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Communication Openness in Building Trust in Marriage Post-Infailthfulness

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of infidelity is becoming increasingly common today. Unhappy marital conditions and unmet needs of partners can trigger infidelity. Infidelity is a violation that can destroy trust in a partner. However, interestingly, some people choose to end their relationships after discovering their partners are cheating, while others choose to stay and try to repair their marriage. This study aimed to analyze, describe, and identify the role of communication openness in building trust between spouses after infidelity. This study employed Social Penetration Theory as a framework for self-disclosure, and the research method used was descriptive qualitative research. Data were obtained from primary data, secondary data, and in-depth interviews involving two married couples who had experienced infidelity in their marriage. Research indicates that open communication plays a vital role in rebuilding trust, as demonstrated by honesty, a willingness to express feelings, and consistent behavior following conflict. Interpersonal communication is crucial as a strategy for restoring marital relationships after infidelity.

1. Introduction

In the modern era, communication has become part of interactions aimed at fulfilling the biological, sociological, and psychological needs of every human being. Various needs can be met if women and men are legally recognized by state law and religious norms in a long-term or lifetime marriage. This is done to achieve a harmonious marriage, where communication plays a very important role (Adrian, 2022).

The bond of marriage becomes one of the processes that must be undergone to fulfill human needs, such as giving and receiving love, having a partner and offspring, and attachment to a family. A healthy and happy marriage can be seen from each partner receiving emotional support, good communication, a sense of comfort, fulfilled sexual needs, and a place to exchange thoughts that can create their own happiness. However, behind that happiness, marriage can also become a source of stress for some people. An unpleasant marriage and unmet needs of the partners can trigger infidelity (Syarif, 2021).

Severall can trigger infidelity, such as a lack of attention to the partner, decreasing intimacy, unequal division of household responsibilities, and a lack of communication. The marital relationship is based on a legally and religiously recognized bond. Therefore, the commitment between husband and wife becomes the foundation for maintaining harmony in the household. The occurrence of infidelity violates the commitment within marriage, which can lead to the breakdown of trust and affect the stability of the husband-wife relationship. According to Jackson (2000) in (Maulita Nanda et al., 2025), infidelity is a violation of someone's trust and involves disloyalty. In such

conditions, open communication plays an important role as a means to express each other's feelings, to explain ongoing issues, and even as an opportunity rebuild trust that has been damaged.

The experience of betrayal by a partner caused by infidelity can be very painful for the victim of the affair and difficult to forget. According to Zuroida et al., in romantic relationships, infidelity is an issue related to mutual trust, love, attachment, and commitment. And according to (Morrissey et al., 2019), infidelity can be committed by anyone regardless of age, gender, or profession (Cendani et al., 2024). This is supported by infidelity cases that have gone viral in Indonesia and can be accessed through various social media platforms. Social media is currently often used as a medium to prove that someone has become a victim of infidelity, as well as a place for the perpetrators to make confessions of infidelity. For example, the viral cases involving public figures such as Inara Rusli, Jule Julia, and TikTokers Ira Nandha. In such situations, evidence of infidelity is often posted openly as a form of validation for the loss of a partner's trust.

The phenomenon of infidelity cases in Indonesia, according to a survey conducted by JustDating, ranks second in Asia as the country with the highest infidelity cases at 40%. However not all infidelities end in divorce. However, it is the second most common factor causing divorce, with 25,190 cases. According to BKKBN data (2020), divorce cases in Indonesia are recorded at more than 200,000 each year (Novi, 2020) in (Maulita Nanda et al., 2025).

Additionally, the Indonesian Statistical Reportstatesthat the number of divorce cases in Indonesia reached 447,743 in 2021. However, in 2022 divorce cases reached 516,334 an increase of 15.31% compared to 2021 (Hasanah, 2024) in (Maulita Nanda et al., 2025). According to research conducted by Health Testing Centers, 15.6% of couples can survive even if one of them is found to be cheating. This result was obtained from a survey conducted on 441 people who admitted to cheating. The majority of respondents, 54.5%, felt immediate despair upon discovering that their partner was cheating, and 30% tried to give their partner a second chance. In addition, only about 16% of couples decided to continue.

Infidelity in a relationship can be considered one of the most painful forms of betrayal. However, interestingly, some people choose to end their relationship after discovering their partner's infidelity, while others choose to stay and try to mend their relationship. Interpersonal communication has a more complex role. There are many aspects of interpersonal communication that partners need to engage in after infidelity, such as listening, expressing feelings, and negotiating fears and hopes for the future (Lingga Nindya, 2024).

Post-affair interpersonal communication is not only a process of information exchange but also a space for negotiating meaning, filled with emotional tension. At this stage, oppeness in communication often becomes a paradox. On one hand, the injured party needs transparency and honesty to restore a sense of security and rebuild trust. However, on the other hand, detailed disclosure of information can actually re-trigger trauma and deepen emotional wounds. This condition makes the process of rebuilding trust a complex and interesting communication phenomenon to study, particularly regarding how couples strive to balance the need to understand the truth with the need to recover emotionally (Fajriyah, 2024).

The trust repair process is an effort to restore interpersonal trust after a breach, which includes elements such as open communication, commitment, and behavioral consistency. This process is necessary to stop the cycle of relationship dynamics damage after infidelity (Lewiciki & Brinsfield, 2017). Relationships will struggle to return to a healthy and stable level of trust without repairing trust (Cendani et al., 2024).

In the study by Marfie & Riana Sahrani (2024) titled “An Overview of Trust Recovery in Early Adults Experiencing Infidelity in Romantic Relationships”, the focus is on the trust repair process after infidelity to understand the subjective experiences of early adults trying to mend their relationships after their trust has been shattered (Marfine, 2024). This research shows that the trust repair process consists of several steps, including acknowledgment of wrongdoing, apology, compensation, and forgiveness. Honest communication, consistent behavior changes, and a commitment to repairing the relationship are identified as supporting factors.

The research still has limitations because it has not further discussed how open communication can help rebuild trust between partners. The study by Marfine & Sahrani (2024) focuses on the psychological stages and behavioral strategies individuals use to repair trust. Still, it does not explain how open communication can play a crucial role in rebuilding trust after infidelity. Furthermore, the research does not specifically differentiate the contexts of relationships by status, such as married versus unmarried couples. Previous research emphasizes the importance of open communication in rebuilding trust after infidelity. Marfine & Sahrani (2024) demonstrate that honesty, acknowledgment of mistakes, and consistent behavioral change are key elements in rebuilding trust.

Meanwhile, the research conducted by Lingga and Astuti (2024) titled "The Role of Interpersonal Communication for Infidelity Victims in Self-Reconstruction Efforts" adds that self-disclosure, empathy, and supportive responses can help both parties understand emotional needs and build psychological safety. This study focuses solely on the self-reconstruction of infidelity victims as individuals, whereas this research focuses on open communication to build trust between husband and wife (Lingga Nindya, 2024). However, the previous studies have not specifically examined how open communication plays a role in rebuilding trust in couples facing infidelity. Therefore, the research titled "Openness in Communication in Building Trust Between Husband and Wife After Infidelity" becomes relevant to fill that gap.

Thus, this study aims to fill the gap in previous research by emphasizing the importance of open communication in building trust between married couples post-infidelity. This research focuses on how open communication serves as the main foundation for married couples to strengthen trust and reinforce their relationship after infidelity. Therefore, the author conducted research on Communication Openness in Building Trust in Unmarried Couples Post-Adultery.

2. Method

According to Sugiyono, qualitative research is a research method conducted in natural conditions (as opposed to experiments) (Safrudin et al., 2023). In the process of rebuilding trust between husband and wife after infidelity, this study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to understand the experiences, perceptions, and subjective meanings of open communication. The qualitative research method was chosen because the phenomenon being studied is personal and cannot be measured. The selection of informants used purposive sampling techniques, based on specific criteria relevant to the research, given the sensitive nature of the topic and the fact that not all individuals have the appropriate experience. In this study, the informants were two married couples deemed sufficient for in-depth interviews, allowing the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of couples' perspectives. The types of data used include primary and secondary data, with data collection conducted through in-depth interviews. The interactive analysis model by Miles and Huberman (2014) is used to conduct data analysis, including data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

3. Result and Discussion

In this section, the researcher presents findings to address the problem formulation regarding the openness of communication in rebuilding trust between married couples after infidelity, and how this openness can contribute to that rebuilding. Through two main concepts in the social penetration theory by Altman & Taylor, namely Breadth or breadth increases because partners need to talk and discuss more aspects of life, while depth or depth increases because deeper emotional openness is required to restore and repair trust effectively. As a relationship develops, new information about each other begins to emerge as communication progresses. The more intimate the relationship between the two people, they will learn about each other. In communication, there is a concept called self-disclosure among interacting parties (Shanaz, 2021).

The research results show that the informants A1, A2, and B1, B2, who experienced infidelity in their marriages, went through a gradual process of communication openness,starting from an initially disrupted communication condition and slowly rebuilding a more open communication. Before

the infidelity occurred, both couples communicated well, but they had not fully discussed their personal emotional issues and personal needs with each other.

In the first couple, the husband (Source A1) said: "Before the affair happened, our communication was actually fine, even when conflicts arose, we could still handle them calmly. However, it wasn't always like that; sometimes I would avoid or stay silent during conflicts."

The wife (Source A2) said: "We rarely talked in-depth about each other, only communicating about daily matters. When there were unpleasant things, they were rarely communicated, only when I could no longer bear them alone."

In the second couple, they experienced a similar pattern. The wife (Source B2) stated: "The relationship and communication before the affair were ordinary and fine, but there were times when it was a bit indifferent and tended to avoid."

When partners can talk about various topics, including sensitives ones, they can engage in the process of clarifying and reconstructing meaning in their relationship. This supports the idea that broader communication is an important initial stage in rebuilding a relationship that has been disrupted. In a monopolistic or imbalanced communication pattern, one party tends to dominate or restrict the communication space, preventing the partner from freely expressing their feelings. This can hinder the process of relationship recovery (Supriadi et al., 2022). Conditions like this can prolong conflicts and prevent the rebuilding of trust.

The husband (Source B1) said: "Our communication was ordinary; during arguments, I tended to stay silent and didn't provide any explanations."

According to Jeanfreau et al. (2014), several factors often cause dissatisfaction in marital relationships include a lack of quality time together, difficulties in resolving conflicts, and a lack of emotional attention. These factors are the main ones that can drive someone to commit infidelity (Wulandari et al., 2025). When communication between partners is more limited, less open, and tends to avoid emotional discussions, there is a high possibility of feeling dissatisfied, which increases the occurrence of trust violations. In this study, one of the issues driving infidelity can be understood asthe limitation of communication openness in expressing emotional needs and resolving conflicts healthily.

Wife (Source B2) said: "I feel disappointed and often find it difficult to fully trust again." This shows that as a victim of infidelity, the source is unable to trust her partner fully and easily feels worried that the betrayal will happen again. The infidelity committed by the husband of respondent B2 affected the psychological condition of the wife as the victim, causing trauma, loss of trust, and disturbances in interpersonal communication.

3.1 Dimension of Breadth

At the beginning of trust recovery, it can be seen through broader communication topics about infidelity. Previously, couples tended to avoid talking about the inciden. Still, after an open conversation, the communication space expanded to various topics, such as the reasons for the affair and how the affair affected their marital relationship.

Wife (Source A2) expressed: 'At first, I stayed silent when I found out he was cheating, but eventually, I couldn't bear it alone.' At that moment, I tried to ask what was really happening and why he had been leaving the house often lately."

The husband (Source A1) stated that: "When my wife said she knew I was cheating, I apologized and admitted my mistake, I tried to listen to her grievances and everything she questioned. After that, we started discussing it gradually."

This shows that couple A is starting the recovery process by expanding their communication. They opened discussions on previously closed, topics regarding a third party in their marriage and the emotional situation. That step marks an expansion of the spectrum of

topics discussed in interpersonal relationships, which serves as a foundation for rebuilding trust in the context of social penetration theory.

According to the research findings, couples who communicate more broadly tend to have higher levels of trust. This is supported by research results showing that constructive mutual communication, or constructive communication, has a positive effect on trust (Miri et al., 2024). Therefore, the more topics that can be discussed openly, the greater the likelihood that couples will be able to rebuild the trust that has been lost. On the contrary, limited communication patterns, such as mutual avoidance, are negatively correlated with trust (MIRI). This condition indicates that the couple does not have time to fully understand each other, which can hinder relationship recovery due to limited communication.

3.2 Dimension of Depth

After establishing the breadth of communication, the next stage is deeper, where they talk about what they feel and what they hope for in the future.

Wife (Source A2) said: "I asked when he started betraying me and where he met that person, not only that, I also asked for the reasons he did it and how far he had gone in betraying me, even tho I knew it would be painful."

Husband (Source A1) expressed: "I tried to be completely open and honest, convincing her to forgive me because that was the only way I knew to fix our marriage."

In the second couple, the wife (Source B2) said: "I expressed everything, from my feelings of heartbreak, my hopes for this marriage, and discussed boundaries with the opposite sex, to committing to being more open with each other about anything."

The couple's courage to express their disappointment, pain, and hopes for the future of their relationship also demonstrates the depth of their communication. Couples can reduce prejudice and rebuild trust through this process, which allows the to understand each other's perspectives. In this study, couples strive to build trsut and offer opportunities to their partners to improve themselves, despite still feeling fear and insecurity (Supriadi et al., 2022).

The husband (Source B1) conveyed: "I acknowledge that my mistakes have greatly harmed her and deeply hurt her feelings. Therefore, I want to fix everything and assure her that I will be more open about anything."

Couple A and couple B experienced a recovery of trust closely related to the shift in their communication pattern from closed to open. Open communication initially was limited to surface level matters such as daily activities. However, over time, it began to focus on emotional aspects, relationship values, and future commitments to their marriage. According to social penetration theory, depth and breadth develop together, not at the expense of one another. With more topics being discussed, more layers of the self are revealed. This allows partners to rebuild trust through listening, understanding, and accepting each other.

This research shows that openness in communication is not just about saying everything that happens, but also about partners' willingness to understand, listen, and respond to feelings. Both couples consistently emphasized the importance of speaking honestly, without being offensive, and of not avoiding conflicts. Thisshowsthat in post-affair relationships, the process ofsocial penetration also involves emotional regulation and caution in choosing communication methods.

4. Conclusion

Based This study found that, through the two dimensions of social penetration theory, namely breadth and depth. Openness in communication is very important in rebuilding the trust of the husband and wife after infidelity. The breadth of communication allows for emotional disclosure and honest communication about the issues that have occurred, which is important for the recovery of trust in a partner who has been a victim of infidelity. On the other hand, the depth of communication

serves as an initial stage in rebuilding interaction and a sense of safety through common topics. Supporting factors such as commitment, honesty, and the willingness to listen to each other gradually influence this process, while hindering factors such as the trauma of being lied to, suspicion, and emotional instability. Therefore, the main mechanism for restoring trust in a post-affair relationship is consistent and open communication.

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