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# Investigating the Mediating Role of Self-Compassion and Cognitive Emotion Regulation in the Relationship Between Experiential Avoidance and Tendency Toward Extramarital Relationships Among Married Women

Hossein. Ebrahimi[1*], Ghazale. Nowrozidoost[2]

1 Department of Psychology, Fir.C., Islamic Azad University, Firoozabad, Iran
2 Department of Psychology, Shi.C., Islamic Azad University, Shiraz, Iran
*Correspondence: hossein.ebrahimi7425@iau.ir

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## ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted with the aim of examining a causal model of experiential avoidance, self-compassion, cognitive emotion regulation, and the tendency toward extramarital relationships among married women in the city of Shiraz. This research employed a correlational design within the framework of structural equation modeling. The statistical population consisted of all married women residing in Shiraz during the winter of 2025, from whom 250 individuals were selected through convenience sampling. Data were collected using the Whatley Tendency Toward Extramarital Relationships Questionnaire (2008), the Neff Self-Compassion Scale (2003), the Garnefski Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (2001), and the Gámez Multidimensional Experiential Avoidance Questionnaire (2001). Data analysis was performed using SPSS version 24 and SmartPLS software. Findings from the model analysis indicated that all direct and indirect paths among the variables were statistically significant, and the model demonstrated an acceptable fit. Accordingly, it can be concluded that experiential avoidance, self-compassion, and cognitive emotion regulation exert significant effects on married women's tendency toward extramarital relationships.

**Keywords:** tendency toward extramarital relationships, self-compassion, cognitive emotion regulation, experiential avoidance, married women

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## Introduction

Infidelity and the psychological, relational, and emotional mechanisms that contribute to extramarital tendencies remain among the most challenging issues in marital and family research. As societies undergo rapid cultural and technological transitions, many relational systems—including marriage—are confronted with new pressures that shape intimacy, attachment, and commitment. Contemporary scholarship conceptualizes infidelity not merely as a behavioral transgression but as a multidimensional outcome rooted in emotional regulation processes, cognitive patterns, individual vulnerabilities, and the relational dynamics between partners (1). Studies consistently show that infidelity can undermine marital trust, emotional

security, and long-term well-being, creating persistent relational disruptions even when the relationship continues (2). These relational ruptures often emerge in a broader context of emotional strain, communication difficulties, and maladaptive coping patterns that accumulate over time.

Emotion regulation difficulties have been widely recognized as a significant predictor of maladaptive relational behaviors, including extramarital involvement (3). When individuals struggle to manage negative affect or interpersonal stress, they may seek external sources of emotional validation or escape, increasing their vulnerability to infidelity-related behaviors. Given that marriage requires continuous emotional labor, emotional regulation serves as a crucial protective factor—or a risk factor when ineffective—in relational stability (4). Cognitive emotion regulation strategies, such as rumination, catastrophizing, or self-blame, tend to escalate interpersonal conflict, diminish intimacy, and foster emotional distancing, all of which can create psychological conditions conducive to seeking alternative relational outlets (5). Conversely, adaptive cognitive strategies, such as positive refocusing and reappraisal, play a moderating role in enhancing dyadic adjustment and reducing relational dissatisfaction (6).

Experiential avoidance, defined as an unwillingness to remain in contact with aversive internal experiences, has emerged as another central variable in understanding relational dysfunction (7). Individuals who excessively avoid difficult emotions often rely on maladaptive behavioral strategies, including withdrawal, emotional disengagement, or seeking reinforcement outside the relationship, which may ultimately intensify marital strain. Research indicates that experiential avoidance predicts lower-quality dyadic interactions and diminished relationship satisfaction, and it mediates the link between stress, trauma, and relational outcomes (8). Because experiential avoidance prevents individuals from addressing sources of distress, it may increase susceptibility to emotionally charged decisions—such as engaging in infidelity—when emotional discomfort escalates (9). Longitudinal studies also suggest that experiential avoidance compromises psychological functioning over time and can exacerbate negative emotional cycles within intimate partnerships (10).

Self-compassion has recently been identified as a psychological construct that can buffer the impact of emotional vulnerability, relational distress, and experiential avoidance. Defined as treating oneself with kindness, recognizing shared humanity, and maintaining mindful awareness during emotional pain, self-compassion promotes healthier coping and improved interpersonal functioning (11). Self-compassionate individuals are less likely to rely on avoidance-based coping, more likely to regulate emotions adaptively, and more capable of maintaining relational balance during periods of conflict (12). Positive links between self-compassion and relational well-being have been observed across cultures and relationship stages, suggesting its broad influence on both internal emotional processes and interpersonal dynamics (13). Self-compassion also predicts higher relationship satisfaction and reduced jealousy, highlighting its role in reducing reactivity to perceived relational threats (14). Moreover, partners who demonstrate greater self-compassion tend to display more understanding and acceptance within the relationship, supporting healthier dyadic functioning (15).

Self-compassion may also act as a deterrent against infidelity-related cognitions and behaviors. Individuals with lower self-compassion tend to engage in self-criticism, emotional suppression, and maladaptive coping—patterns that increase their vulnerability to relational dissatisfaction and external validation seeking (16). Research suggests that self-compassion contributes to forgiveness processes within

couples and facilitates constructive responses to relational transgressions (17). Higher self-compassion is associated with more secure attachment styles, greater empathy, and healthier conflict resolution, all of which can reduce emotional conditions that predispose individuals to extramarital involvement (18). Experimental work further shows that self-compassion can reduce aggressive impulses triggered by social exclusion, underscoring its regulatory role during interpersonal threat (19). Collectively, these studies highlight the potential of self-compassion to serve as a protective factor against dynamics that escalate toward infidelity.

Cognitive emotion regulation and self-compassion are also deeply intertwined. Research demonstrates that individuals with higher self-compassion tend to use adaptive cognitive strategies such as acceptance, positive reappraisal, and perspective-taking, which reduce emotional turmoil and promote resilience (20). Conversely, individuals with low self-compassion may overuse maladaptive cognitive strategies such as rumination and catastrophizing, contributing to emotional dysregulation and interpersonal conflict (21). The interactive effects of cognitive regulation and self-compassion have gained particular attention in understanding relational satisfaction, perceived stress, and psychological well-being (22). Studies show that cognitive reappraisal enhances relational intimacy and emotional stability, whereas maladaptive strategies predict conflict, withdrawal, and negative communication patterns in marriage (23). As a result, difficulties in emotional regulation—especially when paired with low self-compassion—can significantly increase the likelihood of infidelity-related behaviors (3).

Family relationships and early relational experiences also shape these psychological processes. Systematic reviews indicate that positive family functioning supports emotional stability, adaptive coping, and secure relational patterns in adulthood, whereas negative family experiences increase risk for maladaptive emotion regulation and experiential avoidance (24). These patterns become particularly salient during emotionally intense transitions such as early marriage or parenthood, where relational adjustment and stress levels fluctuate significantly (25). Infidelity, as shown in longitudinal research, not only undermines trust and satisfaction but can also adversely impact long-term physical and mental health outcomes (2). Thus, understanding the psychological mechanisms that contribute to extramarital tendencies is essential for designing preventive and therapeutic interventions that support marital stability.

The growing field of infidelity research has expanded beyond behavioral descriptions to include moral, emotional, and cognitive predictors of fidelity. For example, principled faithfulness—a construct capturing moral reasoning behind fidelity—has been found to negatively predict extramarital tendencies and is closely associated with emotion regulation patterns (26). Similarly, emotional reactions to infidelity are influenced by self-compassion, forgiveness, and cognitive appraisal processes, suggesting that internal regulatory mechanisms shape both attitudes toward infidelity and responses to relational breaches (27). Psychological models of extramarital involvement now acknowledge not only situational factors but also complex internal processes embedded within personal histories, cognitive styles, and affective regulation (1).

Recent findings have increasingly pointed to the combined effects of experiential avoidance, self-compassion, and emotion regulation strategies in predicting relational outcomes. Experiential avoidance has been shown to play a mediating role between stressful family patterns and marital satisfaction (9), while self-compassion adds a protective dimension by modulating emotional responses and improving interpersonal functioning (28). Mindfulness-related constructs, including self-compassion and reduced

experiential avoidance, have also been linked to lower perceived stress and improved psychological resilience (12). These constructs interact in dynamic ways: avoidance diminishes emotional openness; maladaptive cognitive strategies intensify interpersonal strain; and low self-compassion exacerbates negative self-evaluations, collectively elevating risk for extramarital inclinations (11). Emotional regulation appears at the core of this triad, shaping how individuals process relational dissatisfaction, manage conflict, and respond to unmet emotional needs (4). The interconnectedness of these variables emphasizes the need for integrative models examining their simultaneous influence on infidelity tendencies.

Despite the extensive international literature, fewer studies have examined how experiential avoidance, self-compassion, and cognitive emotion regulation jointly predict extramarital tendencies among married women in Middle Eastern contexts. Cultural norms, relational expectations, and gendered roles may uniquely shape how these psychological processes manifest and how women interpret relational stressors. This gap further highlights the necessity of research that goes beyond isolated variables and investigates a structural model encompassing both mediating and direct pathways.

The aim of this study is to examine the causal model of experiential avoidance, self-compassion, cognitive emotion regulation, and the tendency toward extramarital relationships among married women.

## Methods and Materials

### *Study Design and Participants*

The present study is applied in terms of its objective and descriptive-correlational in terms of its method, using a structural equation modeling approach. The statistical population consisted of all married women residing in Shiraz during the winter of 2025. Considering that this study included four observed variables and in order to obtain more accurate results and compensate for potential sample attrition or incomplete responses, a sample size of 250 married women residing in Shiraz was selected. The sampling method used in this study was non-random convenience sampling.

### *Data Collection*

**Self-Compassion Scale (SCS).** This scale was developed by Neff (2003) to assess the level of self-compassion. The original version includes 26 items scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “almost never = 1” to “almost always = 5.” The scoring range is 26 to 130, with higher scores indicating greater self-compassion. Neff and colleagues (2003) confirmed the construct validity of this scale using confirmatory factor analysis and reported a Cronbach’s alpha reliability of .92. In Iran, Alipour et al. (2014) standardized the scale among a sample of women and reported a Cronbach’s alpha of .76 and construct validity of .73.

**Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ).** This questionnaire was developed by Garnefski, Kraaij, and Spinhoven (2001) to measure the cognitive strategies individuals use after experiencing negative or stressful events. The original version includes 36 items assessing nine cognitive emotion regulation strategies: acceptance, positive refocusing, planning, positive reappraisal, catastrophizing, blaming others, rumination, putting into perspective, and self-blame. Responses are rated on a five-point Likert scale (“never” to “always”), with higher scores indicating greater use of each strategy. In Iran, the questionnaire was translated and its psychometric properties evaluated by Yousefi (2003). Results showed satisfactory construct validity. Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for the subscales ranged from

.25 to .70, and reliability for the total scale was reported as acceptable. Shorter versions of the CERQ have also been validated in subsequent studies within Iranian populations.

**Multidimensional Experiential Avoidance Questionnaire (MEAQ).** This questionnaire was developed by Gámez, Chmielewski, Kotov, Ruggero, Suzuki, and Watson (2011) to assess various dimensions of experiential avoidance. The original version contains 62 items scored on a six-point Likert scale ("strongly false about me" to "strongly true about me"). The subscales include behavioral avoidance, distress aversion, procrastination, distraction/suppression, repression/denial, and distress endurance. *International psychometric properties:* Gámez et al. (2011) reported internal consistency coefficients ranging from .91 to .95 and found convergent validity with the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (AAQ) at r = .74. *Psychometric properties in Iran:* Moradi, Barghi Irani, Baghian Kolmerz, Kariminejad, and Zabet (2018) evaluated the Persian version. Confirmatory factor analysis supported the six-factor structure, and model-fit indices (GFI, AGFI, CFI, RMSEA) were within acceptable ranges. Cronbach's alpha reliability for the total scale was .84, and for the subscales ranged from .55 to .89. Differential validity was also demonstrated, showing significant differences between clinical and non-clinical groups on all subscales.

**Whatley Infidelity Tendency Scale.** This scale was developed by Mark A. Whatley (2008) to assess individuals' inclination toward engaging in extramarital relationships. The instrument includes 12 items rated on a five-point Likert scale ("strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"), with higher scores indicating a greater tendency toward extramarital involvement. *International psychometric properties:* Whatley (2008) reported a Cronbach's alpha of approximately .80, and the construct validity of the scale has been supported through associations with other marital attitude and behavior measures. *Psychometric properties in Iran:* The translated version has been used in several Iranian studies, reporting internal consistency coefficients between .74 and .85. Content validity has been confirmed by psychology and counseling experts, and confirmatory factor analysis has validated its unidimensional structure.

### *Data analysis*

Data analysis was conducted using structural equation modeling with SPSS version 24 and SmartPLS software.

## Findings and Results

The results indicated that in terms of age, the highest frequency belonged to the 31–40 age group (49%), reflecting the predominance of middle-aged individuals in the sample, whereas the lowest frequency was related to participants under 20 years old (6.5%). Regarding educational level, the majority of participants held a bachelor's degree (50.4%), suggesting that the sample predominantly consisted of individuals with higher education. In contrast, only 7.6% of the participants had a master's degree or higher. Examination of occupational status showed that the largest group consisted of homemakers (47.6%) and the smallest group consisted of students (16.7%), which may reflect the demographic structure of married women in the studied community.

In terms of marriage duration, the highest frequency was observed among individuals with more than 10 years of marital life (46.8%), indicating the predominance of long-term marriage experience among the respondents, whereas only 12% were in their first year of marriage. Furthermore, regarding the number of

children, the highest frequency belonged to women with two children (32.4%), and the lowest frequency belonged to those with three or more children (14.4%), suggesting that having two children is the prevailing pattern in this population.

Table (1) presents the mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis of the research variables. The skewness and kurtosis values for all variables ranged between –2 and +2, indicating the normal distribution of the data and their adequacy for advanced statistical analyses such as structural equation modeling.

**Table 1. Description of Research Variables**

| Variable | N | Mean | SD | Kurtosis | Skewness |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Experiential Avoidance | 250 | 46.94 | 44.23 | −1.33 | 1.15 |
| Self-Compassion | 250 | 146.63 | 17.16 | −1.27 | 1.81 |
| Cognitive Emotion Regulation | 250 | 93.90 | 32.16 | −1.46 | 0.72 |
| Infidelity Tendency | 250 | 39.71 | 14.36 | 0.56 | −0.08 |

To determine construct reliability, composite reliability was used. The results showed that the selected items for measuring the constructs were appropriate (all factor loadings exceeded .60), and Cronbach's alpha values for all constructs were above .70, indicating acceptable reliability. The average variance extracted (AVE) for all constructs was above .50, meaning that the variables had adequate convergent validity. Composite reliability values for the constructs were also above .70, indicating strong internal consistency for the reflective measurement models. Therefore, each construct demonstrated desirable validity and reliability for measuring the research variables.

**Table 2. Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) for Discriminant Validity**

| Variable | Experiential Avoidance | Self-Compassion | Cognitive Emotion Regulation | Infidelity Tendency |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Experiential Avoidance | --- | | | |
| Self-Compassion | .484 | --- | | |
| Cognitive Emotion Regulation | .415 | .523 | --- | |
| Infidelity Tendency | .540 | .470 | .441 | --- |

Table (2) shows that all HTMT values were below .90; therefore, discriminant validity between the constructs was acceptable.

**Table 3. Fornell–Larcker Criterion**

| Variable | Experiential Avoidance | Self-Compassion | Cognitive Emotion Regulation | Infidelity Tendency |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Experiential Avoidance | .767 | | | |
| Self-Compassion | .428 | .816 | | |
| Cognitive Emotion Regulation | .388 | .478 | .794 | |
| Infidelity Tendency | .512 | .369 | .292 | .757 |

Table (3) shows that the constructs were clearly distinct from each other, meaning that the values on the diagonal (square root of the AVE) for each latent variable were higher than the correlations of that variable with the other latent variables in the reflective model.

**Table 4. Structural Model Fit Indices**

| Variable | $R^2$ | $f^2$ | $Q^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|
| Marital Commitment | .580 | .240 | .342 |
| Marital Intimacy | --- | .751 | --- |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Couples' Quality of Life | .345 | .320 | .188 |
| Tendency Toward Divorce | .369 | --- | .176 |

According to Table (4), the $R^2$ values of .580, .345, and .369 for the endogenous variables indicate an acceptable level of structural model fit. The $Q^2$ redundancy index reflects the predictive accuracy of the model; when an endogenous construct achieves $Q^2$ values of .02, .15, or .35, it indicates weak, moderate, or strong predictive power, respectively. The obtained values of .342, .188, and .176 for the endogenous variables confirm the acceptable predictive relevance and structural model fit.

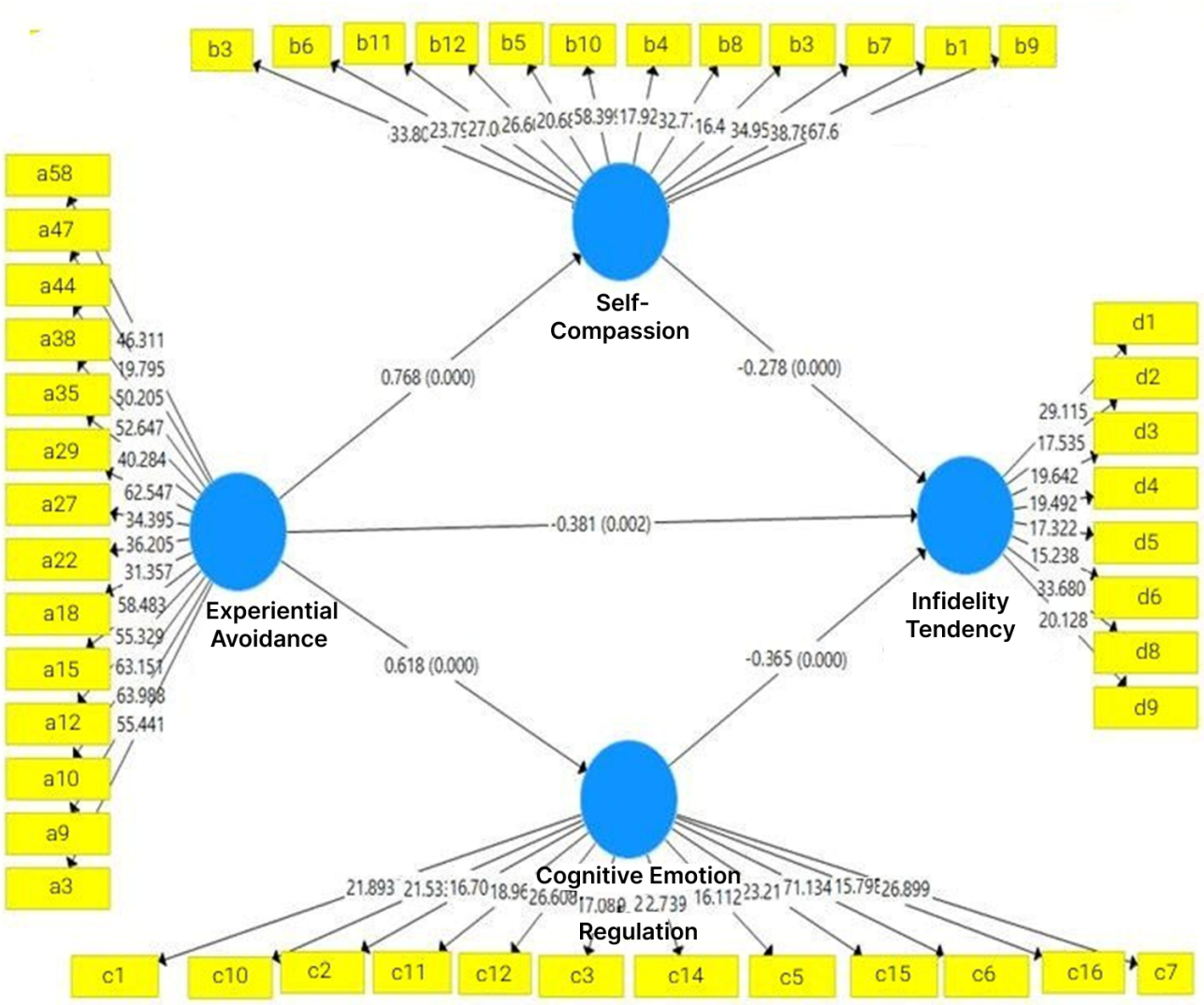


**Figure 1. Final Model for Testing the Hypotheses (Standardized Path Coefficients and Significance Levels)**

The output of Table (5) presents the estimated path coefficients and significance levels for the direct and indirect pathways in the structural model.

**Table 5. Results of Partial Least Squares Analysis and Hypothesis Testing**

| Path | Path Coefficient | Standard Error | t-value | p-value | Result |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Experiential Avoidance → Infidelity Tendency | .448 | .06 | 4.603 | .000 | Supported |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Experiential Avoidance → Self-Compassion | −.368 | .04 | 19.038 | .000 | Supported |
| Experiential Avoidance → Cognitive Emotion Regulation | −.528 | .046 | 13.381 | .000 | Supported |
| Self-Compassion → Infidelity Tendency | −.481 | .119 | 3.191 | .002 | Supported |
| Cognitive Emotion Regulation → Infidelity Tendency | −.315 | .071 | 5.141 | .000 | Supported |
| Experiential Avoidance → Self-Compassion → Infidelity Tendency | .213 | .055 | 5.723 | .000 | Supported |
| Experiential Avoidance → Cognitive Emotion Regulation → Infidelity Tendency | .536 | .117 | 6.676 | .000 | Supported |

**Table 6. Model Fit Indices**

| Index | Description | Recommended Value | Estimated Value |
|---|---|---|---|
| SRMR | Standardized Root Mean Square Residual | < .10 | .054 |
| RMS_theta | Root Mean Square Theta | < .12 | .015 |
| Chi-square | Chi-Square Criterion | --- | 2953 |
| NFI | Normed Fit Index | > .70 | .831 |

Based on the index values in Table (6), the model demonstrates satisfactory fit, indicating that the conceptual model of the research has good adequacy and alignment. This confirms that the relationships specified among the variables are theoretically coherent. Therefore, the causal model linking experiential avoidance, self-compassion, cognitive emotion regulation, and infidelity tendency among married women is well-fitted to the data.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed that experiential avoidance exerted a significant direct effect on the tendency toward extramarital relationships among married women, and this result is consistent with a growing body of research demonstrating that avoidance of internal emotional experiences increases vulnerability to relational disengagement and maladaptive coping behaviors. Studies show that individuals who rely heavily on experiential avoidance often attempt to escape or suppress distress rather than confront relational challenges directly, making them more likely to seek alternative sources of emotional validation or relief outside the marriage (7). This pattern aligns with findings from longitudinal research showing that experiential avoidance contributes to deteriorating psychological functioning and poorer relationship outcomes over time (10). Similarly, evidence indicates that avoidance-based coping fuels interpersonal tension, weakens intimacy, and heightens emotional disconnection, all of which may encourage extramarital involvement when distress becomes overwhelming (3). Therefore, the present findings corroborate these established observations, suggesting that experiential avoidance creates a cognitive-emotional environment in which extramarital tendencies become more accessible as a form of escape rather than deliberate betrayal.

The significant negative association found between experiential avoidance and self-compassion further strengthens the theoretical argument that avoidance disrupts one's ability to relate to oneself with kindness and emotional balance. Prior research demonstrates that individuals with high experiential avoidance often experience elevated self-criticism, emotional suppression, and a diminished capacity for mindful acceptance (22). Conversely, self-compassionate individuals face distress with emotional openness and nonjudgment, reducing the likelihood of internal conflict escalation (11). The current findings parallel results from studies showing that self-compassion and experiential avoidance are inversely related and function as opposing emotional regulation tendencies (12). This relationship is further supported by research indicating that experiential avoidance predicts poorer emotion regulation, higher marital dissatisfaction, and less adaptive

conflict management, especially during stressful relational periods such as early marriage or transition to parenthood (25). Thus, the inverse relationship between experiential avoidance and self-compassion observed in this study aligns well with contemporary frameworks emphasizing the buffering role of self-compassion against maladaptive emotional avoidance.

Similarly, the negative impact of experiential avoidance on cognitive emotion regulation strategies observed in this study is consistent with previous evidence demonstrating that avoidance inhibits the development and use of adaptive cognitive strategies. Studies indicate that individuals who avoid internal experiences engage more frequently in maladaptive strategies such as catastrophizing, self-blame, and rumination (5). Research further suggests that experiential avoidance undermines constructive reappraisal and perspective-taking, preventing individuals from cognitively restructuring relational conflicts in healthy ways (6). These findings mirror the results of the present study, emphasizing that experiential avoidance interrupts cognitive engagement and restricts psychological flexibility, thereby increasing vulnerability to relational strain and subsequent extramarital tendency. Longitudinal analyses support this interpretation by demonstrating that experiential avoidance mediates the negative effects of marital stress and family dysfunction on relational satisfaction (8). Therefore, the current findings reinforce the theoretical view that avoidance behaviors create emotional turbulence that is cognitively unmanaged, ultimately amplifying relational dissatisfaction.

The results also revealed that both self-compassion and cognitive emotion regulation had significant negative effects on extramarital tendencies, consistent with previous research indicating that higher self-compassion enhances relational stability and reduces susceptibility to extradyadic involvement. Studies show that individuals with greater self-compassion demonstrate healthier conflict management, more adaptive coping responses, and higher resilience when facing relational threats (13). This has been linked to reduced jealousy, better emotional balance, and fewer impulsive decisions during interpersonal distress (14). Research further demonstrates that self-compassion promotes secure attachment patterns, non-defensive communication, and emotional openness, all of which protect against behaviors such as infidelity (15). Moreover, findings suggest that self-compassion predicts greater marital satisfaction and relational well-being and can counteract the emotional vulnerabilities that often precede infidelity (18). Therefore, the negative association between self-compassion and extramarital tendencies in the present study aligns with an extensive literature illustrating self-compassion as a stabilizing force within intimate relationships.

Cognitive emotion regulation also emerged as a protective factor, with adaptive strategies reducing extramarital inclination. Prior work establishes that cognitive reappraisal fosters healthier relational dynamics, increases intimacy, and reduces the psychological triggers that often lead to extramarital involvement (6). The current findings are consistent with research showing that maladaptive cognitive strategies predict higher relational conflict, emotional exhaustion, and marital dissatisfaction, all of which are known precursors to infidelity-related behaviors (23). For instance, rumination exacerbates emotional disconnection, while catastrophizing accelerates conflict escalation, pushing individuals to seek emotional relief outside their primary relationship (21). Conversely, positive refocusing, acceptance, and constructive reframing strengthen the emotional and cognitive structures that maintain commitment and fidelity within marriage. These findings converge to suggest that cognitive emotion regulation represents a central

mechanism through which individuals manage relational stress, influence interpersonal processes, and maintain relational fidelity.

Process-oriented interpretations of the results further reveal that both self-compassion and cognitive emotion regulation played significant mediating roles in the relationship between experiential avoidance and extramarital tendencies. This mediating mechanism supports the view that experiential avoidance indirectly facilitates infidelity by weakening self-compassionate responses and impairing constructive emotional regulation. Studies show that when experiential avoidance diminishes emotional clarity and acceptance, individuals are less likely to apply adaptive cognitive strategies, resulting in heightened stress and relational dissatisfaction (12). At the same time, low self-compassion intensifies emotional reactivity, makes individuals more sensitive to interpersonal disappointments, and decreases emotional resilience during conflict (11). The mediation findings align with research demonstrating that experiential avoidance reduces relational satisfaction by undermining psychological flexibility, while self-compassion restores balance by promoting emotional steadiness and prosocial responses (9). Moreover, cognitive emotion regulation acts simultaneously as a bridge between internal emotional processes and behavioral outcomes, supporting the finding that it mediates the pathway from avoidance to relational risk-taking (4).

The significance of these mediating pathways highlights a broader theoretical pattern in which relational functioning is shaped not merely by external relational variables but by internal emotional regulation capacities. The finding that cognitive emotion regulation and self-compassion jointly buffer the negative effect of experiential avoidance underscores the importance of integrating these constructs in understanding marital fidelity. This interpretation is consistent with research showing that psychological flexibility, compassion-focused coping, and adaptive cognitive strategies together create a protective shield that prevents escalation of relational dissatisfaction into infidelity behaviors (26). Additionally, studies investigating technology-related infidelity behaviors have shown that low self-compassion and poor emotional regulation increase the likelihood of engaging in secretive online behaviors, highlighting the broader relevance of these mechanisms in modern forms of infidelity (28). Therefore, the present findings support a multilayered model in which experiential avoidance acts as an underlying vulnerability, while self-compassion and cognitive strategies determine whether this vulnerability manifests as extramarital behavior.

A final interpretive layer concerns the broader relational and cultural conditions under which these psychological processes unfold. Evidence indicates that relational instability, emotional exh austion, and maladaptive emotional coping are all influenced by family-of-origin dynamics and early relational experiences (24). When experiential avoidance and low self-compassion are rooted in earlier relational patterns, individuals may face greater challenges maintaining relational fidelity during marital stress. Moreover, emotion regulation difficulties have been shown to operate dyadically, meaning that one partner's emotional coping style directly affects the other partner's relational outcomes (3). This dyadic sensitivity suggests that interventions targeting self-compassion and emotional regulation may have widespread relational benefits. Studies further show that unresolved emotional threats—such as rejection or exclusion—are reduced when self-compassion increases, breaking the cycle of aggressive or avoidant responses (19). All these findings collectively reinforce the current study's conclusion that experiential avoidance, self-

compassion, and emotion regulation constructively and destructively interact in shaping the tendency for extramarital behavior.

This study relied on self-report instruments, which may be influenced by social desirability and personal bias. The sample consisted exclusively of married women from a specific metropolitan area, limiting generalizability to men, rural populations, or diverse cultural groups. The cross-sectional design restricts causal interpretation and does not capture the dynamic temporal changes in emotional regulation or avoidance processes.

Future research should incorporate longitudinal designs to track changes in experiential avoidance, emotion regulation, and self-compassion over time. Including dyadic data from both partners would deepen understanding of relational interdependence. Researchers should also explore cultural moderators that influence these psychological constructs and examine whether therapeutic interventions targeting self-compassion reduce extramarital tendencies.

Practitioners should prioritize interventions that enhance self-compassion and strengthen cognitive emotion regulation in couples therapy. Educating couples about experiential avoidance may help them address emotions constructively rather than escaping through maladaptive behaviors. Creating emotional skills training programs for married women can support healthier relational functioning and reduce vulnerability to extramarital involvement.

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## Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

## Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

## Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

## Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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