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Sexual self-concept and sexual awareness in divorce, infidelity and control group

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KEYWORDS

Sexual self-concept;
Sexual awareness;
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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of this study was to compare sexual self-concept and sexual awareness among divorced, unfaithful, and normal women.

Methods: The method of this study was causal-comparative, which was conducted to compare sexual self-concept and sexual awareness among three groups of women. The statistical population was all the women who were referred to *Pooyan* Sexual Disorders Clinic between 2016 and 2017. 55 divorced women, 42 unfaithful women, and 50 normal women were selected from volunteers as a sample. They responded to the sexual self-concept questionnaires of Fisher, Davis, and Yarber (2013) and sexual awareness of Snell, Fisher, and Miller (1991) in accordance with ethical principles.

Results: The findings showed that the mean age and the mean years of marital life of women who cheated before were higher than that of divorced women and control group ($p < 0.05$). Moreover, these women had seen more pornography before marriage than divorced women and control group, and also had more masturbation ($p < 0.05$). Results showed that sexual anxiety, sexual self-efficacy, sexual consciousness, avoidance of risky sex, chance sexual control, sexual preoccupation, sexual optimism, sexual self-esteem, sexual satisfaction, power-other sexual control, sexual self-schemata, fear of sex, sexual depression, and internal-sexual-control among the three groups had significant differences ($p < 0.05$). However, sexual assertiveness, sexual problem self-blame, sexual motivation, and sexual problem management were not significantly different among the three groups.

Conclusions: With the increase in life expectancy, the frequency of sexual activity decreases, possibly due to reduced sexual attractiveness by partner, age, occupation, and child care.

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Introduction

Sexual self-concept is a combination of sexual feelings, behaviors, beliefs and attitudes about people themselves. In other words, individual's evaluation of his or her own sexual feelings and actions is called sexual self-concept. Indeed, one of the variables that can play a significant role in healthy sexual behavior between couples is sexual self-concept (O'sullivan, Meyer-Bahlburg, & McKeague, 2006). This concept has become more important in recent decades. Concepts like sexual individuality, sexual stereotypes, sexual mentality, and sexual self-perception are similar to this concept (Pai, Lee, & Chang, 2010). Sexual selfhood means that one understands the nature of his own being in the sexual dimension; in other words, it refers to how he/she thinks and feels about sexual matters (Simon, 2017). Sexual selfhood also has interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions that we -as researchers- need to understand and evaluate at both individual levels and in the context of sexual experience with another person (Thompson, 1996).

One of the variables that can influence the sexual relationship of couples is sexual awareness. As research has shown, divorced women have less sexual satisfaction in their lives (Amiriyanzadeh, Amiryanzadeh, & Yazdani, 2005). In other words, most people who have an unhappy life are actually dissatisfied of sexual issues (Andermouler, & Zeilven, 1991). As we know, inappropriate sexual relationship and sexual dissatisfaction are among the main causes of marital conflicts and disintegration of families (Bahrainian, Nazemi, & Dadkhah, 2009). In fact, sexual satisfaction is an important factor in the success of marital life, and dissatisfaction with this important aspect can lead to marital conflicts. Therefore, one of important factors that can cause divorce and disintegration of the family is sexual dissatisfaction (Foroutan, & Jadid milani, 2009). For example, in a study on 374 married women, the mean score of positive sexual self-concept was 106.32, and the mean score of negative sexual self-concept was 36.64 and the mean score of sexual performance was 22.30. In fact, as positive sexual self-concept increases, sexual performance increases. In addition, in the context of the relationship between negative sexual self-

concept and sexual performance, the results have indicated that with decreasing sexual negative self-concept, sexual performance increases (Jafarpour-Ghahnoyeh, Maroufi, & Molaei Nejad, 2015).

As many researchers have shown betrayal is one of the main causes of marital conflict and divorce (Fung, Wong, & Tam, 2009; Hertlein, Wetchler, & Piercy, 2005; Knight, 2010; Mohsenzadeh, Nazari, & Arefi, 2011; Snyder, Baucom, & Gordon, 2007). Indeed, one of the factors that challenges family health is marital infidelity, which is the most important factor affecting the performance, the stability and the continuity of marital relationships (Mark, Janssen, & Milhausen, 2011), and is the main cause of marital conflicts (Platt, Nalbene, Casanova, & Wetchler, 2008). The rate of extramarital affairs is increasing (Petersen, & Hyde, 2010). People's attitudes toward extramarital affairs, is an important indicator for predicting their tendencies of having extramarital affairs, because these beliefs and values encourage or discourage having such relationships (Bank and Baker, 1995). Research has also shown that marital infidelity is less related to marital dissatisfaction and mixed marital infidelity (having both sexual and intimacy aspects) cause more marital dissatisfaction. Women are more likely to have mixed or emotional marital infidelity (Glass, & Wright, 1985).

Hence, examining women's sexual issues is important to sustain life. Of course, sexual issues are taboo in our society; research on these issues can be hard. However, little studies have been conducted on the sexual self-concept and sexual awareness of divorced women and those who had marital infidelity. Therefore, as far as we know, this is the first study on the sexual issues of divorced women and women who had marital infidelity.

Method

Participants

The current study was a causal-comparative study that was conducted with the purpose of comparing sexual self-concept and sexual awareness among three groups of divorced, unfaithful and normal women. The first statistical

population was all the women who referred to the Pouyan specialized Sexual Disorder Clinic in Gorgan city between 2016 and 2017. 97 people (55 divorced women and 42 unfaithful women) were selected by the available sampling and matching methods from the divorced and unfaithful women. They were matched according to information such as education level, socio-economic status of the family and specific underlying disease. The second statistical population was normal women, 50 women who lived with their husbands. They were selected by matching with two mentioned samples. To select the sample size, the previous similar studies were used as the basis, and the sample size of at least 40 people for each group was selected according to the previous similar study. In the next stage, Fisher, Davis, and Yarber's (2013) sexual self-concept questionnaires and Snell, Fisher, and Miller's (1991) sexual awareness questionnaires were administered on the sample in accordance to ethical principles such as informed consent to participate in the study and confidentiality of information. The criteria for the divorced group were that at least one year had passed since the divorce and lack of any special physical or mental illness. The criteria for unfaithful women group were that infidelity had been legally proven and lack of any special physical or mental illness. Finally, for the group of normal women, at least three years had passed since their marriage and the lack of any specific physical or mental illness. Full explanations about the purpose of the study were given to each participant individually and they were asked to answer the questionnaires completely. At the end of the administration, all questionnaires were collected with a response rate of 100%. To analyze the collected data, MANOVA method was used using SPSS22.

The sample consisted of 55 divorced women and 42 women who cheated before who were referred to Pooyan clinic (a clinic for counseling center of expertise on sexual disorders). Fifty subjects were selected as the control group to be compared with the experimental groups. Then, all participants completed sexual awareness and sexual self-concept questionnaires.

Multidimensional Sexual Self-Concept Questionnaire

This questionnaire is an objective self-report instrument designed to measure 20 psychological aspects of human sexuality. The questionnaire has 100 items and its sub-scales and items are as follows 1) sexual anxiety (81, 61, 41, 21, 1); 2) sexual self-efficacy (82, 62, 42, 22, 2); 3) sexual awareness (83, 63, 43, 23, 3), 4) motivation to avoid risky sex (84, 64, 44, 24, 4), 5) chance sexual control (85, 65, 45, 25, 5), 6) sexual-preoccupation (86, 66, 46, 26, 6), 7) sexual self-expression (87, 67, 47, 27, 7), 8) sexual optimism (88, 68, 48, 28), 9) sexual problem self-blame (89, 69, 49, 29, 9), 10) sexual-monitoring (90, 70, 50, 30, 10), 11) sexual motivation (91, 71, 51, 31, 11), 12) sexual problem management (92, 72, 52, 32, 12), 13) Sexual self-esteem (93, 73, 53, 33, 13), 14) Sexual satisfaction (94, 74, 54, 34, 14), 15) power-other sexual control (95, 75, 55, 35, 15), 16) sexual self-schemata (96, 76, 56, 36, 16), 17) fear of Sex (97, 77, 57, 37, 17), 18) sexual problem prevention (99, 79, 59, 39, 18) 19) sexual-depression (and 20) internal-sexual-control (100, 80, 60, 40, 20) (Fisher, Davis, & Yarber, 2013).

The MSSCQ consists of 100 items arranged in a format in which respondents indicate how characteristic of them each statement is. A 5-point Likert-type scale is used to collect data on peoples' responses, with each item scored from 0 to 4: not at all characteristic of me (0), slightly characteristic of me (1), somewhat characteristic of me (2), moderately characteristic of me (3), and very characteristic of me (4). In order to create subscale scores (discussed below), the items on each subscale are averaged. Higher scores thus correspond to greater amounts of the relevant MSSCQ tendency. The response time to this questionnaire is 45 to 60 minutes (Fisher et al., 2013). Reliability and external validity of this test with Cronbach's alpha for all 20 sub-scales were reported 0.84, 0.85, 0.78, 0.72, 0.88, 0.94, 0.84, 0.78, 0.84, 0.84, 0.89, 0.84, 0.88, 0.91, 0.85, 0.87, 0.85, 0.85, 0.85 and 0.76 (Snell, 1995). Cronbach's Alpha of this test was reported 89% for Iran. This questionnaire has been translated into Persian (Ramezani et al., 2012). In this research, Cronbach's alpha was reported 0.83.

Sexual Awareness Questionnaire

The Sexual Awareness Questionnaire (SAQ; Snell, Fisher, & Miller, 1991) is an objective,

self-report instrument designed to measure four personality tendencies associated with sexual awareness and sexual assertiveness: (a) sexual consciousness (1,4,10,13,22,25), defined as the tendency to think and reflect about the nature of one's sexuality; (b) sexual preoccupation (8,11,29), defined as the tendency to think about sex to an excessive degree; (c) sexual monitoring (2,5,14,17,23,26,28,31,32) defined as the tendency to be aware of the public impression which one's sexuality makes on others; and (d) sexual assertiveness (3,6,9,12,15,18,24), defined as the tendency to be assertive about the sexual aspects of one's life. Some of the items were not related to any of the subscales and were included to hidden the purpose of the questionnaire (7,16,19,20,21,27,30,33,34,35,36) (Fisher, Davis, & Yarber, 2013). Items arranged in a format whereby respondents indicate how characteristic of them each statement is. A 5-point Likert scale is used, with each item being scored from zero to 4: Not at all characteristic of me (0), slightly characteristic of me (1), somewhat characteristic of me (2), moderately characteristic of me (3), Very characteristic of me (4). In order to create subscale scores, the items on each subscale are summed. Higher scores thus correspond to greater amounts of the relevant tendency (Fisher et al., 2013).

Reliability and validity of this questionnaire are calculated separately for both men and women by Cronbach's alpha for each of the four sub-scales. Cronbach's alpha of sexual consciousness was reported 0.83 for men, 0.86 for women. This concept for sexual monitoring was reported 0.86 for men, and 0.88 for women. Cronbach's alpha of sexual preoccupation was reported 0.89 for men, and 0.92 for women, while this concept for sexual assertiveness was reported 0.83 for men and 0.81 for women (Snell et al., 1991). The Cronbach's alpha of the questionnaire was reported to be 0/66.

Data analysis

We used the Chi-square test to analyze the results of the nominal data between the groups. In

addition, to explore the difference between the studied variables, MANOVA and ANOVA was used. Data were analyzed using SPSS 22 software.

Results

The results of the demographic findings in Table 1 show that the average age of women was betrayal, that of divorced women and control group was higher. The age of the marriage was not significantly different among the three groups, however, the number of years of marriage varied among the three groups. In other words, women betrayed, more divorced than divorced women and women in the control group. Also, we came to the conclusion that family marriage among betrayed women was more visible than the other two groups. Analysis of the results also showed that women betrayed, had more pornography than married women and control group, before marriage, more pornography, and also reported more masturbation before marriage. However, watching pornography and masturbation after marriage did not make a difference between the three groups.

Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) about the dependent variable of self-concept showed that the dependent variable of sexual self-concept was divorced among three groups: women betrayed, and women of control group were different ($F_{(40, 252)} = 3/901$, Pillai's trace = 0/765). Also, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) between menopause and dependent variable of sexual awareness showed that the dependent variable of sexual awareness was divided into three groups: divorced women, women betrayed, and women of control group were different ($F_{(8, 284)} = 3/818$, Pillai's trace = 0/194).

According to the analysis of the results in Table 2, one-way analysis of variance each of the sub-scales of sexual self-concept revealed that sexual anxiety, sexual self-efficacy, sexual consciousness, avoidance of sexually

Table 1. Mean, standard deviances, frequency and percent's demographic in divorce, infidelity, and control group

Variables	Divorce (N=55)	Infidelity (N=42)	Control (N=50)	Statistic		
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	$F_{(2,144)}$	<i>P</i>	<i>d</i>
Age	28.95 (6.77)	34.79 (5.84)	31.88 (6.53)	9.863	0.000*	2.35
Age marriage	21.05 (3.95)	21.36 (4.55)	21.94 (2.79)	0.726	0.485	0.37
Year marriage	7.33 (5.04)	13.33 (6.34)	9.90 (5.86)	13.088	0.000*	2.41
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	$\chi^2_{(2)}$	<i>P</i>	
Marriage with relatives				13.376	0.001*	
Yes	12 (21.8)	24 (57.1)	16 (32)			
No	43 (78.2)	18 (42.9)	34 (68)			
Porn past				8.962	0.011*	
Yes	15 (27.3)	24 (57.1)	19 (38)			
No	40 (72.7)	18 (42.9)	31 (62)			
Porn now				4.317	0.116	
Yes	3 (5.5)	8 (19)	6 (12)			
No	52 (94.5)	34 (81)	44 (88)			
Masturbate past				10.607	0.005*	
Yes	8 (14.5)	13 (31)	3 (6)			
No	47 (85.5)	29 (69)	47 (94)			
Masturbate now				4.045	0.132	
Yes	6 (10.9)	7 (16.7)	2 (4)			
No	49 (89.1)	35 (83.3)	48 (96)			
No children						
Any	25 (45.5)	5 (11.9)	10 (20)			
One	23 (41.8)	17 (40.5)	25 (50)			
Two	7 (12.7)	16 (38.1)	12 (24)			
Three	0	4 (9.50)	0			
Four	0	0	3 (6)			
Economic						
Weak	2 (3.6)	2 (4.8)	0			
Medium	22 (40)	23 (54.8)	23 (46)			
Good	28 (50.9)	16 (38.1)	22 (44)			
Very good	3 (5.5)	1 (2.4)	5 (10)			
Education						
Secondary school	12 (21.8)	2 (4.8)	6 (12)			
Diploma	26 (47.3)	21 (50)	17 (34)			
B.A	13 (23.6)	18 (42.9)	21 (42)			
M.A	4 (7.3)	1 (2.4)	6 (12)			

transmitted infections, randomized sexual inhibition, sexual engagement Optimism, sexual optimism, sexual self-esteem, sexual satisfaction,

sexual inhibition by others, sexual scandal, fear of sex, sexual intercourse, sexual depression and intrinsic sexual inhibition among the three groups

we studied You have meaning to each other. While sexual dare, self-blame, sexual motivation and sexual management were not significantly different between the three groups. Also, sexual awareness ($F_{(2, 144)} = 15.1, P < 0.000$) among the three groups of divorced women, women betrayed and the women of the control group

were different. In other words, the women of the control group were betrayed more than divorced women and women, and had more sexual awareness. In contrast, sexual monitoring, sexual dare and awareness of sexual attraction in the three groups we studied did not differ significantly.

Table 2. Mean and standard deviants, inferential statistics of sexual self-concept and sexual awareness in groups

Variables	Divorce	Infidelity	Control	$F_{(2,144)}$	P	Cohen's d
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)			
Sexual self-concept						
sexual-anxiety	2(0.76)	1.35(1)	1.10(0.73)	16.43	0.000*	0.39
sexual self-efficacy	2.23(0.50)	2.46(0.88)	2.60(0.76)	3.56	0.031*	0.15
sexual-consciousness	2.13(0.67)	2.55(0.88)	2.60(0.76)	5.81	0.004*	0.21
motivation to avoid risky sex chance/luck sexual control	2.31(0.77)	3.36(0.83)	2.71(1.03)	16.70	0.000*	0.42
sexual-preoccupation	1.94(0.83)	1.09(0.86)	1.56(0.84)	12.13	0.000*	0.34
sexual-preoccupation	1.93(0.97)	1.12(0.91)	1.32(0.85)	10.49	0.000*	0.34
sexual-assertiveness	2.17(0.73)	2.11(0.86)	2.44(0.78)	2.29	0.105	0.14
sexual-optimism	2.07(0.51)	2.89(0.61)	2.70(0.58)	28.05	0.000*	0.35
sexual problem self-blame	2.09(0.87)	1.86(0.89)	1.74(0.54)	2.69	0.071	0.15
sexual-monitoring	1.92(0.70)	1.30(0.85)	1.52(0.67)	9.10	0.000*	0.25
sexual-motivation	2.21(0.82)	2.39(0.86)	2.24(0.84)	0.60	0.547	0.07
sexual problem management	2.20(0.71)	2.50(0.73)	2.49(0.74)	2.88	0.059	0.14
sexual-esteem	2.34(0.65)	2.67(0.81)	2.80(0.86)	4.77	0.010*	0.20
sexual-satisfaction	2(0.72)	2.42(1.10)	2.82(0.70)	12.11	0.000*	0.34
power-other sexual control	1.85(0.93)	0.80(0.70)	1.33(0.74)	20.09	0.000*	0.42
sexual self-schemata	2.53(0.79)	3.03(0.88)	2.76(0.88)	4.15	0.018*	0.20
fear-of-sex	1.85(0.56)	1.63(0.77)	1.48(0.78)	3.66	0.028*	0.15
sexual problem prevention	2.49(0.72)	3.00(0.86)	2.59(0.75)	5.66	0.004*	0.21
sexual-depression	1.92(0.70)	1.34(1.12)	0.96(0.85)	15.56	0.000*	0.40
internal-sexual-control	2.19(0.67)	2.54(0.82)	2.48(0.79)	3.08	0.049*	0.15
Sexual awareness						
sexual consciousness	2.06(0.73)	2.50(0.94)	2.89(0.64)	15.01	0.000*	0.35
sexual monitoring	1.77(0.45)	1.80(0.47)	1.66(0.53)	1.12	0.328	0.05
sexual assertiveness	1.91(0.70)	1.91(0.80)	2.19(0.64)	2.55	0.081	0.13
sex-appeal consciousness	1.87(0.81)	2.06(1.15)	2.12(1.16)	0.84	0.430	0.11

Discussion

The present research is the first study to examine the sexual issues of divorced women and women betrayed with a control group. Analysis of our results showed that the number of years of marriage varied among the three groups. In other words, women who had betrayed their husbands had more years of marriage than divorced women and the control group. As shown in a research, the duration of marital life is related to sexual satisfaction. In other words, with the increase in life expectancy, the frequency of sexual activity decreases, which may be due to reduced sexual attractiveness by partner, age, occupation and child care. Also, the age difference of couples is also related to sexual satisfaction, with couples whose age range is more than 10 years old, have less sexual satisfaction and the highest satisfaction is between 5-10 years old. In addition, the frequency of sexual activity is one of the most important predictors of sexual satisfaction in couples (Rahmani, Merghati-Khoei, Sadeghi, & AllahGhuli, 2011). An interesting finding in our research showed that familial marriages in betrayed women were more than the other two groups. Also, we came to the conclusion that women betrayed, had seen more than any other women in the divorcee and control group, more pornographic videos, and reported more mobbing in the past. Meanwhile, there was no difference between the three study groups in terms of pornography and masturbation after marriage.

The findings showed that sexual self-concept was divorced among women, women infidelity and control women were significantly different. Of course, we know that enjoying a positive sexual self-concept in a person tends to be more favorable to sexual function, and the opposite, the presence of negative sexual self-concept in one, leads to undesirable sexual performance. In fact, there is a positive relationship between sexual self-concept and sexual function. This means that one needs to have sexual desire to practice sexual activity, because when someone has positive emotions, beliefs and impressions about sexual relations and in a more general statement, they have a positive view of their sexual function, and sexual intercourse who will have more with his partner and this connection will be enjoyable for

him (Jafarpour-Ghahnoyeh et al., 2015). However, inappropriate sexual relations and sexual dissatisfaction are one of the main causes of marital conflicts and disintegration of families (Bahrainian et al., 2009). However, educational sessions will make people find a positive outlook on their sexual issues, and create realistic, positive and healthy sexual expectations between them and their spouses. Therefore, they will have more healthy sexual behaviors and self-expressions more sexual and will experience greater sexuality and satisfaction with their husbands with sexual knowledge (Shakarmi, Davarnia, Zaharakar, & Gohari, 2014).

Our other finding also showed that sexual awareness was divorced among the three groups of women, women betrayed, and the women of the control group were different. In fact, marital relationships as part of a sex-emotional relationship play a significant role in consolidating family ties, and the awareness of couples about their role as spouses and the correct way of having sex is important. This awareness contributes to the mutual understanding of the spouses and promotes the cultural level of the family and the transfer of the right beliefs in sexual matters to the next generation (Mahdizadegan, Barekat, & Golparvar, 2016). Therefore, having sexual awareness in couples' life can increase family relationships and consolidate common life. In other words, proper sexual relations, defined as having healthy, responsible, and pleasurable relationships (Kendrick, 2000), serve as a precondition for enhancing emotions and feelings between couples (Boroffice, 1995), and more. Positive rounds make children better and more effective, and as a result, children are more responsive to dealing with their peers (Hanassab, & Tidwell, 1996). For example, one study showed that 54.5 percent of men had negative attitudes toward sexual relations, while women had a negative attitude of 59.5 percent in relation to sexual relations during pregnancy, On the other hand, women during pregnancy did not know 75 percent of sexual relations; on the other hand, 60 percent of men did not know about sexual relations during pregnancy of their spouses (Heydari, Kiani Asiabar, & Faghihizade, 2006).

Probably one of the things that causes divorce and infidelity in marital life is sexual inactivity in

marital life. As our results showed, women's awareness and sexual awareness of the control group were more divorced than women, and higher women were betrayed. Hence, educating and educating couples about gender issues may increase the role of sexual issues in couple's life. For example, in a research study, increased sexuality improves marital satisfaction. However, this increase in marital satisfaction has not continued (Mohammadi, Ozvekhoban, & Godarzi, 2014). In fact, the first step is to change the behavior of individuals in the same direction, having enough knowledge about it. Because having knowledge and having sufficient knowledge is a prerequisite for changing beliefs and changing the behavior of individuals (Ebadi-Fard, Fesharaki, Hedayat-Rad, & Mousavianpour, 2003). Of course, the proper training of sexual relations, whether in pre-marriage or after marriage, is not well-suited to our country (Hojat et al., 1999).

Limitations

Like all studies, this study unavoidably has some limitations. The first limitation of our research is the lack of comparisons of research variables between men and women, in other words, we did not use a male group to examine the role of gender on research variables. In addition, given that the selection of our samples was only from one single clinic, therefore, in order to generalize the results of this research, we need a larger sample. As we know, due to the cultural context of our society and the cultural taboos and unwillingness to share sexual issues, the last limitation of this study was the lack of cooperation of some participants.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings indicated the sexual desire, frequency, pleasure, and demand of the married couples during the COVID-19 quarantine. Moreover, there was gender-based difference in these sexual variables during the quarantine. It was also found that sexual frequency had a relationship with satisfaction with partner, satisfaction with marriage, economic status, emotional relationship, tobacco

use, and psychiatric disorder during COVID-19 quarantine.

Conflict of interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare. Page | 62

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