



## Phenomenological Consequences of Girls Witnessing Parental Infidelity

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The objective of this study was to explore and determine the phenomenological consequences experienced by adolescent girls who have witnessed parental infidelity.

**Methods and Materials:** This qualitative study employed a grounded theory approach to capture the lived experiences of adolescent girls aged 14–20 years who had directly or indirectly observed parental infidelity. The participants were recruited through purposive sampling from family counseling centers in Shiraz, Iran. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with ten participants until data saturation was achieved. Interview protocols were validated by experts in psychology, and interviews were transcribed and analyzed using Strauss and Corbin's three-phase coding procedure: open, axial, and selective coding. Strategies to ensure trustworthiness included prolonged engagement, member checking, peer debriefing, and maintaining a full audit trail of coding decisions and analytical memos.

**Findings:** Analysis revealed four major categories that represent the core phenomenological consequences of parental infidelity for adolescent girls. First, persistent psychological damages were observed, including depression, anxiety, insomnia, nervous breakdown, and obsessive tendencies in decision-making. Second, a collapse of interpersonal trust emerged, characterized by distrust toward parents, men, love, and fear of marriage. Third, changes in the mental image of family were identified, involving denial of the unfaithful parent, collapse of parental authority, and feelings of helplessness. Finally, despite the trauma, some participants reported psychological and spiritual growth, including cognitive restructuring, heightened awareness of commitment, and positive outcomes from therapeutic experiences.

**Conclusion:** The study highlights that parental infidelity has profound and multifaceted consequences for adolescent girls, encompassing psychological distress, relational insecurity, and identity disruption, yet also carrying the potential for resilience and growth. These findings underscore the need for targeted counseling interventions, culturally sensitive therapeutic support, and preventive education to address the long-term impacts of parental betrayal on adolescents.

**Keywords:** Parental infidelity; adolescent girls; phenomenology; grounded theory; trust; psychological damages; resilience

## 1. Introduction

Parental infidelity is one of the most disruptive family crises, leaving lasting psychological and social consequences for both spouses and children. Scholars have shown that family is the first and most influential institution shaping values, emotional security, and identity formation. When infidelity enters the family sphere, it undermines trust, destabilizes attachment bonds, and creates ripple effects across generations (Mahmud et al., 2024). The disruption is particularly severe for children and adolescents who witness parental betrayal, as they often struggle with conflicting loyalties, emotional instability, and distorted perceptions of relationships (Esan & Olaleye, 2023; Imtinan et al., 2023). Understanding the phenomenological consequences of such experiences is essential, not only for developing targeted interventions but also for illuminating how family crises affect broader social development (Bimenyimana et al., 2024).

Infidelity as a sociocultural and psychological phenomenon has been studied from various perspectives. Research in Southeast Asia highlights the link between infidelity, divorce, and shifting family responsibilities, particularly in contexts where child-rearing duties often fall disproportionately on women (Adawiah, 2024; Sulistija, 2024). Divorce triggered by infidelity frequently imposes financial, emotional, and caregiving burdens on mothers, while simultaneously destabilizing the psychological well-being of children (Bandalović et al., 2025). Similar dynamics appear in African contexts, where family conflicts and parental separation due to infidelity result in developmental challenges and the need for social work interventions to mitigate long-term harm (Bimenyimana et al., 2024; Obalowu & Rahim, 2022). Such findings confirm that children are not mere bystanders to infidelity but are directly shaped by its consequences.

From a psychological perspective, adolescents exposed to infidelity frequently experience anxiety, depression, and trauma symptoms. A study in Nigeria showed that teenagers with unfaithful parents reported significant difficulties in coping and maintaining well-being, underscoring the magnitude of betrayal trauma (Esan & Olaleye, 2023). These results align with observations from other cultural settings, where infidelity is associated with reduced resilience and increased emotional vulnerability among both spouses and children (Muniroh & Hasanah, 2022; Odebo et al., 2021). The psychological scars left by infidelity also intersect with attachment patterns. For example, dominant ego states and

insecure attachment styles have been linked to higher tendencies toward infidelity in adulthood (Kaba & Güngör, 2024), suggesting that children exposed to betrayal may internalize maladaptive relational models that influence their future partnerships.

The intergenerational nature of infidelity's consequences is further evident in studies showing that broken home families often result in children with impaired self-concept and relational anxiety (Marpaung & Kustiawan, 2024). Filipino research similarly illustrates that young adults who grew up in families affected by infidelity exhibit disrupted self-concept and difficulties navigating intimate relationships (Siguan et al., 2021). Such evidence highlights how infidelity penetrates beyond the couple's dyadic conflict to alter the developmental trajectories of their children.

At the same time, literature on moral education and spirituality emphasizes that infidelity contradicts the foundational values transmitted through families. In Islamic contexts, family is perceived as a sacred trust, and infidelity violates moral, religious, and psychological norms (Mahmud et al., 2024; Obalowu & Rahim, 2022). From the perspective of forgiveness and resilience, however, some families strive to maintain stability for the sake of children's education and well-being (Syaiful, 2022). Religious and cultural narratives therefore play a role in shaping whether children perceive parental betrayal as irreparable damage or as a challenge to be processed within a framework of faith and moral growth (Musyahidah & Rustina, 2023; Suyatno & Vechea, 2024).

Another dimension concerns gendered responses to infidelity. Women often bear the heaviest emotional consequences of betrayal, and daughters in particular may internalize their mothers' experiences (Muniroh & Hasanah, 2022; Musyahidah & Rustina, 2023). Qualitative studies of women's resilience show that despite severe distress, some develop coping strategies rooted in spirituality and community support (Muniroh & Hasanah, 2022). Autoethnographic research further illustrates how adult children process their father's infidelity through self-reflection, often oscillating between anger, grief, and the search for meaning (Ban et al., 2022). Such insights resonate with the phenomenological approach, as they reveal the layered, subjective experiences of betrayal across different roles in the family.

The biological underpinnings of infidelity have also been explored, with hormonal predictors linked to betrayal behaviors (Bochon & Bird, 2022). While such research

primarily focuses on adults, it provides indirect insight into why parental betrayal occurs, which in turn shapes children's phenomenological experiences. Additionally, fatherhood itself has been found to moderate infidelity behaviors, influencing how betrayal manifests within family contexts (Lacker et al., 2020). The relevance for adolescents lies in how parental roles and expectations are redefined in the wake of such crises, often resulting in disillusionment and feelings of abandonment.

Infidelity is not only a personal or family-level issue but also intersects with broader social and cultural structures. Studies in African and Asian contexts underscore that children from families fractured by betrayal often face stigma, economic challenges, and disrupted socialization processes (Dagami et al., 2022; Maendesa & Hakak, 2022). The lasting effects can include impaired educational outcomes, reduced trust in social institutions, and internalized shame. At the same time, resilience factors such as grandparental support or community engagement can buffer some of the negative effects (Mubarak, 2023). This suggests that while the psychological harm of infidelity is profound, the surrounding social environment can either amplify or mitigate its impact.

The phenomenological consequences for adolescents are particularly severe because adolescence itself is a critical developmental stage. Identity formation, autonomy, and emotional regulation are all in flux, and the rupture of family stability during this time introduces significant vulnerabilities (Thorson, 2020). Rumination, for example, mediates the relationship between parental infidelity and adolescent well-being, leading to cycles of overthinking and emotional distress (Thorson, 2020). Adolescents' coping responses may also range from withdrawal and mistrust to, in rare cases, psychological growth and redefined resilience.

In contexts such as Iran, research highlights how online infidelity and dark personality traits can also affect marital quality and, indirectly, children's sense of security (Movahedrad et al., 2023; Taheri et al., 2024). This shows that infidelity is not confined to physical betrayal but extends into virtual spaces, complicating children's awareness of parental relationships and potentially intensifying feelings of confusion and insecurity. Globally, studies confirm that the digital age has amplified both the prevalence and the complexity of infidelity (Ismail, 2021; Salih & Chaudry, 2021).

From a criminological lens, extreme cases such as revenge filicide—where children become victims of violence linked to betrayal—illustrate the devastating

consequences of infidelity-related conflicts (Hakimov, 2023; Myers et al., 2021). While such cases are rare, they underscore the profound instability that betrayal can generate within families. This aligns with broader findings that family disruption due to infidelity can escalate into broader social harms, including violence and intergenerational trauma (Maendesa & Hakak, 2022).

At the same time, some literature points to possible pathways of growth. Strength-based counseling interventions have been found effective in reducing the tendency toward infidelity among conflicted couples while enhancing self-compassion (Movahedrad et al., 2023). For children, exposure to therapeutic processes can foster resilience, awareness of relational dynamics, and strategies to cope with vulnerability (Esan & Olaleye, 2023). Similarly, cross-cultural studies of forgiveness suggest that adolescents can, under supportive conditions, reframe betrayal and develop adaptive coping mechanisms (Syaiful, 2022).

The diversity of these perspectives demonstrates that infidelity's consequences are multifaceted, spanning psychological, relational, cultural, and even biological dimensions. For adolescent girls, the experience of parental betrayal is uniquely destabilizing because it challenges their developing concepts of trust, family, and identity. Existing research confirms patterns of depression, anxiety, mistrust, and identity conflict (Esan & Olaleye, 2023; Imtinan et al., 2023), but also suggests that under certain conditions, processes of resilience and psychological growth may occur (Mubarak, 2023; Muniroh & Hasanah, 2022).

Given these complexities, a phenomenological approach is well-suited to capture the lived experiences of adolescents who witness parental infidelity. By focusing on their subjective narratives, such research can illuminate how betrayal is internalized, how it shapes relational expectations, and what coping strategies are developed in response. The present study, therefore, seeks to determine the phenomenological consequences experienced by adolescent girls who have witnessed parental infidelity, with the goal of providing deeper insight into their psychological realities and informing culturally sensitive interventions.

## 2. Methods and Materials

### 2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study adopted the grounded theory methodology, also known as the data-driven theory approach, which is one of the most influential qualitative research methods.

Grounded theory allows researchers to extract theoretical insights directly from the data collected, making it particularly valuable in the fields of social sciences, psychology, and education for uncovering the depth and complexity of human experiences. The study population consisted of adolescent girls aged between 14 and 20 years who had visited family counseling centers in Shiraz and had directly or indirectly witnessed the infidelity of at least one parent. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, which is designed not for statistical generalization but rather for gaining in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. A total of ten participants were ultimately recruited. Sampling continued through semi-structured interviews until data saturation was achieved, meaning that no new themes emerged and additional interviews yielded repetitive information. Entry criteria included being female, aged 14–20 years, having documented or reported the experience of parental infidelity during counseling sessions, the ability to articulate personal experiences, willingness to participate in semi-structured interviews, and provision of written informed consent. Participants also had to accept confidentiality and privacy principles of the research process. Exclusion criteria involved unwillingness to continue participation at any stage, inability to clearly articulate experiences due to severe psychological or communicative difficulties, failure to validate their interview transcripts, not meeting entry criteria, objection from a legal guardian, or withdrawal before completing the interviews.

## 2.2. Measures

Data collection relied primarily on in-depth semi-structured interviews, supported by focused group discussions and library research. This form of interview, often referred to as phenomenological interviewing, enables the co-construction of meaning between researcher and participant through open-ended questions and exploratory dialogue. The interview protocol was developed based on the study's objectives and theoretical background, and its content validity was reviewed and confirmed by three professors of psychology. Questions were designed to be open-ended to allow participants to narrate their experiences freely, while the researcher provided gentle prompts to deepen the exploration of meanings. The first interview was conducted with an eligible participant, transcribed, and read multiple times before being coded and analyzed, which informed subsequent interviews and guided the iterative

research process. Interviews were audio recorded with the informed consent of participants, transcribed verbatim, and carefully checked for accuracy. To ensure trustworthiness, strategies such as prolonged engagement with participants, member checking, peer debriefing, and careful attention to negative or contradictory cases were applied. Additionally, rapport-building with participants was prioritized to create a safe and respectful environment that encouraged candid expression of experiences.

## 2.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted concurrently with data collection following Strauss and Corbin's (1998) grounded theory framework. This iterative process involved three main stages of coding: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. During open coding, transcripts and field notes were broken down into smaller units of meaning, and initial codes were generated, often using participants' own words. These codes were then grouped into broader conceptual categories based on semantic similarities. Axial coding followed, in which relationships between categories were developed using the coding paradigm of causal conditions, contextual factors, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences. This step aimed to link the categories into a coherent structure that reflected the dynamic processes experienced by participants. Finally, in selective coding, the emerging categories were integrated around a central core category that best captured the essence of the phenomenon. Analytical memos were written throughout the process to record reflections, conceptual linkages, and evolving theoretical insights. The constant comparative method was employed across all stages to refine categories, ensure conceptual consistency, and enhance the explanatory power of the emerging theory. To strengthen credibility and confirmability, external audits were conducted by experienced qualitative researchers, and a full audit trail of coding decisions, memos, and analytical steps was maintained. This comprehensive approach ensured that the findings were deeply grounded in the lived experiences of the participants and accurately reflected their phenomenological realities.

## 3. Findings and Results

The analysis of interviews with adolescent girls who had witnessed parental infidelity revealed a complex set of lived experiences marked by emotional, psychological, and relational consequences. Data saturation was reached after

ten semi-structured interviews, with recurring patterns and themes emerging across participants' narratives. Through the grounded theory approach, the process of open, axial, and selective coding allowed for the identification of key categories that captured the phenomenological essence of their experiences. The findings reflect not only the immediate emotional turmoil faced by participants but also the broader ways in which these experiences shaped their sense of identity, interpersonal relationships, and outlook on family and trust.

Initial open coding highlighted recurring expressions of shock, confusion, and distress at the discovery or observation of parental infidelity. Many participants described moments of confrontation with this reality as deeply destabilizing, producing feelings of betrayal and insecurity. As coding progressed, it became clear that these individual emotional reactions were embedded within larger

patterns of disrupted trust, strained family dynamics, and altered self-perceptions. Axial coding further illuminated the conditions under which these experiences unfolded, the coping strategies employed by participants, and the consequences that followed.

Selective coding led to the emergence of a central theme: the struggle to reconcile the dissonance between parental betrayal and the idealized image of family stability. This core category was interwoven with several subsidiary categories, including emotional vulnerability, identity conflict, interpersonal withdrawal, and the development of protective strategies to guard against further psychological harm. Each of these categories reflects a dimension of the participants' lived reality, highlighting the profound and multifaceted consequences of parental infidelity on adolescent girls.

**Table 1**

*Categories and related concepts derived from open coding*

Category	Related Concepts from Open Coding
Persistent Psychological Damages	Depression, anxiety, insomnia, nervous breakdown, obsessive decision-making
Collapse of Interpersonal Trust	Distrust toward parents, men, love, human relationships, fear of marriage
Changes in Mental Image of Family	Denial of the role of the unfaithful parent, collapse of the image of mother or father, feelings of helplessness
Psychological and Spiritual Growth	Cognitive restructuring, collective understanding of betrayal trauma, positive therapy experiences, increased awareness of commitment and vulnerability

### **Persistent Psychological Damages**

One of the most prominent categories to emerge from the participants' narratives was the persistence of psychological damages following the experience of parental infidelity. The girls frequently described enduring feelings of depression and anxiety, often accompanied by sleep disturbances such as insomnia or nightmares. Some reported acute episodes resembling nervous breakdowns, while others developed obsessive tendencies in decision-making, characterized by overthinking and hesitation rooted in fear of making mistakes. These psychological wounds were not limited to the immediate aftermath of the betrayal but appeared to carry long-term consequences, shaping the participants' daily functioning and emotional regulation.

### **Collapse of Interpersonal Trust**

Another central category was the collapse of interpersonal trust, particularly in close and intimate relationships. Many participants expressed profound distrust toward their unfaithful parent, which often generalized to

broader skepticism about men, love, and human relationships in general. For some, the experience instilled a deep fear of marriage and long-term commitments, as they doubted the possibility of loyalty within intimate bonds. This pervasive sense of mistrust emerged as a significant barrier to forming or maintaining healthy relationships, reflecting how parental betrayal became internalized as a model for relational insecurity.

### **Changes in Mental Image of Family**

The participants also reported notable shifts in their mental image of the family unit. In some cases, this took the form of denial regarding the role of the unfaithful parent, as daughters struggled to reconcile their perception of that parent with the reality of betrayal. Others described a more complete collapse of the image of their mother or father, leading to disillusionment and a sense of having lost a fundamental anchor of stability. Feelings of helplessness and lack of protection were recurrent, suggesting that the



family—once perceived as a secure base—had become a source of vulnerability and instability.

### Psychological and Spiritual Growth

Despite the depth of distress, a minority of participants described trajectories of psychological and even spiritual growth resulting from their experiences. Through processes of cognitive restructuring, some girls were able to reframe the trauma, developing greater awareness of the importance of commitment and vulnerability in relationships. For others, collective discussions and shared understanding of betrayal fostered a sense of resilience and solidarity. Positive therapeutic experiences also contributed to their ability to process emotions constructively, leading to increased self-awareness and psychological maturity. This theme highlighted that while infidelity created profound wounds, it also, in some instances, became a catalyst for personal growth and deeper insight into relational dynamics.

## 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed four central categories that captured the phenomenological consequences of witnessing parental infidelity among adolescent girls: persistent psychological damages, collapse of interpersonal trust, changes in mental image of the family, and psychological as well as spiritual growth. These categories emerged as interconnected themes reflecting the deep and long-lasting influence of parental betrayal on daughters' emotional well-being, identity, and future relational patterns. While the immediate outcomes were marked by distress, depression, and insecurity, the narratives also highlighted possibilities for resilience and growth under certain circumstances. This section discusses these findings in relation to existing literature, highlighting areas of convergence and divergence.

One of the most salient results was the persistence of psychological damages such as depression, anxiety, insomnia, obsessive tendencies in decision-making, and even symptoms resembling nervous breakdowns. These findings align with previous studies emphasizing that parental infidelity often precipitates significant psychological distress in children and adolescents. Research in Nigeria has documented that teenagers exposed to parental betrayal display heightened levels of emotional instability, with depression and anxiety being the most common responses (Esan & Olaleye, 2023). Similar conclusions have been drawn in Southeast Asia, where children from broken homes due to infidelity reported

increased psychological vulnerability and impaired emotional regulation (Adawiah, 2024; Marpaung & Kustiawan, 2024). Furthermore, the qualitative reflections of adult children revealed that the trauma of infidelity is not short-lived but often resurfaces in adulthood, manifesting as unresolved grief, self-doubt, or identity conflicts (Ban et al., 2022). The present study's results confirm these observations, demonstrating that psychological damages persist well beyond the immediate crisis and constitute one of the core dimensions of daughters' lived experiences.

Another critical finding concerned the collapse of interpersonal trust. Participants described pervasive skepticism toward parents, men, and human relationships in general, often coupled with fears of entering into marriage. This mirrors research showing that infidelity undermines children's ability to form secure attachments. For instance, a study on intergenerational families affected by betrayal reported that young adults often struggled with distrust in intimate relationships, questioning the possibility of commitment and loyalty (Siguan et al., 2021). Likewise, in Islamic and African contexts, infidelity has been shown to trigger not only marital breakdowns but also intergenerational patterns of mistrust that affect children's future relationships (Musyahidah & Rustina, 2023; Obalolu & Rahim, 2022). Attachment theory also provides a framework for understanding this phenomenon, as betrayal undermines the consistency and reliability of caregivers, leading adolescents to internalize insecurity as a relational norm (Kaba & Güngör, 2024). These findings confirm the destructive impact of infidelity on the foundation of trust, which is central to both family cohesion and individual development.

The third category, changes in the mental image of the family, illuminated how participants' idealized perceptions of their parents and family structure were shattered. Many described denial of the unfaithful parent's role, collapse of parental authority, or feelings of helplessness. This resonates with studies highlighting that infidelity destabilizes family identity by eroding the symbolic meaning of parental figures. For instance, Filipino research found that children witnessing infidelity often experienced a rupture in their perception of the family as a source of security and continuity (Siguan et al., 2021). Similarly, research from Palu Selatan and Lubuk Barumun districts confirmed that children from divorced or conflicted families often expressed a fragmented image of family roles and authority (Ismail, 2021; Marpaung & Kustiawan, 2024). In extreme cases, such as those observed in revenge-related family

violence, the breakdown of family identity can escalate into devastating consequences, reinforcing the centrality of secure family structures for children's development (Hakimov, 2023; Myers et al., 2021). The results of the present study thus provide additional evidence that family image reconstruction is one of the most painful consequences of parental betrayal.

While the majority of participants described distressing consequences, some also reported psychological and spiritual growth. This paradoxical outcome indicates that, despite severe trauma, certain adolescents were able to reframe their experiences through cognitive restructuring, therapeutic support, or spiritual resources. Previous studies provide support for this possibility. Research in Indonesia has shown that women exposed to infidelity may cultivate resilience and strengthen their faith as a coping mechanism (Muniroh & Hasanah, 2022). Similarly, strength-based counseling interventions have been found effective in reducing infidelity tendencies among conflicted couples and promoting greater self-awareness and compassion, indirectly benefiting children in such families (Movahedrad et al., 2023). Community and spiritual frameworks can also foster resilience, as observed in cases where grandparents or extended kin played a role in restoring stability and transmitting spiritual values to children (Mubarok, 2023). The finding of psychological and spiritual growth in this study therefore reflects the possibility of post-traumatic growth, where adversity serves as a catalyst for developing deeper insight into relational commitment and vulnerability.

The findings of this study also converge with the broader literature on the social and cultural dimensions of infidelity. For example, research in Rwanda highlighted how family conflicts negatively affect children's development, requiring social work interventions to prevent long-term harm (Bimenyimana et al., 2024). Similarly, studies from Leyte in the Philippines identified social, cultural, and economic causes of parental separation, confirming that infidelity rarely occurs in isolation but is embedded within broader structural contexts (Dagami et al., 2022). These perspectives highlight that while the lived experiences of adolescent girls in this study are deeply personal, they are also shaped by the cultural, religious, and socioeconomic environment in which betrayal occurs.

Furthermore, the findings resonate with literature addressing the moral and educational dimensions of infidelity. It has been argued that betrayal not only undermines marital bonds but also disrupts the moral education that families are supposed to transmit (Mahmud et

al., 2024). Adolescents in this study expressed heightened awareness of relational commitment, which aligns with the notion that experiencing betrayal may paradoxically reinforce moral lessons about fidelity, honesty, and responsibility. Pre-marriage education programs emphasizing fidelity, such as those developed in Buddhist contexts, illustrate how cultural frameworks can be mobilized to counteract the normalization of betrayal (Suyatno & Vechea, 2024).

Another important point of comparison concerns the role of rumination. Thorson's study demonstrated that rumination mediates the relationship between parental infidelity and adolescents' sense of being "caught" between parents, ultimately undermining well-being (Thorson, 2020). This is consistent with the narratives in this study, where participants described obsessive decision-making and overthinking as byproducts of betrayal trauma. Similarly, the collapse of trust observed here echoes findings by Odebo and colleagues, who reported that literate women in Nigeria expressed profound relational insecurity following infidelity (Odebo et al., 2021). The consistency across cultural settings suggests that certain psychological patterns—such as rumination, distrust, and identity conflict—may be universal outcomes of betrayal, even if their expression varies by context.

At the biological and behavioral level, studies have identified hormonal predictors of infidelity (Bochon & Bird, 2022) and found that fatherhood may increase infidelity tendencies while moderating the relationship between relationship satisfaction and betrayal (Lacker et al., 2020). While the current study focused on adolescents, these insights shed light on the underlying dynamics of parental betrayal. For daughters, learning about such biological and relational factors may further complicate their interpretation of infidelity, oscillating between viewing it as an individual failure and as part of broader human tendencies.

Finally, this study's results also connect with literature emphasizing the importance of social context and resilience. Inter-tribal family studies, for example, highlight how betrayal intersects with historical trauma and cultural identity (Maendesa & Hakak, 2022). Similarly, qualitative inquiries in South Korea illustrate how adult children continue to reflect on their fathers' infidelity, underlining the long shadow cast by betrayal across the lifespan (Ban et al., 2022). By focusing on adolescent girls, this research contributes a unique perspective, showing how betrayal is processed during a critical stage of development when identity, trust, and autonomy are being actively shaped.

## 5. Limitations & Suggestions

Despite its valuable insights, this study has several limitations. First, the sample size was relatively small and limited to adolescent girls in family counseling centers in Shiraz, which constrains the transferability of findings to other cultural or demographic contexts. Second, the reliance on self-reported narratives may have introduced recall bias, as participants' memories and interpretations could be influenced by emotional intensity or time. Third, while grounded theory allowed for in-depth exploration, the absence of triangulation with additional data sources such as parental perspectives or counselor observations restricts the comprehensiveness of the analysis. Finally, cultural factors unique to Iran may have shaped participants' experiences and expressions of betrayal, limiting the extent to which the findings can be generalized to other societies.

Future studies could expand the scope by including diverse populations across different age groups, genders, and cultural settings to explore whether similar phenomenological consequences emerge. Longitudinal designs would be particularly valuable to trace how adolescents' experiences of parental infidelity evolve over time and influence adult relationships, trust, and identity. Cross-cultural comparisons could also illuminate the role of cultural narratives, religious frameworks, and social support systems in shaping adolescents' coping responses. Furthermore, integrating quantitative methods such as psychological scales measuring depression, anxiety, or resilience alongside qualitative interviews could provide a richer and more multidimensional understanding of the phenomenon.

The findings underscore the need for family counselors, psychologists, and educators to develop specialized interventions for adolescents who witness parental infidelity. Therapeutic programs should focus on rebuilding trust, managing rumination, and addressing identity conflicts. Schools and counseling centers could establish support groups where adolescents can share their experiences and learn adaptive coping strategies. Spiritual and cultural resources can also be mobilized to provide a sense of meaning and resilience in the face of betrayal. Ultimately, preventive education for parents emphasizing the long-term impact of infidelity on children could serve as a vital strategy to safeguard family stability and adolescent well-being.

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## Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

## Ethical Considerations

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

## Transparency of Data

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

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## Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this article.

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