

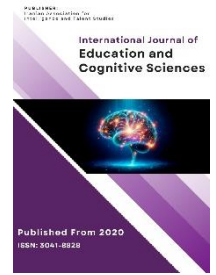


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Developing a Model of Post-Traumatic Growth in Women Affected by Marital Infidelity Based on Emotional Self-Awareness with the Mediating Role of Sense of Psychological Coherence and Emotional Adjustment

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Purpose: The present study aimed to develop a structural model of post-traumatic growth in women affected by marital infidelity based on emotional self-awareness with the mediating roles of sense of psychological coherence and emotional adjustment.

Methods and Materials: This applied study employed a descriptive-correlational design using structural equation modeling (SEM). The statistical population consisted of women affected by marital infidelity who referred to licensed counseling and psychotherapy centers or psychiatrists in Tehran during the first quarter of 2023. Based on the formula proposed by Tabachnick and Fidell (2013), 230 participants were selected through convenience sampling. Data collection instruments included the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory developed by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996), the Emotional Self-Awareness Questionnaire developed by Rieffe et al. (2008), the Sense of Coherence Scale developed by Antonovsky (1993), and the Emotional Adjustment Questionnaire developed by Rabeau et al. (2007). Data were analyzed using SPSS version 27 and SmartPLS version 3 at descriptive and inferential levels.

Findings: The findings demonstrated that emotional self-awareness had a significant positive direct effect on post-traumatic growth ($\beta = 0.426, p < 0.01$), sense of psychological coherence ($\beta = 0.516, p < 0.01$), and emotional adjustment ($\beta = 0.580, p < 0.01$). Sense of psychological coherence also had a significant positive direct effect on post-traumatic growth ($\beta = 0.360, p < 0.01$). Furthermore, emotional self-awareness indirectly predicted post-traumatic growth through the mediating role of sense of psychological coherence ($\beta = 0.186, p < 0.01$). However, emotional adjustment did not significantly predict post-traumatic growth ($\beta = -0.071, p > 0.05$), and its mediating role in the relationship between emotional self-awareness and post-traumatic growth was not significant ($\beta = -0.041, p > 0.05$). The overall model demonstrated acceptable fit and predictive power.

Conclusion: The findings indicate that emotional self-awareness and sense of psychological coherence play significant roles in facilitating post-traumatic growth among women affected by marital infidelity. Emotional self-awareness contributes to positive psychological transformation both directly and indirectly through strengthening individuals' sense of coherence.

Keywords: Post-traumatic growth, marital infidelity, emotional self-awareness, sense of psychological coherence, emotional adjustment.

1. Introduction

Marital infidelity is considered one of the most destructive interpersonal traumas within marital relationships, as it threatens emotional security, trust, intimacy, and the psychological stability of individuals and families. The discovery or experience of infidelity often produces severe emotional, cognitive, and behavioral consequences for the betrayed spouse, including anxiety, depression, emotional dysregulation, humiliation, anger, diminished self-worth, social withdrawal, and symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (Ammari et al., 2022; Shoa Kazemi et al., 2025; Taheri et al., 2024). Women affected by marital infidelity are particularly vulnerable to profound psychological distress because betrayal within intimate relationships disrupts the sense of emotional attachment and safety that forms the basis of marital functioning. Research has shown that infidelity is not merely a relational crisis but also a psychologically traumatic event capable of altering cognitive schemas, emotional functioning, and interpersonal trust (Ammari et al., 2022; Mosharrafi et al., 2025). Consequently, increasing scholarly attention has been directed toward understanding the psychological outcomes associated with betrayal trauma and identifying protective factors that facilitate recovery and adaptation following such experiences.

Although traumatic experiences often produce adverse psychological outcomes, contemporary positive psychology perspectives emphasize that exposure to trauma may also create opportunities for positive psychological transformation. This positive transformation has been conceptualized as post-traumatic growth, which refers to positive psychological changes that emerge following the struggle with highly challenging life crises or traumatic experiences. Post-traumatic growth includes dimensions such as increased personal strength, improved interpersonal relationships, appreciation of life, spiritual development, and recognition of new possibilities in life (Chen et al., 2023; Forstmeier et al., 2009). Individuals experiencing post-traumatic growth often reconstruct their worldview and develop greater psychological maturity and resilience following adversity. In the context of marital infidelity, post-traumatic growth may manifest through improved emotional insight, strengthened coping capacities, reevaluation of personal values, and enhanced psychological independence. However, not all individuals exposed to betrayal trauma experience post-traumatic growth equally, and various emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal factors influence the

extent to which growth occurs after trauma (Mottershead et al., 2024; Nikogoftar & Shourangiz, 2023).

One of the psychological variables that may significantly contribute to post-traumatic growth is emotional self-awareness. Emotional self-awareness refers to an individual's capacity to recognize, identify, interpret, and understand personal emotional states and emotional reactions in various situations. Emotional self-awareness facilitates adaptive emotional processing, improves emotional regulation, and enhances individuals' ability to cope effectively with stressful experiences (Mosbat Shahjouyi & Hasanvand, 2024; Wonda, 2024). Individuals with high emotional self-awareness are more capable of understanding the origins and meanings of their emotions, which allows them to process traumatic experiences more effectively and reduce emotional confusion. Emotional self-awareness also contributes to psychological flexibility and healthier interpersonal functioning because emotionally self-aware individuals are better able to express emotions appropriately and seek constructive support from others (Sharei et al., 2025; Soleimani & Izadi, 2024). In the context of marital betrayal, women who possess greater emotional self-awareness may be more capable of recognizing and managing painful emotional experiences associated with infidelity, thereby facilitating adaptation and eventual psychological growth.

Previous research has consistently highlighted the significant role of emotional processes in facilitating post-traumatic growth. For example, Kim et al. demonstrated that emotional regulation significantly predicted post-traumatic growth among nursing students exposed to stressful experiences (Kim et al., 2023). Similarly, Fonseca et al. reported that coping strategies and emotion regulation contributed to post-traumatic growth among medical rescuers during the COVID-19 pandemic (Fonseca et al., 2022). Research has also shown that emotional intelligence and emotional competencies are associated with enhanced psychological adaptation and resilience following trauma (Wonda, 2024). Since emotional self-awareness constitutes one of the core components of emotional intelligence, it can be expected that emotionally self-aware individuals possess greater capacity for constructive cognitive-emotional processing following traumatic experiences such as marital infidelity.

Another important construct associated with adaptation to traumatic experiences is sense of coherence, which originates from Antonovsky's salutogenic theory. Sense of coherence refers to a global orientation reflecting the degree

to which individuals perceive life as comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful. Individuals with a strong sense of coherence tend to perceive stressful events as understandable and controllable challenges rather than overwhelming threats (Forstmeier et al., 2009; Mottershead et al., 2024). Such individuals are more likely to mobilize coping resources effectively and maintain psychological stability during adverse circumstances. Research has shown that sense of coherence is positively associated with psychological well-being, resilience, coping effectiveness, and post-traumatic growth (Forstmeier et al., 2009; Mottershead et al., 2024). In traumatic contexts, individuals with a strong sense of coherence are better able to integrate traumatic experiences into their broader life narrative, which facilitates meaning-making and growth.

The role of sense of coherence in promoting post-traumatic growth has received considerable empirical support. Forstmeier et al. found that sense of coherence was positively associated with post-traumatic growth among former German child soldiers who had experienced war-related trauma (Forstmeier et al., 2009). Likewise, Mottershead et al. emphasized the salutogenic role of sense of coherence in promoting positive adaptation and growth among military veterans exposed to severe life challenges (Mottershead et al., 2024). In addition, Zadhasan and Gholamzadeh Jofreh demonstrated that emotion-focused cognitive therapy improved both sense of coherence and post-traumatic growth among women recovered from COVID-19 (Zadhasan & Gholamzadeh Jofreh, 2023). These findings suggest that sense of coherence may function as a crucial mediating mechanism through which emotional and cognitive resources contribute to positive psychological transformation after trauma.

Emotional adjustment is another variable that may influence individuals' responses to traumatic experiences. Emotional adjustment refers to an individual's ability to maintain emotional balance, regulate emotional responses, and adapt effectively to stressful situations. Emotionally adjusted individuals are generally more capable of coping with psychological distress, maintaining interpersonal functioning, and preserving emotional stability during adversity (Fonseca et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2023). Emotional adjustment may reduce vulnerability to maladaptive coping strategies and facilitate adaptive responses to relational trauma. Since betrayal trauma often produces intense emotional instability, emotional adjustment can play a significant role in determining whether individuals remain

psychologically distressed or move toward adaptation and growth.

Studies examining emotional adjustment and related constructs indicate that emotional functioning substantially contributes to psychological outcomes after trauma. Aliche found that mindfulness indirectly predicted post-traumatic growth through positive reappraisal and self-compassion among cancer patients (Aliche, 2023). Similarly, Nikogoftar and Shourangiz reported that self-compassion mediated the relationship between emotional schemas and post-traumatic growth among widowed women affected by COVID-19 loss (Nikogoftar & Shourangiz, 2023). Furthermore, Chen et al. demonstrated that psychological resources moderated the relationship between emotional neglect and post-traumatic growth among adolescents (Chen et al., 2023). These studies collectively indicate that adaptive emotional processing and emotional adjustment mechanisms are central to understanding post-traumatic growth across various traumatic contexts.

In addition to emotional functioning, contemporary trauma theories emphasize the importance of resilience-related processes in explaining positive adaptation after adversity. Zeng et al. demonstrated that psychological resilience mediated the relationship between negative emotions and creativity during the COVID-19 pandemic, while post-traumatic growth moderated this relationship among university students (Zeng et al., 2022). These findings suggest that individuals capable of effectively processing negative emotional experiences may transform adversity into opportunities for psychological development. Emotional self-awareness and emotional adjustment are likely to contribute to this transformative process because they enable individuals to identify emotional experiences accurately and respond adaptively rather than defensively.

The importance of emotional awareness and emotional functioning has also been highlighted in intervention-based studies. Haghghat-Bayan et al. compared the effectiveness of emotion-focused therapy and acceptance and commitment therapy on post-traumatic growth among individuals with post-traumatic stress disorder and reported significant improvements in trauma-related outcomes (Haghghat-Bayan et al., 2022). Similarly, Soleimani and Izadi demonstrated that emotion-focused therapy significantly enhanced emotional self-awareness and reduced psychological symptoms among female students (Soleimani & Izadi, 2024). Sharei et al. also reported that mindfulness therapy improved emotion regulation and cognitive self-awareness among adolescents exposed to

psychosocial vulnerabilities (Sharei et al., 2025). These findings reinforce the importance of emotional self-awareness as a foundational psychological capacity that facilitates adaptive coping and growth following stressful experiences.

Despite the increasing body of literature examining post-traumatic growth, emotional functioning, and coherence-related constructs, limited research has specifically focused on women affected by marital infidelity. Most previous studies have examined trauma associated with illness, war, bereavement, or public health crises, whereas relational betrayal remains relatively understudied despite its profound psychological impact (Chen et al., 2023; Nikogofar & Shourangiz, 2023). Moreover, although emotional self-awareness, sense of coherence, and emotional adjustment have independently been linked to psychological adaptation, fewer studies have simultaneously examined these variables within a comprehensive structural framework. In particular, the mediating roles of sense of coherence and emotional adjustment in the relationship between emotional self-awareness and post-traumatic growth among women affected by marital infidelity have not been adequately investigated.

Given the increasing prevalence of marital conflicts and online infidelity in contemporary societies, understanding the psychological mechanisms that facilitate recovery and growth following betrayal has become increasingly important (Shoa Kazemi et al., 2025; Taheri et al., 2024). Identifying factors that promote post-traumatic growth can contribute to the development of more effective psychological interventions aimed at reducing distress and enhancing adaptive functioning among women exposed to marital betrayal. Emotional self-awareness may help individuals process painful emotions more constructively, while sense of coherence may facilitate meaning-making and adaptive interpretation of traumatic experiences. Emotional adjustment may further contribute to emotional stability and resilience during recovery from betrayal trauma.

Therefore, considering the theoretical and empirical significance of these constructs, the present study aimed to develop a model of post-traumatic growth in women affected by marital infidelity based on emotional self-awareness with the mediating roles of sense of psychological coherence and emotional adjustment.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study was applied in terms of purpose and descriptive-correlational in terms of data collection method, employing a structural equation modeling design. The statistical population of the study consisted of all women affected by marital infidelity who had referred, due to the psychological consequences of marital infidelity, to counseling and psychotherapy centers licensed by the Psychological and Counseling Organization of Iran, the State Welfare Organization, or psychiatrists licensed by the Iranian Medical Council in the city of Tehran during the first quarter of 2023. In order to estimate the sample size, because the number of members of the statistical population was not countable, the formula proposed by Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) was used. Based on the proposed formula, the minimum sample size in correlational studies was calculated using the formula $m + 50 \leq n$ ($15 > p > 5$). In this formula, n represents the sample size, p is a constant number ranging from 5 to 15, and m represents the number of variable components. Based on this rule, the sample size was calculated as follows:

$$(18 \times 10) + 50 = 230$$

In this equation, the number of variable components was 18 (5 components for post-traumatic growth, 2 components for emotional self-awareness, 3 components for sense of psychological coherence, and 2 components for emotional adjustment), and the final sample consisted of 230 participants. Due to the lack of access to all clinics, centers, and specialized offices, as well as the inability of all individuals to participate, the sampling method was convenience sampling among volunteers. The inclusion criteria were: having at least a high school diploma, no history of diagnosed psychological disorders or hospitalization in psychiatric hospitals, no use of psychiatric medications (based on self-report), compliance with the age criterion (18 to 60 years), and willingness to participate in the study. The exclusion criteria included substance abuse addiction, alcohol consumption or use of psychoactive drugs, unwillingness to continue participation in the study, incomplete questionnaires, and simultaneous participation in psychotherapy classes, psychological intervention programs, or couple therapy interventions. The required data were collected using the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory developed by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996), the Emotional Self-Awareness Questionnaire developed by Rieffe et al. (2008), the Sense of Coherence Scale developed by

Antonovsky (1993), and the Emotional Adjustment Questionnaire developed by Rabeau et al. (2007).

2.2. Measures

Post-Traumatic Growth: This questionnaire was developed by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) to assess changes in individuals' self-perception following exposure to traumatic experiences and events. The theoretical foundation of this questionnaire was based on individuals' reports of positive outcomes, such as changes in life philosophy and self-perception, resulting from traumatic experiences including cancer. The questionnaire consists of 21 items scored on a Likert scale ranging from 0 ("I did not experience this change as a result of my crisis") to 5 ("I experienced this change to a very great degree as a result of my crisis"). The initial evaluation conducted by the developers reported an overall internal consistency coefficient of Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.90$ for the total scale, and alpha coefficients of 0.85, 0.84, 0.67, 0.72, and 0.85 for the respective subscales. The two-month test-retest reliability coefficient for the total scale was reported as 0.71. In Iran, Kazemipour et al. (2020) reported a reliability coefficient of 0.91 using Cronbach's α . Furthermore, in the study conducted by Hosseinlou and Namvar (2020), the reliability coefficient obtained through Cronbach's α formula was 0.85, and construct validity was assessed using principal component factor analysis. In the present study, convergent validity for the constructs was assessed in order to ensure the convergence level of items related to each factor and to evaluate the adequacy of variance explanation by theoretical constructs through the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) index calculated on 230 participants. The results demonstrated that the AVE value for the questionnaire was 0.584, indicating desirable convergent validity and an adequate capacity for explaining item variance. In addition, in the present study, the reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's α to evaluate internal consistency and structural coherence among the items. The findings indicated that the reliability coefficient for post-traumatic growth was 0.803, reflecting a desirable level of internal consistency and acceptable coherence among the items.

Emotional Self-Awareness: The revised version of the Emotional Self-Awareness Questionnaire was developed by Rieffe et al. (2008) to describe aspects of emotional functioning. The questionnaire consists of 30 items completed on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 5

("strongly agree") to 1 ("strongly disagree"). Rieffe et al. (2008), in a sample of 665 students, reported internal consistency coefficients ranging from 0.74 to 0.77 for the original version of the questionnaire. Furthermore, factor analysis conducted on the original version of the Emotional Self-Awareness Questionnaire demonstrated an appropriate factorial structure, with the developers reporting that the components collectively explained 46% of the variance. The psychometric properties of this questionnaire in Iran were examined by Yousefi and Taghiani (2019). In their study, exploratory factor analysis using principal component analysis demonstrated that the extracted components explained 52.13% of the total variance. Confirmatory factor analysis also indicated satisfactory model fit. The reliability coefficient of the questionnaire using the test-retest method was calculated as 0.82 for the total scale. In addition, the correlations between the emotional awareness components and measures of alexithymia and emotional intelligence demonstrated high criterion validity for the questionnaire. Therefore, the Emotional Self-Awareness Questionnaire possessed the necessary psychometric properties for use in the Iranian population. In the present study, the results indicated that the AVE value for the Emotional Self-Awareness Questionnaire was 0.544, reflecting desirable convergent validity and an adequate ability to explain item variance. Furthermore, the Cronbach's α coefficient for the questionnaire was 0.568.

Sense of Psychological Coherence: The Sense of Coherence Questionnaire was developed by Antonovsky (1993) to assess individuals' sense of coherence. The short form of the questionnaire consists of 13 items, each rated on a 7-point Likert scale. A score of 1 corresponds to "never" (or other options indicating low tendency), whereas a score of 7 corresponds to "very often" (or other options indicating high tendency). In this questionnaire, items 1, 2, 3, 7, and 10 are reverse scored. The total score ranges from 13 to 91, with higher scores indicating a stronger sense of coherence. Scores ranging from 13 to 63 indicate a low sense of coherence, scores from 64 to 79 indicate a moderate sense of coherence, and scores from 80 to 91 indicate a high sense of coherence. Eriksson and Lindström (2005), in a review of 458 scientific articles and 13 doctoral dissertations published between 1992 and 2003, concluded that the 13-item Sense of Coherence Questionnaire demonstrated satisfactory content, construct, and predictive validity, as well as desirable reliability and cross-cultural applicability. In Iran, Mohammadzadeh et al. (2011) standardized the translated version of the questionnaire among Iranian university

students and reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.75 and 0.78 for male and female students, respectively. Concurrent validity of the scale with the 45-item Psychological Hardiness Questionnaire was reported as 0.54. Additionally, the test-retest reliability coefficient for the total scale was 0.66. Moreover, in order to assess the validity of the questionnaire, these researchers examined the relationships between the subscales of comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness with the total questionnaire score, obtaining coefficients of 0.86, 0.81, and 0.76, respectively. The findings demonstrated satisfactory validity and reliability of the scale. In the present study, the results indicated that the AVE value for the Sense of Psychological Coherence Questionnaire was 0.673, indicating desirable convergent validity and an adequate ability to explain item variance. Furthermore, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the questionnaire was 0.765, indicating desirable internal consistency and acceptable coherence among the items.

Emotional Adjustment: The Emotional Adjustment Questionnaire was developed by Rabeau et al. (2007) to assess individuals' emotional stability or balance. This scale consists of 28 items, and participants respond to each item on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 ("strongly agree") to 6 ("strongly disagree"). In the study conducted by Rabeau et al. (2007), the shared variance between the Emotional Adjustment Scale and the Eysenck Personality Inventory developed by Eysenck and Eysenck (1975), as well as the Five-Factor Questionnaire developed by Caprara et al. (1993), empirically supported the convergent validity of the Emotional Adjustment Scale. In the same study, the internal consistency coefficient of the Emotional Adjustment Scale was reported as 0.89. In Iran, the questionnaire was standardized by Shokri et al. (2016). In their study, the correlations between emotional adjustment and perceived stress reactivity as well as the Health-Promoting Lifestyle Profile empirically supported the construct validity of the Emotional Adjustment Questionnaire. Additionally, the internal consistency coefficients for the general factor and subscales of the Emotional Adjustment Questionnaire ranged from 0.84 to 0.91. The results of the present study indicated that the AVE value for the Emotional Adjustment

Questionnaire was 0.903, reflecting desirable convergent validity and an adequate ability to explain item variance. Furthermore, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the questionnaire was 0.894, indicating a desirable level of internal consistency and acceptable coherence among the questionnaire items.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted at both descriptive and inferential levels using SPSS version 27 and SmartPLS version 3. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were calculated for all study variables and their components. Due to the non-normal distribution of the data, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed to examine the proposed research model. Prior to hypothesis testing, the assumptions of the model, including the absence of multicollinearity and the existence of relationships among the study variables, were assessed and confirmed. The measurement model was evaluated through Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), while the structural model was assessed using the coefficient of determination (R^2), Stone-Geisser predictive relevance coefficient (Q^2), redundancy index (Red), and the Goodness-of-Fit (GoF) index. Statistical significance of the direct and indirect paths was determined using t-values and p-values.

3. Findings and Results

The sample of the present study consisted of 230 women affected by marital infidelity, the majority of whom had been married for more than 10 years. Regarding age distribution, 19.1% were between 18 and 30 years old, 29.1% were between 31 and 40 years old, 33.5% were between 41 and 50 years old, and 17% were between 51 and 60 years old. In terms of educational level, 19.1% had a high school diploma, 15.2% had an associate degree, 33% had a bachelor's degree, 22.17% had a master's degree, and 9.1% had a doctoral degree. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics related to the scores of the research variables and their respective components.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of the Research Variables

Source of Variation	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Total Post-Traumatic Growth Score	230	39	120	82.96	14.34
New Possibilities or New Ways of Life	230	7	30	19.97	4.26
Relating to Others	230	8	42	27.14	5.44
Personal Strength	230	5	24	16.58	3.60
Appreciation of Life	230	4	18	12.37	2.71
Spiritual or Existential Changes	230	2	12	6.90	2.54
Total Emotional Self-Awareness Score	230	66	109	88.08	8.83
Differentiating Emotions	230	9	35	23.64	5.32
Verbal Sharing of Emotions	230	8	35	21.57	5.37
Bodily Awareness	230	9	21	14.78	2.19
Attending to Others' Emotions	230	4	18	9.95	2.90
Analysis of Emotions	230	10	25	18.15	3.01
Total Sense of Psychological Coherence Score	230	22	80	53.23	9.60
Comprehensibility	230	10	30	19.73	3.91
Manageability	230	5	33	20.42	4.24
Meaningfulness	230	5	21	13.08	3.46
Total Emotional Adjustment Score	230	50	160	100.32	20.14
Lack of Regulation of Emotional and Physiological Arousal	230	25	74	46.35	9.01
Hopelessness and Wishful Thinking	230	25	86	53.97	12.15

The mean and standard deviation of post-traumatic growth were calculated as 82.96 ± 14.34 . Among the components of post-traumatic growth, the component “relating to others” had the highest mean and standard deviation (27.14 ± 5.44), whereas “spiritual or existential changes” had the lowest mean and standard deviation (6.90 ± 2.54). The mean and standard deviation of emotional self-awareness were reported as 88.08 ± 8.83 . Among its components, “differentiating emotions” had the highest mean and standard deviation (23.64 ± 5.32), whereas “attending to others’ emotions” had the lowest mean and standard deviation (9.95 ± 2.90). The mean and standard deviation of sense of psychological coherence were 53.23 ± 9.60 . Among its components, “manageability” had the highest mean and standard deviation (20.42 ± 4.24), whereas “meaningfulness” had the lowest mean and standard deviation (13.08 ± 3.46). The mean and standard deviation of emotional adjustment were reported as 100.32 ± 20.14 . Among the components of emotional adjustment,

“hopelessness and wishful thinking” had the highest mean and standard deviation (53.97 ± 12.15), whereas “lack of regulation of emotional and physiological arousal” had the lowest mean and standard deviation (46.35 ± 9.01). The collected data were analyzed at both descriptive and inferential levels using SPSS version 27 and SmartPLS version 3. Since the distribution of the research data was non-normal, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS version 3 was employed to test the model. Therefore, before structural equation modeling, the assumptions of this statistical method, including (1) absence of multicollinearity and (2) existence of relationships among the scores of the dependent variables, were examined and confirmed. In addition, prior to inferential analysis, the goodness-of-fit of the research model was evaluated. Model fit in PLS version 3 consists of three components: measurement model fit, structural model fit, and overall model fit.

Table 2

Cronbach's Alpha Reliability, Composite Reliability, and Convergent Validity Values

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Sense of Psychological Coherence	0.765	0.861	0.674
Emotional Self-Awareness	0.568	0.777	0.544
Post-Traumatic Growth	0.803	0.862	0.580
Emotional Adjustment	0.894	0.948	0.902

The fit of the measurement models included the assessment of reliability and convergent validity of the research constructs. Reliability values for all constructs, except emotional self-awareness, were higher than 0.70, indicating acceptable reliability for the model constructs. However, since standardized questionnaires validated in Iran were used to collect the data for these variables, the issue of lower composite reliability for sub-constructs could be

overlooked if the overall model fit was acceptable. The AVE values for evaluating convergent validity of the research constructs were all above 0.30 for all study components. Following the calculation of Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and AVE values, and considering that all indices exceeded the defined thresholds, the reliability and validity of the research model were confirmed.

Table 3

Stone–Geisser Values, Redundancy Criterion, and Coefficient of Determination of the Model

Variable	Q ²	Red
Sense of Psychological Coherence	0.342	0.161
Emotional Self-Awareness	0.156	–
Post-Traumatic Growth	0.403	0.210
Emotional Adjustment	0.527	0.274
Mean	0.357	0.215

According to the data analysis algorithm in the PLS method, after fitting the measurement models, the structural model fit of the research was evaluated. In this section, three criteria were examined for structural model fit: (a) coefficient of determination (R^2), (b) Stone–Geisser criterion (Q^2), and (c) redundancy criterion. In the examined model, the coefficient of determination for sense of psychological coherence was at a moderate level ($0.19 < R^2 < 0.33$), whereas for post-traumatic growth and emotional adjustment it was at a strong level ($0.33 < R^2 < 0.67$). Therefore, the predictive power of the model constructs was desirable. Furthermore, the Stone–Geisser criterion indicated that the predictive power of the model for emotional self-awareness and sense of psychological coherence was at a moderate level ($0.15 < Q^2 < 0.35$), while for post-traumatic growth and emotional adjustment it was at a strong level ($Q^2 > 0.35$). The average predictive power of the model was at a strong and acceptable level ($Q^2 > 0.35$). Therefore, the predictive capability of the model constructs was considered acceptable. To assess the overall model fit, which simultaneously evaluates both the measurement and

structural models, the Goodness-of-Fit (GoF) index was calculated. The average communality values of the model variables were first calculated, resulting in a value of 0.357. The average coefficient of determination values for the variables was also equal to 0.335. Consequently, the following calculation was obtained:

$$GoF = \sqrt{(0.357 \times 0.335)} = \sqrt{0.120} = 0.345$$

The GoF index was therefore equal to 0.345, which, based on the values of 0.01, 0.25, and 0.36 as weak, moderate, and strong fit indices, respectively, indicates a strong overall model fit ($GoF = 0.345$). Accordingly, the proposed model demonstrated satisfactory fit, allowing for examination of the relationships within the model.

In this model, post-traumatic growth was considered the criterion variable, emotional self-awareness was the predictor variable, and sense of psychological coherence and emotional adjustment served as mediating variables. A summary of the estimated coefficients for the indirect relationships of the model is presented in Table 4.

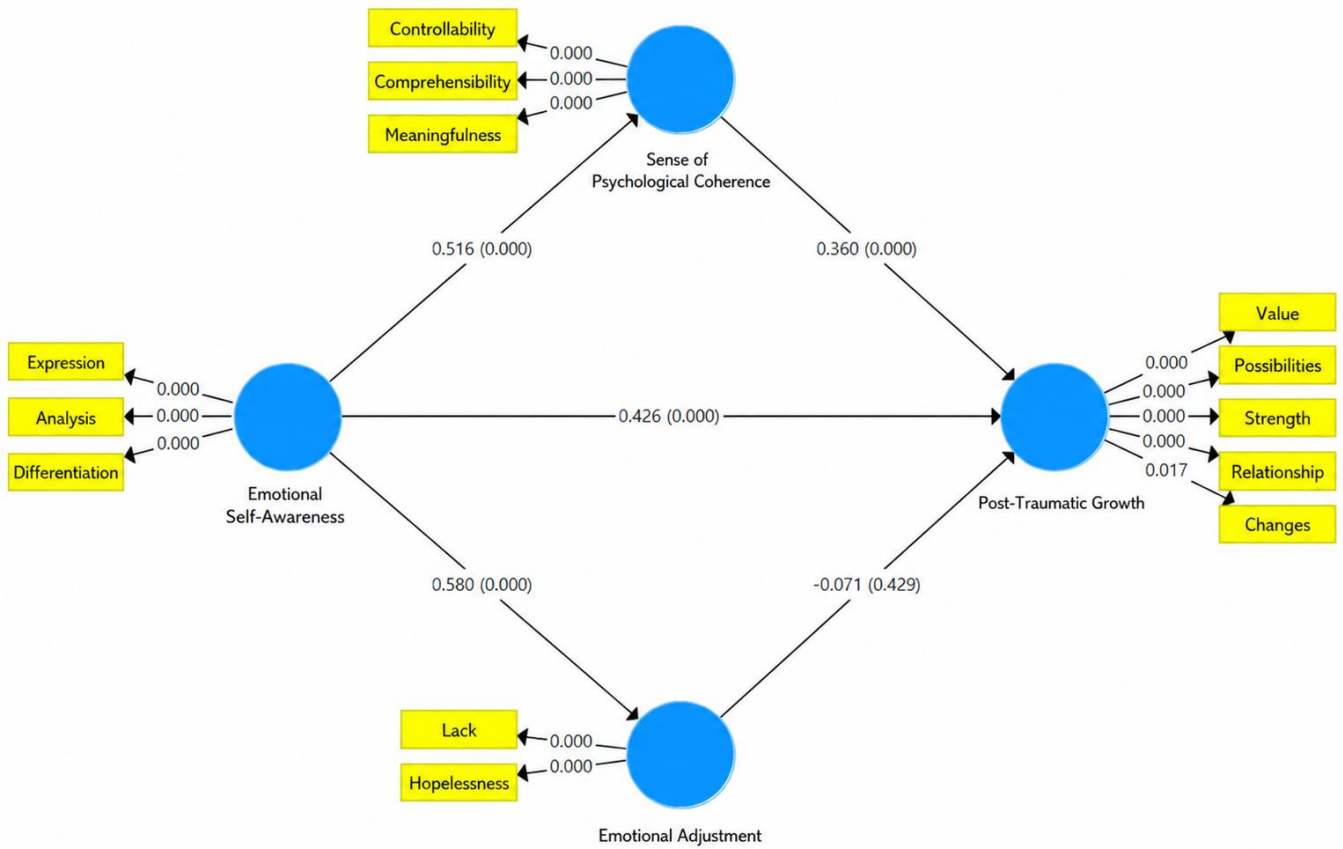
Table 4

Summary of the Indirect Coefficients of the Model

Indirect Path	Path Coefficient	t Value	Significance Level
Emotional Self-Awareness → Sense of Psychological Coherence → Post-Traumatic Growth	0.186**	3.939	0.001
Emotional Self-Awareness → Emotional Adjustment → Post-Traumatic Growth	-0.041	0.760	0.447

Figure 1

Research Model



The results of the estimated research model indicated that the indirect path from emotional self-awareness to post-traumatic growth through sense of psychological coherence was positive and statistically significant, with an effect coefficient of 0.19. Accordingly, there was an indirect

relationship between emotional self-awareness and post-traumatic growth in women affected by marital infidelity through the mediating role of sense of psychological coherence. A summary of the estimated coefficients for the direct relationships of the model is presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Summary of the Direct Coefficients of the Model

Direct Path	Path Coefficient	t Value	Significance Level
Sense of Psychological Coherence → Post-Traumatic Growth	0.360**	4.029	0.001
Emotional Self-Awareness → Sense of Psychological Coherence	0.516**	11.345	0.001
Emotional Self-Awareness → Post-Traumatic Growth	0.426**	5.744	0.001
Emotional Self-Awareness → Emotional Adjustment	0.580**	12.815	0.001
Emotional Adjustment → Post-Traumatic Growth	-0.071	0.792	0.429

The results of the estimated research model demonstrated that the direct paths from sense of psychological coherence ($\beta = 0.36$) and emotional self-awareness ($\beta = 0.43$) to post-traumatic growth were positive and statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). Furthermore, significant positive relationships

were observed between emotional self-awareness and sense of psychological coherence ($\beta = 0.52$), as well as between emotional self-awareness and emotional adjustment ($\beta = 0.58$) ($p < 0.01$).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to develop a structural model of post-traumatic growth in women affected by marital infidelity based on emotional self-awareness, with the mediating roles of sense of psychological coherence and emotional adjustment. The findings demonstrated that emotional self-awareness had a significant positive direct effect on post-traumatic growth. In addition, emotional self-awareness significantly predicted sense of psychological coherence and emotional adjustment. The results further indicated that sense of psychological coherence had a significant positive effect on post-traumatic growth and mediated the relationship between emotional self-awareness and post-traumatic growth. However, emotional adjustment did not significantly predict post-traumatic growth and did not mediate the relationship between emotional self-awareness and post-traumatic growth. Overall, the proposed model demonstrated acceptable explanatory and predictive power, indicating that emotional and coherence-related processes play important roles in understanding positive psychological adaptation among women affected by marital infidelity.

One of the major findings of the study was the significant direct relationship between emotional self-awareness and post-traumatic growth. This finding suggests that women who possess greater awareness and understanding of their emotional experiences are more likely to experience positive psychological transformation following betrayal trauma. Emotional self-awareness enables individuals to recognize emotional reactions accurately, process painful emotions effectively, and avoid maladaptive suppression or denial. Women affected by marital infidelity often experience intense feelings of shame, anger, betrayal, insecurity, and emotional confusion. When these emotional experiences are acknowledged and processed consciously, individuals may reinterpret traumatic experiences in more constructive ways and ultimately develop greater psychological strength and self-understanding. This finding is consistent with the results of Kim et al., who reported that emotional regulation significantly predicted post-traumatic growth among nursing students exposed to stressful experiences (Kim et al., 2023). Similarly, Fonseca et al. found that emotional regulation and adaptive coping strategies contributed positively to post-traumatic growth among medical rescuers during the COVID-19 pandemic (Fonseca et al., 2022). Since emotional self-awareness forms the foundation of emotional

regulation and adaptive coping, the current findings are theoretically aligned with these previous studies.

The present findings can also be explained within the framework of emotional processing theories, which propose that effective emotional awareness facilitates cognitive restructuring and meaning-making after trauma. Individuals who are capable of identifying and differentiating emotions can process traumatic experiences more adaptively, which reduces emotional avoidance and psychological fragmentation. Emotional self-awareness may therefore create the psychological conditions necessary for individuals to transform traumatic experiences into opportunities for personal growth. This interpretation is supported by the findings of Soleimani and Izadi, who demonstrated that emotion-focused therapy significantly improved emotional self-awareness and reduced psychological symptoms among female students (Soleimani & Izadi, 2024). Furthermore, Sharei et al. reported that mindfulness-based interventions enhanced emotion regulation and cognitive self-awareness among vulnerable adolescents (Sharei et al., 2025). These studies collectively suggest that emotional self-awareness is a fundamental psychological resource that contributes to adaptation and growth following stressful experiences.

Another important finding of the study was the significant positive relationship between emotional self-awareness and sense of psychological coherence. Women who demonstrated higher emotional self-awareness also reported stronger perceptions of comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness in life. This finding indicates that emotional awareness may facilitate more coherent interpretations of stressful experiences and strengthen individuals' confidence in their ability to cope with adversity. Individuals who understand their emotions are likely to perceive stressful experiences as more predictable and manageable because emotional clarity reduces uncertainty and psychological confusion. In the context of marital infidelity, emotional self-awareness may help women understand the emotional consequences of betrayal more effectively, thereby enabling them to reconstruct personal meaning and maintain psychological stability. This finding is compatible with the salutogenic framework proposed by Antonovsky, which emphasizes the role of meaningfulness and comprehensibility in adaptive coping and psychological health.

The relationship between emotional self-awareness and sense of coherence is also consistent with previous empirical findings. Zadhan and Gholamzadeh Jofreh found that emotion-focused cognitive therapy enhanced both sense of

coherence and post-traumatic growth among women recovered from COVID-19 (Zadhasan & Gholamzadeh Jofreh, 2023). Similarly, Mottershead et al. highlighted the protective role of sense of coherence in promoting positive adaptation and growth among military veterans exposed to severe life challenges (Mottershead et al., 2024). Emotional self-awareness may contribute to sense of coherence by helping individuals organize emotional experiences into coherent cognitive frameworks, thereby reducing emotional chaos and enhancing perceptions of control and meaning. In addition, emotionally self-aware individuals may be more capable of engaging in reflective thinking and adaptive problem-solving, which further strengthens their sense of coherence.

The findings also demonstrated that sense of psychological coherence had a significant positive direct effect on post-traumatic growth. This result suggests that women who perceive life events as meaningful, manageable, and understandable are more capable of transforming betrayal trauma into opportunities for growth and psychological development. Sense of coherence may facilitate post-traumatic growth by enabling individuals to reinterpret adversity within broader existential frameworks and maintain psychological resilience despite emotional suffering. Women with a stronger sense of coherence may be more likely to perceive betrayal as a challenge that can be overcome rather than as an irreversible psychological catastrophe. Consequently, they may engage more effectively in adaptive coping strategies, emotional reflection, and constructive meaning-making processes.

This finding is strongly supported by previous research. Forstmeier et al. found that sense of coherence was significantly associated with post-traumatic growth among former German child soldiers exposed to war-related trauma (Forstmeier et al., 2009). Likewise, Mottershead et al. demonstrated that salutogenic processes and sense of coherence contributed to post-traumatic growth among military veterans confronting major life challenges (Mottershead et al., 2024). The current findings therefore extend previous research by demonstrating that sense of coherence also plays a significant role in facilitating positive adaptation among women affected by relational betrayal and marital infidelity. Theoretical perspectives on trauma and resilience similarly emphasize that individuals who are capable of constructing coherent narratives around traumatic experiences are more likely to achieve psychological growth following adversity.

Another major finding of the present study was the significant indirect effect of emotional self-awareness on post-traumatic growth through sense of psychological coherence. This finding indicates that emotional self-awareness may enhance post-traumatic growth partly because it strengthens individuals' sense of coherence. In other words, emotionally self-aware women appear more capable of perceiving traumatic experiences as understandable and manageable, which subsequently promotes positive psychological transformation. This mediating mechanism highlights the importance of cognitive-emotional integration in the process of post-traumatic growth. Emotional awareness alone may not directly produce growth unless it contributes to coherent meaning-making and adaptive interpretation of traumatic experiences.

This result is conceptually aligned with studies emphasizing the mediating role of psychological resources in trauma adaptation. Nikogoftar and Shourangiz found that self-compassion mediated the relationship between emotional schemas and post-traumatic growth among widowed women affected by COVID-19 (Nikogoftar & Shourangiz, 2023). Similarly, Aliche reported that positive reappraisal and self-compassion mediated the relationship between mindfulness and post-traumatic growth among cancer patients (Aliche, 2023). These findings collectively suggest that emotional and cognitive capacities contribute to post-traumatic growth indirectly through adaptive psychological mechanisms such as coherence, self-compassion, and positive reinterpretation. Emotional self-awareness may therefore function as a foundational resource that strengthens broader psychological processes involved in recovery and growth.

Contrary to expectations, the present study found that emotional adjustment did not have a significant direct effect on post-traumatic growth and did not mediate the relationship between emotional self-awareness and post-traumatic growth. Although emotional self-awareness significantly predicted emotional adjustment, emotional adjustment itself did not contribute meaningfully to growth outcomes. This finding may indicate that emotional adjustment primarily reflects emotional stability and symptom reduction rather than transformative psychological change. Women who achieve emotional adjustment following betrayal trauma may experience reduced distress and improved emotional balance, but these outcomes do not necessarily translate into deeper existential growth or psychological transformation.

One possible explanation for this finding is that post-traumatic growth requires not only emotional stability but also active cognitive-emotional struggle and meaning-making. Excessive emotional adjustment may even reduce the motivational pressure necessary for deeper reflection and transformation. In this regard, emotional adjustment may help individuals restore equilibrium without necessarily altering fundamental beliefs or personal values. Previous research has similarly suggested that psychological growth and symptom reduction are related but distinct processes. Haghghat-Bayan et al. reported that therapeutic interventions may simultaneously influence trauma symptoms and post-traumatic growth, but the mechanisms underlying these outcomes may differ substantially (Haghghat-Bayan et al., 2022). Likewise, Zeng et al. emphasized that resilience and post-traumatic growth involve complex psychological processes that extend beyond simple emotional stabilization (Zeng et al., 2022). Therefore, emotional adjustment may contribute to recovery but not necessarily to transformative growth following marital betrayal.

The findings of the present study also have important implications for understanding the psychological consequences of marital infidelity among women. Marital betrayal represents a uniquely interpersonal and emotionally charged form of trauma that directly threatens trust, attachment security, identity, and relational meaning. Previous studies have demonstrated that marital infidelity is associated with emotional divorce, loneliness, depressive symptoms, and impaired emotional functioning (Ammari et al., 2022; Mosharafi et al., 2025; Taheri et al., 2024). The current findings suggest that despite these severe consequences, women affected by infidelity may still experience significant post-traumatic growth when they possess adequate emotional awareness and coherence-related capacities. This perspective aligns with positive psychology approaches emphasizing human resilience and the possibility of constructive transformation following adversity.

Overall, the findings of the present study highlight the central role of emotional self-awareness and sense of psychological coherence in facilitating post-traumatic growth among women affected by marital infidelity. Emotional self-awareness appears to strengthen individuals' ability to process painful emotional experiences adaptively, while sense of coherence enables them to interpret trauma within meaningful and manageable cognitive frameworks. Together, these processes contribute to psychological

growth, resilience, and adaptive transformation following relational betrayal. The study therefore contributes to the growing literature on positive adaptation after trauma and provides important insights into the emotional and cognitive mechanisms underlying post-traumatic growth in women exposed to marital infidelity.

One of the limitations of the present study was the use of a correlational research design, which limits the ability to infer causal relationships among the variables. In addition, the participants were selected using convenience sampling from counseling and psychotherapy centers in Tehran, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader populations of women affected by marital infidelity. Another limitation was the reliance on self-report questionnaires, which may have been influenced by response bias, emotional defensiveness, or social desirability. Furthermore, cultural and interpersonal factors influencing perceptions of infidelity and trauma were not examined in depth in the current study.

Future research is recommended to employ longitudinal and experimental designs to examine causal pathways between emotional self-awareness, coherence-related processes, and post-traumatic growth over time. Researchers are also encouraged to investigate additional mediating and moderating variables such as resilience, forgiveness, attachment styles, social support, and coping strategies. Comparative studies across different cultural contexts and demographic groups may provide a more comprehensive understanding of post-traumatic growth following marital betrayal. In addition, qualitative studies exploring women's lived experiences of betrayal trauma and psychological growth could contribute to a deeper conceptual understanding of these processes.

The findings of the present study suggest several practical implications for psychological counseling and therapeutic interventions. Mental health professionals working with women affected by marital infidelity should emphasize interventions that enhance emotional self-awareness, emotional expression, and reflective emotional processing. Therapeutic approaches focusing on meaning-making, emotional insight, and strengthening sense of coherence may facilitate psychological growth following betrayal trauma. Psychoeducational programs aimed at improving emotional competencies and adaptive coping skills may also help women reinterpret traumatic experiences more constructively and develop greater resilience and psychological well-being following relational crises.

Authors' Contributions

All authors significantly contributed to this study.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

In this study, to observe ethical considerations, participants were informed about the goals and importance of the research before the start of the interview and participated in the research with informed consent.

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