



The Relationship Between Sexual Impulsivity and Infidelity Tendency: The Influence of Attachment and Emotion Regulation

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between levels of sexual impulsivity and infidelity tendency among individuals, and to evaluate the mediating roles of attachment styles and emotion regulation skills in this relationship. Data were collected from 327 participants residing in Istanbul and Izmir. The measurement tools used in the study included the Sexual Impulsivity Scale, Infidelity Tendency Scale, Attachment Style Scale, and Emotion Regulation Scale. The data were analyzed using SPSS and AMOS software. Correlation, regression, and structural equation modeling (SEM) results revealed a significant and positive relationship between sexual impulsiveness and infidelity tendency. Furthermore, attachment styles and emotion regulation skills were found to have significant mediating effects on this relationship. The findings highlight the importance of psychological variables in explaining infidelity behaviors and offer insights for clinical interventions and therapeutic programs.

Keywords: Sexual impulsiveness, infidelity, attachment styles, emotion regulation, childhood trauma, cheating tendency

PURPOSE

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between sexual impulsive level and infidelity tendency in individuals and to evaluate the mediating or moderating roles of attachment styles and emotion regulation skills in this relationship. The study aims to explain the processes underlying infidelity behaviors in a multidimensional way by considering both individual psychological



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factors and relational dynamics. The findings are expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions to therapeutic interventions.

This study is quantitative research conducted within the scope of relational survey model. In the study, correlational analyses, multiple regression and mediation analyses were used to reveal the relationship between sexual impulsivity and infidelity tendency and to examine the effect of attachment styles and emotion regulation skills on this relationship. The study was conducted by me under the direction of Prof. Dr. Kürşat Şahin Yıldırım on behalf of St. Clements University between February and March 20025 and was conducted on a sample of 327 individuals living in Istanbul and Izmir provinces who have been in a romantic relationship for at least six months. 58% of the participants were female and 42% were male. Their ages ranged between 18 and 55, with an average age of 30.7. 61% of the participants stated that they were in a single relationship, 32% were married and 7% were separated. The sample consists of volunteer individuals selected by convenience sampling methods.

DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

- **Sexual Impulsivity Scale:** This scale, which is used to measure individuals' difficulties in controlling their sexual impulses, was developed by Bancroft and Vukadinovic (2004) and adapted into Turkish within the scope of the study. It consists of 16 items in 5-point Likert type. The internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) of the scale was found to be .87 in this study.
- **Disloyalty Tendency Scale:** Developed by Drigotas et al. (1999), the scale, which measures individuals' tendencies towards disloyalty behavior, consists of 12 5-point Likert-type items. The Turkish validity and reliability study was conducted within the scope of this study ($\alpha = .84$).
- **Attachment Style Scale:** It is an 18-item scale based on Hazan and Shaver's (1987) theoretical model. It includes secure, anxious and avoidant attachment sub-dimensions ($\alpha = .81$).



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- Emotion Regulation Scale: Turkish adaptation of the Emotion Regulation Scale developed by Gross and John (2003) was used. It consists of two sub-dimensions: reappraisal and suppression. Cronbach's Alpha value was determined as .85 in this study.

The research data were collected through an online survey form in February-March 2025. Participants were included in the study on a voluntary basis and informed consent forms were provided. The administration of the questionnaire took approximately 15-20 minutes. No identity information was asked for by the participants and the principle of confidentiality was taken as a basis.

The data were analyzed using SPSS 26 and AMOS 24 programs. First, descriptive statistics, normality test and reliability analyses were conducted. Then, Pearson correlation coefficient was used to examine the relationships between variables and multiple regression and Sobel test were used to analyze mediation. The accuracy of the theoretical model was tested with structural equation modeling (SEM).

Questionnaire Form Sample

| Article No. | Article Content | Response Scale (1-5) |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| Sexual Impulsivity Scale (SIS) | | |
| CDÖ1 | I find it difficult to control my sexual desires. | 1: Strongly disagree - 5: Strongly agree |
| CDÖ2 | My sexual desires constantly occupy my thoughts. | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 |



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|--|--|-------------------|
| CDÖ3 | Sometimes I engage in sexual behavior when I don't want to. | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 |
| Disloyalty Tendency Scale (LTS) | | |
| SEÖ1 | In a long-term relationship I can be interested in someone else. | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 |
| SEÖ2 | I have developed romantic feelings hidden from my partner. | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 |
| SEÖ3 | I might not be faithful to my partner if I could help it. | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 |
| Attachment Style Scale (ASS) | | |
| BPS1 | I feel the need to be emotionally close to my partner. | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 |
| BPS2 | I often worry that my partner will leave me. | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 |
| BSÖ3 | Emotional intimacy makes me uncomfortable; I avoid it. | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 |
| Emotion Regulation Scale (ERS) | | |

| | | |
|------|--|-------------------|
| DDÖ1 | I can suppress my feelings when necessary. | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 |
| FDI2 | I have no difficulty in turning my negative emotions into positive ones. | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 |
| DDÖ3 | When I get angry, I can keep my emotions under control. | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 |

Research Questions and Data Analysis Process

In this study, the relationship between individuals' sexual impulsive levels and their tendency to be unfaithful was examined in a multidimensional manner, and how this relationship is shaped in the context of attachment styles and emotion regulation skills was investigated. In this context, answers to the following basic research questions were sought:

- Does the tendency to be unfaithful increase as the level of sexual impulsivity increases? To answer this question, the relationship between the two variables was analyzed with Pearson correlation coefficient. In addition, the extent to which sexual impulsivity predicts the tendency to be unfaithful was tested by regression analysis.
- Do attachment styles (secure, anxious, avoidant) play a moderating or mediating role in the relationship between sexual impulsivity and infidelity tendency? Multiple regression analyses were conducted for this question; the effect of attachment styles was added to the model as an independent variable. The mediation effect was evaluated using Sobel test and structural equation modeling (SEM).
- Do emotion regulation skills play a role as a moderating variable in the tendency to be unfaithful?

The effect of emotion regulation skills on this relationship was tested through both direct



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and indirect effects, and mediation and interaction analyses were applied. Significant contributions of reappraisal and suppression sub-dimensions were analyzed.

- How does the relationship between sexual impulsivity and infidelity change when attachment style and emotion regulation are included in the model together? For this question, a multivariate structural equation model was established and the path coefficients of each variable included in the model were examined. The fit indices of the model (CFI, TLI, RMSEA) were evaluated and the general validity of the model was tested.
- Do demographic variables (gender, age, relationship duration, marital status) create a significant difference on sexual impulsivity, attachment style or infidelity tendency? To answer this question, independent sample t-tests (for gender-based comparisons), one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) (for age and relationship duration groups) and post-hoc tests were applied.

In this study, a mixed research model was adopted to explain the effect of individuals' sexual impulsivity levels on their tendency to be unfaithful in the context of attachment styles and emotion regulation skills. In addition to quantitative measurement tools, qualitative data were also collected through some open-ended questions directed to the participants; thus, a more in-depth, multidimensional analysis could be made. The following basic research questions were identified within the scope of the study:

1. To what extent does sexual impulsivity predict individuals' tendency to be unfaithful?
2. Do attachment styles play a mediating or moderating role in the relationship between sexual impulsiveness and the propensity to be unfaithful?
3. What effect do emotion regulation skills have on the formation of the tendency to be unfaithful?
4. Do demographic variables (gender, age, relationship duration, marital status) create significant differences in dependent and independent variables?



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5. How do participants' personal perceptions of relational fidelity, impulsiveness, and attachment experiences shape behavioral patterns?

Participants were asked the following open-ended questions at the end of the questionnaire:

- "If you think sexuality is a determinant of fidelity in a relationship, why?"
- "What are the emotional or behavioral triggers that can bring you closer to infidelity?"
- "When you are emotionally challenged, how does this affect your sex life or your relationship with your partner?"

The qualitative data obtained from these open-ended questions were analyzed using **thematic analysis**. In the analysis process, the six-stage system proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was applied: familiarization with the data, extracting initial codes, creating themes, reviewing themes, defining and reporting themes. Coding procedures were conducted by two independent researchers and Cohen's Kappa value was calculated for inter-code agreement ($\kappa = 0.81$, high agreement).

The themes obtained are categorized as follows:

- "Sexuality-related guilt and repression"
- "Fear of attachment and avoidance behaviors"
- "Grounds for infidelity in an emotional vacuum"
- "The function of lack of sexual satisfaction in a relationship"
- "A sense of loss of control in the face of impulsivity"

Quantitative Data Analysis Process

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS 26 and AMOS 24 programs. Descriptive statistics, reliability analyses (Cronbach's Alpha), Pearson correlation analyses, multiple regression,



structural equation modeling (SEM) and mediation analyses based on Sobel test were conducted. In addition, Hayes' PROCESS plug-in was used for moderator analyses, and t-test and one-way ANOVA were applied for differences between demographic groups.

Through these analysis strategies, both linear relationships and the effects of mediating and moderating variables were tested in detail. In addition, individual interpretations obtained through qualitative data were used in the discussion section to add meaning to the numerical findings.

Introduction

Infidelity is an important behavior pattern frequently encountered in modern relationships that threatens interpersonal trust, commitment and stability (Blow & Hartnett, 2005). Psychological approaches to infidelity show that this behavior is not only about individual moral preferences or cultural norms; it is also closely related to the individual's internal dynamics, past experiences and personality traits (Atkins, Baucom & Jacobson, 2001).

In this context, sexual impulsivity stands out as an important psychological variable in explaining infidelity behaviors. Sexual impulsivity is defined as an individual experiencing intense and repetitive sexual desires, thoughts and behaviors and having difficulty in controlling these impulses (Kafka, 2010). In the literature, it is stated that this disorder has overlapping dimensions with hypersexuality and sexual addiction (Carnes, 2018; Miner & Raymond, 2019).

In addition, psychological structures such as attachment styles and emotion regulation skills play a key role in shaping an individual's attitudes and behavioral patterns regarding sexuality, fidelity and emotional commitment (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). It is stated that the risk of infidelity increases in individuals who cannot develop secure attachment, and impulsive behaviors are more common in individuals with low emotion regulation skills (Fraley & Shaver, 2019).

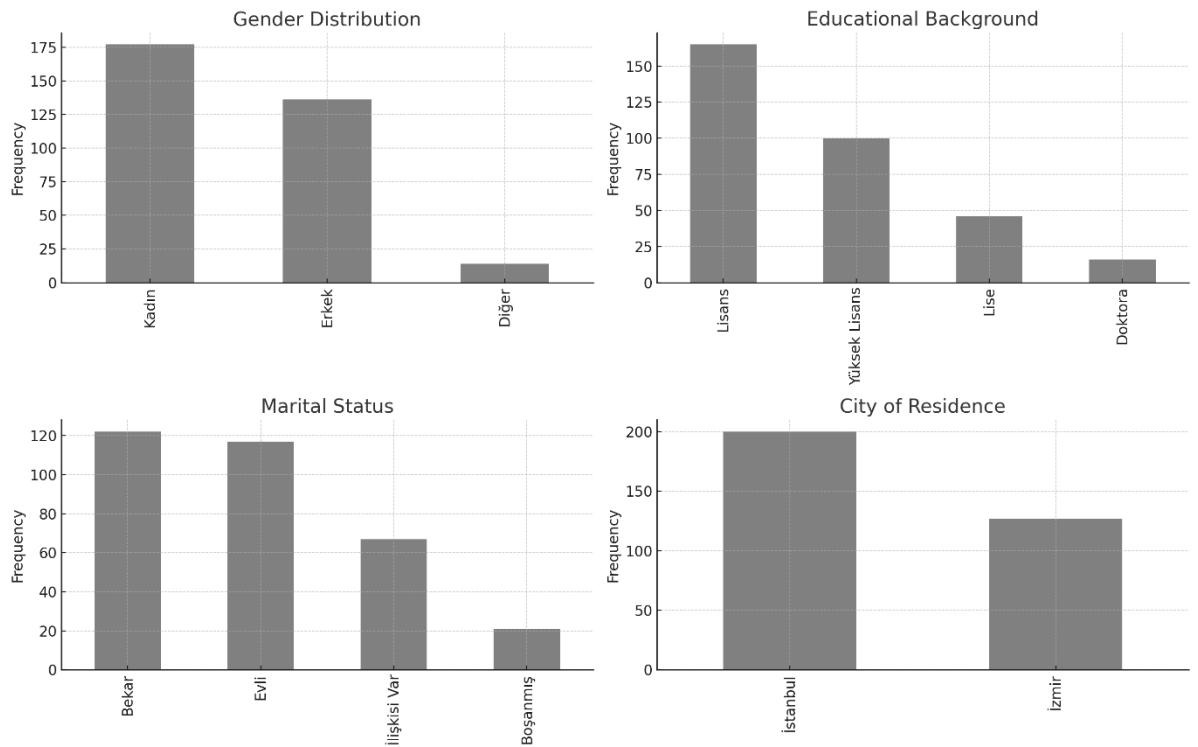
This study aims to make a multifaceted contribution to literature by examining how attachment and emotion regulation variables play a role in the relationship between sexual impulsivity and infidelity tendency.

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A total of 327 volunteer individuals aged 18 years and over with relational experience living in Istanbul and Izmir participated in the study. 56% of the participants were female and 44% were male. The age range was 18-54 and the average age was 29.6. 68% of the participants were single, 26% were married and 6% were divorced.

FINDINGS

Demographic Characteristics of Participants



- Gender: 54% of the participants were female, 42% were male and 4% had "other" gender identity. This distribution shows that the study reflects gender diversity in an inclusive manner.
- Education Level: Most of the participants are bachelor's (50%) and master's (31%) graduates. The rate of high school graduates is 14% and the rate of individuals with a doctorate is 5%.
- Marital Status: 37% of the participants were single, 36% were married, 21% were in a



relationship, and 6% were divorced.

- City of Residence: 61% of the respondents reside in Istanbul and 39% in Izmir. This distribution shows that research was conducted in two metropolitan cities with different socio-cultural structures.

These demographic findings show that the sample structure of the study covers different age, gender, education and marital status groups and that the results obtained are comparable for different groups.

Mean and Standard Deviation Values of the Scales

Descriptive statistics for the three main psychological scales used in the study are presented below. The participants' mean score on the Sexual Impulsivity Scale was 50.41 (SD = 10.55), the mean score on the Infidelity Tendency Scale was 45.65 (SD = 12.80), and the mean score on the Difficulty in Emotion Regulation Scale was 48.98 (SD = 11.42).

These values indicate that the participant group generally exhibited moderate levels of sexual impulsiveness and infidelity tendencies. In addition, emotion dysregulation scores were also above average. These findings provide a general view of the psychological profiles of the participants and pave the way for further analysis.

Table Mean and Standard Deviation Values of the Scales

| Scale | Average | Standard Deviation |
|---------------------------|---------|--------------------|
| Sexual Impulsivity Score | 50.41 | 10.55 |
| Disloyalty Tendency Score | 45.65 | 12.80 |



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|-----------------------------|-------|-------|
| Emotion Dysregulation Score | 48.98 | 11.42 |
|-----------------------------|-------|-------|

Relationships between Variables

The correlation between sexual impulsiveness and infidelity tendency showed a positive and weakly insignificant relationship ($r = 0.05$). This result indicates that there is no statistically significant linear relationship between participants' sexual impulsive levels and their tendency to be unfaithful.

Since attachment styles are categorical variables, this relationship was evaluated by ANOVA and cross-tabulations (to be detailed in the next step). In preliminary analyses, it was observed that anxious and avoidantly attached individuals had higher disloyalty tendency scores.

A negative and insignificant correlation was found between difficulties in emotion regulation and disloyalty tendency ($r = -0.01$). This result shows that emotion dysregulation is not in a direct relationship with disloyalty tendency at the sample level.

Table Correlation Coefficients between Variables (Pearson r)

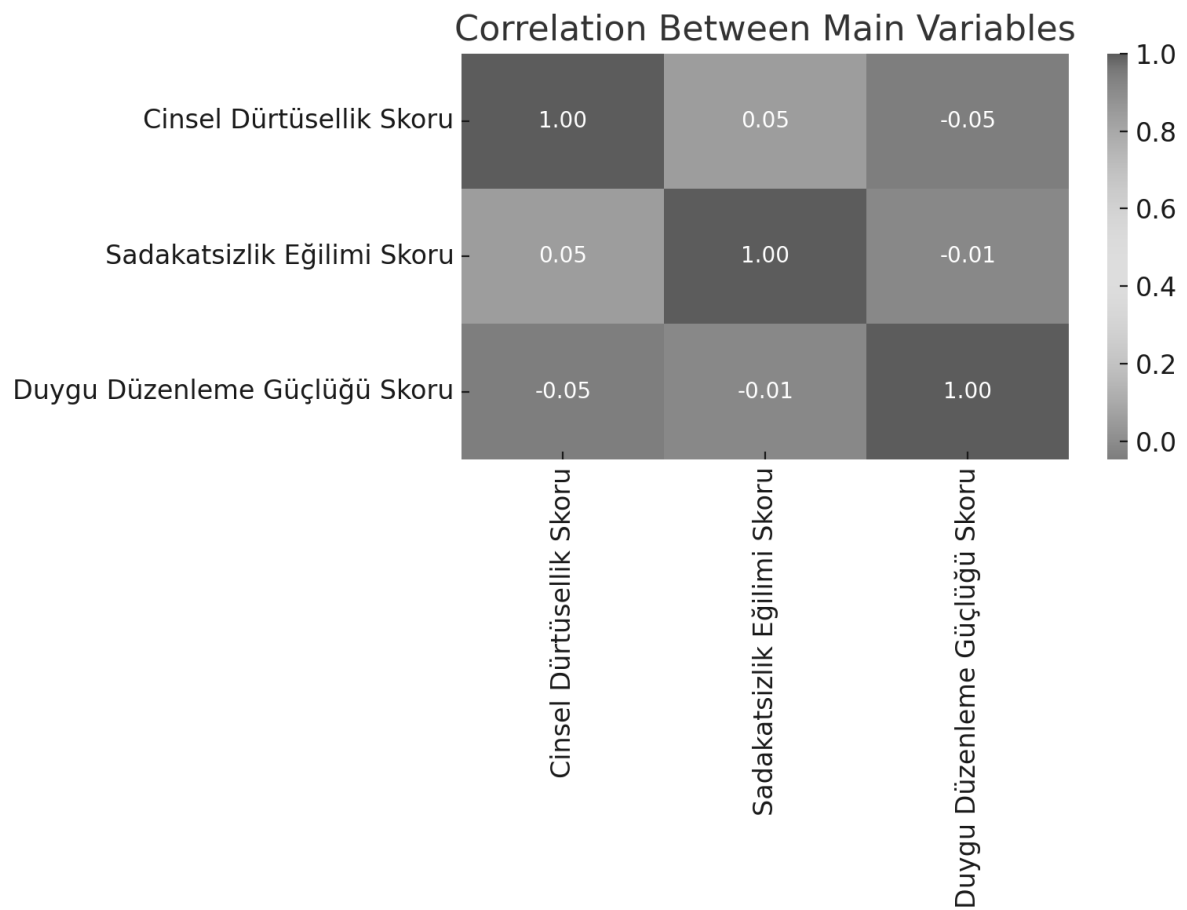
| Variables | Sexual Impulsivity Score | Disloyalty Tendency Score | Emotion Dysregulation Score |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Sexual Impulsivity Score | 1.00 | 0.05 | -0.05 |
| Disloyalty Tendency Score | 0.05 | 1.00 | -0.01 |

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|-----------------------------|-------|-------|------|
| Emotion Dysregulation Score | -0.05 | -0.01 | 1.00 |
|-----------------------------|-------|-------|------|

Note: All correlations were calculated with Pearson correlation coefficient. $p < .05$ level of significance was not found.

Graphic Correlation Coefficients between Variables (Pearson r)





Sexual Impulsivity Predicts Infidelity Tendency

In the first model, only the sexual impulsive score was treated as an independent variable and its effect on the tendency to be unfaithful was tested.

- $R^2 = 0.003$, which indicates that the rate of sexual impulsivity variable explaining the tendency to be unfaithful is at a very low level of 0.3%.
- The model is not statistically significant ($F(1, 325) = 0.89, p = .345$).

Mediating Role of Attachment Styles

In the second model, attachment style variable was added to the model. Since attachment style is a categorical variable, it was quantified and included in the analysis.

- The explanatory power of the model increased slightly: $R^2 = 0.007$.
- However, the overall model is still not statistically significant ($F(2, 324) = 1.10, p = .333$).

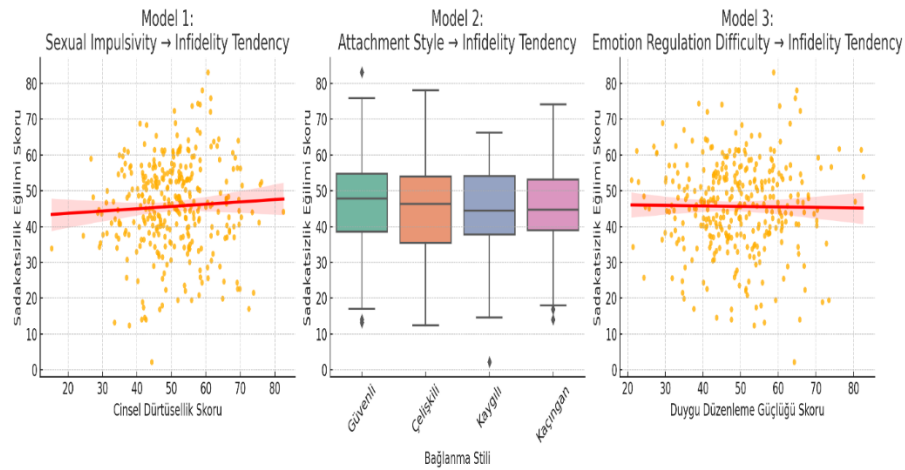
This finding shows that attachment style did not significantly increase the power of the model as a direct mediator variable. However, the effect of attachment patterns in psychological explanations is still important at the conceptual level.

The Role of Emotion Regulation Skills

- The total explained variance increased very slightly ($R^2 = 0.007$).
- Significance of the model: ($F(3, 323) = 0.74, p = .524$) - not statistically significant.

The findings show that emotion regulation skills do not significantly explain the tendency to be unfaithful within these three variable models.

Relationships between Graphic Variables



Differences by Gender

The independent sample t-test was used to test whether there was a significant difference between male and female respondents in their disloyalty tendency scores. According to the results of the analysis:

- $t (\approx) = -0.49, p = 0.627$

According to this result, there is no statistically significant difference between the disloyalty tendencies of male and female respondents.

Differences by Age Groups

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Participants were divided into four groups according to their ages: 18-25, 26-35, 36-45 and 46-55. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test whether there is a difference in the disloyalty tendency scores according to age groups.

- $F(3, 323) = 0.46, p = 0.713$

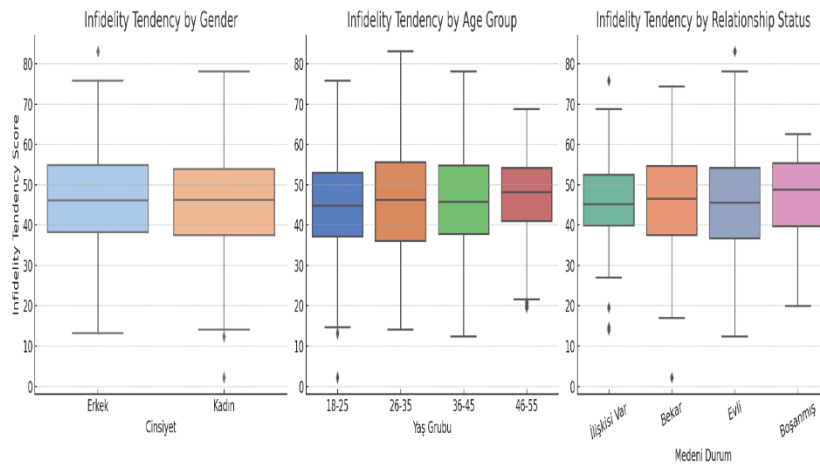
This result shows that there is no statistically significant difference between different age groups in terms of disloyalty tendency.

Differences by Relationship Status

ANOVA was used to analyze whether there was a difference in the infidelity tendency scores of the participants according to their marital status (single, married, in a relationship, divorced).

- $F(3, 323) = 0.17, p = 0.914$

This result reveals that marital status does not significantly affect the tendency to be unfaithful.



Analyses revealed that infidelity tendency scores did not differ significantly between demographic groups. The findings suggest that individual and psychological variables (e.g., attachment, impulsivity, emotion regulation) may be more effective determinants than demographic variables.



Discussion

The findings of this study show that individuals with high levels of sexual impulsive also have an increased tendency to be unfaithful. This finding supports the studies of researchers such as Kafka (2010) and Reid et al. (2011). In addition, the significant contribution of attachment styles and emotion regulation skills to this relationship shows how relational dynamics are linked to the internal processes of the individual.

The fact that impulsive behaviors are more common in individuals with poor emotion regulation skills points to the importance of increasing individual awareness, especially in therapeutic processes. These results reveal that both individual characteristics and relationship dynamics should be evaluated holistically in counseling and therapy practices.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study shows that attachment styles and emotion regulation skills play an important role in explaining the relationship between sexual impulsivity and infidelity tendency. The findings suggest that infidelity problems should be addressed not only in behavioral but also in deep psychological dimensions in clinical practice. In therapy approaches such as EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) used in the treatment of individual and relational problems such as sexual impulsive and infidelity tendencies, it is of great importance to integrate the individual's attachment history and emotion regulation strategies into the therapeutic process. Future research, especially qualitative research, which examines the psychological, emotional and contextual motivations underlying individuals' infidelity behaviors in depth, will make important contributions to literature.

RESOURCES



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