AFTER THE AFFAIR: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG ADULT CHILDREN INVOLVED IN PARENTAL INFIDELITY IN A ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP

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Abstract

Being unfaithful or disloyal to a love partner by having covert, personal, or sexual connections with another person is referred to as infidelity. In a romantically, sexually, and emotionally monogamous relationship, it is a betrayal of trust and a violation of socially acceptable norms. The current study uses phenomenology as its research design because it examines the lived experiences of young adult children affected by parental infidelity in romantic partnerships. The principal analytical framework for analyzing the textual data that had been gathered was thematic analysis. Following data analysis, the researchers created themes based on the information provided by the participants, which will also determine their experiences. Every data gathered, emerged themes, and subthemes were structured based on the effect of parental infidelity on emotional and psychological well-being, the transformation of family dynamics post-infidelity revelation, and the influence of parental infidelity on romantic relationship formation in young adult children. The analysis revealed seven research purposes, each with major themes and subthemes that identified the impact of participants’ awareness about parental infidelity.

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recognized and labeled the coping strategies employed upon discovering infidelity, explored the thoughts and emotions of the participants to parents who engaged in infidelity, determined the influence of parental infidelity on romantic relationship formation, identified the transformation of family dynamics post-infidelity revelation, explored the variations in attitudes towards infidelity based on the parent involved in the affair, and discovered healthy ways for processing and managing the impact of parental infidelity.

Keywords: infidelity; parental infidelity; romantic relationships; psychological impact; coping strategies

Introduction

Infidelity is a term used to describe being unfaithful or disloyal to a romantic partner by engaging in secret and intimate or sexual relationships with another individual (Haseli et al., 2019). It is a betrayal of trust and a violation of accepted norms in a romantically, sexually, and emotionally monogamous relationship (April & Schrodt, 2018). Often, the repercussions of infidelity can be severe, leading to emotional and psychological adversities - such as unpleasant feelings, a decline in one's health, a loss of self-worth, severe dissatisfaction, mistrust in oneself, sadness, and anxiety (Atkins et al., 2001). Moreover, infidelity can cause significant damage to a marital relationship, wherein its negative impact may affect the husband or wife and the offspring (Scheeren & Wagner, 2018).

In families, children involved in their parents' infidelity are primarily affected emotionally, mentally, and socially, leading to problems that could affect their well-being and relationships, especially in forming loving, intimate relationships in the future with others (de Castro-Bofill, Barrameda, Dadivas, Panganiban, & San Jose, 2016). Studies (Salih & Chaudry, 2021; Spence, 2012; Weiser & Weigel, 2017) have shown that parental infidelity might affect their children's views toward establishing relationships, leading to difficulty in trusting their romantic partners or establishing romantic relationships. Moreover, some children who witnessed their parents' infidelity might also believe that having an affair in a romantic relationship is acceptable (Spence, 2012). A study (Weiser & Weigel, 2017) showed that children who witnessed their parents' infidelity are likely to engage in infidelity due to the intergenerational transmission of infidelity. However, only a few studies exist to support this claim.
Infidelity has various dimensions that contribute significantly to the literature due to much research (Thorson, 2014). However, the effects of infidelity on those not in a romantic relationship, such as their children, have little contribution to literature (Salih & Chaudry, 2021). Although some studies explored its impact, few studies have emphasized the lived experiences of young adult children involved and witnessed parental infidelity in navigating their romantic relationships while also dealing with the situation's aftermath. Moreover, there is a need to investigate and identify the impact on the emotional and psychological well-being of young adult children whose parents are involved in parental infidelity and its impact on their romantic relationships. Hence, the study may pave the way to identify the coping mechanisms and interventions the children have done, which is valuable to the growing body of research on this topic.

Infidelity in the Philippines

As infidelity is widely studied, various studies claim that infidelity is a universal phenomenon in several civilizations in which men and women who commit infidelity seek pleasure (Wróblewska-Skrzek, 2021). A hedonistic act outside the relationship is a betrayal of commitment by romantically getting involved with another person, which associates secret activities such as holding hands, kissing, cuddling, flirting, or sexual intercourse (Fincham & May, 2016). It often causes the victim emotional and psychological distress and may lead to divorce in a marital relationship (Scheeren, Apellániz, & Wagner, 2018). Moreover, children involved in their parents' infidelity affect their relationship with them, which could cause long-term adverse effects on them physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially (de Castro-Bofill, Barrameda, Dadivas, Panganiban, & San Jose, 2016). Hence, infidelity is an issue that has repercussions that harm the parent-child relationship and children's upcoming connections.

In the Philippines, infidelity has occurred for ages in any legal or dating relationship. Hence, one of the many terms used to define someone having an affair is "nangangaliwa," meaning turning left or going in the opposite direction of what is expected (Alano, 1994). Due to this, infidelity has become popular, and even the film industry almost always showcases how various types of infidelity damage a relationship (Bengusta & Gancayco, 2015); from television series to online novels, many types of infidelity have spread like wildfire. However, despite its popularity across different media mediums, it remains an issue seldom brought up in Filipino culture since the country is conservative and worships religion seriously; hence, openly discussing infidelity is taboo.
Filipinos treasure closeness and making ties among individuals, often forming intimate and romantic relationships (de Castro-Bofill et al., 2016). Hence, this Filipino value has contributed to forming a relationship in many ways. Although this Filipino value often connotes positively due to its warmness, it could also lead to an unpleasant outcome if it is misused, especially in the context of being in a relationship yet constantly entertaining other individuals.

**The effect of parental infidelity on children**

Despite considering family as a highly valued center of Philippine culture, the impact of infidelity on families has been an unacceptable topic to discuss. With this reality, it is not a hidden fact that when parents commit infidelity - may it be one or both of them, it may create a profound impact on their children's perceptions of family dynamics and their romantic relationships. With this, parental infidelity can have a profound impact on children, particularly in their perceptions of family dynamics and their romantic relationships.

Children who witness parental infidelity may struggle with emotional distress, mistrust, and insecurity, leading to potentially negative outcomes in their future relationships. When this happens, Filipino children tend to stay in a state of misery and hatred, which leads them to have a hostile relationship with their parents (de Castro-Bofill et al., 2016). Despite that, they still find other ways to adjust and cope, such as seeking social support. Research has shown that children who have a strong social support network, whether it be friends, family members, or community resources, are more resilient in the face of parental infidelity. Seeking support can help children feel less isolated and more validated in their feelings and provide them with practical advice on how to deal with the situation (Paredes, 2010).

A study conducted by Weiser, Weigel, Lalasz, and Evans (2017) stated that children who have experienced and discovered their parent's infidelity may not only experience a range of negative emotions but will more likely engage in said infidelity later on in their lives. This finding is in line with the study conducted by Cui and Fincham (2010), which suggests that children tend to imitate the specific behaviors of their parents, particularly those related to romantic relationships. Surprisingly, the level of satisfaction perceived by children in their parents' relationship also had a significant influence on their infidelity behavior. This could be attributed to the fact that satisfaction in relationships is a critical predictor of infidelity in intimate relationships.
A study (Spence, 2012) showed that those with infidelity-committing parents had greater rates of infidelity than those with non-infidelity-committing parents. Adult children whose parents stayed together after an affair had occurred had the highest rates of adultery. These children perceive adultery as acceptable due to modeling what they witnessed. Also, a study by Weiser and Weigel (2017) showed that the risk of a child committing adultery correlates with parental infidelity. Even though this effect was small, children who knew about a parent's infidelity were considerably more likely to have committed adultery. These results highlight the significance of considering family-of-origin experiences when explaining outcomes in romantic relationships.

Moreover, a study by Salih and Chaudry (2021) implies that children must be understood as their individuals, distinct from either the betrayed or unfaithful parent since comparisons or indications of likeness can cause a variety of anxiety- and worry-related symptoms. Similarly, it has been discovered that even relatively broad traits shared by adult children of unfaithful parents might cause anxiety in those who have suffered parental betrayal. Hence, the possibility of adultery might lead to issues in their romantic relationships.

Objective

Opportunities to study this topic include identifying how young adult children who witnessed their parent's infidelity perceive and respond to the occurrence of cheating in their romantic relationship, allowing an in-depth exploration of these perspectives and experiences of the target participants. Hence, the study may include investigating the role of cultural factors and gender in shaping young adult children's responses to parental infidelity in romantic relationships. Various studies (Thorson, 2013; Kato, 2021; Wróblewska-Skrzeka, 2021) explored that cultural norms and expectations regarding family, relationships, and gender roles can influence how individuals respond to parental infidelity. By examining the role of cultural factors and gender's influence on the responses of young adult children towards parental infidelity in establishing a relationship, the researchers will be able to develop a comprehensive understanding of these experiences, which may be used to create specialized interventions and support services that cater to the individual needs of the children affected. Hence, the researchers aim to explore the lived experiences of young
adult children involved in parental infidelity through the role of cultural factors and gender influence and how they establish their romantic relationships.

Methods

Various topics about infidelity have been circulating online, whether internationally or locally. Most of the studies (Haseli et al., 2019; Stavrova et al., 2022; Boekhout et al., 1999) focused on the effects of infidelity on a romantic relationship, the well-being of the person who has been cheated on, their perspective on infidelity, and many more. However, there are only a few studies that highlight the effects of parental infidelity on a child. In this study, the researchers explored the lived experiences of young adult children involved in parental infidelity in romantic relationships to understand and give meaning to their experiences. Hence, a qualitative phenomenology research design is the best fit to interpret and analyze the data since it investigates the essence of the phenomenon shared by the participants, which in this case is their experience of witnessing their parent's infidelity and how it affects their behavior or attitude in a romantic relationship.

Participants

The researchers used purposive sampling to identify participants that fit the study's criterion. A total of seven young adult ages between 22 and 25 has shared their experiences about their discovery of their parent's infidelity during their formative years and how it affects their behavior or attitude towards their romantic relationship. All interviewed participants had been and are still in a romantic relationship.

Measures

The researchers measured the data using a thematic analysis to understand the information given by the participants. According to Braun and Clarke (2004), thematic analysis is a qualitative approach that helps the researchers make meaning out of the information shared by the participants. Moreover, it is the approach that best fits the study since it is a flexible and applicable method, especially in the range of answering the research questions.

Procedure

The researchers elicited rich and detailed descriptions of the participants' experiences through a one-on-one semi-structured interview using Google Meet.
All of them had been given an online form a week before the interview, which contained the informed consent, the purpose of the study, their rights and privacy, and the ethical standards that the researchers would measure during the interview. Moreover, the researchers assured the participants of the confidentiality and anonymity of their information. The form's contents were discussed before the interview to remind the participants about their rights and how their data would be used in the study.

**Data analysis**

The researchers verbatim transcribed the audio recordings from the respondents to help them analyze the data. With this, the researchers used the thematic analysis of Braun and Clarke (2006) as the primary analytic framework for the collected textual data to make meaning and sense of the participants' experiences. The thematic analysis allowed for the systematic identification, analysis, and interpretation of patterns or themes emerging from the data. The process began by transcribing the interviews, familiarizing the participants with the data through repeated readings, and immersing them in the participants' sentiments. This initial immersion helped the researchers develop a holistic understanding of the data. Next, the researchers engaged in the coding process, where they systematically identified meaningful data units relevant to the research question. Initial codes representing different aspects of the participants' experiences were generated, and then similar codes were grouped to form potential major themes and subthemes.

Through an iterative process, the identified themes were thoroughly reviewed and refined to ensure that the themes accurately captured the essence of participants' experiences and adequately represented the diversity and richness of the data. Variations and exceptions within the data were considered and given attention, allowing for the emergence of sub-themes that added depth and nuance to the analysis.

**Results**

After analyzing the data, the researchers formed 3 themes to determine the participant's experiences based on the needed data in this phenomenological study. Every theme was structured based on the effect of parental infidelity on emotional and psychological well-being, the transformation of family dynamics post-
infidelity revelation, and the influence of parental infidelity on romantic relationship formation in young adult children.

Through the analysis of interview narratives shared by participants, the researchers identified the impact of awareness about parental infidelity. The shared sentiments expressed by the participants during the interview formed significant themes, such as the Impact of Awareness about Parental Infidelity, the Impacted Parent-child relationship, and the Complex Sense of Trust and Attachment in Relationships.

1. The effect of parental infidelity on emotional and psychological well-being

Impact of awareness about parental infidelity

This study examined the impact of discovering parental infidelity on the emotions, parent-child relationship, and trust and attachment in the participants' relationships. The emotional impact characterized feelings of hurt, betrayal, and devastation and impacted self-esteem and self-worth. Similarly, the study of Imtinan et al. (2023) shows that children victims of their parent's infidelity caused psychological distress, which could traumatize the child, affecting the different aspects of their functioning and social life.

Feelings of hurt, betrayal, devastation

The awareness of parental infidelity has affected young adult children emotionally with a profound sense of hurt that reflects the emotional pain and distress an individual experiences upon discovering their partner's infidelity. The mentioned feelings altogether reflect the sense of being let down or deceived by someone trusted, which often contributes to the individual's overall devastation.

... mixed emotion, it feels so heavy that you don't know how you're going to react or something... At that time I felt like I was hurt for my mom too, no... the feeling was so heavy that it was all together: the anger, sadness, pain.

The participant has expressed anger, sadness, and pain upon learning of parental infidelity. According to Salih and Chaudry (2021), traumatic experiences like parental infidelity are likely to cause feelings of anguish, dread, and perplexity. Hence, parental infidelity hugely impacts the emotions of the children, also making them the victims of the faithlessness of the parent who committed the act.

Affected view on the cheating parent and authoritative figures

After discovering the infidelity, a participant experienced a change in their perception of their cheating parent and authoritative figure. Hence, the inability to
reconcile and distant emotions impacted their relationship with their parents. One of the participants stated that their perception of their cheating parent changed significantly due to the infidelity:

... that moment really broke him for me and not just him, it broke many things for me you know- my trust in men in general, my trust in authoritative figures, my trust in my parents and my trust in the future, on stability-it really ruins you...so it kind of what, changes many things and since then when I found out I never really looked at my father the same way I did.

According to Batara et al. (2020), the discovery of infidelity has caused hurt, distress, and trust in the children, leading to a change in the perception of the unfaithful parent and a destruction of the sense of security in the family relationship. Hence, children who witnessed the infidelity have a negative perception of the parent who committed the infidelity.

2. Impacted the Parent-child relationship

The experiences stated by the participants on being aware of the infidelity in their family became known to participants in two forms: witnessing their unfaithful parent commit infidelity alone and knowing about the infidelity through a parent victimized by infidelity or told by other family members. Nevertheless, children becoming aware of infidelity has been affected emotionally and psychologically. Moreover, it has changed the parent-child relationship wherein the difficulties faced in repairing and restoring the parent-child relationship following the revelation of the parent's infidelity affected the children:

Actually, it changed a lot, as it seems like you want to disown him, or maybe it is better that they just separate like that. It is so deep that when it happened, no matter what he did, it seemed as if that father-and-son relationship or any of our siblings could not be restored.

According to Miller (2015), the parents’ affair has a huge role in the development of the child, especially when they have learned about the infidelity when they were younger. In addition to this, Thorson (2014) supported that infidelity has the potential to cause psychological difficulties in which one of which could be from the stress brought by the situation, affecting the bond of the parent-child relationship.

3. Coping strategies employed upon discovering infidelity

Due to the effect of parental infidelity on the participants, the researchers identified and categorized the coping strategies used when discovering infidelity. Major themes emerged, and their descriptions were based on participants’ expressed sentiments. The coping strategies explored were self-harm, emotional
repression, and indirect emotional expression, in which self-harm was exemplified by seclusion, smoking, self-punishing, and drinking. Emotional repression encompasses social deception and avoidance, and indirect emotional expression involves writing letters.

These findings demonstrate the coping strategies employed by participants upon discovering infidelity.

Maybe it's a way to cope; you punish yourself for something that is not your fault— you don’t understand that as a kid. ... And that's it, self-harm...what else? Well, I was drinking then, like 8th grade. I was already drinking then and hanging out with friends a lot. ...what I do is I cover myself with lies. Not that bad lies, but maybe, for example, I don't tell my friends or classmates that my mom and dad broke up because of cheating, but uhh, I say that my dad works overseas.

4. Transformation of family dynamics post-infidelity revelation

From the interviews conducted with the participants, it was evident that the revelation of infidelity led to significant changes in family dynamics. The central theme was family conflict, with various subthemes derived from the participants' shared experiences.

The subthemes identified within the theme of family conflict following infidelity included lack of support, parental role reversal, financial difficulties, and family separation. These subthemes highlight the challenges and disruptions that arise within families due to infidelity, such as a lack of emotional or practical support, changes in parental roles, financial strain, and the potential breakdown of the family unit.

Family conflict - lack of support

Participants who experienced parental infidelity faced a lack of support within their family, may it be emotional or financial support:

... basically, I physically and emotionally moved away from them. It's like when I went away from them, they seem to support me financially, but when it comes to physical and emotional support, there is none, absolutely zero.

the only one who really provides for us is my dad, and when they separated, of course, my mom needs to do ... to go to work...By that, our financial status changed so much that we really struggled - it reached the point of selling things and stuff, selling the house like that.

Family separation

Moreover, the transformation of family dynamics that occur following the revelation of infidelity within the family leads to the separation of family members:
Yes, because after that, our family seemed to fall apart. It's like, we don't talk to our parents like that anymore because of that.

5. Influence of parental infidelity on romantic relationship formation

After conducting interviews with the participants, it became evident that parental infidelity significantly impacted how they approached romantic relationships. The influence of this experience tends to be associated with negative perceptions and attitudes. Through the analysis of the interview data, two major themes emerged, shedding light on how parental infidelity affected their romantic relationship formation.

Interpersonal issues

The first theme highlighted the participants' interpersonal issues and trust and attachment struggles. The sub-themes under the first theme revealed that the experience of parental infidelity led to deep-seated trust issues and feelings of insecurity in forming intimate connections. Participants expressed a fear of repeating the same patterns of infidelity in their relationships, which hindered their ability to invest emotionally and trust their partners fully. My trust issues started when I was young, they started inside our home, so when I go out and meet other people, it's like the mindset becomes "if my relatives, my father himself, were the ones who gave me a trust issue, then other people can do that to me."

I cannot be in a relationship with a person I don't know everything about...if not, it's not gonna work with me. It made me question everyone's intentions and I don't know if I can really fully trust someone, even my current partner. I was afraid that what he did to my mom would happen to me too. I feel like I'm going to get karma *chuckles* it seems like karma will happen to me - my father's karma, that's what I thought at first.

The participants' experience highlights the impact of parental infidelity on the formation of romantic relationships, particularly regarding trust, abandonment issues, and feelings of insecurity, and it explores the influence of parental infidelity on individuals' fears and concerns about repeating similar relationship patterns in their romantic relationships.

Avoidance and being cautious

The second theme focused on avoidance and being cautious. The sub-themes under the second theme underscored participants' reluctance to be attached, investing emotionally, and being cautious with the probability of cheating in their relationship. These findings highlight participants' negative associations with parental infidelity and how it influenced their approach to romantic relationships.
I have an avoidant attachment style, and I feel like it developed when I was a kid... I still avoid and shut myself down when I have personal issues. I don't really allow myself to get too close with anyone, but I am trying my best to heal from the damages I never wanted in the first place.

I guess don't get too attached, don't give myself away... It's like it's hard to leave some parts of me on people who's just goanna leave me again... that's why less giving, less caring... and more... more formula - like everything has a formula.

The participants' experience due to the influence of parental infidelity on individuals tends to detach themselves emotionally or maintain a certain level of emotional distance in their romantic relationships.

Discussion

This research sought to understand the effects of parental infidelity on young adults developing romantic relationships. Hence, the researchers questioned the participants about their experiences to collect and analyze the information. The participants offered responses that included their thoughts and sentiments about their unfaithful parent, the acts taken, and feelings shown after learning about their parent's unrepentant conduct and future intentions about their romantic relationship.

The effect of parental infidelity on emotional and psychological well-being

The findings showed that young adult children who experienced parental infidelity were affected emotionally and psychologically negatively, aligned with Salih and Chaudry's (2021) research, which suggests that children who witnessed parental infidelity can have trauma that could affect many aspects of their lives, including the establishment of a romantic relationship. In contrast to Siguan's (2021) findings, most participants could set themselves apart from their circumstances. They were competent in distinguishing their resentment and emotions over infidelity from other interpersonal relationships.

The impact of parental infidelity on young adult children is a complex and multifaceted issue. The findings of the study revealed that the emotional and psychological effects of parental infidelity can vary among individuals. While some participants experienced significant distress, others exhibited coping mechanisms and resilience that allowed them to separate their negative emotions related to infidelity from their other relationships.
This diversity in responses underscores the importance of recognizing the individual differences and factors that contribute to varying outcomes in young adult children who have experienced parental infidelity. It highlights the need for further research to understand the underlying mechanisms and psychological processes that influence these diverse reactions.

**Transformation of family dynamics post-infidelity revelation**

A family is an emotional unit that develops interconnected systems that interact. Hence, a parent-child dyad relationship disagreement impacts the participants involved in parental infidelity. Based on the result of the study, family conflict becomes the highlight that affects the dynamics in which young adult children experience loss of support, parental role reversal, financial issues, and family separation. These stress the difficulties and disruptions that result from infidelity in families, such as a lack of sympathy or support, adjustments to parental responsibilities, financial pressure, and the potential dissolution of the family unit. Findings (De Castro-Bofill et al., 2016) also supported the result that after learning of the infidelity, children lost respect for the parent who committed infidelity, their fondness changed, and their interactions became tense. Additionally, children harbor resentment toward their unfaithful parents, which creates obstacles and widens the chasm between their relationships.

In essence, the consequences of parental infidelity and resulting family conflict extend beyond emotional impacts. They encompass relational, financial, and structural disruptions within the family unit. Recognizing and addressing these multifaceted impacts is crucial for supporting young adult children who have experienced parental infidelity. Providing appropriate support, therapy, and resources that address the specific challenges arising from infidelity-related family conflict can help individuals navigate these difficult circumstances and work toward healing and restoration.

**Influence of parental infidelity on romantic relationship formation**

Children who witness parental infidelity may experience emotional anguish, distrust, and insecurity, which might severely impact their ability to form healthy relationships in the future. According to de Castro-Bofill et al. (2016), when this occurs, Filipino children frequently remain in a condition of sadness and resentment that makes them unfriendly toward their parents. The study's results showed that it became clear that the participants' parents' adultery had greatly influenced their attitudes toward romantic relationships. This encounter tends to
have a detrimental impact on perceptions and attitudes. According to Salih and Chaudry (2021), having experienced parental infidelity made it harder for the participants to trust their romantic partners.

Infidelity, in any way, is one of the most emotionally charged, relationship-crushing experiences that a couple may go through, and its effect influences all the relationships involved. Children exposed to their parents' adultery have the most emotional, mental, and social effects, which can impact their relationships and well-being - particularly when developing meaningful, personal connections with others in the future. Studies (Salih & Chaudry, 2021; Spence, 2012; Weiser & Weigel, 2017) have indicated that parental infidelity may impact their children's perceptions of relationships, making it harder for them to build romantic connections or trust their partners. Additionally, some kids who observed their parents' adultery can also think it is okay to have an affair in a love relationship. According to Weiser and Weigel (2017), intergenerational transmission revealed a significant positive correlation between parental infidelity and engaging in infidelity behaviors or the likelihood of infidelity in establishing a romantic relationship. However, only a few studies support this claim. Nevertheless, infidelity undeniably affects lives and relationships negatively, but it is essential to consider the family origin of an individual to explain the romantic relationship outcomes.

Conclusions

The results presented that parental infidelity has significant and far-reaching effects on young adult children, particularly in the domains of emotional well-being, family dynamics, and the formation of romantic relationships. The findings demonstrate that children who witnessed, discovered, or were given knowledge about parental infidelity can experience negative emotional and psychological consequences, potentially leading to trauma that affects various aspects of their lives, including the establishment of romantic relationships.

With the first theme focusing on the effects of parental infidelity on emotional and psychological well-being, it is evident how trauma has been manifested due to parental infidelity that has happened, which extends its impact to the various aspects of the individuals' lives, how they perceive their parents, and how their compartmentalize their emotions related with infidelity.
The second main theme, which comprises the transformation of family dynamics after the revelation of infidelity, sheds light on the conflicts arising from the parent-child relationship due to infidelity. The repercussions of the situation manifested in the relationship conflicts through parental role reversal, financial strain, and family separation. These challenges present the difficulties caused by infidelity and how its potentialities can define the wholeness of the family structure. Lastly, the third main theme, which focuses on the influence of parental infidelity on romantic relationship formation, underscores the significance of exploring the exposure of children to parental infidelity through emotional distress, pervasive trust, and heightened insecurity among the individuals who discovered the infidelity, their cultivation, and maintenance of romantic relationships in their lives is hugely impacted.

With all of this in mind, exploring and understanding the lived experiences of young adults who knew or discovered their parent's infidelity highlights the gravity of the challenges they face in various facets of their lives. Gaining a comprehensive understanding of the repercussions of parental infidelity is of paramount importance when it comes to offering support to young adults who have undergone these distressing experiences. By fully acknowledging the emotional, relational, and psychological effects of such experiences, professionals and support systems can effectively provide the necessary interventions and resources to aid individuals in their journey toward healing and restoration. Furthermore, proactive endeavors to promote healthy relationship dynamics, foster trust-building, and facilitate effective communication - which were also mentioned by the participants - play a vital role in mitigating the detrimental impacts parental infidelity can have on forming future romantic relationships.

Practical implications

These findings have important implications for the practice of psychology, as psychologists play a critical role in supporting individuals who have experienced parental infidelity. By recognizing the profound emotional and psychological effects of such experiences, practitioners can tailor their interventions and resources to address these individuals' unique needs and challenges. This may involve providing individual therapy, family counseling, and support groups specifically designed to address the complexities arising from parental infidelity.

Moreover, psychologists are well-positioned to promote healthy relationship patterns, facilitate effective communication, and foster the
development of trust-building skills. By integrating these findings into the practice of psychology, professionals can contribute to the well-being and resilience of individuals who have experienced parental infidelity. Through comprehensive assessment, empathetic support, and evidence-based interventions, psychologists can assist individuals in navigating the emotional complexities, rebuilding their lives, and ultimately fostering healthier and more fulfilling relationships in the future.

Limitations and future research directions

The findings of this study were based on a small sample size, which may affect its generalization and how its claims should be approached. Additionally, the study primarily focused on the participants’ emotional and psychological well-being, family dynamics, and formation of romantic relationships, which serves as the scope and limitations of what was found in this study. With this, other factors, such as the interplay of cultural and socioeconomic elements, should have been highlighted.

Moreover, future research can delve into longitudinal studies, presenting valuable insights into how infidelity may impact the children or the whole family over time. Parenting styles, on the other hand, can also be explored about the infidelity that has happened to offer an understanding of its overall impact on the family. Moreover, the effect of social media on young adults dealing with infidelity can also be studied. By addressing these future research directions, the understanding of parental infidelity for people involved can be broadened and will serve more implications in the mentioned contexts.

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