

Psychological Distress of Female Young Adults Who Experienced Infidelity In Dating Relationships

Felia Syifa Budyningrum & Atika Dian Ariana, M.Sc., M.Psi., Psikolog
Department of Psychology Clinical and Mental Health, Faculty of Psychology Airlangga University

ABSTRACT

Infidelity is a deeply personal and emotionally devastating experience, particularly for young adults navigating the complexities of romantic relationships. This study examines the psychological distress of Indonesian female young adults (aged 18-29) who experienced infidelity in dating relationships. Using a qualitative, instrumental case study approach, it explores their emotional, cognitive, and relational struggles. Findings reveal significant distress, including anxiety, depressions, and emotional dysregulation, and trust issues, impacting their self-esteem and relationships. Coping mechanisms ranged from supportive relationships and therapy to maladaptive behaviors like self-harm. This study underscores the need for mental health interventions tailored to this group and calls for future research on cross-cultural perspectives and long-term recovery.

Keywords: *young adults, psychological distress, infidelity*

PENDAHULUAN

Infidelity is a prevalent issue in romantic relationships that often lead to profound psychological distress, particularly for young adults navigating their formative years of emotional and relational development. In Indonesia, where cultural values heavily influenced personal relationships, the impact of infidelity remains an underexplored area in psychological research. Existing literature highlights that individuals who experience infidelity often suffer from emotional dysregulations, depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem, all of which can hinder their relational and personal growth (Arnett, 2023). However, studies specific to Indonesian young adults, especially women, remain scarce, presenting a significant gap in understanding how cultural and developmental factors interact in shaping their experiences.

This research addresses the gap by exploring the lived experiences of female young adults in Indonesia who have faced infidelity in dating relationships. While global studies emphasize the psychological aftermath of infidelity, such as attachment injuries and trust issues (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), there is a limited focus on how young women from collectivist cultures cope with and recover from these experiences. This study aims to contribute to the field by providing insights that are not culturally contextualized but also deeply personal and nuanced.

The study seeks to answer the following research questions: What are the psychological impacts of infidelity on female young adults? How do they cope with these experiences? The hypothesis driving this research is that infidelity leads to significant psychological distress, influencing emotional regulation, self-esteem, and relational trust. Furthermore, the study posits that coping mechanisms are influenced by both personal resilience and socio-cultural factors (Nag et al., 2022).

By employing a qualitative instrumental case study approach, this research aims to fill the identified gap and provide a framework for understanding the psychological distress and resilience strategies of young women affected by infidelity. The findings are expected to inform mental health interventions, offering practical benefits for therapists and counselors working with this demographic while advancing the broader understanding of relationship dynamics in young adulthood.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design with an instrumental case study approach to explore the psychological distress experienced by female young adults in Indonesia following infidelity in dating relationships. This method was chosen to capture the participants' lived experiences and provide an in-depth understanding of their emotional, cognitive, and relational struggles.

The study involved four female young adults aged 18-29 years who had experienced infidelity in their past dating relationships. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure they met specific criteria, including:

1. Identifying as female and within the specified age range
2. Having encountered infidelity in a dating relationship within the last 3 years
3. Being willing to share their experiences and provide informed consent

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted in a private and comfortable setting. The interview guide was developed based on previous literature and focused on

the participants' emotional responses, coping mechanisms, and perceived long-term impacts of infidelity. Each interview lasted approximately 60-90 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participants' consent. Interviews were conducted in the participants' native language to facilitate comfort and authenticity.

The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using theory-driven thematic analysis, following the instrumental case study framework. The analysis involved several steps:

1. Familiarization with the data by reading and re-reading the transcript
2. Identifying emerging themes related to psychological distress, coping mechanisms, and relational impacts.
3. Grouping themes into superordinate categories to capture the shared experiences and nuances of each participant

This study adhered to ethical guidelines to ensure participants' well-being and confidentiality. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board before data collection. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. All identifying information was anonymized, and pseudonyms were used in reporting the findings. Audio recording and transcripts were securely stored to maintain confidentiality.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, this study employed triangulation by involving multiple researchers in the analysis process. Additionally, member checking was conducted by sharing the preliminary findings with participants to confirm that their experiences were accurately captured.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The study analyzed the psychological distress experienced by four female young adults aged 18-29 who encountered infidelity in dating relationships. Key findings for each participant are:

- Participant 1: Reported symptoms of anxiety and emotional dysregulation, including difficulties in academic focus and recurring feelings of anger and betrayal.
- Participant 2: Exhibited signs of self-doubt, withdrawal from social settings, and feelings of worthlessness.
- Participant 3: Experienced depression symptoms, such as insomnia and appetite loss, accompanied by avoidance behaviors and substance use.
- Participant 4: Highlighted trust issues, anger, and challenges in forming new relationships.

In terms of coping strategies, two participants relied on external support systems such as therapy and family, while two others engaged in maladaptive behaviors, including isolation and substance use.

The hypothesis posited that infidelity in dating relationships leads to significant psychological distress, manifesting as emotional dysregulation, lowered self-esteem, and trust issues. The study's findings supported this hypothesis through consistent patterns observed across participants:

1. All participants reported psychological distress, with symptoms ranging from anxiety and depression to maladaptive coping mechanisms.
2. Trust issues were a recurring outcome, hindering future relational openness for all participants.

The descriptive results align with prior studies that emphasized the impact of infidelity on psychological well-being. Although differences in coping strategies were observed, all participants demonstrated

varying degrees of resilience in managing distress. The critical analysis indicated that external support systems play a significant role in recovery, while maladaptive behaviors tend to exacerbate emotional difficulties.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal key insights into the psychological distress experienced by female young adults following infidelity, interpreted here in the context of prior research and relevant literature. Participants consistently reported anxiety, anger, and sadness, aligning with Bucher et al. (2019), who highlighted emotional instability as a consequence of betrayal. Declines in self-esteem observed in this study echo Feldman and Cauffman (1999), who found that infidelity causes individuals to question their worth. Unique to this study is the influence of cultural expectations, where societal pressures intensified feelings of inadequacy, diverging from Western-centric findings focused on individualistic impacts (Shrout & Weigel, 2020).

Trust issues were universal among participants, consistent with prior findings on the relational impacts of infidelity (Beltran-Morillas et al., 2022). The participants' fear of judgement within collectivist cultural context heightened relational difficulties, suggesting a sociocultural layer to the attachment injuries often described in prior research (Warch & Josephs, 2021).

Participants demonstrated varying coping mechanisms. Those utilizing therapy or family support exhibited quicker recovery, supporting Lazarus and Folkman (1984). In contrast, maladaptive behaviors like substance use prolonged distress, as noted by Stavrova et al. (2022). This study highlights the protective role of family in collectivist cultures, which contrasts with the predominantly individual-focused strategies documented in Western contexts.

This study contributes by exploring the sociocultural dimensions of infidelity in a collectivist society, emphasizing the interplay between psychological distress, cultural expectations, and coping mechanisms. While prior research highlights individual impacts (Shrout & Weigel, 2020), this study underscores the significant role of family in emotional recovery, suggesting modifications to Lazarus' Stress Theory to account for collective support systems.

Culturally tailored mental health interventions are essential for addressing infidelity-related distress in collectivist societies. Therapists should incorporate family dynamics into treatment to enhance resilience. Future research could explore gender differences, cross-cultural comparisons, and longitudinal effects of infidelity to deepen the understanding of recovery processes.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the profound psychological distress caused by infidelity among Indonesian female young adults, emphasizing the role of societal expectations and collectivist values in shaping experiences. It reveals that emotional dysregulation, low self-esteem, and trust issues are universal impacts, yet culturally specific coping mechanisms, such as reliance on family support, play a significant role in recovery. By demonstrating the influence of cultural context, this research challenges the universal applicability of Western-centric psychological theories like Lazarus' Stress Theory. It contributes to psychology by advocating for culturally sensitive interventions that integrate collective support systems, offering a new perspective for understanding and addressing infidelity-related distress. These findings pave the way for future research to explore cross-cultural differences and the

long-term impacts of infidelity, enriching relational and cultural psychology while guiding the development of inclusive therapeutic practices.

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