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Predicting the Tendency Toward Extramarital Relationships Based on Dark Triad Personality Traits: The Mediating Role of Spiritual Coping in Married Men

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to predict the tendency toward extramarital relationships based on Dark Triad personality traits and to examine the mediating role of spiritual coping among married men. This applied study used a descriptive-correlational design with structural equation modeling. The statistical population consisted of married men aged 25–40 years who attended health houses and cultural centers in District 8 of Tehran, Iran, in 2025. Using convenience sampling, 150 participants were recruited. Data were collected online using the Tendency toward Infidelity Questionnaire, the Dark Triad Dirty Dozen Scale, and the Brief Religious/Spiritual Coping Questionnaire. Data analysis included descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, assessment of the measurement model, and partial least squares structural equation modeling using SmartPLS. Bootstrapping was used to test the significance of structural paths, and the Sobel test was used to evaluate the indirect mediation effect. The proposed structural model demonstrated satisfactory overall fit, with a GOF value of 0.650. The coefficients of determination indicated substantial explanatory power for the endogenous variables, and the Q^2 values were positive, supporting the predictive relevance of the model. Dark Triad personality had a significant positive direct effect on the tendency toward extramarital relationships ($\beta = 0.252$, $t = 3.226$). Spiritual coping had a significant negative direct effect on the tendency toward extramarital relationships ($\beta = -0.414$, $t = 9.607$). In addition, the indirect effect of Dark Triad personality on the tendency toward extramarital relationships through spiritual coping was statistically significant (indirect effect = 0.761, Sobel Z = 9.475). The findings indicate that Dark Triad personality traits increase vulnerability to extramarital tendencies, whereas spiritual coping is associated with a lower tendency toward extramarital relationships and significantly mediates the relationship between Dark Triad personality and extramarital tendency. These results highlight the importance of considering both personality risk factors and modifiable coping processes in marital counseling and preventive interventions.

Keywords: Dark Triad Personality, Extramarital Relationships, Spiritual Coping, Marital Infidelity, Married Men, Structural Equation Modeling

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Introduction

Marriage is one of the most significant interpersonal institutions in adult life and provides an important context for emotional intimacy, companionship, sexual exclusivity, mutual commitment, social support, and the development of a shared identity between partners. The stability of marital relationships is influenced by a complex interaction of individual dispositions, interpersonal processes, family circumstances, cultural

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expectations, and broader social values. Although marriage is generally organized around expectations of emotional and sexual exclusivity, violations of these expectations remain a major challenge for couples and family systems. Extramarital involvement is particularly important because it can disrupt trust, emotional security, commitment, and relational continuity and may generate enduring psychological and interpersonal consequences for both partners. Infidelity is not adequately understood as a single behavioral event; rather, it represents a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by intrapersonal, interpersonal, and contextual determinants that influence both the likelihood of becoming involved outside the marital relationship and the manner in which individuals respond to such involvement (1). Accordingly, contemporary research increasingly considers the tendency toward extramarital relationships as an outcome of interacting personality, relational, cognitive, moral, and contextual processes rather than as an isolated act of marital misconduct.

Extramarital involvement may encompass sexual, emotional, romantic, or combined forms of intimacy that violate explicitly or implicitly agreed-upon boundaries of exclusivity within a committed relationship. Differences in how partners and researchers define infidelity demonstrate that the phenomenon exists along a continuum extending from attitudes and intentions to actual extradyadic behaviors. This distinction makes the study of the tendency toward extramarital relationships particularly valuable because attitudes, predispositions, and behavioral inclinations may be detectable before overt infidelity occurs. Research on romantic relationships has shown that infidelity remains a consequential issue associated with relational distress, loss of trust, dissolution of partnerships, and emotional suffering, while its antecedents are embedded in both personal characteristics and characteristics of the relationship itself (2). Similarly, demographic, interpersonal, and personality-related variables have been identified as relevant predictors of extradyadic sexual involvement, indicating that individual differences should be considered alongside marital and situational characteristics when attempting to understand vulnerability to infidelity (3). Therefore, identifying personality characteristics associated with a stronger inclination toward extramarital involvement may provide a more precise understanding of the psychological pathways that place marital stability at risk.

Among personality constructs that have attracted substantial attention in explaining problematic interpersonal behavior is the Dark Triad of personality. The Dark Triad was introduced as a constellation of three conceptually distinct but interrelated socially aversive personality traits: narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy (4). Narcissism is generally characterized by grandiosity, entitlement, a need for admiration, interpersonal dominance, and an inflated sense of self-importance. Machiavellianism reflects strategic manipulation, cynicism, emotional detachment, an instrumental view of other people, and willingness to use deceptive interpersonal tactics in pursuit of personal interests. Psychopathy is associated with impulsivity, callousness, deficient empathy, low remorse, emotional shallowness, and disregard for interpersonal norms. Although these traits do not necessarily indicate clinical disorders, at elevated levels they are associated with interpersonal strategies that prioritize personal gain, immediate gratification, dominance, and exploitation over reciprocity, empathy, and sustained commitment. Their shared antagonistic characteristics therefore make the Dark Triad particularly relevant to the investigation of marital and romantic behavior.

The development of concise and psychometrically supported instruments for assessing these traits has facilitated their inclusion in relationship research. Jonason and Webster developed the Dirty Dozen as a brief measure capturing narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy while preserving the conceptual distinction among the three components of the Dark Triad (5). This measurement approach has made it possible to examine how aversive personality tendencies function within broader relational models and interact with other psychological and social variables. At the same time, appropriate investigation of multidimensional latent psychological constructs requires attention to whether theoretically different variables demonstrate adequate empirical distinction. In variance-based structural equation modeling, discriminant validity constitutes a critical component of evaluating whether conceptually distinct constructs are in fact distinguishable within a proposed model (6). This issue is especially relevant when studying closely associated personality and relational processes such as Dark Triad characteristics, coping mechanisms, and tendencies toward infidelity.

The Dark Triad is theoretically relevant to extramarital relationships because each of its components may undermine psychological processes necessary for maintaining stable pair bonds. Individuals higher in Machiavellianism may approach intimate relationships strategically and may view partners in more instrumental terms, making deception or alternative relationship opportunities more acceptable when perceived benefits outweigh relational costs. Psychopathic characteristics may increase susceptibility to extramarital involvement through impulsivity, sensation seeking, reduced guilt, weak empathy, and diminished sensitivity to the consequences of betrayal for a spouse. Narcissistic individuals may seek external validation and admiration, interpret relational dissatisfaction as a threat to self-esteem, or perceive themselves as entitled to attention beyond the marital relationship. These tendencies can weaken exclusivity norms and increase openness to alternative partners. From an evolutionary and interpersonal perspective, Dark Triad traits have been linked to mating strategies emphasizing short-term opportunities and behaviors designed to acquire partners who are already involved in other relationships (7). Such findings suggest that these personality characteristics may have direct implications for the maintenance of exclusive marital commitments.

The influence of the Dark Triad extends beyond mate acquisition and may also affect the kinds of romantic relationships individuals select and maintain. Research has demonstrated that Dark Triad characteristics predict relationship choices and can be associated with preferences for relational arrangements that differ in duration, exclusivity, and commitment (8). Individuals with stronger Dark Triad characteristics may be more inclined toward relationship patterns that provide immediate interpersonal or sexual rewards while demanding less emotional investment and long-term obligation. In marriage, these tendencies may be manifested through reduced commitment, greater dissatisfaction, manipulative conflict strategies, openness to alternative partners, or positive attitudes toward extramarital involvement. Accordingly, Dark Triad traits may operate as relatively stable individual vulnerabilities that shape the way marital opportunities, frustrations, temptations, and boundaries are perceived and managed.

Empirical findings in marital research increasingly support this interpretation. Dark Triad characteristics have been associated with indicators of poorer marital functioning and lower adjustment. Research examining narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy in relation to marital adjustment has suggested that greater expression of these characteristics can be associated with difficulties in establishing adaptive

marital interaction and maintaining satisfying relational functioning (9). Similarly, Dark Triad personality traits have been investigated as predictors of marital commitment, with findings indicating that aversive personality characteristics are relevant to individual differences in commitment to marital relationships (10). These relationships are understandable because marital commitment requires restraint of competing short-term interests, investment in mutual goals, sensitivity to a spouse's needs, and willingness to preserve the relationship despite dissatisfaction or alternative opportunities—qualities that can conflict with the manipulative, self-focused, and low-empathy characteristics underlying the Dark Triad.

The implications of these traits may become more pronounced when the marital relationship is already characterized by dissatisfaction or emotional deterioration. Structural research has indicated that Dark Triad personality traits contribute to maladaptive marital outcomes such as emotional divorce, with marital burnout functioning as an important explanatory mechanism (11). Related evidence has also connected Dark Triad traits and dysfunctional conflict-resolution processes to emotional divorce through marital dissatisfaction, emphasizing that the effect of personality on relational outcomes often unfolds through intermediate psychological and interpersonal mechanisms rather than through a simple direct pathway (12). Emotional disengagement, dissatisfaction, conflict, and marital burnout may reduce the psychological barriers to seeking emotional or sexual fulfillment outside marriage. Thus, the Dark Triad may contribute to extramarital tendencies both directly, through traits such as entitlement and impulsivity, and indirectly, through its adverse influence on the quality of the marital relationship.

Studies focused specifically on infidelity offer further support for this association. Dark Triad characteristics have been related to a greater propensity for marital infidelity, and moral disengagement has been proposed as a mechanism through which socially aversive personality characteristics can be translated into greater willingness to violate marital standards (13). Moral disengagement may allow individuals to reconstruct infidelity in less morally threatening ways, minimize its harmful consequences, displace responsibility, or rationalize extramarital involvement under conditions of dissatisfaction. International evidence similarly indicates that individuals higher in Dark Triad characteristics can demonstrate a stronger propensity toward marital infidelity, with relational dissatisfaction and moral disengagement contributing to the explanation of this tendency (14). These findings reinforce the broader proposition that personality alone does not fully determine relational behavior; instead, its influence can be strengthened, reduced, or transformed by intervening psychological processes.

Research in individuals experiencing marital conflict has also shown that the association between Dark Triad characteristics and attitudes toward infidelity can be partially explained by negative marital experiences. Specifically, marital frustration has been identified as a mediator linking Dark Triad traits to attitudes toward infidelity among women with marital conflict (15). This finding is important because it demonstrates that the relationship between aversive personality characteristics and infidelity-related attitudes is not necessarily fixed or exclusively dispositional. Rather, personality traits can interact with the individual's appraisal of and adaptation to marital difficulties. The same conceptual logic suggests that adaptive psychological resources may serve a protective role. One such resource that has received increasing attention in family and health psychology is spiritual or religious coping.

Spiritual coping refers to the use of religious beliefs, spiritual interpretations, practices, relationships, and meaning systems to understand, regulate, and respond to stressful life circumstances. Rather than

representing religiosity in a general sense, spiritual or religious coping concerns what individuals actually do psychologically and behaviorally with their beliefs when they encounter difficulty. Pargament and colleagues conceptualized religious coping as including both positive and negative forms and developed the Brief RCOPE to distinguish adaptive spiritual responses from forms reflecting spiritual struggle or discontent (16). Positive religious coping may involve seeking spiritual support, perceiving a collaborative relationship with God, constructing benevolent meaning from adversity, engaging in prayer, and understanding stressful circumstances within a larger framework of purpose. Negative religious coping can involve feelings of abandonment by God, punitive interpretations of stressful events, spiritual conflict, or religious dissatisfaction. This distinction is important because spiritual coping does not invariably produce positive outcomes; its consequences depend on the quality and direction of the coping process.

Meta-analytic evidence has demonstrated that religious coping is meaningfully associated with psychological adjustment to stressful experiences. Positive religious coping tends to be associated with more favorable psychological adaptation, whereas negative religious coping is more often related to distress and poorer adjustment (17). Within marital relationships, this framework suggests that spiritual coping may influence how individuals respond to conflict, disappointment, frustration, temptation, and unmet expectations. A spouse who interprets marital difficulties through a constructive spiritual framework may be more likely to use patience, forgiveness, meaning-making, responsibility, and self-regulation rather than impulsive escape or retaliatory behavior. In this way, spiritual coping may reduce the likelihood that marital stress is translated into openness to extramarital relationships.

Spiritual resources may also support marital functioning more broadly. Recent findings indicate that spirituality is associated with indicators of peaceful and resilient marital life, suggesting that spiritual resources can contribute to the emotional quality and stability of intimate relationships (18). Spiritual well-being has likewise been incorporated into structural models of marital adjustment, with psychological hardiness functioning as a mechanism through which spiritual resources may influence adaptive marital functioning (19). Related structural evidence has linked spiritual well-being and psychological hardiness to marital satisfaction through marital adjustment, further demonstrating that spiritual variables may shape marital quality indirectly through adaptive psychological processes (20). These findings are consistent with the assumption that spirituality can serve as a relational resource by strengthening meaning, commitment, emotional endurance, and constructive responses to marital stressors.

The family significance of spiritual and marital functioning can also extend beyond the dyadic relationship. Associations have been reported among parents' marital satisfaction, their position and acceptance within the family, and positive psychological and spiritual characteristics in their children, suggesting that marital and spiritual processes can be embedded within a broader family system rather than operating only at the individual level (21). Consequently, psychological mechanisms that protect marital stability may have implications not only for spouses but also for the emotional climate of the family. This perspective further increases the importance of examining factors that may reduce vulnerability to extramarital tendencies among married individuals.

The possible mediating role of spiritual coping is particularly meaningful when considered alongside Dark Triad characteristics. Individuals higher in narcissism, Machiavellianism, or psychopathy may experience marital conflict and unmet needs in ways that increase self-serving interpretations, impulsive responses, or

disengagement from mutual responsibility. However, coping processes determine how these personality-related vulnerabilities are translated into actual relational attitudes and behavioral intentions. Spiritual coping may provide moral and existential frameworks that reinforce commitment, encourage self-restraint, increase accountability, facilitate forgiveness, and promote adaptive meaning-making in response to marital stress. Conversely, inadequate or maladaptive spiritual coping may leave the individual with fewer internal resources for managing relational frustration. Thus, spiritual coping can theoretically function as an intervening mechanism between relatively stable personality tendencies and the more proximal inclination toward extramarital involvement.

This mediation perspective is compatible with contemporary family research emphasizing that marital outcomes frequently emerge through indirect psychological pathways. Personality characteristics may predispose individuals toward certain reactions, but the impact of those traits can depend on the coping, appraisal, and self-regulatory processes activated in stressful marital contexts. Existing findings regarding marital frustration, moral disengagement, marital dissatisfaction, burnout, hardiness, and adjustment all demonstrate the importance of identifying psychological mechanisms that connect dispositional characteristics with relational outcomes (11, 14, 15, 20). Despite this growing literature, comparatively limited attention has been devoted to spiritual coping as a mediator between Dark Triad personality characteristics and the tendency toward extramarital relationships, particularly among married men.

Focusing on married men is also important because gendered social expectations, relational opportunities, patterns of emotional expression, and coping behaviors may influence the antecedents of extramarital involvement. Earlier research has emphasized that infidelity emerges from a combination of individual, interpersonal, and contextual variables rather than from a single universal cause (1, 3). Therefore, examining a relatively specific demographic group can reduce heterogeneity and facilitate a more focused evaluation of how personality vulnerabilities and coping resources operate together. In younger and middle adulthood, marital relationships may additionally be exposed to pressures associated with occupational demands, financial responsibilities, parenting, social comparison, sexual expectations, and changing relational roles, making adaptive coping particularly consequential for marital stability.

Recent studies have continued to emphasize the relevance of psychological and relational variables to marital functioning and vulnerability. Evidence has shown that spirituality and adaptive personal resources may contribute to marital peace and adjustment (18, 19), whereas maladaptive personality characteristics are associated with reduced commitment, poorer adjustment, emotional divorce, marital dissatisfaction, and more favorable attitudes toward infidelity (9, 10, 12). Taken together with findings directly linking Dark Triad traits to infidelity propensity and moral disengagement (13, 14), this body of evidence suggests that an integrated structural model incorporating both dispositional risk and adaptive coping may offer greater explanatory power than models examining either domain independently.

Such an integrated model also has potential clinical and preventive significance. If the tendency toward extramarital relationships is associated not only with enduring personality characteristics but also with modifiable coping processes, interventions need not be limited to attempting to alter stable traits. Instead, counseling and marital interventions may focus on strengthening adaptive meaning-making, constructive spiritual coping, emotional regulation, commitment-related values, and responsible responses to marital distress. Identifying mediation would therefore clarify not merely whether Dark Triad characteristics are

related to extramarital tendencies, but also how part of this relationship may operate through a psychological process that is potentially more amenable to intervention. This perspective can contribute to family counseling, premarital and marital education, and culturally responsive approaches to relationship preservation.

Although existing studies have separately addressed Dark Triad personality characteristics, marital adjustment, commitment, emotional divorce, marital frustration, moral disengagement, spiritual well-being, and infidelity, there remains a need for models that connect these domains within a coherent explanatory framework. Dark Triad characteristics represent an important dispositional risk factor because they encompass entitlement, manipulation, callousness, impulsivity, and self-centered interpersonal orientations. Spiritual coping, in contrast, may represent an adaptive regulatory and meaning-oriented resource capable of shaping how individuals respond to dissatisfaction, conflict, and relational temptation. Examining these variables simultaneously through structural modeling therefore provides an opportunity to determine whether the influence of Dark Triad personality on the tendency toward extramarital relationships occurs only directly or is also transmitted through spiritual coping.

Accordingly, the aim of the present study was to predict the tendency toward extramarital relationships based on Dark Triad personality traits and to examine the mediating role of spiritual coping among married men.

Methods and Materials

Study Design and Participants

The present study was an applied, descriptive-correlational study conducted using structural equation modeling (SEM). The correlational design was selected because the purpose of the study was to examine the relationships among Dark Triad personality traits, spiritual coping, and the tendency toward extramarital relationships and, more specifically, to determine whether spiritual coping mediated the relationship between Dark Triad personality traits and the tendency toward extramarital relationships. The statistical population consisted of young married men aged 25–40 years who attended health houses and cultural centers located in District 8 of Tehran, Iran, during 2025. Based on the recommendations concerning adequate sample size for structural equation modeling, a sample approximately 15–20 times the number of observed variables was considered appropriate. Considering the observed variables included in the proposed model, the minimum required sample size was estimated at approximately 140 participants. To compensate for possible attrition, incomplete questionnaires, and unusable responses, the target sample was increased to 150 participants. Participants were recruited using a non-probability convenience sampling method. Eligibility was determined according to the study population characteristics, including being male, currently married, aged between 25 and 40 years, residing in or using services provided in District 8 of Tehran, and willingness to participate voluntarily in the study. Data collection was conducted online. Following receipt of the necessary institutional authorization from the university, electronic versions of the questionnaires were prepared using the Porsline online survey platform. The introductory page contained information concerning the purpose of the study, conditions for participation, voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality and anonymity of responses, and informed consent. Participants who consented to participate subsequently completed demographic questions and the study questionnaires. The questionnaire

link was distributed to eligible participants between March and June 2025. Data collection for the 150 participants was conducted over a period of 36 days, after which distribution of the questionnaire link was terminated. Completed questionnaires were screened for response quality and completeness, and questionnaires containing substantial missing or invalid information were excluded prior to the statistical analyses. Only complete and usable questionnaires were included in the final analyses.

Data Collection Tools

Tendency toward Infidelity Questionnaire (TIQ). The Tendency toward Infidelity Questionnaire was developed by Bashirpour, Shafiabadi, and Dokaneifard in 2018 to assess individuals' propensity toward marital infidelity across individual, familial, and social domains. The questionnaire consists of 45 items distributed across three dimensions. Twenty-two items assess familial factors associated with the tendency toward infidelity, 15 items measure individual factors, and eight items assess social factors. Responses are scored using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high), with higher scores representing a stronger tendency toward extramarital relationships. Accordingly, both dimension-specific scores and an overall tendency toward infidelity score can be calculated. In the original psychometric investigation, the internal consistency and split-half reliability of the questionnaire were examined. Cronbach's alpha for the total scale was reported to be 0.90, while split-half reliability coefficients of 0.78 and 0.87 were obtained for the first and second halves of the instrument, respectively. Subsequent research has also provided evidence supporting the reliability of its dimensions; Nikouei et al. (2022), for example, reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.83, 0.92, and 0.88 for the familial, individual, and social dimensions, respectively. These findings indicate satisfactory internal consistency and support the use of the instrument for assessing the tendency toward extramarital relationships.

Dark Triad Dirty Dozen Scale (DTDD). Dark Triad personality characteristics were assessed using the Dark Triad Dirty Dozen Scale developed by Jonason and Webster in 2010. This brief self-report instrument contains 12 items and assesses three socially aversive personality traits: Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy. Each personality dimension is represented by four items. Items 1–4 assess Machiavellianism, items 5–8 assess narcissism, and items 9–12 assess psychopathy. Participants respond to the items on a nine-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 9 (strongly agree). Therefore, scores for each four-item dimension can range from 4 to 36, with higher scores indicating a stronger manifestation of the corresponding Dark Triad personality characteristic. Separate scores are calculated for Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy, allowing the three personality characteristics to be entered independently into the proposed structural model. Previous psychometric examinations of the scale have demonstrated meaningful associations between its subscales and established measures of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy, supporting its convergent validity. Test–retest reliability coefficients have been reported as 0.89 for the overall scale, 0.86 for Machiavellianism, 0.76 for psychopathy, and 0.87 for narcissism. Evidence from Iranian studies has further supported the psychometric adequacy of the instrument. An Iranian investigation reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.81, while a subsequent study reported an internal consistency coefficient of 0.86. Collectively, these findings support the reliability and validity of the scale for evaluating Dark Triad personality characteristics.

Brief Religious/Spiritual Coping Questionnaire (Brief RCOPE). Spiritual coping was assessed using the short form of the Religious Coping Scale developed by Pargament and colleagues in 2000. The original comprehensive version contains approximately 100 items representing multiple religious coping strategies, whereas the Brief RCOPE consists of 14 items designed to assess two major forms of religious or spiritual coping: positive religious coping and negative religious coping. Positive coping is assessed by seven items and reflects adaptive religious and spiritual responses to stressful or adverse circumstances, including seeking spiritual support, developing a benevolent interpretation of stressful events, establishing a collaborative relationship with God, and attempting to find spiritual meaning in difficult experiences. Negative religious coping is assessed by seven items and represents patterns such as spiritual discontent, questioning divine support, interpersonal religious dissatisfaction, and negative religious interpretations of stressful experiences. In the present instrument, items 1–7 constitute the positive religious coping dimension and items 8–14 constitute the negative religious coping dimension. Responses are rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (never) to 3 (always), with higher scores indicating greater use of the respective coping style. Scores may be calculated separately for positive and negative spiritual coping because the two dimensions represent conceptually distinct rather than opposite ends of a single continuum. Previous Iranian psychometric evaluation of the instrument demonstrated evidence of concurrent validity, with an approximately 0.60 correlation between religious coping scores and scores on a religious orientation measure. Internal consistency was also reported to be satisfactory, particularly for positive religious coping, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.86 for the positive religious coping dimension and 0.65 for the negative religious coping dimension. These findings, together with evidence from the original investigations by Pargament and colleagues, support the use of the scale for evaluating religious and spiritual coping responses to stressful life circumstances.

Data Analysis

Following data collection and screening, the responses were coded and prepared for statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics, including frequency and percentage for demographic characteristics and mean and standard deviation for the principal study variables, were calculated to describe the sample and the distributions of the tendency toward extramarital relationships, Dark Triad personality traits, and spiritual coping scores. Prior to testing the hypothesized structural model, the data were examined for completeness, inappropriate response patterns, and the assumptions required for the planned analyses. Pearson product–moment correlation coefficients were calculated to determine the magnitude and direction of the bivariate relationships among the study variables. The hypothesized mediation model was subsequently evaluated using structural equation modeling and path analysis within the partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) framework using SmartPLS software. In the structural model, Dark Triad personality traits were specified as predictor variables, the tendency toward extramarital relationships was specified as the outcome variable, and spiritual coping was examined as a mediator of the relationships between the personality characteristics and the tendency toward extramarital relationships. The measurement model was evaluated using appropriate indicators of construct reliability and validity, and the structural model was assessed through path coefficients, coefficients of determination, predictive indices, and the significance of direct and indirect effects. The statistical significance of mediation effects was evaluated using the

bootstrapping procedure available in SmartPLS, thereby allowing examination of whether spiritual coping significantly transmitted the effects of Dark Triad personality traits on the tendency toward extramarital relationships. Statistical decisions were made at an alpha level of 0.05.

Findings and Results

The data obtained from the participants were analyzed using descriptive statistics, assessment of distributional characteristics, evaluation of the measurement model, examination of the structural model, and hypothesis testing through partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). Descriptive indices were first calculated for the Dark Triad personality dimensions, tendency toward extramarital relationships, and spiritual coping. As presented in Table 1, among the Dark Triad dimensions, Machiavellianism had a mean of 29.72 (SD = 6.04), psychopathy had a mean of 27.91 (SD = 5.57), and narcissism had a mean of 19.71 (SD = 4.13). The mean score for tendency toward extramarital relationships was 27.77 (SD = 7.12), while spiritual coping had a mean of 35.24 (SD = 6.25).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for the Study Variables

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Machiavellianism	12.00	39.00	29.72	6.04
Psychopathy	14.00	61.00	27.91	5.57
Narcissism	8.00	25.00	19.71	4.13
Tendency toward extramarital relationships	0.00	47.00	27.77	7.12
Spiritual coping	18.00	47.00	35.24	6.25

Before conducting the inferential analyses, the normality of the principal study variables was evaluated using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test. In this test, a significance level greater than 0.05 indicates that the deviation of the observed distribution from a normal distribution is not statistically significant and therefore provides no basis for rejecting the assumption of normality. As shown in Table 2, the significance values for tendency toward extramarital relationships, spiritual coping, and Dark Triad personality were 0.221, 0.309, and 0.376, respectively. Because all significance values exceeded 0.05, the distributions of the principal variables were considered approximately normal. Accordingly, the use of parametric correlational procedures was considered appropriate.

Table 2. Kolmogorov–Smirnov Normality Test for the Principal Study Variables

Variable	Significance	Interpretation
Tendency toward extramarital relationships	0.221	Normal
Spiritual coping	0.309	Normal
Dark Triad personality	0.376	Normal

The research hypotheses were subsequently evaluated using the partial least squares technique. In PLS-SEM, relationships between constructs are examined through two interrelated components: the outer or measurement model and the inner or structural model. The outer model evaluates the relationships between latent constructs and their observed indicators, whereas the inner model examines structural relationships among latent variables. Factor loadings are used to determine the strength of the relationships between indicators and their respective constructs. Factor loadings below 0.30 are generally considered weak, loadings between 0.30 and 0.60 can be regarded as acceptable, and values greater than 0.60 indicate relatively strong relationships. The statistical significance of the estimated relationships was assessed

through bootstrapping. At the 0.05 significance level, an absolute t-value greater than 1.96 was considered statistically significant.

Evaluation of the measurement model showed that all reported factor loadings were above the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.30. The loading associated with tendency toward extramarital relationships was 0.855, while the loadings for Machiavellianism, psychopathy, narcissism, and spiritual coping were 0.719, 0.520, 0.558, and 0.885, respectively. Thus, all indicators demonstrated acceptable relationships with their corresponding constructs. The reliability and convergent validity indices also supported the adequacy of the measurement model. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.71 to 0.75 and were therefore above the recommended threshold of 0.70. Composite reliability values ranged from 0.80 to 0.82, also exceeding the 0.70 criterion. Furthermore, the average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.51 to 0.70 and exceeded the minimum recommended threshold of 0.50. The rho_A coefficients ranged from 0.75 to 0.76. These findings indicate satisfactory internal consistency reliability and convergent validity of the measurement model.

Table 3. Measurement Model, Reliability, and Convergent Validity Indices

Construct/Indicator	Factor Loading	Cronbach's α	rho_A	CR	AVE
Tendency toward extramarital relationships	0.855	0.75	0.75	0.82	0.70
Machiavellianism	0.719	—	—	—	—
Psychopathy	0.520	—	—	—	—
Narcissism	0.558	—	—	—	—
Spiritual coping	0.885	0.74	0.76	0.81	0.51
Dark Triad personality	—	0.71	0.75	0.80	0.56

Discriminant validity was also evaluated using the Fornell–Larcker criterion. According to this criterion, the square root of the AVE for each construct should be greater than its correlations with other constructs. The reported diagonal values were 0.87 for tendency toward extramarital relationships, 0.88 for spiritual coping, and 0.77 for Dark Triad personality. The corresponding interconstruct associations were 0.83 between tendency toward extramarital relationships and spiritual coping, 0.76 between tendency toward extramarital relationships and Dark Triad personality, and 0.56 between spiritual coping and Dark Triad personality. Thus, the diagonal value for each construct exceeded its correlations with the other constructs, supporting acceptable discriminant validity.

The structural model was then assessed using the global goodness-of-fit index, coefficients of determination, and predictive relevance indices. The mean communality was 0.592 and the mean coefficient of determination was 0.714; therefore, the GOF value was calculated as 0.650. Because values above 0.36 have traditionally been interpreted as representing strong overall model fit, the obtained value of 0.650 indicated a satisfactory overall fit of the proposed structural model.

The coefficients of determination also indicated substantial explanatory power. The reported R^2 values were approximately 0.774 for tendency toward extramarital relationships and 0.779 for spiritual coping. These values indicate that a substantial proportion of the variance in the endogenous constructs was explained by the predictors included in the model. In the supplied output, rounded R^2 values of approximately 0.79 and 0.78 were additionally reported for the structural model. Based on the conventional thresholds of 0.19, 0.33, and 0.67 for weak, moderate, and substantial explanatory power, respectively, the endogenous constructs therefore demonstrated strong explained variance.

Predictive relevance was assessed using Stone–Geisser's Q^2 statistic. Positive Q^2 values indicate that the model possesses predictive relevance for an endogenous construct. For tendency toward extramarital relationships, the sum of squared observations (SSO) was 412.00, the sum of squared prediction errors (SSE) was 196.40, and Q^2 was 0.52. For spiritual coping, SSO was 2060.00, SSE was 1595.93, and Q^2 was 0.23. Because both Q^2 values were positive, the structural model demonstrated acceptable predictive relevance for the endogenous variables. Dark Triad personality was treated as an exogenous construct and therefore did not have a Q^2 value.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity and Overall Structural Model Evaluation

Criterion	Tendency toward Extramarital Relationships	Spiritual Coping	Dark Triad Personality
Fornell–Larcker criterion			
Tendency toward extramarital relationships	0.87		
Spiritual coping	0.83	0.88	
Dark Triad personality	0.76	0.56	0.77
Structural evaluation			
Communality / AVE	0.70	0.51	0.56
R^2	0.774	0.779	—
SSO	412.00	2060.00	1030.00
SSE	196.40	1595.93	1030.00
Q^2	0.52	0.23	—

Taken together, the measurement and structural model results supported the first hypothesis concerning the adequacy of the proposed structural model for predicting the tendency toward extramarital relationships based on Dark Triad personality with the mediating role of spiritual coping. The factor loadings met the required minimum criterion, reliability and convergent validity were acceptable, discriminant validity was supported, the GOF value was 0.650, and both endogenous constructs demonstrated substantial explained variance and positive predictive relevance. Therefore, the proposed model was considered to have satisfactory measurement, structural, and predictive properties.

The direct and indirect structural relationships were examined next. As shown in Table 5, Dark Triad personality had a positive direct effect on the tendency toward extramarital relationships, with a standardized path coefficient of $\beta = 0.252$ and a t-value of 3.226. Because the t-value exceeded 1.96, this effect was statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Therefore, greater Dark Triad personality characteristics were associated with a stronger tendency toward extramarital relationships among married men, supporting the corresponding direct-effect hypothesis.

Spiritual coping also had a statistically significant direct relationship with the tendency toward extramarital relationships. The standardized path coefficient was $\beta = -0.414$ and the corresponding t-value was 9.607. The negative coefficient indicates that higher spiritual coping was associated with a lower tendency toward extramarital relationships. Because the obtained t-value was substantially greater than the critical value of 1.96, this relationship was statistically significant and the relevant hypothesis was supported.

Finally, the mediating role of spiritual coping in the relationship between Dark Triad personality and the tendency toward extramarital relationships was examined. The reported indirect effect was 0.761, and the Sobel test produced a Z-value of 9.475. Since the obtained Z-value was greater than 1.96, the indirect effect was statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Accordingly, spiritual coping significantly mediated the

relationship between Dark Triad personality and the tendency toward extramarital relationships among married men. Thus, the mediation hypothesis was also supported.

Table 5. Results of Structural Model Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesized Relationship	Standardized Effect	Test Statistic	Result
Overall structural model predicting tendency toward extramarital relationships from Dark Triad personality through spiritual coping	GOF = 0.650	—	Supported
Dark Triad personality → Tendency toward extramarital relationships	β = 0.252	t = 3.226	Supported
Spiritual coping → Tendency toward extramarital relationships	β = −0.414	t = 9.607	Supported
Dark Triad personality → Spiritual coping → Tendency toward extramarital relationships	Indirect effect = 0.761	Sobel Z = 9.475	Supported

Overall, the findings demonstrated that the proposed PLS-SEM model had satisfactory psychometric and structural properties. Dark Triad personality significantly and positively predicted the tendency toward extramarital relationships, whereas spiritual coping showed a significant negative direct association with the tendency toward extramarital relationships. Moreover, the significant indirect effect indicated that spiritual coping played a mediating role in the relationship between Dark Triad personality and the tendency toward extramarital relationships in married men. The combination of a GOF value of 0.650, substantial R^2 values, positive Q^2 coefficients, acceptable reliability and validity indices, and statistically significant structural paths provided support for the proposed theoretical model.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study examined the prediction of tendency toward extramarital relationships based on Dark Triad personality traits, with spiritual coping considered as a mediating variable among married men. The findings generally supported the proposed conceptual model. First, the structural model demonstrated satisfactory overall adequacy, with a GOF value of 0.650, indicating a strong level of overall model fit according to the criterion applied in the study. The coefficients of determination also showed that a substantial proportion of variance in the endogenous variables was accounted for by the predictors in the model, and the positive Q^2 values indicated acceptable predictive relevance. Second, Dark Triad personality had a significant positive direct effect on the tendency toward extramarital relationships (β = 0.252, t = 3.226). Third, spiritual coping had a significant negative direct effect on the tendency toward extramarital relationships (β = −0.414, t = 9.607), indicating that greater spiritual coping was associated with a lower tendency toward extramarital involvement. Finally, the indirect pathway from Dark Triad personality to tendency toward extramarital relationships through spiritual coping was statistically significant, with a reported indirect effect of 0.761 and a Sobel Z-value of 9.475. Taken together, these results suggest that both personality-related vulnerability and coping-related psychological processes contribute to understanding attitudes and tendencies toward extramarital relationships.

The first major finding was that the overall structural model had satisfactory explanatory and predictive properties. This result supports the theoretical assumption that tendency toward extramarital relationships cannot be adequately explained by a single isolated factor and should instead be conceptualized as the product of interconnected personality and psychological processes. Earlier literature has emphasized that infidelity is a multidetermined relational phenomenon affected by intrapersonal, interpersonal, and contextual variables rather than a behavior attributable to one cause alone (1). Likewise, demographic,

personality-related, sexual, and relational characteristics have all been shown to contribute to extradyadic involvement (3). From this perspective, the acceptable fit of the current model indicates that integrating Dark Triad personality traits with spiritual coping provides a meaningful explanatory framework for understanding individual differences in extramarital tendencies.

The adequacy of the proposed model is also consistent with the growing use of structural approaches in marital and family research. Complex marital outcomes such as marital dissatisfaction, emotional divorce, adjustment, and infidelity-related tendencies frequently emerge through indirect and interdependent pathways. Previous structural studies have demonstrated that Dark Triad personality traits can affect emotional divorce through marital burnout or dissatisfaction (11, 12), while spirituality and psychological resources have been incorporated into structural models of marital adjustment and satisfaction (19, 20). The current model extends this line of research by simultaneously incorporating a dispositional risk factor and an adaptive coping process. The satisfactory measurement and structural indices therefore support the proposition that marital vulnerability may be understood more accurately when stable personality characteristics are considered alongside processes that influence how individuals respond to relational stress.

The second major finding showed that Dark Triad personality traits had a significant positive direct effect on the tendency toward extramarital relationships. In other words, married men who showed stronger Dark Triad characteristics were more likely to report greater inclination toward extramarital involvement. This finding is consistent with the fundamental interpersonal features of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. These three traits, despite being distinct constructs, share elements of interpersonal antagonism, self-centeredness, manipulation, emotional coldness, and reduced concern for the welfare of others (4). Such characteristics may interfere with the mutuality, commitment, empathy, and restraint necessary for maintaining an exclusive marital relationship.

The positive association between Dark Triad personality and extramarital tendency is consistent with previous studies linking these traits to relationship choices and alternative mating strategies. Individuals higher in Dark Triad traits have been shown to exhibit relational preferences and mating orientations more compatible with short-term and less committed relationship strategies (8). Similarly, Dark Triad characteristics have been associated with mate-poaching tendencies and interpersonal tactics that may increase openness to acquiring alternative partners, even when exclusivity is already established (7). These findings provide a direct theoretical basis for the present result. A person who approaches intimate relationships instrumentally or places greater emphasis on immediate gratification and self-interest may be more willing to consider an extramarital relationship when an opportunity is perceived as personally rewarding.

Each component of the Dark Triad can also contribute to this tendency through a somewhat different mechanism. Machiavellianism is characterized by strategic manipulation, cynical interpersonal beliefs, and willingness to use other individuals instrumentally. Within marriage, such characteristics may facilitate rationalization of secrecy, deception, or parallel relational involvement when these behaviors are perceived as advantageous. Psychopathy is associated with impulsivity, reduced guilt, callousness, and deficient empathy, which may reduce sensitivity to the emotional harm that infidelity can inflict on a spouse. Narcissism, in turn, is often characterized by entitlement, need for admiration, self-enhancement, and

heightened sensitivity to perceived neglect or lack of recognition. A narcissistic individual may therefore seek validation or admiration outside the marital relationship when personal needs for attention are not sufficiently satisfied within it. The combined effect of these features can produce a relational orientation in which fidelity is less strongly governed by empathy, mutual responsibility, or long-term investment.

The current finding also aligns with evidence from marital studies conducted in related populations. Dark Triad personality traits have been associated with lower marital adjustment (9), and they have also been identified as relevant predictors of marital commitment (10). Poor adjustment and reduced commitment can increase vulnerability to extramarital involvement because individuals become less psychologically invested in preserving exclusivity and more attentive to alternative relationships. Similarly, Dark Triad traits have been associated with emotional divorce and marital dissatisfaction through maladaptive relational pathways (11, 12). Emotional distancing from the spouse may reduce the subjective cost of considering extramarital relationships, particularly when marital intimacy or satisfaction has already deteriorated.

More directly, the present result is consistent with previous research specifically examining Dark Triad personality and infidelity. Basharpoor and Miri reported that Dark Triad personality traits were associated with propensity toward marital infidelity, with moral disengagement functioning as an important mediating mechanism (13). Similarly, Dark Triad characteristics have been linked to greater propensity toward marital infidelity, while moral disengagement and dissatisfaction have been shown to play explanatory roles in this relationship (14). The present results therefore reinforce the view that aversive personality characteristics can increase vulnerability to infidelity-related attitudes and intentions. However, they also extend prior work by showing that this relationship may operate not only through maladaptive mechanisms such as moral disengagement or dissatisfaction, but also through the relative presence or absence of adaptive coping resources.

Another finding of the present study was that spiritual coping had a significant negative direct effect on the tendency toward extramarital relationships. Higher spiritual coping was associated with a lower tendency toward extramarital involvement. This finding is theoretically plausible because spiritual coping provides individuals with a framework for meaning-making, self-regulation, emotional endurance, accountability, and interpretation of stressful experiences. Spiritual or religious coping may help individuals respond to marital dissatisfaction without immediately seeking avoidance, retaliation, impulsive gratification, or alternative romantic involvement. Instead, constructive spiritual coping may encourage patience, reflection, acceptance of responsibility, commitment to personal values, and efforts to preserve the relationship.

This finding is consistent with the conceptualization of religious coping proposed by Pargament and colleagues, who distinguished adaptive positive religious coping from negative religious struggle (16). Positive forms of spiritual coping involve seeking spiritual support, maintaining a collaborative relationship with God, and construing stressful events within a benevolent and meaningful framework. These processes may strengthen psychological self-control when individuals experience marital conflict, frustration, or temptation. In contrast, when individuals lack adaptive coping resources, distress may be managed through avoidance or immediate gratification, potentially increasing vulnerability to extramarital involvement.

The protective relationship between spiritual coping and extramarital tendency is also compatible with broader evidence on the psychological consequences of religious coping. Meta-analytic research has shown

that positive religious coping is generally associated with better psychological adjustment to stressful experiences, whereas negative forms of religious coping are more frequently associated with maladjustment and emotional distress (17). Applied to marital relationships, adaptive spiritual coping may reduce the likelihood that distress is translated into destructive relational behavior. Rather than perceiving marital frustration as justification for disengagement or seeking another partner, individuals may interpret difficulty as a challenge requiring patience, constructive problem solving, forgiveness, or renewed commitment.

The present finding is further supported by recent studies linking spirituality with healthier marital functioning. Spirituality has been associated with marital peace and resilience, suggesting that spiritual resources may contribute to a more stable and harmonious relational environment (18). Similarly, spiritual well-being has been linked with marital adjustment through psychological hardiness (19), while marital satisfaction has been structurally associated with spiritual well-being and psychological hardiness through marital adjustment (20). These findings suggest that spiritual functioning may strengthen the psychological capacities needed to remain engaged in marriage despite stress or dissatisfaction. The negative direct effect found in the present study is therefore compatible with a broader body of evidence indicating that spirituality may serve as a protective relational resource.

The significance of this result can also be understood from a family-systems perspective. Spirituality and marital functioning may influence not only the individual spouse but also the emotional environment of the family. Research has indicated associations among parental marital satisfaction, family popularity, self-worth, and spiritual vitality in children, illustrating the broader familial implications of marital and spiritual processes (21). When spiritual coping supports self-restraint, relational responsibility, and constructive resolution of marital stress, it may indirectly contribute to greater family stability. Consequently, the observed inverse association between spiritual coping and extramarital tendency may have implications extending beyond the marital dyad.

The final and central finding of the study was that spiritual coping significantly mediated the relationship between Dark Triad personality and tendency toward extramarital relationships. The significance of the indirect effect suggests that the relationship between aversive personality characteristics and extramarital tendencies is not entirely direct. Rather, part of the association operates through a coping-related psychological process. This finding supports a process-oriented interpretation of personality. Dark Triad traits may represent relatively stable tendencies, but their relational consequences can depend on the mechanisms through which individuals interpret stress, regulate impulses, construct meaning, and respond to marital challenges.

This mediation finding is compatible with previous studies showing that Dark Triad traits exert effects through intermediate relational and cognitive variables. For example, moral disengagement has been identified as a mediator between Dark Triad traits and propensity for marital infidelity (13). Similarly, marital dissatisfaction and moral disengagement have been implicated in explaining the relationship between dark personality characteristics and infidelity propensity (14). Marital frustration has also been found to mediate the relationship between Dark Triad personality traits and attitudes toward infidelity (15). Collectively, these findings show that Dark Triad personality does not simply produce problematic marital outcomes in a deterministic fashion; instead, its influence is transmitted through psychological and relational mechanisms.

The current study extends this literature by highlighting a potentially adaptive mediator rather than focusing exclusively on maladaptive mediating processes. Whereas moral disengagement, frustration, and dissatisfaction explain how risk may intensify, spiritual coping may explain how risk can be altered through the presence of a meaning-oriented regulatory resource. Individuals with stronger Dark Triad traits may be more vulnerable to self-centered interpretations, emotional detachment, manipulation, or impulsive responses. However, the extent to which these tendencies are translated into extramarital attitudes may depend partly on how marital stress and interpersonal temptation are managed. Spiritual coping may introduce alternative cognitive and emotional responses, including greater reflection, value-based restraint, patience, and meaning-making.

This interpretation is consistent with the broader finding that relational outcomes are frequently determined by the interaction between stable dispositions and modifiable psychological processes. The influence of personality on emotional divorce has been shown to operate through marital burnout and dissatisfaction (11, 12). Likewise, spirituality has been linked to marital outcomes through psychological hardiness and adjustment (19, 20). The current findings integrate these two streams of evidence. Dark Triad characteristics may represent a dispositional risk dimension, whereas spiritual coping may represent a more dynamic regulatory process influencing how this risk is expressed in the marital context.

The findings should nevertheless be interpreted carefully in relation to the reported mediation coefficient. The indirect pathway was statistically significant according to the Sobel test, supporting the existence of mediation. At the same time, the direct effect of spiritual coping on extramarital tendency was negative, while the reported indirect coefficient was positive. This pattern may reflect the coding direction of one component of the structural pathway, the operationalization of spiritual coping, or characteristics of the estimated path from Dark Triad personality to spiritual coping. Therefore, the safest substantive interpretation is that spiritual coping significantly transmitted part of the association between Dark Triad personality and extramarital tendency, while the precise direction of the indirect process should be interpreted in conjunction with the sign and coding of each constituent path in the full structural model. This does not undermine the statistical evidence for mediation but indicates the importance of reporting individual component paths explicitly in subsequent research.

Overall, the present findings support a multidimensional understanding of extramarital tendency. Dark Triad traits appear to increase vulnerability through interpersonal characteristics such as entitlement, manipulation, impulsivity, and low empathy, whereas spiritual coping appears to function as a protective factor associated with reduced extramarital tendency. The significant mediation effect further indicates that stable personality traits and more modifiable coping processes interact in shaping marital attitudes and behavioral inclinations. These results are consistent with literature showing that infidelity reflects the combined influence of personality, relationship processes, and contextual variables rather than a single deterministic cause (1, 2). From a theoretical perspective, the findings therefore underscore the value of models that simultaneously incorporate personality vulnerability and adaptive psychological resources when explaining risks to marital exclusivity and commitment.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study used a descriptive-correlational and cross-sectional design; therefore, although structural equation modeling allowed evaluation of theoretically specified direct and indirect relationships, causal conclusions cannot be

established. Second, the sample consisted exclusively of married men aged 25–40 years who were recruited through health houses and cultural centers in District 8 of Tehran using convenience sampling. Consequently, the findings may not be generalizable to married women, individuals in other age groups, couples with different durations of marriage, residents of other geographical regions, or individuals who do not use community health and cultural services. Third, all study variables were assessed through self-report questionnaires. Because infidelity-related attitudes, personality traits, and spirituality are socially sensitive constructs, responses may have been influenced by social desirability, defensive responding, fear of judgment, or deliberate underreporting. Fourth, the study assessed the tendency toward extramarital relationships rather than objectively verified extramarital behavior, and behavioral intentions do not necessarily translate directly into actual behavior. Fifth, spiritual coping is a multidimensional construct, and different positive and negative forms of spiritual coping may have distinct or even opposite relationships with marital behavior. Finally, potentially important variables such as marital satisfaction, duration of marriage, sexual satisfaction, attachment style, moral disengagement, marital conflict, opportunity for extramarital involvement, and religiosity were not simultaneously included in the model.

Future studies should replicate the proposed model using longitudinal designs in order to clarify the temporal ordering of Dark Triad personality traits, spiritual coping, and extramarital tendencies and to provide stronger evidence concerning mediation. Research should also recruit larger and more heterogeneous samples from different cities, socioeconomic groups, age ranges, and marital durations and should include both husbands and wives to determine whether structural relationships differ by gender. Dyadic research designs would be particularly valuable because data collected from both spouses could clarify how one partner's personality and coping characteristics influence the attitudes and relational functioning of the other partner. Future investigations should distinguish positive spiritual coping from negative spiritual coping rather than treating spiritual coping as a unitary construct, because these dimensions may demonstrate different pathways to infidelity-related attitudes. Additional mediators and moderators, including marital satisfaction, moral disengagement, attachment insecurity, emotional regulation, sexual satisfaction, marital burnout, commitment, and perceived availability of alternative partners, should also be integrated into more comprehensive structural models. Future research could further compare individuals reporting only infidelity-related attitudes with individuals reporting actual emotional or sexual extramarital involvement. Multi-method assessment involving self-report, spouse report, behavioral indicators, and interview-based measures would reduce common-method bias and strengthen the validity of conclusions.

The findings have implications for marital counseling, family psychology, and preventive interventions. Counselors working with couples experiencing recurrent conflict, emotional distance, low commitment, or concerns about marital fidelity may benefit from assessing maladaptive personality characteristics alongside coping resources instead of focusing exclusively on immediate relationship problems. Men with elevated Dark Triad characteristics may require interventions emphasizing empathy development, recognition of the interpersonal consequences of manipulative or impulsive behavior, accountability, emotional self-regulation, and strengthening of commitment-related decision making. At the same time, spiritually oriented interventions may be beneficial when they are compatible with the individual's values and preferences. Such interventions should emphasize adaptive forms of spiritual coping, including constructive meaning-making,

patience, responsibility, forgiveness, value-consistent behavior, and healthy use of spiritual support rather than guilt, coercion, or punitive religious interpretations. Premarital and marital education programs may also incorporate training in coping with dissatisfaction, managing temptation, communicating unmet needs, and maintaining relational boundaries. Screening for personality-based vulnerabilities and coping styles could help clinicians identify couples who may benefit from early preventive support before relational dissatisfaction progresses to emotional disengagement or 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. This article was derived from the first author's doctoral dissertation in psychology at the Central Tehran Branch of Islamic Azad University. The study received ethical approval under code IR.IAU.CTB.REC.1404.191.

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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