

Disclosing Middle-Aged Thai Women's Voices about Unfaithful Husbands

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Abstract: Having an unfaithful husband, one who is involved in one or more extramarital affairs, can be found within every culture. Contending with an unfaithful husband can be seen as a form of psychological violence or abuse against the affected woman. Because Thai women, who have unfaithful husbands, cannot forestall their spouses' infidelities and tend to keep this problem private, so as to avoid embarrassing their families, limited published research exists on the topic.

This study sought to explore the experience of 18 middle-aged Thai women, living in Bangkok, who had unfaithful husbands. Heideggerian phenomenology and feminist theory were used to guide the research design. Data were gathered via tape-recorded, in-depth interviews of the participants and analyzed using content analysis. The findings showed four emergent themes: seeking the facts; suffering; facing the husband's abusive behavior; and dealing with the problem. Unfaithful husbands were found to be an invisible family relationship problem, with many of the women trying to solve the problem by themselves. The women tended not to speak out about their problem because of fear of the social stigma associated with the issue. The findings suggest the importance of nurses supporting women with unfaithful husbands and assisting them in the development of their own well-being.

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Background and Significance

Contending with an unfaithful husband, a form of psychological violence or abuse against women, often occurs in Thailand because of the cultural belief that the status of males is dominant or superior to that of females.¹⁻³ This dominant status, such as the presence of an unequal division of labor between men and women, begins within the family and progresses to the practiced societal norms of the culture. Men are attributed with the power, autonomy and decision-making, while women tend to be placed into subservient roles to men. Historically, it was common practice for a wife and

her sons/daughters to be viewed as possessions of the husband/father. During the early Ratanakosin period (end of 19th century), Thai law allowed men to have multiple wives⁴ and to control their wives by punishing or condemning them, if they had extramarital affairs or did not do as their husband desired. However, this standard was not applied to men, demonstrating the existence of a harsh double standard regarding marriage.

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In 1932, the Thai political system changed from solely a monarchy to a constitutional monarchy, under a parliamentary democratic system. As a result of further westernization, in 1935, a law was passed that Thai men could have only one wife.⁵ The passing of this law resulted in women accepting a monogamist relationship, as well as tolerating the fact that Thai men could, and did, engage in sexual activities outside of marriage. Thus, Thai men came to believe that it was their right to engage in extramarital affairs. This belief has been fueled by the cultural belief that men are the heads of households and, thus, can do anything they desire, including having mistresses or “minor wives.” A mistress or “minor wife” is defined as a woman with whom a husband provides some monetary support and has a close sexual relationship.⁶

Presently, the number of Thai men who have mistresses or “minor wives” remains unclear. Chaisinthob⁷ found that 23.5% of the men studied in Bangkok had a mistress, while 55% of them had thought about having one. It is possible that, due to feeling ashamed about telling the truth to the researcher, these values were underestimated. The literature reveals that approximately half of all married men, in Western countries, are unfaithful to their wives during their marriage.⁸ In addition, it is known that unfaithful men often try to hide their affairs because of fear of negative outcomes (i.e. divorce, emotional trauma to the wife and children, or public shame).⁸ In Hong Kong, 93.8% of the men studied were found to have had an extramarital affairs.⁹ While the Chinese culture espouses monogamous marriage, a double standard appears to exist in practice. Not surprisingly, married Chinese women who are found to be unfaithful to their husbands are rejected by society, while Chinese men's involvement in adultery is not considered a problem.⁹

A number of factors increase the probability of marital problems and, subsequently, the occurrence of a husband, wife or both, engaging in an extramarital affair. These factors include: the desire for an alternative lifestyle; boredom; unhappiness; the need to feel needed by another person; emotional disturbances; long distance marriages; feeling unappealing and unloved; not getting enough love or attention at home; and, confusion about a sexual relationship.¹⁰⁻¹² The Thailand Department of Mental Health, Ministry of Public Health,¹³ identified four main reasons a man may become an unfaithful husband. They include: a) wanting to have a new and strange experience; b) a lack of understanding between husband and wife; c) presence of problems in the couple's sexual relationship; and, d) the couple not getting along and, thus, wanting exciting love that enhances sexual desire. In addition, Limsuwan and Kongsakon¹⁴ found the reasons Thai men have a minor wife include the fact they: want closeness with a woman; have an attitude that they are able to have many wives; are unhappy with their wives; and, experiencing financial or work-related problems.

Within the Thai society, the existence of an unfaithful husband is a common societal problem.¹⁵ However, similar to spousal abuse, the presence of an unfaithful husband is viewed as a personal/family matter that is not open to disclosure or discussion outside of the home.¹⁶ According to Lempert,¹⁷ since the wives of unfaithful husbands feel shame and want to protect their own images and that of their families, their practice of silence about the issue, most likely, is a strategy used for survival and face-saving. In addition, middle aged Thai women have been found to encounter unfaithful husbands because their relationship with their spouses have become comfortable and familiar, and grown into friendships rather than sexual relationships.¹⁸ In such cases, their husbands have

sought sexual relationships with other women who often are younger than their wives.¹⁸

Recently, disclosure about unfaithful husbands has become more common. However, since many within the Thai culture continue to view males as the dominate gender, the problem of an unfaithful husband remains somewhat invisible. A wife who reveals such personal information still may be forced to face the discomfort and humiliation of contending with an unfaithful spouse. Often a woman's first disclosure about having an unfaithful husband is with the physician treating her in the emergency room secondary to the physical abuse she has experienced as a result of confrontations related to her husband's having a mistress or minor wife.¹⁹

Limited research exists regarding the impact that unfaithful Thai husbands have upon the health and well-being of their wives, especially those who are middle-aged. Therefore, this study sought to explore the experiences of middle-aged Thai women who were living in Bangkok and contending with unfaithful husbands.

Method

Design: The study design was qualitative in nature, using an integration of Heideggerian phenomenology^{20, 21} and feminist theory.^{22, 23} Heideggerian phenomenology focuses on exploring the meaning and understanding of a phenomenon, such as a middle-aged woman's encounter with an unfaithful husband, while feminist theory addresses equality between genders and construction of knowledge through the voices of women who may be oppressed.²⁴ Studying the experiences of middle-aged Thai women, who live with unfaithful husbands, provides a deeper understanding of what the women daily face and the impact their experiences have on their health and well-being.

Ethical Consideration: Approval to conduct the study was granted by the Ethical Research

Committee of the Faculty of Medicine Ramathibodi Hospital, Mahidol University. Potential participants were verbally informed about: the purpose of the study; what their participation would involve; confidentiality and anonymity; and, their right to withdraw, at any time, without repercussions. Those who consented to take part in the study were asked to sign a consent form prior to data gathering.

Sample: The participants consisted of 18 Thai women who were conveniently recruited via distribution, by the principal investigator (PI), of printed fliers in an open market, university hospital, governmental organization and private businesses in Bangkok. The fliers contained information about the study and encouraged those who were interested to call the PI at the number provided. Twenty potential participants, who met the inclusion criteria, contacted the PI. The inclusion criteria included Thai women who were: a) 45 to 55 years of age; b) currently and had been living in Bangkok more than one year; c) experiencing an unfaithful husband; d) married; e) a mother of at least one child; f) in good self-reported physical and mental health; and, g) willing to participate in the study. Two of the potential subjects refused to consent due to their situation being a personal, family matter they did not want to discuss. The other 18 potential participants consented to participate and completed two interviews.

The participants, who had a mean age of 50.05 years, predominantly were married, Buddhist, mothers of one or two children and undergraduate college graduates. They, on average, had lived in Bangkok for 29.5 years, felt they were in good physical and mental health, and had either a professional or non-professional (equally divided among the participants) occupation.

Procedure: Following approval to conduct the study and obtaining each participant's consent to participate, two tape-recorded, in-depth interviews were conducted with each woman. Field notes also

were written after each interview addressing the environment and general events during the interview, and the participant's behaviors, emotions, facial expressions, vocalizations and dialogue. In addition, the PI wrote memos regarding what she gained from the interview, what things needed clarification during the second interview and the focal point of each interview. The duration of each interview was approximately one to two hours. Both interviews took place in a private location, designated by the participant (i.e. participant's home or researcher's office).

The first interview began with the PI obtaining the participant's demographic information (age, years living in Bangkok, marital status, number of children, religion, self-reported level of physical/mental health, educational level and type of occupation). Once demographic data were obtained then one general open-ended statement was posed ("Please tell me about your experiences with an unfaithful husband.") for the purpose of seeking information about the women's experience of dealing with an unfaithful husband. In order to encourage the participant to further elaborate on her specific situation, a series of probing questions/statements were posed (i.e. "How did you feel when you knew that your husband had a mistress?"; "What made you feel like that?"; "I am not quite sure I understand what you did with your life after your husband was unfaithful. Please tell me more about that, plus anything else you desire to add."; and, "You just told me that he injured you and hurt your feelings. Please tell me more, regarding this situation."). In addition, clarification was sought after a participant responded to a probing question/statement by posed such questions as: "How did he injure you or hurt your feelings?"; "Could you give me examples of the physical abuse your husband imposed?"; "How did you solve this problem?"; and, "Could you tell me more about that situation?"

All tape-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. The need for additional and clarifying data was noted as the PI read and analyzed the data obtained from transcriptions of the tape-recordings of the first interview. A second interview then was scheduled by telephonically contacting each participant.

The second interview were conducted 2-3 weeks after the first interview, and used to verify and clarify data obtained during the first interview, as well as to gain further insights into each participant's experience when the PI felt the data obtained during the first interview was insufficient. The same questions asked during the first interview were asked during the second interview to ascertain whether each participant's initial responses were correct. Questions the PI forgot to ask during the first interview, as well as questions, similar to those posed during the first interview that sought additional information, were asked during the second interview. The participants also were encouraged to delete data provided or add additional data they forgot to reveal during the first interview, as well as verify the PI's interpretation of data obtained during the first interview.

Data Analysis: The researcher repeatedly listened to the tape recordings and read transcripts of the interviews to obtain a complete sense of the data before data analysis began. Data were analyzed concurrently with data collection via use of a modified Benner method.²⁰ The PI selected the transcript of one female participant as a paradigm case because it containing very complete data compared to the others. Memos and field notes were used concurrently to confirm her data. The data from the selected transcript was compared, line-by-line, with the data from other transcripts to determine the similar and different meanings and concerns contained within the data. All data were coded and grouped into categories of similar meanings and

concerns. The similarity and differences among the categories were compared and contrasted, across participants, to identify emerging themes. The exemplars were the concrete examples used to explain the categories.

Verification of data and themes were conducted by way of the second interview. The data analysis and emerging themes were confirmed and validated by two qualitative nursing research experts who read and commented about data from three of the transcribed interviews. In addition, prior to discussing the coding, categories and themes with the experts, the PI developed a table that showed the categories with supporting raw data, the group categories and the identified themes. The content within the table was discussed and refined by the experts and PI until consensus was reached.

According to Lincoln and Guba,²⁵ trustworthiness of a qualitative study includes credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Credibility, in this study, was enhanced by use of peer debriefings and member checking. Transferability was established by providing sufficient details of the study findings. Dependability was accomplished through use of tape recordings of each interview, starting all interviews with the same probing questions/statements and analyzing the data from transcriptions of the interviews, memos and field notes. The memos included brief descriptions about some of the details, thoughts and comments the PI noted during the interviews, while the field notes consisted of comments regarding observational data. Thus, the memos and field notes were used as supporting data during the analysis process. In addition, the experts helped to verify the consistency of interpretation of the data. Confirmability was accomplished via use of two qualitative nursing research and women's health experts who verified the researcher's interpretations of the data.

Findings

Four major themes emerged reflecting the women's experiences in living with unfaithful husbands. They included: 1) seeking the facts; 2) suffering; 3) facing the husband's abusive behavior; and, 4) dealing with the problem. The details of each theme and its related categories are presented below.

Theme 1 Seeking the facts: When first learning about the possibility that their husbands were unfaithful, most women sought confirmation regarding whether their husbands' behaviors involved having affairs with other women. Three categories emerged supporting this major theme, including: observing for changed behavior; exploring the husband's personal belonging; and, asking others to find out about their husbands possible sexual infidelities.

1.1 Observing for changed behavior involved the women looking to see if any abnormal or unusual behaviors were occurring in regards to their husbands. They tended to compare past behavior, which they perceived as normal, to current behavior. For example, two of the women stated:

He looked strange. Normally, he went to work and came back home on time. He phoned every time when he had other schedules that I didn't know about. A few years ago, he changed. He looked weird. He always said that at his work he was very, very busy. He always stayed late at the office or he went to work outside Bangkok for several days per month.

Before he had another woman, he listened to me when I said something. Now he felt irritated when I talked with him. When I said anything, he disliked listening and

blamed me. His behaviors changed a lot from liking to stay at home to frequently liking to go outside. He said that he had work to do in other provinces and had to stay overnight there. He claimed, almost every day, he had to go out to eat and entertain his customers. At night he said he was tired from work and did not want to have sexual relationship with me. He looked weird.

1.2 Exploring the husband's personal belongings involved a sense of paranoia on the part of the women. The wives tried to search for evidence of infidelities to support their suspicions about their husbands' unfaithfulness. As a result, they would look through their husbands' personal effects (i.e. clothes, telephone and/or e-mail) for evidence. Two women remarked:

When I gathered his clothes for washing, I smelled female perfume on them. It was not perfume that I ever used. Sometimes, I would find a lipstick stain on his shirt or handkerchief.

I couldn't stand it if the phone was ringing. I paid more attention when the person on the phone was a woman. As a result, I would listen in on his conversation, if possible. Sometimes, I even checked the messages or phone numbers on his mobile phone when he left it on the table.

1.3 Asking others to find out about the husband's sexual infidelities generally lead to involvement of the participants' relatives, friends and/or colleagues. It was the women's attempt to

confirm or refute their suspicions of their husbands' unfaithfulness. The women made comments such as:

I asked my younger friends who worked in the same office as my husband to observe his behavior with females, especially the ones I did not personally know.

I asked my close friend to follow my husband. She was like my detector. She helped me to find out my husband's unfaithful behaviors. She checked the minor wife's phone. She drove her car to follow him to the minor's wife's house. She followed him when he had activities with the minor wife. She called me to report his behaviors. She also recorded a video, through her mobile phone, and sent it to me.

My aunt couldn't stand my problem. She helped me to detect whether my husband had another woman.

Theme 2 Suffering: The feelings expressed by participants, in regards to their unfaithful husbands, was one of suffering. Their suffering was noted to be either from: heartache; social stigma; or, loneliness.

2.1 Suffering from heartache, was the type of suffering most often expressed by the women. Most participants indicated they could not eat, sleep or engage in social or personal activities. Their energy became depleted and they could not think clearly or work in a productive manner. Some said they wanted to stay home and felt like crying all day. Their thoughts were summarized by one who stated:

I felt heartache after I knew my husband had a minor wife. I felt that my heart was broken. I didn't know what he wanted to do next. He was infatuated with the minor wife. A few years ago he paid less attention to me, although I was his formally wedded wife. I felt stressful. I couldn't eat or sleep. I was scatter-brained. It was difficult to make my mind cool and peaceful.

2.2 Suffering from social stigma was experienced when members of society seemed to look down on them because others believed they had not been good wives and, as a result, their husbands had to go out and find other women to satisfy their needs. The women said they felt ashamed and guilty, and blamed themselves for their circumstances. Some thought it was their karma that made them face this situation, while others thought they were blind and had selected the wrong man to marry. Most of them exhibited emotional pain when answering questions related to their husbands and indicated they dared not go outside to face others in the community. Several indicated:

I felt dishonored when others knew my husband had engaged in an affair with another woman. Some friends looked down on me and said I could not control my husband. It looked like I could not complete the roles of a wife. It was my karma [bad luck] to face this problem. It was like I fell into hell. It hurt so much! It was my fault for marrying this man.

At the previous time, we often went out together to a party or social gathering. After that, I went to a party or social gathering alone. The

people who I knew at the party or social gathering liked asking me where my husband was and why I came alone. Some gossiped and told me my husband had another woman and now he stayed with her. He abandoned me. I might have something wrong with me so he couldn't stand me. Since then, I selected a few activities to attend; I didn't want to see or listen to others gossiping or blaming me.

It is my karma in my past life that made me live with my husband in this life. I was blinded when I chose this man. I didn't know that he would be unfaithful with me. I felt sad about my life. What's wrong with me? Perhaps I was not a good wife. I couldn't take care of him good enough, so he had another one to respond to his needs.

2.3 Suffering from loneliness occurred when they tried to isolate themselves and let time pass with the hope everything soon would be back to normal. Because they did not want the circumstances of their marital problems to be spread from one person to another, they avoided discussing their issues with others. As a result, they avoided meeting and going out with relatives, friends and colleagues. Instead, they occupied their thoughts with ways to deal with their situations on their own. Several shared the following comments:

I felt alone and adrift. I did not know what to do. I did not want to consult others. I felt very bad talking about my personal problems with others. When my friends invited me to a party, I did not want to go. I disliked

responding to questions related to my husband. I wanted to stay home and think about my problem and my future.

I dared not tell my parents. I worried that they would feel sad and stressed about my family life. I seldom went to visit my parents because I didn't want to tell them about my problem. I avoided going out to meetings with my friends because when we met, they usually talked and exchanged information related to husband and children issues.

When I first was faced with this problem, I was angry. Then I thought it was useless to spend time crying. Nobody could help me. I avoided going outside and stayed home alone. I remembered the time I stayed with my husband with love, and now the situation was changed; I had to solve this problem by myself. I hold the Buddha teaching. Thus, I should stay with him peacefully.

Theme 3 Facing the husband's abusive behavior: When they learned their husbands were having extramarital affairs, they often were faced with abusive behavior from their husbands. Their husbands' abusive behaviors were manifested either as psychological or physical abuse.

3.1 Facing psychological abuse involved the women having to deal with their husbands' lack of sensitivity or caring about their feelings, financial mismanagement and verbal abuse. Their husbands' lack of sensitivity was manifested by them: not paying attention to their wives; being unconcerned about issues related to their wives; and, asking their

wives to do something for their mistresses/minor wives, or for them, prior to leaving to meet their mistresses/minor wives. One woman remarked:

He said he would not be home this weekend. I was expected to prepare his clothes and luggage for the weekend. After that, I had to take him to the bus station and pick him up on his return home. I knew he went to his minor wife's house. When he returned, I felt disgusted and uncomfortable. He was a very dirty man! Why didn't I leave him? He insulted my honor and ignored my feelings. He wanted me to be mentally upset.

Financial mismanagement, on the part of their husbands' abusive behavior, involved them spending extravagantly and destroying household items. Many of the women said their husbands spent money on expensive gifts (i.e. deluxe cars, designer clothing, jewelry, a new house and household decorations) for women with whom they had affairs. When the wives confronted their husbands about the mistresses/minor wives, their husbands often became enraged and threw household items (glasses, plates, bottles and flowerpots) against the floor, wall or ceiling. As summarized by one woman:

During our good times, we [my husband and I] planned on buying a new house, but now we do not have enough money to do so. My husband withdrew money to buy things for another woman (i.e. a house and a car). When we had a quarrel, he destroyed household items. I had to spend a lot of money to buy new items to substitute for the items he

demolished. I felt heartache about his behavior

Their husbands' also were verbally abusive toward their wives. Many of the wives indicated their husbands used words to demoralize them by comparing their weak points to other women's strong points. This caused the participants to experience anger and emotional pain. One woman summarized the feelings of many of the other women when she stated:

He [my husband] threw a stone at me and ridiculed me that I was old, fat and not beautiful. I did things very slowly. I am not active. I do not look like I did when I was young. He likes to look at younger women because he says it makes his life bright and lively. I hear such comments every day. I feel hurt and sometimes cry when no one else is around.

3.2 Facing physical abuse was noted when the wives experienced being slapped, pushed, shaken, bite, scratched, kicked or hit by their husbands. The participants stated they tended to face physical abuse when their husbands were either drunk or aware their wives had learned about the existence of their extramarital affairs. The women often tried to divert the conversations with others when asked about scratches, bruises, welts and scars on their bodies, and tried to keep their injuries secret from others. Even though some of them attempted to fight back by throwing things at their husbands, they tended to live in constant fear of further assaults from their husbands. One woman stated:

When I said I found out that he [husband] had affairs with other women, he got very angry. He slapped my face and seriously shook my body, sometimes bumping my

body against the wall or the cabinet... At that time, I was afraid of him, but I tried to suppress my fear and fight back by throwing things at him that I could grab.

Theme 4 Dealing with the problem: The women said it was not easy to deal with their unfaithful husbands because problems associated with their husbands' infidelity not only affected them, but also other family members. The affect their husbands' infidelity had upon their children was the women's greatest concern. Therefore, they felt a need to approach and deal with their husbands' unfaithfulness very carefully. Thus, they contended with their husbands' indiscretions by: being patient and accepting the problem; practicing Dharma; rationalizing; and/or, seeking support from relatives and friends.

4.1 Being patient and accepting the problem was the approach often selected by the women. They worried their children would grow up within a broken home if they chose to leave their husbands. Because of concern for their children, most of them felt being patient and accepting the problem was the best approach to contend with their husbands' infidelities. Two of them said:

I was patient for my children's sake. I wanted my children to have a faithful and caring father, rather than being fatherless. I had to accept that... it was my karma. The woman my husband had an affair with was young, fresh, fit and active. It was difficult for him to let her go.

My children didn't know their dad had a minor wife. I dared not tell them about this problem. When their dad didn't join their activities at school, I told them he was very busy

at work or he had to work outside Bangkok for a few days. I didn't want my children feeling bad about their dad. I had to be patient and kept my family life in order to protect my children from being orphaned.

4.2 Practicing Dharma served as a mental sanctuary for the participants. They indicated that Dharma taught them all suffering comes from different sources, so one needs to find the cause of the problem and then learn how to solve it. In addition to using Dharma, the women also engaged in other religious activities (i.e. reading Dharma books, praying, making merit, dressing in white clothes and meditating) to reduce their anger, stress and anxiety. One woman summarized the beliefs of the other women by stating:

I held the principles of Dharma as mental pillars. This made my mind calm and peaceful. I read Dharma books, prayed, donated money and offered food to monks on a daily basis. I often did these things... then I felt good. According to Buddha's teachings, when my mind is peaceful, wisdom will happen and I then can understand the problem. After using Dharma, I was able to return to my role as a wife...I did my best.

4.3 Rationalizing was another approach the women used to contend with their unfaithful husbands. They were aware people could not control or stop unexpected problems from occurring, but never expected infidelities in their marriages. The women tried to look at their situations from the perspective that it is natural for husbands to look at women other than their wives and, as a result, although their husband were physically with them,

their minds often wandered to others. The women felt they were born to be wives and mothers, and needed to carry out their roles the best way possible. None the less, most of them held out hope their husbands would realize the way of their errors and behave in a moral and upright manner. Two examples of the women using rationalization, as an approach to dealing with infidelity, were:

I am an open-minded woman. I realized I could not control my husband's behaviors or thoughts. I could not stop him, but I had to accept the truth. I could, however, control my mind and my thoughts. The best way was to keep my mind at a normal level and stick with the present. I hoped my husband would change his behavior and become a good husband.

I thought everyone could do something wrong once in his/her life. My husband did some wrong by being unfaithful to me. Sometimes I thought I should accept this weakness about him because he was an ordinary man. Sometimes he might have been absent-minded about having another woman. Anyway, I thought that if I was good enough to be his children's mom, he would return to me when he became bored with his minor wife. I did my best to be his wife and a mother for my children.

4.4 Seeking support from relatives and friends, who had encountered problems similar to theirs, was a method the participants used to cope with their unfaithful husbands. Since they feared the abusive activities would escalate if their husbands

found out they had revealed their injuries to the health care providers, they did not seek support from the health care providers unless they experienced serious abrasions, hearing loss or wounds with active bleeding. Rather, they turned to their relatives and friends for advice regarding how to deal with their husband's infidelity. Two of them remarked:

I tried to fix my problem by talking with cousins and friends who had faced the unfaithful husband problem. I selected cousins and friends who I trusted, so that I could tell my personal story. It looked like I had friends who had the same experience. When talking about my problems, we exchanged our experiences with one another. I received some ideas on how I could deal with my problem.

One of my friends encountered the unfaithful problem as well. She was my good consultant. I could share my problem with her without worrying about other things because she understood me and I could trust her that she would not tell my problem to others. Nowadays we still talk to each other. She had good strategies to manage her unfaithful husband.

Discussion and Implications

The experiences of Thai middle-aged women contending with unfaithful husbands were found to consist of four major themes: a) seeking the facts; b) suffering; c) facing the husband's abusive behavior; and, d) dealing with the problem. The majority of women, although they sought out facts about their husbands (i.e. observing for changed

behavior, exploring personal belongings and asking others to find out about possible sexual infidelities) so as to confirm infidelities, never mentioned the possibility of divorcing or leaving their husbands. Rather they seemed to simply want to contend with the ramifications of their situations by working to make their situations, and that of their children, tolerable. They especially felt it was important that their children not be exposed to a broken home. Fan and Lui⁹ found couples, who have several children and are experiencing marital infidelity, are less likely to seek a divorce because they are concerned about the values of their culture and worried their children will suffer discrimination from peers if raised in a single-parent household.

The results revealed most of the women were stressed by the presence of infidelity in their marriages. As a result, a great deal of emotional suffering (i.e. heartache, dealing with social stigma and loneliness) took place. This finding was similar to those of a previous study wherein extramarital affairs were found to impose profound psychological stress on family life, which can lead to conflicts between husbands and wives.²⁶ Fiene²⁷ found that when infidelity occurs within a marriage, many women feel hurt, guilty and blame themselves. They often believe they are not good wives, which causes their husbands to engage in extramarital affairs. Thus, it is the role of health care providers to provide services that help build women's self-esteem and sense of empowerment so as to contend with the difficulties of marital difficulties. In addition, as noted in this study, the women found various ways to deal with the stress of their situations (accepting the situation, practicing Dharma, rationalizing and seeking social support). Thus, women, contending with unfaithful husbands, should be directed to examine the helpful practices they have used in the past to deal with stressful situations. These practices may prove helpful as they work through the stressors of infidelity.

The fact the husbands' infidelities tended to be hidden by the wives, in this study, led the women to seek medical assistance only after contending with the results of severe physical abuse. Although their husbands dealt out both psychological and physical abuse, they tried to deal with the abuse on their own. Landerburger²⁸ points out abused women cannot adequately manage their situations solely on their own. Thus, it behooves health care providers to be alert to signs and symptoms of abuse and to direct victims and their spouses to available resources (i.e. 24-hour hotline services, support groups, anger management classes and marital and individual counseling). Changing the societal practice of infidelity is difficult. However, it may prove helpful to provide classes to young couples preparing for wedlock regarding how to develop a healthy marriage.

Limitations and Future Research

The fact the topic of this research carries a great deal of social stigma in the Thai culture, the researcher had to assume the participants were truthful in reporting their experiences. However, due to the sensitivity of the topic, it is possible the women were somewhat reserved with the depth and breadth of their responses during the interview process.

Although the research design was qualitative in approach, the sample size was small. Thus, one must use caution when attempting to generalize the findings. The findings are applicable only to women similar to those who were part of this study.

Further study is needed regarding the effects of stress and depression on women who have an unfaithful husband. There also is a need for development of realistic interventions to empower and increase the self-esteem of women with an unfaithful husband.

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การเปิดเผยเสียงสะท้อนจากผู้หญิงไทยวัยกลางคนเรื่องสามีนอกใจ

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บทคัดย่อ: ปัญหาสามีนอกใจหรือปัญหาความสัมพันธ์อันนอกสมรสเกิดขึ้นได้ในทุกวัฒนธรรม ปัญหาสามีนอกใจเป็นรูปแบบหนึ่งของความรุนแรงต่อผู้หญิงด้านจิตใจ การศึกษาในเรื่องนี้มีน้อยมากในการวิจัยทางการแพทย์ของประเทศไทยเนื่องจากผู้หญิงที่มีสามีนอกใจไม่สามารถยับยั้งการนอกใจของสามีตนเองได้ และผู้หญิงบางคนมักเก็บปัญหานี้ไว้เป็นความลับเพื่อหลีกเลี่ยงการเกิดปัญหาในครอบครัว

การศึกษานี้เป็นการศึกษาถึงประสบการณ์ของผู้หญิงไทยวัยกลางคนที่อาศัยอยู่ในกรุงเทพมหานครที่มีปัญหาเรื่องสามีนอกใจ ระเบียบวิธีวิทยาการวิจัยเชิงปรากฏการณ์วิทยาแบบไฮเดกเกอร์และทฤษฎีสตรีนิยมได้รับการนำมาใช้ในการศึกษาประสบการณ์ของผู้หญิงไทยวัยกลางคนที่มีปัญหาเรื่องสามีนอกใจจำนวน 18 คน เก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลโดยการสัมภาษณ์แบบเจาะลึกพร้อมบันทึกเทปจำนวน 2 ครั้ง ข้อมูลที่ได้จากการสัมภาษณ์นำมาวิเคราะห์โดยใช้วิธีการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลเชิงเนื้อหา

ผลการศึกษาพบ 4 ประเด็นที่สำคัญดังนี้ การค้นหาความจริง ความทุกข์ทรมาน การเผชิญกับพฤติกรรมที่รุนแรงของสามี และการจัดการกับปัญหา ปัญหาเรื่องสามีนอกใจเป็นปัญหาความสัมพันธ์ในครอบครัวที่มองไม่เห็น ผู้หญิงหลายคนพยายามจะแก้ปัญหาด้วยตัวคนเดียว บางคนไม่กล้าที่จะพูดปัญหานี้ออกมาเนื่องจากกลัวปัญหาการตีตราบาปจากสังคม จากการศึกษาเสนอแนะถึงความสำคัญของพยาบาลในการสนับสนุนและช่วยเหลือผู้หญิงที่ประสบปัญหาสามีนอกใจเพื่อให้มีความสุขในชีวิต

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คำสำคัญ: ปัญหาสามีนอกใจ ผู้หญิงไทยวัยกลางคน ระเบียบวิธีวิทยาการวิจัยเชิงปรากฏการณ์วิทยาแบบไฮเดกเกอร์ ทฤษฎีสตรีนิยม

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