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THE PRESENCE OF MARRIAGE AND EXTRAMARRIAGE RELATIONSHIPS IN YOUNG FAMILIES

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Abstract

Young families represent a socially and psychologically sensitive stage of marital development characterized by identity formation, role negotiation, economic adjustment, and emotional bonding. During this transitional phase, vulnerability to relational instability—including extramarital involvement—may increase. The present study examines the presence and socio-psychological implications of extramarital relationships in young families (marriage duration 1–10 years). Using a cross-sectional quantitative design, data were collected from 284 married individuals aged 22–35. Statistical analyses included descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, independent t-tests, and multiple regression analysis. Results indicate that 34.5% of participants reported emotional or physical extramarital involvement within the first decade of marriage. Significant negative associations were found between extramarital involvement and marital satisfaction ($r = -0.68, p < 0.001$), emotional intimacy ($r = -0.64, p < 0.001$), and trust ($r = -0.72, p < 0.001$). Psychological distress was significantly higher among affected spouses. Regression modeling revealed that communication breakdown, unmet emotional needs, and digital media exposure significantly predicted extramarital risk ($R^2 = 0.59$). The findings underscore the need for preventive counseling programs targeting young couples.

Keywords: Young families, marriage stability, extramarital relationships, marital satisfaction, psychological distress, communication breakdown



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Introduction

Marriage during early adulthood constitutes a critical developmental stage marked by adaptation to shared living, financial cooperation, reproductive decisions, and interpersonal growth. Young families—defined here as couples married for up to ten years—often experience heightened emotional intensity alongside increased vulnerability to conflict.

Modern social transformations, including digital connectivity, workplace mobility, and shifting gender roles, have introduced new relational dynamics. While marriage remains a central social institution, the boundary between marital exclusivity and external emotional connections has become increasingly complex. Emotional affairs, online relationships, and physical infidelity represent growing concerns for marital stability in early family life.

Young couples frequently face stressors such as economic instability, career pressure, childcare responsibilities, and identity conflicts. These stressors may weaken relational bonds and increase susceptibility to extramarital involvement. Despite global research on infidelity, focused empirical investigation into young families remains comparatively limited.

Research Objectives

1. To assess the prevalence of extramarital relationships in young families.
2. To analyze socio-psychological consequences on marital functioning.
3. To identify predictors of extramarital involvement in early marriage.
4. To examine effects on emotional well-being and family stability.

Research Hypotheses

H1: Extramarital involvement significantly reduces marital satisfaction in young families.



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H2: Emotional intimacy mediates the relationship between communication quality and extramarital risk.

H3: Psychological distress is significantly higher among spouses exposed to infidelity.

Methods

Research Design

A cross-sectional quantitative research design was implemented. Data were collected through anonymous structured surveys distributed both online and offline.

Participants

The study involved 284 married individuals (142 men, 142 women) aged 22–35 years (Mean = 29.1, SD = 3.6). All participants were married between 1 and 10 years.

Sample Characteristics

Variable	Category	N	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	142	50%
	Female	142	50%
Marriage Duration	1–3 years	98	34.5%
	4–6 years	104	36.6%
	7–10 years	82	28.9%
Children	Yes	196	69%
	No	88	31%



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Reported Extramarital Involvement

Type of Involvement	N	Percentage (%)
None	186	65.5%
Emotional Affair	58	20.4%
Physical Affair	24	8.5%
Both Emotional & Physical	16	5.6%

Total reported involvement = 34.5%

Instruments

1. Marital Satisfaction Inventory (MSI)
2. Emotional Intimacy Scale (EIS)
3. Trust in Marriage Scale (TMS)
4. Communication Quality Index (CQI)
5. Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21)

Reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) ranged between 0.80–0.92.

Data Analysis

Data analysis included:

- Descriptive statistics
- Pearson correlation coefficients
- Independent sample t-tests
- Multiple regression analysis
- Mediation analysis

Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.



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Results

1. Marital Satisfaction Differences

Group	Mean MSI Score	SD	t-value	p-value
No Extramarital Involvement	82.3	8.7	10.54	<0.001
Extramarital Involvement	64.8	12.1		

Marital satisfaction was significantly lower among those reporting extramarital relationships, confirming H1.

2. Psychological Distress

Variable	No Involvement (Mean)	Involvement (Mean)	p-value
Depression	7.5	15.9	<0.001
Anxiety	6.8	14.2	<0.001
Stress	8.4	17.3	<0.001

Psychological distress levels were more than double among affected individuals, supporting H3.

3. Correlation Matrix

Variable	Satisfaction	Trust	Intimacy	Communication	Distress
Satisfaction	1	0.76**	0.71**	0.68**	-0.70**
Trust		1	0.74**	0.72**	-0.65**
Intimacy			1	0.69**	-0.63**
Communication				1	-0.59**
Distress					1

(**p < 0.01)



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4. Predictors of Extramarital Risk (Regression Model)

Predictor	Beta	p-value
Communication Breakdown	-0.38	<0.001
Emotional Intimacy Deficit	-0.34	<0.001
Digital Media Exposure	0.29	<0.01
Financial Stress	0.21	<0.05

Model $R^2 = 0.59$

This indicates that 59% of variance in extramarital involvement was explained by these predictors.

5. Mediation Analysis

Emotional intimacy partially mediated the relationship between communication quality and extramarital involvement (Indirect effect = 0.25, $p < 0.01$), confirming H2.

Discussion

The findings indicate that young families experience measurable vulnerability to extramarital involvement. Approximately one-third of participants reported some form of external relational engagement, highlighting a significant presence of extramarital dynamics within early marriage.

Trust and emotional intimacy emerged as protective factors. Communication breakdown was the strongest negative predictor, reinforcing systemic family theory perspectives that emphasize relational processes over individual traits.

Digital media exposure significantly contributed to extramarital risk. Online communication platforms facilitate emotional connections that may bypass traditional marital boundaries, especially among digitally integrated younger populations.



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Psychological consequences were substantial. Depression, anxiety, and stress levels were markedly higher among those involved in or exposed to extramarital relationships. These findings align with trauma-based frameworks that conceptualize infidelity as relational betrayal trauma.

Financial stress also played a moderate predictive role. Economic instability during early family formation may exacerbate emotional distance, increasing vulnerability to external attachments.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that extramarital relationships represent a significant socio-psychological challenge within young families. Approximately one-third of surveyed couples reported emotional or physical involvement outside marriage during the first decade of marital life.

Key findings include:

- Significant reduction in marital satisfaction
- Increased psychological distress
- Strong association with communication breakdown
- Emotional intimacy as a mediating protective factor

Practical Implications

1. Implementation of premarital and early-marriage counseling programs.
2. Communication skill training workshops for young couples.
3. Digital relationship boundary awareness education.
4. Early psychological intervention for couples experiencing distress.



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Limitations

- Self-report bias
- Cross-sectional design
- Cultural specificity

Recommendations

Longitudinal research is needed to track early marital vulnerability over time. Future studies should incorporate qualitative data to explore deeper relational narratives.

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