

# Prediction of Attitudes Towards Infidelity among Married Individuals Based on Marital Satisfaction and Grateful Disposition

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## ABSTRACT

Infidelity is an action that can threaten the safety and security of the family, so it needs to be prevented. However, existing data shows that individual attitudes towards infidelity have changed. In some countries, there has been a decline in attitudes that are more permissive and tolerant of infidelity. Research on attitudes towards infidelity is still very limited, even though this change in attitude can be an important indicator in predicting an individual's predisposition towards infidelity. This study aims to see the role of grateful disposition and marital satisfaction on individual attitudes towards infidelity. This study is a cross-sectional with 101 married men and 360 married women selected in through purposive sampling. Attitude Towards Infidelity [ATIS], Gratitude Questionnaire [GQ-6] and the Couple Satisfaction Index [CSI] were administered to measure gratitude, marital satisfaction and attitudes towards infidelity. The results of data analysis using multiple regression methods show that interaction between grateful disposition, marital satisfaction, gender and past infidelity experience were able to significantly predict attitudes toward infidelity [ $R^2 = .158, p < .001$ ]. From these results, it can be concluded that attitudes toward infidelity can be predicted by demographic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal factors.

**Keywords:** *gratitude, marital satisfaction, attitude towards infidelity*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As individuals enter marriage, they promise to share emotional and physical intimacy only with their spouse [1]. Although most marriages are monogamous, many married individuals are involved in infidelity [2]. Infidelity is one of the main reasons couples seek therapy [3]. Leeker [3] stated about 11-25% of all married couples experience infidelity.

Infidelity is one of the leading causes of divorce in Indonesia. The statistical data presented by the Director General Religious Judiciary, Wahyu Widiana [4] stated that infidelity is the second factors of family disputes leading to divorce. There are Infidelity resulting in 10,444 Individuals having some 15,771 divorce cases in Indonesia during 2007. Then in 2010, the source was available similarly, infidelity is still the number two trigger with the number of cases increased, namely 20,199 cases. East Java occupies the order the highest with 7,172 cases, advising West Java about 3,650 cases and the third position is occupied by Central Java number 2,503 [4]. Meanwhile, according to the Bekasi City Religious Court, Jazilin [5], there were 2,231 divorce cases that occurred in Bekasi City from January to October 2017 [5]

Infidelity is defined as sexual or emotional behavior

outside the primary relationship or a violation of trust or marriage vow [6]. Types of infidelity could be classify into two major categorized such as emotional and sexual infidelity [7]. Although there are many types of infidelity, but the main feature of infidelity is the presence of a component of secrecy [8] Infidelity can cause various negative effects. First, infidelity can lead to partner violence and murder [9]. Second, disappointment, angry, hopelessness, loss of self- confidence, anxiety and depression [10].

Due to various negative impacts of infidelity and violate the marriage norm, most people consider infidelity is unacceptable. However, Lavelle [11] states that there is pressure from culture to women and married couples to tolerate infidelity as a common occurrence to preserve the marriage. In line with this, there is more open attitude towards infidelity in some countries. A survey conducted in France found that 47% of men rated infidelity as morally acceptable [12]. Similarly, a survey conducted by Paul Hemez found that for the first time in 50 years, the percentage of adults who describe infidelity in America as 'the thing that's always wrong' has decreased to 79% in 2014 [13]. According to Hemez [13] this change in attitude may be caused by the percentage of millennial respondents who have a more permissive attitude towards

infidelity than generation X and baby boomers.

Not only in Western countries, changes in attitudes towards infidelity also found in Asian country. In India most women (76%) and men (61%) stated that infidelity is not an immoral behavior [14]. Based on the survey in various countries, it can be concluded that there are change in attitudes towards infidelity that are more positive or open.

However, in Indonesia, research on infidelity, especially attitudes towards infidelity, is still limited. Whereas changes in attitudes towards infidelity can be an important indicator in predicting the tendency of individuals to engage in infidelity, because the beliefs and values of individuals can encourage or inhibit individuals to engage in infidelity [15]. Blow & Harnett [16] stated people who have more positive attitudes toward infidelity are more likely to engage in infidelity. Therefore, researching the factors that can predict attitudes towards infidelity is important to prevent infidelity.

There are three major factors that can predict infidelity according to Mark et al [17] such as demographic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Glass & Wright [18] found that men held more positive attitude towards infidelity than women. Those who had cheat in the past also more likely to see infidelity as acceptable [10].

Based on previous studies, marital satisfaction is one of the interpersonal factors that are usually associated with infidelity [19] [20]. It is related to an individual's overall evaluation of his marital relationship [21]. Whatley [22] found that people with low marital satisfaction tend to have a more positive attitude toward infidelity. In line with this, Isma and Turnip [2] was also found that marital satisfaction could predicts attitude towards infidelity.

On the other hand, other study has found that marital dissatisfaction does not contribute to infidelity [23]. These results indicate that there is a possibility that individual satisfaction with their marriage is not enough to prevent infidelity behavior, so further research is needed to determine intrapersonal factor that can protect individual in preventing infidelity by forming negative attitudes towards infidelity.

Personality trait is intrapersonal factor that consider important in predicting infidelity [17]. Most of this research have focused on negative indicators, for example through the impulsive nature of the low agreeableness and conscientiousness traits [17] [2]. Meanwhile, the protective factors of infidelity have received less attention. In line with this, Fye and Mims [24] also states removing risk factors does not automatically become a protective factor for infidelity, but it is necessary to find factors that protect couples in maintaining monogamous relationships and avoid infidelity.

The development of positive psychology has shifted studies that have traditionally focused on dysfunction in humans, to the study of human characteristics that contribute to optimizing function and resilience in certain situations [25]. Seligman [25] explains that these factors can function as a protector against behavioral, physical and mental risks. Therefore, investigating character strength as a protective factor against infidelity becomes

interesting to study because there have not been many studies examining the role of character strength in the context of infidelity. One of the most studied character strengths in the context of marital relationship, is gratitude.

Gratitude can be seen as state or affective trait. McCullough et al., [26] used grateful disposition to describe gratitude as an affective trait, defined an individual's tendency to recognize and respond to the goodness and benefits obtained from others with positive emotions. Furthermore, this is also related to differences in the tendency to feel emotion of gratitude. Individuals who have a high grateful disposition tend to have a lower threshold for feeling the emotion of gratitude [26]. For this reason, this study will focus on grateful disposition. Compared to emotions that only affect temporary perceptions, gratitude will affect the consistency of these perceptions in the long term so that it becomes a stronger basis for attitude formation.

In general, grateful people tend to show positive recall bias behavior, which is remember more positive memories than negative ones [26]. This makes them more aware of the goodness that exists in their lives, have better relationships and tend to maintain and appreciate these relationships and have more secure attachments [27]. These behaviors are also important in maintaining monogamy relationship and preventing infidelity [24]. Fye & Mims [24] state that one of the efforts that needed to prevent infidelity is to strengthen emotional bonds through remembering attributes and positive efforts made by partners.

Past research has found that gratitude has a major role in promoting and maintaining quality romantic relationships, including marital relationship [28]. Gratitude works in moral domain, thus enabling individuals to be aware of other's kindness or contribution, elicits motivation to repay the kindness of others and motivate relationship-oriented behavior [27]. Research has found that grateful individuals tend to desire more time with their partner and perceive others as responsive to their needs [29]. Thus they are more likely to engage in behaviors that can strengthen their relationship, such as resolving conflicts [28]. Grateful individuals are also more committed to their marriage [30]. It can be concluded that, gratitude is important in marital relationship because feeling grateful can affect an individual's perspective towards their partner and marriage in general. Thus, feeling and expressing gratitude is important in the development of positive marital relationships [28].

It could be assumed that of gratitude can motivate individuals to maintaining their relationships, then it is possible that gratitude can also prevent individuals from committing acts of infidelity by remembering positive aspects of their partners and relationships. Although, gratitude's links to relationship maintenance is well established [29], evidence for its influence within acts that violate the norm has been primarily limited to cheating behaviors [6]. Recent work has also linked gratitude to self-control. For example, people feeling grateful, compared with others feeling happy, show enhanced self-

control and reduce cheating behavior [6]. Both cheating and infidelity involving act that violate the norm and morals. The ability to delay immediate gratification could also plays a role in managing other types of moral challenges, such as infidelity. For this reason, it is assumed that gratitude can protect married individual in engaging infidelity, by forming negative attitudes towards infidelity.

Considering what was mentioned, the main question of the current study is whether marital satisfaction and grateful disposition have predictive effects on infidelity or not.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Attitudes Towards Infidelity**

Fishbein and Ajzen [31] state attitude as an evaluation of an object that result in likes or dislikes and is formed from three mutually components, namely cognitive, affective and conative. While infidelity, can be defined as behavioral or emotional outside the main relationship and is a violation or agreed boundaries of the relationship [16]. Thus, the attitude towards infidelity is an individual evaluation based on the affective, cognitive, and conative components so that it creates positive (like) or negative (disliked) feelings towards behavior that violates commitments or beliefs in marriage in the form of behavior and emotions carried out with other people outside the marital relationship. A positive attitude towards infidelity shows that the more accepting or positive attitudes towards infidelity.

### **2.2. Marital Satisfaction**

Wong and Goodwin [21] define marital satisfaction as a general evaluation of the marital relationship and is also associated with the quality of the marriage.

### **2.3. Grateful Disposition**

McCullough, Emmons and Tsang [26] formulate gratitude as a virtue or trait, using the term grateful disposition. Grateful disposition is defined as a habitual pattern in recognizing and responding to the contributions of others to personal experiences and results obtained with a sense of gratitude. Individuals who have a grateful disposition also tend to be aware of the contribution of non-human forces such as God to individual well-being [26]. As an affective trait, grateful disposition lowers the threshold for individuals to feel emotion gratitude [27]. Grateful dispositions have four facets that are interrelated, such as intensity, density, frequency, and span [26].

Gratitude as an affective trait was chosen because this study focuses on gratitude which tends to be persistent. Thus, gratitude is not only related to who the individual feels or expresses his gratitude to, but also makes the individual more reflective and aware of his life as a whole. Thus, even in unfavorable situations he can

still see positive things.

### **2.4. Hypothesis**

Both marital satisfaction and grateful disposition can predict attitude towards infidelity in married men and women.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1. Design**

This study is a quantitative-based cross-sectional design. The primary data used in this study were collected through self-report utilizing a questionnaire. From February 11 to March 11, 2021, data collecting was conducted online.

### **3.2. Respondents**

This study is a cross-sectional with 101 married men [21.9%] and 360 married women [78.1%] selected in through purposive sampling. Respondents' age ranged are from 21 – 61 years old. Majority of the respondents have been married for 1–5 years [66.8%]. In terms of education, most respondents in this study had college degree [62.7%]. Along with demographic information, the researcher included a question on the respondents' experience with the acts of infidelity. Respondents were asked to select on or more behaviors associated with emotional infidelity, sexual infidelity or online infidelity that they have engaged in during current or previous relationships. The findings indicated that 83 men and 280 women respondents admitted that they had never committed an affair. Meanwhile, 18 male and 80 female respondents admitted to having had an affair.

### **3.3. Procedure**

Prior to data collection, researcher get permission from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Psychology, to collect data. Data collection uses primary data obtained through google forms which are distributed online via WhatsApp, Twitter, and Line. Respondents are allowed to send invitations to other people. Since this topic is a sensitive and taboo issue, online methods were used to ensure the anonymity of respondents

### **3.4. Measurement**

To measure attitudes towards infidelity, researchers used the Attitudes Toward Infidelity Scale (AIS) developed by Whatley [22]. AIS is unidimensional measuring instrument and consists of 12 items. This study used AIS that has been translated to Bahasa Indonesia by Isma & Turnip [2] with a choice of a scale of 1 – 4. Score in item 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12 is reversed. The minimum total score is 12

and the maximum score is 48. The higher the score obtained, the more positive or accepting attitude towards infidelity (Isma & Turnip, 2019). Whatley [22] demonstrated a good reliability and validity of the scale. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients of internal consistency were assessed .80 in his study.

Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI) by Funk & Rogge [32] was used to measure marital satisfaction. There are 16 items with a Likert-type scale. An adaptation of the CSI was performed by Fatheya [33] and demonstrated excellent internal consistency .94 and validity index with a range of 0,49 – 0,85. Thus CSI is reliable in measuring marital satisfaction.

Grateful Disposition was measured using Gratitude Questionnaire-6 by McCullough M., E [26] that designed to assess respondent differences in the prones to experience gratitude in daily life. For this study, an adaptation of the GQ-6 by Oriza, I. I. D., & Menaldi, A [34] was used. Respondent endorse each item on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. The measure has demonstrated good internal consistency .84 and validity index range of 0,54 – 0,71.

**3.5. Data Analysis**

The data in this study were analyzed statistically using SPSS version 20.0 for Mac. Multiple regression method was used to see the model of the contribution of the two main variables, namely marital satisfaction, and gratitude in predicting attitudes towards infidelity in married individuals, controlled by gender and past infidelity experience. The researcher also added a question item to find out the participants' past infidelity experience.

The results of the assumption test indicate that there is no multicollinearity, homoscedasticity, or autocorrelation. However, the findings of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) normality test indicate that the data were not normally distributed. The researcher, nevertheless, continued to utilize parametric multiple regression and assumed that the data are normally distributed. This refers to the Central Limit Theorem (CLT), which states that as sample size increases, the average sampling distribution approaches the normal distribution [35]. The sample size in this study was fairly high, 461 in total, which prompted the use of multiple regression for data analysis. To support this, the author employed a robust analysis method, ensuring that the model's results stay significant in predicting attitudes toward infidelity. That being said, it does not violate pre-existing assumptions, hence minimizing bias in interpreting statistical data.

**4. RESULT**

*Attitudes Towards Infidelity based on Marital Satisfaction, Grateful Disposition, Gender and Prior Infidelity Experience.* The information in Table 1 shows the result of multiple regression of the attitude towards infidelity. The Goodness-fit-model test results are seen in column adjusted R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.158 which are greater than P value [p < .001]. It means that 15.8% of the changes in attitudes toward infidelity are explained by marital satisfaction and grateful disposition.

Marital satisfaction significantly predicted attitudes toward infidelity [B = -.166, p < .001]. This shows that the more satisfied individuals with their marriage, the lower the attitude toward infidelity. Furthermore, grateful disposition was also significant in predicting attitudes toward infidelity [B = -.174, p < .001], meaning the lower gratitude, the higher attitudes towards infidelity.

Past infidelity experience was also significant in predicting individual attitudes towards infidelity [B = -.206, p < .001]; individuals who have committed infidelity show a more permissive attitude toward marital infidelity. Additionally, gender has significant effect in predicting attitudes toward infidelity [B = -.168, p < .001]; women tended to have a more negative attitude toward infidelity.

Additional analysis of differences in marital satisfaction and gratitude using Mann-Whitney method found a significant difference in marital satisfaction between men and women (U = 14884, p = .008). Men had higher marital satisfaction (M = 261.66) than women (M = 221.84). In the grateful disposition, there was no significant difference between men and women (U = 17.280, p > 0.05).

**Table 1** Multiple Regression

Predictors	B	Beta	t	Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	ΔR <sup>2</sup>
	23.040		22.419	.087	.091
<b>Model 1</b>					
Gender	-1.357	-0.138	-3.065**		
Infidelity experience	-.144	-0.246	-5.456**		
<b>Model 2</b>	33.765		15.297	.158	.074
Gender	-1.645	-.168	-3.839**		
Infidelity experience	-1.995	-0.206	-4.688**		
Marital Satisfaction	-0.044	-0.166	-3.653**		
Grateful Disposition	-0.278	-0.174	-3.837**		

**Table 2** Mean differences based on Gender

Variable	Men		Women		U	Z	p
	N	Mean	N	Mean			
Attitudes towards infidelity	101	277.90	360	217.84	13386	-3.947	.000
Grateful Disposition	100	223.31	360	232.50	17280	-.635	.525
Marital Satisfaction	100	261.66	360	221.84	14884	-2.651	.008

**5. DISCUSSION**

Engagement in infidelity could be predict by attitudes towards infidelity. The more positive or permissive

attitudes towards infidelity, the more likely they would get involved in it [16]. The results of this study showed that overall, marital satisfaction, grateful disposition, gender and prior infidelity experience were able to significantly predict attitudes toward infidelity.

The findings of this study in line with previous study that found marital satisfaction can predict infidelity [20] and also predict individual attitudes toward infidelity [2]. Smith [36], argued that individuals who are dissatisfied with their marriage are more prone to infidelity. The idea that marriage is complex and that specific needs must be addressed influences an individual's decision to form connections with others as natural and acceptable.

Couples who view their relationship as satisfying, on the other hand, are more likely to experience positive emotions, which contributes to their favorable judgment of their relationship. Additionally, they are committed and faithful only to their partner [19]. Thus, they form negative attitude towards infidelity.

Furthermore, the more grateful individual, the more negative or rejecting their attitude toward infidelity is. This is the first finding that discovered gratitude in the context of infidelity. Interestingly, the variance in grateful disposition outweighs the contribution in marital satisfaction. That being said, if the individual has a proclivity to respond positively to the goodness acquired as a result of the partner's positive contributions and aspects, they will have a negative attitude toward infidelity. Although the mechanism by which gratitude affects views about infidelity is unknown, researchers have made various assumptions. To begin, Shackelford et al. [9] assert that impulsivity and an inability to delay immediate are robust predictors of infidelity, as they tend to act on sexual urges that arise. Recent study shows that individuals who exhibit a high level of gratitude have greater self-control, and experienced gratitude improves an individual's capacity to delay immediate gratification [6]. Hence, individuals who have a strong tendency toward gratitude disposition are more able to resist the urge to commit infidelity. Second, according to Algoe's [29] experienced gratitude reminds individuals of what they currently have, including positive qualities and attributes of their partner, and then inspires individuals to do some acts that will foster their relationship. In other words, gratitude orients people toward their partner and relationship [37]. These qualities enable individuals to overlook and adversely appraise other objects that are in direct conflict with their goal of strengthening and maintaining relationships. Therefore, grateful people will have negative attitude towards infidelity because infidelity can have a variety of negative consequences, not only destroying and harming their spouse but also harming their children. Additionally, married man in comparison with women, have a more positive or accepting attitude toward infidelity in marriage. These findings align with other studies that found significant differences in intention, attitudes and infidelity related behavior based on gender [16] [17]. Abdolmaleki [15] stated that males desire physical and sexual pleasure in order to increase their likelihood of forming new connections outside of

marriage and to be aroused by new sexual relationship.

As a result, they have a more positive and receptive attitude toward infidelity [15]. Similarly, those who have had an affair demonstrate a more permissive attitude toward infidelity. This finding is consistent with Jackman [10] finding that individuals who have had an affair in the past have a more positive attitude toward infidelity than individuals who have never committed infidelity. The question is, do approval of infidelity because they have engaged in more infidelity? Or, is this attitude already formed before they commit an affair?

## 6. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The findings of this study suggest grateful disposition (gratitude as a trait), marital satisfaction, gender and past infidelity behavior could predict attitude towards infidelity. This study can complement and expand our understanding of the infidelity in collective culture in Indonesia. Additionally, the findings of this study highlight the importance of personality or intrapersonal variables in anticipating and predicting infidelity.

There are some limitations of this study. First, an imbalanced sample of women and men. Therefore, future research is expected to employ a more balanced sample of men and women. Second, the present study also did not directly explore the effect of infidelity experience on sexual versus emotional infidelity, though we feel this would be an interesting future direction. Future research needed to understand the differential impact experience has on reactions to different types of infidelity. Third, future research can measure other demographic variables that were not controlled in this study, such as religious affiliation, social media and ethnicity, this will enrich the understanding of infidelity in Indonesian which have diverse culture.

The efforts that can be taken in order to establish a negative attitude and prevent infidelity can be through two things. First, increasing public awareness about the negative impact of infidelity; for instance, by educating people about the negative impact of infidelity—second, involving psychoeducation regarding infidelity into premarital or couple counseling, emphasizing the importance of gratitude in relationships, and enhancing marital satisfaction in couples, for instance, by creating gratitude journal.

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