



# Understanding The Perception Of Infidelity: Construction And Validation Of Perception Of Infidelity Scale (PIS)

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## ABSTRACT

The present study focuses on construction and validation of Perceived Infidelity Scale (PIS), a psychometric tool to assess the perception of infidelity in relationships among adult population. It was conducted on 254 participants using simple random sampling technique. The internal consistency reliability was assessed utilizing Cronbach's Alpha and Split-half reliability, while face and content validity were measured to establish validity of the measurement scale. Dimensions were created after a thorough review of literature leading to eight dimensions namely emotional attachment, emotional dependency, emotional intimacy, physical affection, online infidelity, breach of trust, secretive behavior/ omission of truth and past relationship experiences. The results suggest that the present scale provides a reliable and valid measure of assessment of perception of infidelity.

**Keywords:** Perception of Infidelity, Emotional Infidelity, Sexual Infidelity Online Infidelity, Tool construction

## Introduction

The concept of Infidelity has evolved through the generations and time. What once was simply understood as the involvement in physical and sexual acts outside a dyadic and committed relationship has now expanded itself to multiple dimensions. Engagement of a partner in behaviors of infidelity can have a devastating impact on relationships, even leading to possible conflict or relationship dissolution (Negash et al, 2014). The answer to the question of what constitutes infidelity is quite unclear. Infidelity, nowadays, is no longer a synonym for adultery and unfaithfulness but a more comprehensive term, taking into account the breach of trust (Feldman and Cauffman, 1999), patterns of behavior, emotional behavior and emotional cheating (Wilson et al., 2011) and the newest addition, the online world full of interactions (Alexopoulos et al., 2020).

### Definition of infidelity

Infidelity can be defined as "the situation in which one partner in a marriage or intimate relationship becomes sexually or emotionally involved with a person other than the partner's spouse or girlfriend or boyfriend". According to Blow and Hartnett (2005) Infidelity or "cheating", as it is usually understood, includes "a sexual and/or emotional act taking place outside of one's primary relationship that somehow violates the trust and/or norms that have been established between those individuals". This involvement is no longer contained within the bounds of the real world but has grown to the virtual world too (Alexopoulos et al., 2020). Easy access to the internet, the promise of anonymity and provisions of confidentiality has made it easier for individuals to indulge in unfaithful acts and keep their slates clean.

### Types of infidelity

The established research agrees upon the basic categorization of infidelity- Sexual and emotional (Kinsey et al., 1948; Glass and Wright, 1992). Sexual Infidelity can be understood as extradyadic (outside a dyadic relationship) (sexual interaction or involvement, specifically while being in a monogamous relationship (Blow & Harnett, 2005). These interactions refer to sexual intercourse, oral sex, kissing, sexual role-play etc.

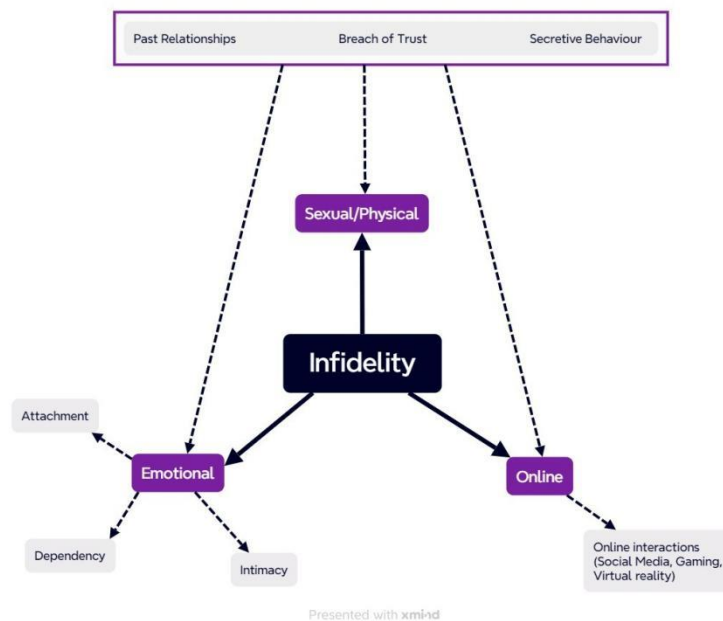
### (Thornton & Nagurney, 2011).

Emotional infidelity involves a romantic or an emotional tangent. It expands itself outside the bounds of physical and biological needs and includes investment of time, love and romantic involvement, emotional intimacy and connection with someone other than one's primary partner (Shackelford et al., 2000).

Online or infidelity is perceived and experienced same as 'offline' forms or acts of infidelity (Whitty & Quigley, 2008). Hertlein and Piercy (2008), defined online or infidelity as "a romantic or sexual contact facilitated by internet use that is seen by at least one partner as an unacceptable breach of their marital contract or faithfulness". One of the most important elements in online infidelity is the element of 'secrecy', which showed consistency across several definitions given by the researchers.

### Dimensions

Based on an extensive review of literature, the present study considers three types of infidelity: Emotional, Physical and Online infidelity, broken down into 8 dimensions which are mentioned in figure 1.



**Figure 1:** Dimensions of the scale

As crucial as it is to understand the concept of infidelity, it is also essential to understand the perceptions of infidelity among people and across age groups and gender. Perception, in this context, refers to what an individual considers cheating or unfaithfulness and what they would perceive as an act of infidelity. Studies investigating the perception of infidelity classify it into online infidelity, emotional infidelity, fantasized infidelity, hidden attachment and sexual infidelity (Brewer et al., 2023).

Considering the various aspects of infidelity that have been explored through multiple studies and the extensive pool of information that is available on the matter, it is imperative that the perception of infidelity has changed and will continue to change in the future, assessment of which is the primary objective for the development of the present tool.

### Review of literature

Several studies have attempted to list the behaviors that are perceived as cheating or unfaithfulness. One of the first social scientists to investigate the concept of perception of infidelity was Alfred Kinsey and he differentiated between two types: emotional and sexual (Kinsey et al., 1948). Sexual involvement and behaviors have been found to be more strongly perceived as infidelity than other non-sexual behavior like keeping secrets, omission of truth, going out, hiding information etc. (Kruger et al., 2013). Emotional infidelity can be understood as emotional intimacy and connection with an individual other than one's partner or outside of one's relationship (Wilson et al., 2011).

Sexual acts have been found to comprise infidelity to the greatest extent while online, emotional and other related behaviors were less considered as acts of infidelity (Thompson and Sullivan, 2015). One's perception of what constitutes as cheating or infidelity may be sculpted by one's previous experiences (Moreno and Kahumoko Fessler, 2018).

Over the years, several studies have supported the parental investment theory (Trivers, 1972; Townsend, 1995), also known as the evolutionary theory, which suggests that sexual infidelity is seen as a greater threat to a relationship by males (fear of cuckoldry), whereas for women, emotional infidelity ranks higher (fear of desertion and depriving of resources) (Townsend, 1995). These assumptions have been challenged by several

research studies. Studies have found no significant sex related differences in the response to the cues relating to emotional of sexual infidelity (Schützwohl, 2005).

Recent studies have found significant influence of individual differences on the perception of infidelity, for example, chronic jealousy (Miller and Maner, 2009), agency and communion (Thornton and Nagurney, 2011), sexually permissive attitudes (McAnulty & Brineman, 2007), personality traits like narcissism and psychopathy (Sevi et al., 2020), attachment anxiety and fear of ending up alone (Sakman et al., 2021). Other than individual differences, age has been found to have an influence and can have a cohort effect in context of infidelity (Atkins et al., 2001). The impact of parenting styles and attachment styles have also been explored among the population which have encountered infidelity in their relationships (Hatami et al., 2011). A significant positive relationship between infidelity and income and employment status has been observed in married couples (highest effect in marriages where only one partner is working) (Atkins et al., 2001).

Research has also established a significant positive relationship between power and infidelity. However, gender was not seen as a moderating factor in prevalence of infidelity (Lammers et al., 2011). Males and females have been seen to be equally likely to cheat on their partners, whether married or unmarried (Adamopoulou, 2013). Highest rates of prevalence of infidelity have been found in couples who are dating, followed by cohabitating couples or so called "Live in relationships and lastly, the married couples (Adamopoulou, 2013). An increase in the prevalence of infidelity has been recently observed, especially in women (Lammer et al., 2011; Brand et al., 2007) narrowing the gap in gender differences. In a study aimed at understanding the perception towards infidelity, females checked off or perceived more behaviors as acts of infidelity than males, especially behaviors related to emotional cheating (Thornton and Nagurney, 2011).

A growing body of research suggests an increase in prevalence of online infidelity is quite prevalent in the present times (Cravens & Whiting, 2014; Vossler, 2016). Online infidelity has been seen to not only have sexual components or intention but also emotional investment (Henline & Lamke, 2007). Behaviors related to online infidelity were rated highly and approximately as devastating as sexual intercourse (Whitty, 2003). The impact of such behaviors can lead to deterioration of familial relationships and marriages and have a significant negative effect on relationships, causing pain and stress (Hertlein & Stevenson, 2010).

### Objectives

1. To identify the dimensions of infidelity such as emotional dependency, emotional attachment, emotional intimacy, physical affection, online infidelity, secretive behavior, betrayal of trust and past relationships.
2. To contribute to the current understanding of perception of infidelity among young adults.
3. To construct and provide a standardized and reliable tool to be used in the studying of perception of infidelity.

### Method

**The objective of the present study was to construct a reliable tool to assess perception of infidelity among the adult population. The process of construction and validation was done through following phases:**

#### Planning

After a thorough and extensive review of literature and assessment of the tools relevant to the present topic, the research question and objectives to be accomplished were set, which was the first step towards the construction of the tool. Next, the list of variables, based on which the item pool would be constructed, was selected.

#### **There were eight variables chosen for item construction including:**

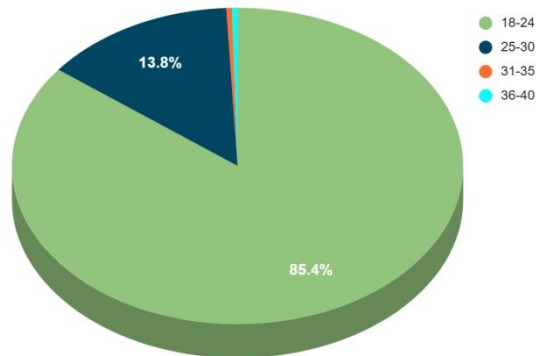
1. Emotional intimacy: involves the capacity to be vulnerable, build trust, share one's deepest thoughts and feelings, establishing a deep and meaningful connection with a partner.
2. Emotional Attachment: Sense of security, peace and connection and feeling of affection towards the people one is close to.
3. Emotional Dependency: It refers to the degree of trust and reliance on one's partner for decision making.
4. Physical affection: Includes a spectrum of behaviors denoting physical intimacy and is a broad concept ranging from a casual kiss to sexual intercourse.
5. Online infidelity: Includes involvement in inappropriate online interactions (e.g.- sexting, sharing explicit media or engaging in sexual activities)
6. Secretive behavior/Omission of truth: Behavior aiming to conceal information one's partner. Omission of truth is deliberate withholding of information from one's partner to avoid conflict.
7. Breach of trust: It involves a violation of trust, commitment and faith in a relationship.
8. Past relationships: Includes perception and attitude towards a partner's former relationships.

## Construction

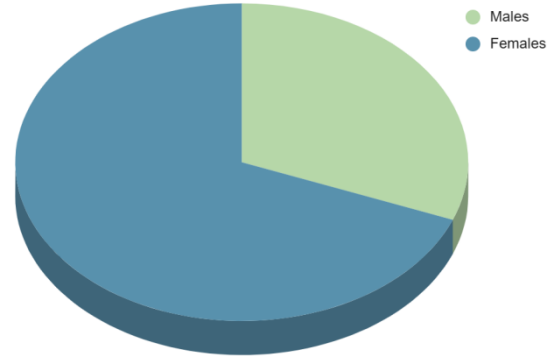
The next step focused on creating a pool of items which would collectively assess the chosen dimensions and create the first draft of the questionnaire. A question pool consisting of 62 items was formulated encompassing all 8 dimensions. The range of questions for each dimension ranged from 2-10. After an extensive panel check which concluded with five phases, 21 items were finalized from the initial number of 62 items and the pilot study was conducted using the 21-item questionnaire. All the items were checked for grammatical errors and were modified in line with the instructions from the panelists.

## Quantitative Evaluation Participants

To gather the data, simple random sampling techniques were utilized among the population with an age group of participation set at 18-40 years of age. Sample population included young adults belonging to diverse cultural backgrounds. Total number of participants in the sample was 254 out of which included 30.3% males and 69.7% females. 85.4% of the participants were in the age group of 18-24 years, 13.8% in the age group of 25-30 years and 0.8% belonged to the age group of 31-35 years. 41.3% of the participants mentioned being in a committed romantic relationship, 52.8% reported being single while 5.9% reported being in a complicated relationship (situationship). 42.9% of the respondents reported being cheated on at least once in their lifetime while 16.2% admitted cheating on their partners.



**Graph 1:** Age Distribution



**Graph 2:** Gender Distribution

## Procedure

Participants were asked to read the statements and imagine themselves in a situation where their partners indulged in the behaviors mentioned and mark the ones which they would consider as cheating. Each item was rated on a 3-point scale (No=1, Maybe=2 and Yes=3). Participants also filled demographic details (Age, religion, education etc.) and relationship specific details. The data collection was done via google forms (online questionnaire) and distribution of offline forms. The online questionnaire was circulated via multiple social media platforms and simple random sampling techniques were utilized.

Specific instructions were given to the participant prior to distribution of the form and no other inclusion criteria was implemented except for age. The process of data collection ran for a period of 6 weeks in the month of March '24 - April '24 and the final number of responses measured up to 258 out of which 4 responses were removed due to missing values. The details and responses of the participants were kept completely confidential and anonymous.

## Measures

The present study focuses on advancing the current understanding of infidelity and its perception among young adults. After a rigorous and thorough review of literature, consultation of the experts in the field and selection of eight dimensions relating to perception of infidelity, the Perceived Infidelity Scale was constructed. The Perceived Infidelity Scale (PIS) comprises of 21 statements (behavior exhibited by the current partner), aiming to gain an insight on what people consider as infidelity in their relationships.

## Validation

For the standardization of the constructed tool, it is crucial to assess the validity and reliability of the tool. A set of standardized procedures was established to ensure the consistency and accuracy of the measurement tool.

## Tool Design

The perceived infidelity scale (PIS) is a self-reported tool used to assess the perception of infidelity among individuals. PIS consists of 21-items reported on a 3-Likert scale with options Yes, Uncertain and No.

**Table-1:** Item Total Statistics

1 <sup>st</sup> Draft							
Item no.	Item Selection	Item no.	Item Selection	Item no.	Item Selection	Item no.	Item Selection
Item 1	Modified	Item 17	Modified	Item 33	Modified	Item 49	Modified
Item 2	Retained	Item 18	Modified	Item 34	Modified	Item 50	Retained
Item 3	Modified	Item 19	Deleted	Item 35	Modified	Item 51	Retained
Item 4	Retained	Item 20	Deleted	Item 36	Retained	Item 52	Retained
Item 5	Retained	Item 21	Modified	Item 37	Modified	Item 53	Modified
Item 6	Modified	Item 22	Deleted	Item 38	Deleted	Item 54	Modified
Item 7	Modified	Item 23	Deleted	Item 39	Retained	Item 55	Deleted
Item 8	Modified	Item 24	Deleted	Item 40	Modified	Item 56	Modified
Item 9	Retained	Item 25	Deleted	Item 41	Retained	Item 57	Deleted
Item 10	Modified	Item 26	Retained	Item 42	Retained	Item 58	Deleted
Item 11	Retained	Item 27	Modified	Item 43	Retained	Item 59	Retained
Item 12	Modified	Item 28	Modified	Item 44	Deleted	Item 60	Retained
Item 13	Modified	Item 29	Retained	Item 45	Retained	Item 61	Modified
Item 14	Deleted	Item 30	Modified	Item 46	Modified	Item 62	Retained
Item 15	Retained	Item 31	Modified	Item 47	Deleted		
Item 16	Modified	Item 32	Retained	Item 48	Modified		

Table 1 shows the total number of items in the initial draft and their status after the 1<sup>st</sup> panel check.

**Reliability**

Reliability is the extent to which consistent results are produced by a measurement tool or a test when administered on different participants and over time, keeping the test conditions constant. For the present study, Cronbach’s Alpha, a statistical measure used to assess internal reliability, was employed.

**Table-2:** Reliability of the Assessment Perception of Infidelity (PIS)

Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
21	.894

Table 2 shows the value of Cronbach’s Alpha Coefficient of 0.894, indicating a high internal consistency reliability of 89%.

**Table 3:** Final list of items

Item	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Correlation	Item-Total Squared Correlation	Multiple Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
<b>EA 1</b>	45.228	92.201	0.436	0.302	0.891
<b>EA 2</b>	45.276	93.766	0.349	0.311	0.893
<b>EI 1</b>	45.209	92.253	0.437	0.328	0.891
<b>EI 2</b>	45.303	91.595	0.513	0.452	0.889
<b>EI 3</b>	45.209	90.276	0.561	0.417	0.888
<b>ED 1</b>	45.232	90.053	0.588	0.418	0.887
<b>PA 1</b>	45.252	90.521	0.521	0.4	0.889
<b>PA 2</b>	44.866	92.923	0.479	0.347	0.89
<b>PA 3</b>	45.067	90.774	0.578	0.458	0.887
<b>OI 1</b>	45.319	92.74	0.421	0.284	0.891
<b>OI 2</b>	45.256	89.551	0.595	0.479	0.887
<b>OI 3</b>	44.846	90.383	0.658	0.706	0.885
<b>BOT 1</b>	44.913	90.656	0.61	0.525	0.886
<b>BOT 2</b>	45	89.605	0.625	0.68	0.886
<b>BOT 3</b>	44.925	89.69	0.684	0.652	0.885
<b>BOT 4</b>	45.047	91.033	0.543	0.401	0.888
<b>PR 1</b>	45.24	91.511	0.481	0.316	0.89
<b>PR2</b>	45.512	96.686	0.158	0.255	0.899
<b>SB 1</b>	45.22	92.054	0.443	0.296	0.891
<b>SB 2</b>	45.492	92.077	0.454	0.389	0.891
<b>SB3</b>	45.169	90.442	0.569	0.43	0.887

The item statistics of the finalized items in accordance with Cronbach's alpha value are given in table 3. No items were recommended to be removed from the final 21 items chosen for the scale.

**Validity**

Validity is the extent to which a measurement tool or test accurately measures what it intends to measure. It gauges the accuracy of the tool, ensuring that it measures the constructs and all its dimensions without bias. For the present scale, face and content validity was measured through multiple checks by a team of experts in the field.

Table 4 contains the correlation matrix showing the correlation among the 21-items of the scale.

**Data Analysis**

This study aimed to construct a reliable and valid tool for the assessment of perception of infidelity. The total number of participants went up to 255 which consisted of 30.3% males and 69.7% females. 85.4% of the participants were in the age group of 18-24 years. For statistical analysis, IBM SPSS 22.0 version software was used. For assessment of the reliability of the measurement tool, Cronbach’s Alpha was used. The item total statistics are shown in table 3. No items were deleted as there were no values with lower Cronbach Alpha value or low corrected item correlation score.

**Table 4: Correlation Matrix: Relationship of items**

PIS E PA 1 EI 1 OI 1 BOT PA 2 PR 1 EA EI 2 SB 1 PR2 ED 1 EI 3 OI 2 BOT SB 2 OI 3 PA 3 BOT BOT SB3 A 1 1 2 3 4 1	EA 1	PA 1	EI 1	OI 1	BOT 1	PA 2	PR 1	EA 2	EI 2	SB 1	PR2	ED 1	EI 3	OI 2	BOT 2	SB 2	OI 3	PA 3	BOT 3	BOT 4	SB3	
EA 1	1	0.343	0.418	0.199	0.264	0.245	0.224	0.184	0.223	0.232	0.091	0.359	0.32	0.27	0.267	0.216	0.248	0.215	0.235	0.28	0.143	
PA 1		1	0.352	0.372	0.291	0.37	0.303	0.133	0.194	0.207	0.032	0.318	0.287	0.411	0.438	0.106	0.419	0.334	0.329	0.336	0.384	
EI 1			1	0.241	0.298	0.255	0.169	0.145	0.227	0.229	-0.002	0.346	0.29	0.34	0.355	0.182	0.215	0.257	0.269	0.195	0.217	
OI 1				1	0.321	0.223	0.287	0.178	0.271	0.07	0.146	0.205	0.171	0.286	0.266	0.189	0.335	0.248	0.344	0.188	0.308	
BOT 1					1	0.324	0.304	0.123	0.245	0.235	0.005	0.311	0.438	0.409	0.516	0.291	0.615	0.5	0.59	0.447	0.444	
PA 2						1	0.263	0.143	0.182	0.232	0.046	0.243	0.218	0.333	0.523	0.118	0.454	0.286	0.441	0.267	0.347	
PR 1							1	0.272	0.303	0.211	0.3	0.327	0.299	0.346	0.254	0.274	0.303	0.245	0.321	0.189	0.292	
EA 2								1	0.438	0.292	0.26	0.298	0.298	0.126	0.012	0.339	0.069	0.227	0.139	0.189	0.119	
EI 2									1	0.352	0.35	0.377	0.404	0.182	0.19	0.421	0.266	0.253	0.336	0.348	0.243	
SB 1										1	0.022	0.398	0.316	0.227	0.278	0.341	0.259	0.3	0.333	0.28	0.277	
PR2											1	0.088	0.058	0.048	-0.078	0.181	0.036	0.057	-0.002	0.084	0.106	
ED 1												1	0.479	0.399	0.382	0.383	0.346	0.338	0.412	0.324	0.312	
EI 3													1	0.34	0.339	0.404	0.324	0.392	0.398	0.337	0.26	
OI 2														1	0.604	0.29	0.491	0.377	0.449	0.383	0.457	
BOT 2															1	0.168	0.716	0.38	0.612	0.426	0.513	
SB 2																1	0.143	0.341	0.321	0.195	0.273	
OI 3																	1	0.513	0.699	0.493	0.553	
PA 3																		1	0.587	0.354	0.4	
BOT 3																			1	0.506	0.464	
BOT 4																				1	0.399	
SB3																						1

Table 4 contains the correlation matrix showing the correlation among the 21-items of the scale.

**Data Analysis**

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**Table 5:** Descriptive statistics of PIS

N of Items	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation
21	42	21	63	47.429	100.309	10.0154

Table 5 contains descriptive statistics of the 21-items including mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum value, range and variance.

**Table 6:** Scoring of PIS

Option	Score
Yes	3
Uncertain	2
No	1

Table 6 contains the Likert scale used for the assessment and scoring of them options.

**Table 7:** Descriptive statistics of the final scale items

Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
EA 1	254	2.201	0.8774
EA 2	254	2.154	0.8598
EI 1	254	2.22	0.8704
EI 2	254	2.126	0.8196
EI 3	254	2.22	0.8704
ED 1	254	2.197	0.8532
PA 1	254	2.177	0.9046
PA 2	254	2.563	0.7399
PA 3	254	2.362	0.8068
OI 1	254	2.11	0.8456
OI 2	254	2.173	0.8855
OI 3	254	2.583	0.7486
BOT 1	254	2.516	0.7788
BOT 2	254	2.429	0.844
BOT 3	254	2.504	0.7738
BOT 4	254	2.382	0.8292
PR 1	254	2.189	0.8733
PR2	254	1.917	0.9051
SB 1	254	2.209	0.88
SB 2	254	1.937	0.8597
SB3	254	2.26	0.8455

Table 7 consists of the dimension-wise list of items finalized after the assessment of face and content validity, item statistics of all 21 items, mean and standard deviation of the scale items. The mean score for the items was calculated according to the values assigned to the 3-point Likert scale which came out to be 2. All 21 items exhibit a slight positive deviation from the mean score of 2, which could be considered small to be statistically significant.

## Discussion

Tool development is a systematic, transparent and extensive process which requires an exhaustive review of literature and a series of standardization procedures. The present study aimed at developing a reliable tool for measurement of perception of infidelity in young adults, owing to the lack of a relevant standardized tool. To create such a tool, it is imperative to establish strong reliability and validity of the measurement tool. To assess the internal consistency of the developed tool, Cronbach's alpha was employed. The present tool exhibited strong internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.894 which can be interpreted as excellent internal reliability. The high internal consistency shows that there is a strong inter-item correlation present in the tool and these items collectively and effectively measure the same construct. The Perceived Infidelity Scale has exhibited strong correlations among the constructed items, ensuring that it measures the exact construct it intended to measure, further confirming its validity.

## Ethical Considerations

Throughout the study, ethical standards were carefully upheld, and rigorous measures were enforced to ensure ethical conduct and completion. Signed informed consent was taken from the participants prior to the inclusion in the study and strict measures were implemented to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

Participants were informed beforehand regarding their right to discontinue their participation at any point during the data collection without the obligation to provide any justification.

### Acknowledgement

We would like to express our gratitude towards all the individuals who have participated in and facilitated the completion of this research. We would also like to extend our heartfelt thanks to Department of Psychology, Lovely Professional University, our families and friends for their constant support and helpful guidance throughout the process of the research.

### Conclusion

This study focused on construction and validation of a measurement tool, Perceived infidelity scale, which assesses the perception of infidelity. The items of the tool were meticulously designed after a thorough and exhaustive review of literature and identification of certain research gaps, which included absence of standardized tools to measure or assess the perception of infidelity. Finalization of items was followed by assessment of reliability and validity of the tool. The data was analyzed using the statistical software SPSS 26.0. Internal consistency reliability was gauged by employing Cronbach's alpha, showing great reliability. The face and content validity were assessed utilizing a panel of experts.

The primary objective of the development of the present psychometric tool was to understand the perception of infidelity among adults. Future implications of the present study suggest that PIS can be administered during couple's, marriage or pre-marital counselling. PIS could also be incorporated in online dating platforms and applications such as tinder, hinge or eHarmony. It could enhance user experience by enriching the compatibility quizzes and creating personalized profiles and interactions for the users. Apart from utilization in relationship and therapy-based interventions, the present tool could be of great importance to the researchers and academics in the field.

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