so I'm having a hard time guessing his way of thinking” (AA_BR221).

Ineffective communication also occurs in XX relationships. Communication between her and her husband did not improve until four months after XX knew about her husband's past story. XX stated that besides feeling cheated, she felt jealous because the women in her husband's past were more beautiful than her. It makes XX feel worthless. She tried to get her husband's attention by contacting her male friends to make him jealous. At first, it can make her husband jealous. However, after she made contact again with one of her male friends during college, XX felt like there was something that made her flutter. XX feels cared for and appreciated by his male friend. She began to intensely communicate with him almost every day. At first, XX felt guilty for having intense communication with a man who was not her husband, but she rationalized that what she was doing was still normal and she considered this as punishment for her husband who was dishonest to her. Fights between XX and her husband were inevitable after XX's husband found out that his wife was getting more intense with other men and made XX's husband do not want to stay at home.

“So, I tried to express my upset feelings by chatting with other guys so my husband would know that I was jealous. I also felt that my disappointment toward him was ignored. I assume that this way will make him understand what I want... I just want him to apologize and be better, but he perceives it differently and it makes our relationship worse... Our communication... I don't think we are open about each other's feelings, so it's like guessing what's in our minds” (XX_BR256).

It was shown that XX, who was not open about her feelings of upset and jealousy, think that her partner did not understand her feelings. It could be because the communication way chosen is not fit and makes the situation worse.

Then, ineffective communication also occurs in the WW relationship. Communication between her and her husband is only limited to crucial things such as finances. WW became secretive to her husband about her career life when she started working again. Then it is worsened by her husband's habit of consuming alcohol to distract him from his problems. WW felt she had sacrificed and tried to earn money, but her husband was doing things he shouldn't have done.

“At that time, he was down because he lost his job but what I was disappointed about was why he ran to alcohol, especially since he was the head of the family so he should set a good example. I became more and more annoyed. I felt like I had sacrificed to earn money, but how come he is like that. So, I was unwilling to discuss with him about our future. When I come home from work, I prefer to remain quiet and go straight to bed, most of all talking about paying for electricity, buying gas like that” (WW_BR196).

Communicating openly with partners is no longer done by the three research subjects. Further, it eliminated the warmth in a relationship because they were no longer telling each other how their day was, even if it's just asking about each other's conditions. It causes a decrease in individual satisfaction in marriage. It is in line with Hawkins et al. (2012) and Karimi et al. (2019) which showed a positive relationship between effective communication and marital satisfaction. Furthermore, higher ineffective communication also predicts infidelity in marital relationships (Maddox-Shaw et al., 2013). Effective communication is needed because it allows individuals to understand each other, resolve conflicts, and verbally

express future plans together. Lack of effective communication when dealing with conflict in marriage becomes a risk factor for someone to have a marital affair (Mong et al., 2014). Poor communication in dealing with conflict in the three cases above is a factor in individuals committing affairs.

Lack of intimacy

In addition to communication, the most important thing in a relationship is intimacy. The intimacy between AA and her husband is also fading, with no conversations related to personal matters from the heart to heart and no special things they did as a husband and wife, even celebrating their wedding anniversary. Further, there is no sexual intercourse between husband and wife, even though they are still in the same bed. It makes their relationship even more distant. AA becomes more active outside the home than before.

“I feel that our intimacy is not the intimacy of husband and wife. We talk but are only limited to essential things because our relationship is not that good, you know. So, no more heart-to-heart chat, no longer celebrating wedding anniversaries. Moreover, we no longer have sexual relations like husband and wife. So, it feels flat” (AA_BR415).

Furthermore, the lack of intimacy also happened in XX. The intimacy between XX and her husband is slowly diminishing. Dinner together, which was a mandatory agenda every day, is no longer arranged. Furthermore, there were no conversations before bed. XX tends to spend time with her cell phone, while her husband always comes home late.

“As I know all about his past, I feel disgusted, I don't want to talk to him either. Skinship.... I don't think I want to; I feel worthless too. We no longer do our sweet habits because I'm still disappointed with him. I often chat with other people whom I feel cared for me, and honestly, I become more comfortable

with that person than with my husband” (XX_BR304).

WW also explained that intimacy with her partner also diminishes. Her husband became depressed because of losing his job, while WW felt tired after work. It was implications that the two did not share enough intimacy. They are still in the same bed, but they often sleep in separate rooms and rarely talk about their plans for the future. Moreover, WW admitted that she began to feel comfortable with other men (her boss at work).

“I already feel like ‘just give it up’ at that point, I know he is depressed. However, I also need to be cared for or just asked how my day was or asked if I was tired or not. It’s like our cold war. I used to like to cook for him and eat together, but, at that time, I didn’t do it anymore because when I came home from work, I just bought ready-made food” (WW_BR312).

From those three subjects, we know that the lack of intimacy is one of the reasons they have an affair. They feel that other people can provide the intimacy they need, while the relationship with their partner feels increasingly bland. Maintaining intimacy with a partner is not always easy. One in four adults faces difficulties maintaining intimacy with their partner (Apostolou et al., 2019) even though it is a parameter of the quality of the marital relationship (Pizarro & Gaspay-Fernandez, 2015; Karimi et al., 2019). When intimacy is low, the quality of the marital relationship will decline. Intimacy manifests in various forms because every couple has their own way. One of them is by having sexual intercourse. A healthy sexual relationship is considered a major marker of marital well-being and a fundamental way for couples to show care and love for each other and considered as a strong symbol of the couple’s relationship (Schoenfeld et al., 2012). Sexual activity is one of the ways that is considered to be important because couples can share their love, intimacy, and deep feelings. However, this activity is rarely

happening to the three subjects with their husband.

Lack of quality time

Furthermore, one of the factors that caused the three subjects to have an affair was the lack of quality time with their partners. AA felt that she was too tired after work, as well as her husband, and they only had little time to talk. AA’s motivation to go home early was only because she wanted to meet her child, not her husband.

“Nothing, almost nothing [quality time], because I work. So, automatically we don’t have time together... he also comes home in the afternoon, so we just focus on taking care of trivial household matters” (AA_BR187).

In XX, the lack of quality time is caused because the husband often comes home late. Her husband tends to spend time after work with his friends, while XX spends more time with his cellphone.

“He often comes home late, I’m busy with my cellphone. I was already asleep when he got home. Since the time I found out he was mean to me, I didn’t want to go out with him, usually, we watch movies or travel out of town. But not anymore” (XX_BR215).

Later, WW mentioned that she also lost quality time with her husband because she was also working while her husband was busy with his problems (losing his job). Activities such as cooking and eating together that they used to do is not done anymore because WW only buys food outside. After work, WW felt tired and didn’t want to talk too much with her husband to minimize the debate.

“I enjoy being at work more than at home. When I get home, it’s a bit late and tired. Previously, I used to cook often at home, but since I’ve been working, I don’t have time, so that I prefer to buy food outside.

I usually spend holidays with my children without my husband” (WW_BR450).

Lack of quality time occurs in the three subjects in this study. Mong et al. (2014) stated that one of the risk factors for women who commit infidelity in marriage is lack of quality time. Lack of quality time with your partner can miss the opportunity for reconciliation. This condition would also be worsened if a person finds another partner and spends more quality time together.

Unfulfilled expectations from their partner

The unfulfilled expectations of the partner are indeed one of the reasons for the three subjects of this study to have a marital affair. The unfulfilled expectations from their partner make them think that other men can fulfill them. In AA, this happened because she wanted her husband to do religious rituals according to her beliefs when they gathered with the AA family. However, her husband often avoids family gatherings or religious celebrations.

“I know my family won’t be able to accept that easily, and on the other hand, I really hope that my husband can at least be tolerant. Is it hard for him to pretend?” (AA_BR211).

AA’s other expectations for her husband are also related to financial problems. Even though they both work, it turns out that AA’s salary is higher than her husband’s, so AA’s money is used for some family expenses. Financial matters are not a problem when their marriage is still harmonious. However, when ineffective communication and a relationship that is no longer intimate are issued, it is a problem. AA thinks that she has sacrificed a lot in her marriage and feels burdened to spend more money for household needs. AA feels that her husband should be able to be kinder to her, considering that the AA always takes care of all the needs of the family. This expectation is unfulfilled because her husband’s response was always quiet and

withdrew. Tired of trying, AA prefers to let her husband do whatever he wants to do.

“I’ve indeed been feeling like I’m the one who bears the cost or expenses of the house. Why is it me again? So, our previous problem was not clear at all then I felt that finances were also a problem. I feel like I have sacrificed a lot, whereas when I asked him to make other sacrifices (following religious rituals when I was with my family) it was very difficult to do” (AA_BR564).

Unfulfilled expectations by the partner are also felt by XX. She wants her husband to take responsibility for her disappointment and apologize to her until she feels better. However, XX considers her husband to apologize superficially. Disappointment due to her husband’s lies continues to rage in XX’s mind. It triggers her to hurt her husband by communicating with other men. Day by day, XX felt she was too close and comfortable with her male friend. She admits that her male friend gives her compliments and even gifts that she rarely gets from her husband. In addition to apologies, XX hopes that her husband can understand her feelings and give her what she needs, such as compliments and more attention, especially since they’ve just gotten married. XX was indecisive and questioned herself whether her decision to get married at that time was the right thing and whether they should divorce or not because at the early age of marriage, too many things did not go according to her expectations.

“I had mixed feelings at the time. I was so disappointed that he lied. I feel like he’s not really apologizing. Then there’s a guy, a close friend of mine, who I feel like he knows what I need, and he gives me gifts and compliments that make me happy and wonder why my husband isn’t like this” (XX_BR145).

Then, in the case of WW, she felt that her husband should be the head of the family, who was strong and took care of her and her

family. WW thinks her husband is too occupied with his problems to ignore her. In addition, WW admitted that she was impressed by her boss at work, who has the image of a family man as she expected. WW felt guilty for betraying her husband. However, WW felt that her husband was no longer able to become the person she hoped for. The relationship that was initially intimate became no longer warm. WW spent more time working and sharing her attention with her boss. At first, WW admitted that she committed the affair initially because she felt sorry for her children because their needs are unfulfilled by their father, although this is still not justified as a reason for her having an affair.

“I never thought that my husband was at the point where he was so down like that. I tried to understand the condition he was in for some time, but it didn’t improve. We still need to eat, and life goes on, especially when we have children. I had to go back to work and earn some money, but what he did made me feel even more distant. I also work for my family, but I was indeed wrong because I was amazed by other people” (WW_BR283).

The three subjects indicated that unfulfilled expectations were another factor that also caused them to commit infidelity. Expectations are manifested in the form of wanting attention, compliments, gifts, and being appreciated by their partners. As stated by Watkins and Boon (2016) that everyone has their own expectations in their marriage and if these expectations are fulfilled it will improve the quality of a relationship. Shackelford et al. (2008) added that if a person feels that the quality of marriage is in accordance with the desired expectations, then the individual will feel satisfaction in marriage. On the other hand, individuals who feel that the quality of their marriage is not in line with their expectations tend not to feel happiness in marriage and are very vulnerable to infidelity. Infidelity occurs as compensation to compensate for unmet expectations in marriage.

Furthermore, according to Subotnik and Harris (2005) the deeper emotional involvement between the subject and the cheating partner is an indicator that the cheating partner is more attractive to things that their husbands cannot give them. It is in line with what was stated by Allen et al. (2005) that deep emotional involvement in an affair relationship is very influential on the marital relationship.

Then, if we look at the feelings faced during the confession and divorce process, the three subjects reported felt guilty, stressed, and anxious after committing an affair. It is in accordance with the research conducted by Azhar et al. (2018), Robustelli et al. (2015), and Wilkinson et al. (2012) that both partners who are perpetrators and victims of infidelity are reported to experience emotional problems after the disclosure of the affair. AA had experienced great fear and felt guilty for her husband. However, after contemplating and discussing with the family, AA finally decided to end her marriage and relationship with her cheating partner. XX and WW share the same anxiety and guilt. XX also finally ended her marriage because she felt she had destroyed her marriage. In contrast, WW’s husband forgave her and maintained their marriage. It shows that forgiveness and support from a partner are things that can make a broken relationship improve, even though it takes time (Fife et al., 2013, Sauerheber & Ponton, 2017). The existence of a strong commitment not to repeat each other’s mistakes and try to improve communication is a factor that strengthens WW and her husband to maintain the marriage. Shackelford et al. (2002) stated that not all couples end their marriage after an affair committed by their partner. Some couples start marriage therapy and try to fix their marital relationship, even though infidelity is one of the most difficult problems to deal with in the therapy process (Shrout & Weigel, 2018; Kroger et al., 2012).

Then, in AA, external factors such as friends in the work environment do not function as

agents of social control. In the end, the work environment did not become a protective factor for infidelity relationships in this study, so it is necessary to explore whether certain work cultures can eventually become a protective factor or vice versa.

CONCLUSION

This study provides an overview of the risk factors that cause infidelity in married women, including unresolved conflict, lack of intimacy, ineffective communication, low-quality time, and unfulfilled expectations from partners. The results imply that it is essential to take protective steps to minimize the possibility of marital affairs. It can be initiated by premarital/marriage counselors or related clinicians to provide reinforcement programs so that married couples can maintain the quality of their relationship. Things that can strengthen marriage are asking your partner to schedule private time in the evening, having lunch/dinner together, re-evaluating each individual's participation in outside activities, and encouraging the partner to balance work and married life. However, this study is limited to women's perspectives who may differ from men regarding marital conflict and marital infidelity. Then, the subjects in this study were limited to married women and not women whose status was in dating, cohabitation, or fiancées who might also have different perspectives so that personal meanings would be different. In addition, the subjects involved in this study are all from the same ethnic group, so there may be differences between cultures and ethnicities. Further research can consider differences in culture and ethnicity to investigate issues related to marital infidelity.

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