

Parental Infidelity and Children's Reactions: A Case Study in a Filipino Family

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ABSTRACT

A child first develops within the family environment. Disruptions to a functional family affect a child, especially in his/her psychological development. One of the alarming issues a family faces is the infidelity of the mother. With this, the present study conducted a case study that looks into the reactions and perceptions of the children upon exposure to their mother's infidelity. Both the interviews and psychological tests indicated that a parent's infidelity has a debilitating impact towards the children's perceptions about their parents, to relationships, towards trust, towards themselves, to the act of infidelity, and to other vital areas in their lives. The immediate and observable impacts following exposure to infidelity provided valuable insights regarding its implications to a growing child.

Keywords: infidelity; exposure to infidelity; children; relationships; parents

INTRODUCTION

Parents are the child's first teachers who teach about his/her environment, the right and the wrong, how to do things, and the like. The children's experience with their parents helps them makes sense of the world around them (Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985). Parents provide the support and security these children need as they go through their formative years (Bowlby, 1969). However, children's representations and sense of security are challenged with the presence of infidelity in their respective families. Infidelity is defined as sexual and/or emotional act occurring outside the primary relationship and is characterized by a breach of trust and/or violation of the exclusivity of the relationship (Blow & Hartnett, 2005). Infidelity is

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labeled as one of the most severe violations and betrayal that a person can experience (Whisman & Wagers, 2005). The breach of trust is not only experienced by the couple but other individuals connected to the relationship as well, specifically their children. This is because infidelity has a ripple effect (Vangelisti & Gerstenberger, 2004) that in turn cascades the detrimental effects of infidelity on the children. However, most adults failed to realize this involvement (Duncombe & Marsden, 2004); hence it is also important to include children in studying this phenomenon. Considering the significant change that these children experience, there are still limited studies about their views on infidelity and how exposure to their parents' infidelity provides an immediate impact. The present study looked into the children's perceptions towards infidelity, their parents, and other areas of their lives.

Childhood experiences influence children's future behaviors and perceptions. Negative childhood experiences like family conflict, violence, sexual and physical abuse (Hughes & Vango, 1989) are associated with negative health and psychosocial outcomes (Felitti et al., 1998), development of a psychiatric disorder (Dube et al., 2003), and intimate partner violence (McCloskey, Figueredo, & Koss, 1995). The disappearance of one parent may bring about difficulty in emotional adjustment (Amato & Keith, 1991), behavioral problems like lower academic achievement, disengagement, and alienation (East, Jackson, & O'Brien, 2006; Spigelmen, Spigelman, & Englesson, 1991). Thus, the separation of parents influences the lives of children, and these separations are either the cause or consequence of infidelity.

The act of betrayal (infidelity) destroys the children's sense of security and trust that they no longer see the world as safe and predictable (Sori, 2007). These children have difficulty

in initiating and sustaining a relationship because the negative feelings that accompany their parents' infidelity inhibit them to trust potential partners which may lead to committing infidelity in their own relationship (Platt, Nalbone, Cassanova, & Wetchler, 2008; Walker & Ehrenberg, 1998). Children internalize actions observed and use these observations to guide their future behavior (Bandura, 1986). Having seen their parents commit infidelity, these children may perceive infidelity as normal behavior and thus consider it normal to engage in infidel acts (Sori, 2007). Exposure to parents' infidelity confuses children's values system that they are unable to distinguish between right and wrong (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1996).

Children's exposure to infidelity may cause both short and long-term effect on children. These effects include distress (Duncombe & Marsden, 2004), unwillingness to communicate (Webster, 1995) which may be due to embarrassment of their parents' infidelity and/or their inability to fully explain what they are going through (Wallerstein, Lewis, & Blakeslee, 2000), and academic difficulties (Potter, 2010). Long-term damages among children include trauma (Janoff-Bulman, 1992), loss of trust to the parent (Pam & Pearson, 1996), depression and reduced self-esteem (Amato & Keith, 1991).

Given the bulk of studies on the debilitating consequences of the children's exposure to their parents' infidelity, however, most studies focus on adult children, individuals who are 18 years old and above during the time of the study. These adult children used their childhood experiences of parental infidelity to report its effects. These studies failed to consider the amount of time that has passed from the discovery of infidelity until the time of the study that may have affected the changes being observed (Greene, 2006). Greene (2006) recommended

that studies be conducted nearer to the time of the discovery so that the immediate impact may be looked into. Likewise, Duncombe and Marsden (2004) reported that most studies assess the children's feelings through their parents' perceptions which result to unrealistic optimism about children's reaction rather than their real experience.

Given the effects of infidelity and the limitations of the literature, the present study aims to investigate in detail children who are under the age of 18 and had just recently discovered their parents' infidelity by looking into their perceptions and feelings towards various aspects of their lives.

METHODS

Research Design

The study is approved by the University of San Carlos Institutional Ethics Review Committee. The current research study, conducted from 2015 to 2016, utilized multiple measures case study that employs various sources of evidence enabling an in-depth investigation of a case (Yin, 1980).

Participants

The participants were three siblings: Anna, Maria, and John (not their real names), who were 16, 14, and 12 years old, respectively, during the time of the study. Their family came from Manila and transferred to Cebu in 2010. It was in the year 2013, when their father went back to Manila, that the children discovered their mother's affair with a neighbor. Each

child discovered their mother's infidelity in different ways. Anna discovered through text messages, Maria was told directly by the mother, and John saw her mother having sex with her lover. Sometime in 2014, their parents separated. The mother left and lived somewhere in Cebu though she continually visits the children while refusing to talk to the father. At the time of the study, the children were living with their father who provided their needs by driving a cab. They were renting the same house where the mother's affair took place. Having come from a broken family himself, the father asked that all three children be included in the study because he has already observed that the children lost their drive to attend school.

Measures

Interview and psychological tests were employed. Interview questions were structured to know their feelings and perceptions upon their discovery of parental infidelity. Questions were created by the researchers under the guidance of a psychologist and were in vernacular form. Psychological tests acted as support to the different aspects being studied.

Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict (Fincham, 2013). CPIC is a scale that measures the children's perspective of the aspects of the interparental conflict. This scale is composed of 50 questions that assess children's thoughts and feelings towards the current situation of their parents' marital relationship. It is composed of three subscales, namely: conflict properties, threat, and self-blame.

Attachment Style Questionnaire (Muris, Meesters, van Melick, & Zwambag, 2001). AQ-C is a 1-item self-report questionnaire for ages 7 to 17 years old. It yields scores on three

attachment categories: secure, ambivalent, and avoidant. Children's attachment style will tell the kind of relationship they have with other people and the amount of trust they have for others, especially their peers.

Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). SWLS is a short 5-item instrument designed to measure global cognitive judgments of satisfaction with one's life. This scale provided the cues that there is an underlying reason affecting the children's responses. This scale is noted to be suited to different age groups.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). RSES is a 10-item scale that helps to measure global self-worth. This is done by measuring both positive and negative feeling about oneself by measuring the children's self-esteem. The scale uses a 4-point Likert scale whose responses range from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Satisfaction with Family Life Scale (Zabriskie & Ward, 2013). SFLS is composed of 5 items on a Likert scale that assesses the individual's global judgment of family satisfaction. Family satisfaction was theoretically practiced to be dependent on one's comparison of his or her family life circumstances with one's standards and expectations. This scale, according to Zabriskie and Ward (2013) was given a 5.5 reading level by Flesh-Kincaid grade level reading analysis, which means that an average ten-year-old can read and understand the scale.

Spence Children's Anxiety Scale (Spence, Barrett, & Turner, 2003). SCAS assesses the severity of anxiety symptoms which includes generalized anxiety, panic or agoraphobia, social phobia, separation anxiety, obsessive-compulsive, and physical injury fears. This scale was included not to diagnose the children with an anxiety disorder but to see the extent of anxiety

caused by parental infidelity to children. It also showed which anxiety symptoms the children are more inclined to. The SCAS has a 4-point frequency scale which ranges from never to always; it has 44 items and takes about 10 minutes to complete (Spence, 1997, 1998; Spence et al., 2003). The scale could be administered to children and adolescents aged between 8 and 17 years old (Origiles, Mendez, Spence, Huedo-Medina,& Espada, 2012).

House, Tree, Person. HTP is a projective test developed by John Buck (1948) (as cited in Killian, 1985). The idea of HTP is that through drawing the participants shows the unconscious difficulties through sketching the inner image of the primary process and is believed to be rooted to the individual's basic personality (Killian, 1985). In the interpretative process, the objects project the participants' world: the House mirrors the children's home life and familial life, hence was placed in the parents variable; the Tree is their experiences with their environment that reflects elemental relationships; and the Person is the children's interpersonal relationships; the Tree and Person also touch the participants' self-concept (Killian, 1985), thus was placed both in the relationship and self-variables.

The instructions and items of these psychological tests' are in English; hence the tests were given to each one of the children and the researchers verbally and individually guided them through the instructions and items using the local dialect.

Procedure

Upon gaining approval from the ethics review committee, the researchers then started scouting for participants. Through a referral, the researchers recruited three children who had

just recently experienced parental infidelity. The father signed the assent form admitting all three children to the study. Confidentiality and other concerns were discussed and agreed upon. A series of sessions was conducted wherein the children, upon their consent, voluntarily underwent two or three sessions per day. Each session lasted for an average of thirty minutes with breaks in between each session. In every meeting, the researchers were accompanied by a psychologist. The comfort, security, and privacy of the children were prioritized. A debriefing was conducted before and after each session. When all the sessions were done and accounted for, the collected data were encoded and stored in a computer that only the researchers can access.

RESULTS

This section provides the results and interpretations of both objective and projective tests. Moreover, the interview revolved around the children's perceptions and/or feelings towards an ideal family, upon the discovery of their mother's infidelity, towards their parents, relationship or marriage, trust, infidelity, and themselves.

Table 1 provides the summary of the results of the scale used in the study. The succeeding paragraphs are the summary of the results of both the interview and the tests of each participant. Conversation during the meeting was in Cebuano language. For easy understanding, the lines were translated into English.

Table 1. *Summary of the results of the scales used*

Tests	Anna	Maria	John
CPIC			
• Conflict Properties	27	Did not answer	31
- Frequency	11	CPIC	11
- Intensity	9		10
- Resolution	7		10
• Threat	19		27
- Perceived threat	6		11
- Coping efficacy	13		16
• Self-Blame	22		15
- Content	10		8
- Self-Blame	12		7
AQ-C	Avoidant Attachment	Secure Attachment	Ambivalent Attachment
SLS	16 (Slightly Dissatisfied)	22 (Slightly Satisfied)	23 (Slightly Satisfied)
RSES	25	25	26
SFLS	13	17	29
SCAS	75	Did not answer SCAS	40
• Separation Anxiety	16		8
• Social Phobia	10		14
• Obsessive Compulsive	16		8
• Panic or Agoraphobia	17		2
• Physical Injury Fears	1		1
• Generalized Anxiety	12		5

Case 1: Anna

Background Information

Anna is a 16-year-old female who was a Grade 9 student in a night high school at the time when research sessions were conducted. Anna is the eldest of three; her two siblings are a girl (Maria) and a boy (John). Her parents separated due to the infidelity her mother committed. She discovered her mother's infidelity sometime in the year 2013 through text messages sent by the man with whom her mother was having an affair. The said man also visits

their house late at night. Due to her discovery, she and her mother had frequent arguments. Their disagreements and arguments intensified when her mother blamed Anna for her miscarriage. This led her to disclose her mother's infidelity to her father sometime in 2014. The separation of her parents drove her to take her mother's role in their household.

Interview results

Back when they were still in Manila, Anna expressed that she was not that close to her parents because they were strict. Yet, she held positive perceptions towards them by describing her mother as caring and her father as hard working and a good person. Anna expressed a positive perception about an ideal family such that if there were problems, open communication about it might be able to resolve these family-related problems (Case 1 Session 1 Lines # 113-114, 117).

However, upon discovery of her mother's infidelity, Anna was doubtful about telling her father. She also expressed fear of the trouble that may happen to their family (Case 1 Session 1 Lines # 174-175, 292-293).

Though Anna pitied her father, she kept silent. It was not until the disagreements between her and her mother intensified that she decided to tell her father. Her discovery of her mother's infidelity led her to hold negative perceptions towards her mother whom she sees flirty and irresponsible and her father as weak (Case 1 Session 1 Line # 235-239, 222).

Anna expressed many emotions. She was sad, angry, and confused about the situation especially after her parents separated due to her mother's infidelity. She was confused on whose side to take, what to do about the situation, and who is right.

"I'm confused between them, I like my mother, and I also like my father. I'm confused as to whom to side... I don't know what to do... I don't know who is right, my mother or my father?" (Case 1 Session 1 Line # 247-249, 337; Case 1 Session 3 Line # 45-46)

Anna expressed her desire to improve her family's state and help her father in the future.

Although she holds future aspirations for her family, she does not see herself having her own family. Thus, she held negative perceptions towards marriage and/or relationships.

"...I don't want to get married... having a boyfriend is bothersome... I still have many responsibilities to think about.)" (Case 1 Session 2 Line # 31, 47, 54-55)

Regarding her perception towards trust, Anna said she always had a gut feeling when a person could be trusted or not (Case 1 Session 2 Line # 62).

As for infidelity, Anna expressed her negative view strongly and felt anger towards those who committed infidelity.

"I'm angry... they don't think about the effects of what they are doing." (See Case 1 Session 2 Line # 85-86).

With what they had and were going through, Anna keeps a strong façade. Though she expressed no mistrust, Anna dislikes being pitied; hence she keeps it all to herself (Case 1 Session 2 Line # 120-121, 131). She also expressed difficulty in her studies because she lost focus and was tired from doing household chores. Hence, it resulted in her frequent absences and/or tardiness (Case 1 Session 2 Line # 135-136). Anna disclosed many worries which were related to their family's situation. Her utmost concern is going astray in which for her is a result of the neglect of their parents. She also worries about her father's health and him becoming

depressed. Despite this overwhelming experience, Anna is quite hopeful for a better future (Case 1 Session 2 Line # 229-230, 232).

Summary of psychological tests

In the different psychological tests, Anna scored fair and/or moderate on self-esteem, knowledge about parents' conflict and coping with it. She scored low on satisfaction with her family life; and anxiety with the highest score on panic or agoraphobia which is closely followed by separation anxiety and obsessive-compulsive. However, she also indicated that she had a lot to fear, adding four more things that make her anxious: loneliness, losing someone special, scrutinized by people and having an illness. Anna had a high level of knowledge about her parents' conflict and also indicated high self-blame on these conflicts. She exhibited slight dissatisfaction with her life and indicated an avoidant style of attachment. Anna's House drawing indicated insecurity, obsessive-compulsive traits, withdrawal from interpersonal give and take, and knowledge of strong conflict in her house. Her Tree drawing showed depression, anxiety, and feelings of inadequacy. Lastly, her Person drawing which also showed a picture of her entire family, indicated feelings of inferiority, fear of own aggression, insecurity, and defiance.

Case 2: Maria

Background Information

Maria is a smiling 14-year-old girl. She is the second or middle child of their family. She likes to play video games and play with other children in their neighborhood. Unlike her siblings, Maria was directly told by her mother about her affair with another man. She expressed to her mother her dislike about the affair, but she disclosed that her mother would not listen to her. This affair eventually led to her parents' separation and her loss of motivation to go to school.

Interview results

Maria holds a positive perception of an ideal family being intact, free of frequent fights, and parents get along with each other (Case 2 Session 1 Line # 56, 61, 64). Before, she disclosed that she was close to both parents. She expressed positive perception towards her mother whom she described as loving, kind, and generous; and her father who she perceived as good but was also strict (Case 2 Session 1 Line # 92, 95). However, Maria was affected when she learned her mother's infidelity. For her, her mother's infidelity is the cause of trouble in their family. Maria expresses much anger towards her mother and held negative perceptions towards her mother.

"I am angry at her... why did she have to fall for that guy (Case 2 Session 1 Line #131, 142)... It has changed... she is flirty... she has no delicadeza." (Case 2 Session 1 Line # 173, 175, 177)

At the time of discovery, Maria felt pity towards her father. However, despite this pity, she remained silent as she was afraid that if her father finds out, this will cause an intense fight between her mother and father (See Case 2 Session 1 Line # 160-162).

Maria did not respond to questions about trust. Yet, she held strong negative perception towards marriage and infidelity.

“I don’t believe in marriage... because... of what happened between my parents.” (See Case 2 Session 1 Line # 190, 192, 195)

“It is not nice to look at... traitorous (Infidelity).” (See Case 2 Session 1 Line # 210, 212)

Like her sister Anna, Maria was frequently absent at school after the incident (Case 2 Session 1 Line # 222). However, Maria still saw herself doing her best in her studies in the future (Case 2 Session 1 Line # 225).

Summary of psychological tests

Maria was unable to answer the CPIC and SCAS tests. Results of her psychological test showed fair and/ or moderate level of self-esteem, satisfaction in life and family life. She also exhibited a secure style of attachment. Maria’s House drawing hinted knowledge about strong conflicts in their house and defensive sensitivity. Her Tree drawing showed rigidity and chronic tendencies to anticipate frustration. And lastly, her Person drawing indicated efforts to be socially desirable or accepted, reluctance to accept visual stimuli, rejection, contempt, a sensitivity of criticism, fear of own aggression and tenuous reality.

Case 3: John

Background Information

John is the youngest of the three siblings. He was 12 years old and was on his first-year high school at the time of the sessions. John loves to play basketball with his neighbors. He was living with his father and two older sisters (Anna and Maria). He discovered his mother's infidelity when he saw his mother and her lover having sex in their living room. At that time, his mother thought he was sleeping and covered him with a blanket. The alleged guy frequently visits their home in the wee hours of the morning.

Interview results

John expressed positive perception towards an ideal family saying that all members of the family are capable of helping each other (Case 3 Session 2 Line # 177, 182, 184-185). In contrast to this perception, their current family situation says otherwise. John showed great distress towards their family's situation especially when his mother left.

"... We were a family until my mother left." (Case 3 Session 1 Line # 56-57)

He also held great contempt towards his mother's lover.

"I am angry with the guy... We had a family why does he have to steal it when he has already a family of his own." (Case 3 Session 1 Line # 131, 163-164)

Initially, John held positive perception towards his parents, describing his mother as caring and his father as good. However, after his mother's infidelity, John expressed that he was not entirely angry towards his mother, but he is more hurt in the change of his mother's demeanor (Case 3 Session 1 Lines # 133, 137, 143). John misses his mother dearly. He also expressed hurt and pity for his father (Case 3 Session 1 Line # 196, 200).

John was particular in the idea that if one is married, romantic meddling with others outside the married life is not right (Case 3 Session 2 Line # 223). John failed to give responses to questions about trust, infidelity, and self. Despite this, John holds a positive disposition about his future where he aspires to become a basketball player and a seaman (Case 3 Session 2 Lines # 4, 11).

Summary of psychological tests

In the different psychological test, John scored fair and/or moderate on knowledge of parental conflict as well as being threatened and self-blame on the said conflicts, self-esteem and slight satisfaction on his life. He had high scores on coping to interparental conflict and family life satisfaction. He scored low on the level of anxiety. John showed an ambivalent style of attachment. His House drawing showed knowledge about the strong conflict in his house, controlled and too defensive, see the future as difficult but willing to play along with it, and good contact with reality. His Tree drawing indicated anxiety that is under control, dependency, forced affect, feelings of constriction of his environment and wanting to break out, sheer effort to remain control, and obsessive desire of something. Lastly, John drew his whole family,

whereas his drawing of himself exhibited immaturity, effort to be socially acceptable, fear of voyeurism, rejection and contempt, adjustment and frustration.

DISCUSSION

Infidelity has a ripple effect (Vangelisti & Gerstenberger, 2004) and extends its detrimental effects to the people associated with the couple, most especially their children (Brown, 2001; Duncombe & Marsden, 2004). What is alarming is that the children might carry these effects into their adulthood (Angarne-Lindberg & Wadsby, 2009). The perceptions of children may provide insights on how the influences of infidelity persist through the children's adulthood.

The present study looks in-depth into the impact of exposure to parental infidelity to the different areas of the children's lives. Specifically, it focuses on children's perceptions towards the discovery of infidelity, parents, relationship and/or marriage, infidelity, and themselves.

Perceptions to Discovery of Parental Infidelity

Upon discovering their mother's infidelity, the children showed negative feelings as their reactions. These negative feelings include hurt and distress (Duncombe & Marsden, 2004), confusion (Ong et al., 2014), and fear that their family will be destroyed. Two of the children

(Anna and Maria) expressed anger towards their mother whereas John showed more anger towards his mother's lover.

The feelings of hurt experienced by the children may be linked to the destruction of their sense of security. Infidelity is marked by betrayal (Whisman & Wagers, 2005). As they witnessed infidelity, the deception that comes along with it led them to feel hurt, not only for themselves but also for their parent who was betrayed (father). Hurt feelings were observed in their feelings of pity towards their father.

Likewise, distress may stem from the failure of the parents to provide good role models of behavior (Lusterman, 2005). By failing to provide good models of behavior, the children lose their sense of security (Sori, 2007) which may cause them feelings of distress. Consequently, the family should be the source of security for these children. Filipino adolescents valued connection, intimacy, care, and support (Garo-Santiago, Ressureccion, & Tan-Mansukhani, 2009) that a family provides; however, the disruption in the family brought about by infidelity causes distress to the children.

On the other hand, the confusion of the children may be attributed to the idea that their parents are their model for doing and thinking which is right and wrong. However, the infidelity they witnessed (which is presumed wrong) led the children to be confused about what is right and wrong. The confusion stems from the parent (i.e., mother) committing the wrong act (infidelity) and who was supposed to teach them that infidelity is wrong (Ong et al., 2014). Furthermore, their indecision as to whose side they will remain loyal further confuses and distresses the children (Lusterman, 2005). Perhaps a reason why the two girls (Anna and Maria)

expressed more anger towards their mother than John is that this feeling of confusion is more common in mother-daughter relationships than in mother-son relationships and father's relationship with children of either sex (Amato & Afifi, 2006).

Similarly, the children's fear of the destruction of their family could be linked to the confusion of taking sides. The children's confusion on taking sides and the consequences it brings to their family (Lusterman, 2005) is the reason why the children initially remained silent about their mother's infidelity. Scenarios of disruption in the Filipino family who generally have close ties (Morillo, Capuno, & Mendoza, 2013) could be the least that children want to experience.

Another effect of discovering parental infidelity is the sudden decline of the academic performance of these children (Emery & Forehand, 1994). The children's preoccupation with their family's situation led them to lose concentration which in turn leads them to do poorly in their studies (Emery & Forehand, 1994). This preoccupation also led the children to absent more frequently at school leading to failure in several subjects. Likewise, Anna expressed that she is sometimes tired from household chores that led her to miss school. Anna takes care of the family or comes to the rescue of the family when occasion of difficulty (separation of parents) arises (Carandang, 1987 as cited in Tarroja, 2010). We can recall that the children's seemingly loss of motivation to go to school is the main reason why their father requested that all three be included in the study. This suggests that their poor academic performance may also be their way to gain attention from their parents.

Perception towards Parents

The children initially had positive perceptions towards their parents (e.g., good, caring, loving, and hardworking), especially towards their mother. However, after witnessing parental infidelity, these children developed negative perceptions, most especially, towards their mother.

Children see their parents as models of behavior (Bandura, 1986). However, if these role models showed unlikely behavior, these children experience negative emotions developing negative perceptions towards their parents (Lusterman, 2005). Children experience embarrassment out of their parents' wrongdoing preventing them from interacting with others (Emery, 1999). Finally, children lose trust towards their parent who committed infidelity and may now see the world as dangerous (Sori, 2007).

Another factor to the development of negative perceptions towards the parents is the presence of interparental conflict. Interparental conflicts could be a cause or a consequence of infidelity (Amato & Booth, 2001). These conflicts hinder the children from establishing trust in their parents and may cause future relationship problems (Krishnakumar & Buehler, 2000). Furthermore, when conflicts are hostile and are child-related, they cause distress in children (Pryor & Rodgers, 2001).

Perception towards Relationship and/or Marriage

Children who experienced their parents' infidelity have difficulty in initiating and sustaining a relationship in fear that infidelity may happen in their relationships. The children

felt betrayed by their parents' infidelity (Whisman & Wagers, 2005) and lose their sense of security (Sori, 2007) inhibiting them to trust, initiate, or sustain relationships (Walker & Eherenberg, 1998). In the present study, children exhibited negative perceptions towards entering a relationship and/or marriage because of their mother's infidelity.

By being exposed to their mother's infidelity, children may believe that their parents were permitted to be unfaithful and that they can also do such. The participants' inability to see themselves settling down in the future may be attributed to the violation and betrayal that their mother did to their father. In a Bowenian perspective, a dysfunctional family (in this case, caused by parental infidelity) elicits negative feelings and attitudes of the children towards marriage (Hurst, Sawatzky, & Pare, 1996).

Furthermore, significant disruptions in the life of children (i.e., infidelity), cause changes in their attachment style (Platt et al., 2008). Though the researchers are unable to assess previous attachment styles of the children, their current reported attachment styles vary. They reported secure (Maria) and insecure (Anna and John) attachment styles. This suggests forming an insecure attachment style may be partly influenced by infidelity.

The presence of social support may have contributed to the differences in attachment styles of the children. A secure attachment style is linked to successful peer relationships such that children may have seen their peers as their base for security and become the basis for their social development and adjustment (Kerns, 1996). On the other hand, insecure attachment style is rooted from low levels of reliable support from the mother when the children experience stress (Yunger, Corby, & Perry, 2005). Mothers play an important role in the lives of

their children such that when they leave the entire family has to adjust (Morillo et al., 2013). The absence of a mother may lead to a lack of secure base the children can turn into.

Perception towards Trust

Infidelity has a ripple effect. Hence, betrayal of trust is not only experienced by the partner of the infidel but also by their children (Vangelisti & Gerstenberger, 2004).

Anna started losing trust not only to her mother but with other people as well. This mistrust holds her from opening up to her peers (Walker & Ehrenberg, 1998). Anna avoided sharing her feelings and thoughts even to her closest friends because she dislikes being pitied upon. This fear of embarrassment and ridicule may be attributed to her mother's infidelity (Emery & Forehand, 1999; Wallerstein et al., 2000).

Consequently, the children's models in building relationships are their parents' relationship. When this model relationship shows dysfunction, children may develop low levels of trust in future relationships, holding to the idea that relationships work that way (Amato & Booth, 2001). The mother's infidelity destroys the children's sense of security (Lusterman, 2005) since they no longer receive it from their mother. Children who experience the disruption in their parents' marital relationship may lead them to experience anger and hostility (Hamama, & Ronen-Shenhav, 2012).

Perceptions towards Infidelity

Children view infidelity as a cause of the separation of their parents (Ong et al., 2014) and infidelity committed by the mother influenced the children's way of thinking towards their future relationships (Plat et al., 2008). In the present study, the children expressed negative perception towards infidelity. They voiced hatred and anger towards people who do the act of cheating. However, the children also showed differences. While the two girls (Anna and Maria) deliberately expressed anger towards infidelity, John expressed more anger towards his mother's partner. A plausible reason for this difference could be their perceptions towards their mother. The children do hold a negative attitude towards their mother after the discovery of infidelity, but John exhibited a lesser negative perception towards her. He would rather express hurt directed to the change of his mother's demeanor towards him.

It was also found that the children became stringent in identifying and assessing as to which behaviors are considered as infidelity. Though she did not deliberately enumerate as to what actions are deemed unfaithful, Anna expressed contempt towards flirtatious girls. This strict view of proper behavior may have been influenced by the experience of exposure to parental infidelity.

Perception towards Self

Upon exposure to infidelity, the children have reduced willingness to communicate (Emery & Forehand, 1994), behave in a strange manner (Sori, 2007), show signs of depression (Amato & Keith, 1991), and may have reduced self-esteem (Amato & Keith, 1991).

The children's unwillingness to communicate could also be associated to their inability to fully explain what they are going through and the embarrassment about their parents' separation due to infidelity (Wallerstein et al., 2000). The possibility of exhibiting strange behaviors is also present. Anna expressed concern that she and her siblings might do risky behaviors (e.g., drinking liquor) though she declined to do them. She perceived that children who behave strangely are neglected by their parents. Due to the absence of their mother, children feel neglected and often experience loneliness, insecurity, vulnerability, and desire for more intimacy from their mother (Parrenas, 2001). By exhibiting negative behaviors, the children can cope with the feelings of neglect (Sori, 2007). Depression and reduced self-esteem exhibited by the children could be associated with the parents' failure of providing good models of behavior (Lusterman, 2005).

Limitations and practical implications of the study

Although the information gathered were substantial in providing insights regarding the immediate effect of infidelity towards children, the researchers failed to collect data from other sources such as parents, peers, and teachers. The father declined to be interviewed but gave his observation on the changes of his children's academic performance. Likewise, the father requested that the study be conducted outside their neighborhood to protect the family from gossips of their neighbors. Hence, the researchers decided not to include the children's peers since most of their peers is composed of their neighbors and if the researchers were to pursue them, then the privacy of the family may be put at risk. Future studies may have to consider these factors.

Greene (2006) suggested that the closer the study is to the time of the discovery of infidelity, the direct impact of cheating can be assessed. Despite some limitations, the present study was able to look into the effects of children's exposure to infidelity in the shortest time possible.

In general, the present study provides insights on how the mind of children works after discovering parental infidelity. It was also observed that exposure to infidelity has detrimental consequences. The findings serve as a guide for helping professionals in creating intervention programs designed for these children.

Instability in the family negatively affects the children's well-being (McKeown & Sweeney, 2001) leading them to experience behavior problems, anxiety, and depression (Cummings & Davies, 1994). Having a good relationship between the husband and wife may benefit not only the couple but also the entire family especially the children.

CONCLUSION

Infidelity exists in our society. It does not only threaten the couples but the children as well. Children's involvement in the experience of infidelity is often neglected. These children are also affected in various ways by their parents' infidelity, and they carry these effects into their adulthood. Thus, looking into the effects of the children's exposure to their parents' infidelity will provide valuable insights into understanding and helping them.

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