

The Relationship Between Social Support and Relationship Survival With the Mediation of Psychological Vitality

DOI: 10.22098/jpc.2025.18224.1344

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Abstract

Aim: The purpose of this study was The Relationship Between Social Support and Relationship Survival With the Mediation of Psychological Vitality.

Method: The statistical population consisted of individuals who had experienced marital infidelity at least once and continued their shared life for at least six months thereafter. A sample of 200 individuals (102 women and 98 men) was selected in 2025 using a convenience sampling method. The research instruments included the Social Support Questionnaire (Zimet et al., 1988), the Subjective Vitality Scale (Ryan & Frederick, 1997), and the Investment Model Scale was used to assess relationship survival (Rusbult et al., 1998). Data were analyzed using structural equation modeling with a partial least squares (PLS-SEM) approach and Smart PLS-3 software.

Finding: The results of the confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling indicated that the research constructs were at an satisfactory in terms of reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Path analysis revealed that social support had a direct, positive, and significant effect on relationship survival after infidelity ($\beta = 0.438$, $p < 0.001$). This effect was further strengthened through the mediation of psychological vitality ($\beta = 0.544$, $p < 0.001$). Psychological vitality was also found to be a significant predictor of relationship survival ($\beta = 0.290$, $p < 0.001$). The proposed model was able to explain a significant portion of the variance in the dependent variables ($R^2 = 0.414$ for relationship survival, $R^2 = 0.296$ for psychological vitality).

Conclusion: The findings suggest that psychological vitality plays a key role in the process of adapting to and recovering from marital infidelity, mediating the protective effects of social support. This study emphasizes the importance of both internal resources (such as psychological vitality) and external resources (such as social support) in rebuilding relationships after a crisis like infidelity.

Keywords: Social Support, Psychological Vitality, Relationship Survival, Marital Infidelity, Investment Model.

Introduction

Marital infidelity is among the most emotionally disruptive and relationally destabilizing experiences couples may encounter. Such behavior undermines marital commitment and trust and can in many cases lead to divorce and separation (Gordon et al., 2023). Marital infidelity is a serious crisis for couples and families, and it usually causes severe psychological and emotional distress for both the betrayed spouse and the unfaithful partner (Karger et al., 2024). Various variables can help individuals who have experienced infidelity to overcome this critical stage with fewer problems by affecting their psychological injuries.

Social support is one of these variables that, by attracting support from others, enhances the psychological resilience of affected individuals and enables them to cope with the current situation and seek adaptive solutions (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Social support, as a relatively accessible component, can be used to promote well-being, especially psychological well-being (Gnilka & Broda, 2019; Zhang et al., 2019; Kong et al., 2019; Pushkarev et al., 2019). Research has shown that perceived social support has a significant impact on quality of life, marital relationships, sexual function, mental health, and the reduction of psychological and sexual abnormalities (Samadifard et al., 2019). The presence of social support also helps increase self-confidence, self-worth, and individuals' readiness to experience new situations and improves their life satisfaction, relationship survival, and psychological status (Van Leeuwen et al., 2010). An individual's awareness of support resources makes them believe that when facing a traumatic experience like infidelity, they can count on the help of others and their coping resources will be strengthened (Seidi et al., 2021). At first, the occurrence of infidelity may seem very stressful, but access to social support helps the individual to tolerate it and reduces its negative effect (Idemudia & Mulaudzi, 2019). Perceived social support makes the individual feel respected and cared for and that they are a member of a supportive network (Pillemer & Holtzer, 2016).

Another key concept that is of special importance in this field is psychological vitality. Psychological vitality refers to a dynamic state of mental and physical energy that enables individuals to experience motivation, enthusiasm, and emotional well-being. This feature indicates the individual's positive psychological state and originates from feelings such as freedom, independence, and intrinsic motivation (Tanhai Rushwanlo et al., 2018). Individuals with lower psychological vitality have lower self-esteem due to the feeling of inability to control events and less experience of enthusiasm and joy, and their ability to respond appropriately to the unreasonable demands of others decreases. These individuals also have less independence and freedom of action in making individual decisions and are more influenced by others and their emotions (Bahram Baigi & Karimi Bagh Malek, 2024). Psychological vitality plays an important role in an individual's ability to cope with

difficult life situations and it serves not only as a measure of psychological well-being but also as a comprehensive personal resource (Singh & Sharma, 2018). Research has shown that psychological vitality is one of the key determinants of psychological well-being. This vitality includes a conscious feeling of positive energy, joy and spirit of the individual, and therefore has a direct and positive relationship with positive constructs and various aspects of psychological well-being (Popovych et al., 2021). The concept of well-being, of which psychological vitality is one of the dimensions, has a complex structure and is related to optimal functioning and optimal performance of the individual. It seems that having a positive and conscious attitude towards oneself and others promotes higher levels of psychological well-being and human performance (Voci et al., 2019; Nefer et al., 2023).

The current research is designed with the aim of examining the relationship between social support and psychological vitality and their association with relationship survival after marital infidelity.

Previous studies have consistently demonstrated that marital infidelity is one of the most devastating relationship crises, leading to significant psychological consequences including depression, anxiety, and reduced marital satisfaction (Gordon et al., 2023). Furthermore, substantial evidence confirms that both social support and psychological vitality serve as crucial resources for coping with life stressors and promoting psychological adaptation (Ryan & Frederick, 1997; Zimet et al., 1988). Despite established knowledge about the individual importance of social support and psychological vitality, the precise mechanisms through which these variables contribute to relationship survival following infidelity remain poorly understood. Specifically, the potential mediating role of psychological vitality in the relationship between social support and relationship survival after marital infidelity has not been empirically examined within existing literature. This study was designed to address this knowledge gap by investigating the following research question: Does psychological vitality mediate the relationship between social support and relationship survival after experiences of marital infidelity?

Based on this, and considering that meta-analytic studies indicate marital infidelity prevalence rates range from 20% to 40% internationally (Blow & Hartnett, 2005), with clinical studies showing 30-60% of affected individuals experiencing severe psychological sequelae such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress symptoms (Gordon et al., 2023; Karegar et al., 2024), this study was designed with the aim of modeling the mediating role of psychological vitality in the relationship between social support and relationship survival after experiencing marital infidelity.

Method

Due to the lack of reliable resources regarding the exact number of individuals who have experienced marital infidelity, the statistical population of this study consisted of all individuals who had experienced at least one instance of marital infidelity, as confirmed through a self-report screening question administered prior to study participation. A sample of 200 individuals (102 women and 98 men) was selected using a convenience sampling method. The research was conducted in 2025, and the samples were selected through a convenience sampling method. According to Loehlin's (2004) perspective, the minimum sample size for structural equation modeling is 100 individuals, while an optimal sample size is 200 individuals. Additionally, Garson (2012) has introduced the maximum likelihood method as the most common estimation technique in structural equation modeling. Therefore, the selection of a sample size of 200 in this study facilitates achieving valid and generalizable results.

Sampling Procedure, Ethical Considerations, and Inclusion/Exclusion

Criteria Participants were recruited through a multi-phase strategy addressing the research topic's sensitivity in Shiraz, Iran. Collaborations with licensed marriage counseling centers in Shiraz allowed therapists to inform eligible clients about the study. Targeted social media advertisements focused on Shiraz-based communities emphasized confidentiality, and snowball sampling enabled initial participants to refer others within the same geographical area. Operational definition of marital infidelity: "a breach of relationship trust through sustained emotional intimacy (e.g., romantic attachment) or sexual involvement with someone other than one's partner, including physical encounters or covert online relationships." Inclusion criteria required participants to: (1) have experienced at least one instance of marital infidelity as defined above, (2) have continued the relationship for at least six months post-discovery, (3) be aged 18 or older, and (4) be current residents of Shiraz. Exclusion criteria included: (1) ongoing intensive couple therapy outside Shiraz (to ensure accessibility to local resources), (2) severe psychological disorders (e.g., psychosis or active substance abuse), and (3) unwillingness to provide informed consent. Ethical compliance was ensured through written informed consent, the right to withdraw without penalty, anonymity via coded identifiers, and secure data storage. All participants received psychological support resources from licensed clinics in Shiraz post-study. The 78% participation rate stemmed from non-judgmental framing, confidentiality assurances, modest compensation and local trust in Shiraz-based research institutions. For data analysis, the method of structural equation modeling with Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) and the Smart PLS-3 software was utilized. "It should be noted that the sample consisted of individuals who had experienced

marital infidelity, encompassing both the injured party and the unfaithful partner, who chose to continue their relationship for at least six months post-discovery.

Subjective Vitality Scale (SVS): This scale was developed by Ryan and Frederick (1997) and consists of 7 items designed to measure a person's conscious experience of energy and vitality. Scoring is based on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all true) to 7 (very true). The total score is obtained by summing all items, ranging from 7 to 49. Scores of 7-17 indicate low vitality, 18-38 indicate moderate vitality, and scores above 38 indicate high vitality. The original version demonstrated high reliability with Cronbach's α coefficients ranging from 0.84 to 0.89 and strong construct validity. For the Persian version, content validity was confirmed by experts (Sadidi, 2013), and reliability coefficients were reported as 0.85 (Abolghasemi, 1982, cited in Sadidi, 2013) and 0.89 (Sadidi, 2013). In the current study, the scale showed excellent reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.902$, composite reliability = 0.922) and acceptable convergent validity (AVE = 0.629).

Social Support Questionnaire (SSQ): Developed by Zimet et al. (1988), this questionnaire comprises 12 items and three subscales: family support, friends support, and significant others support. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The total score ranges from 12 to 60, with higher scores indicating greater perceived social support. The original version demonstrated high reliability, with Cronbach's α values of 0.89 for family support, 0.87 for friends support, 0.91 for significant others support, and 0.93 for the total score, along with strong factorial and convergent validity. For the Persian version, Salimi et al. (2009) reported Cronbach's α values of 0.89, 0.86, and 0.82 for the family, friends, and significant others subscales, respectively. In the current study, the questionnaire exhibited high reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.939$, composite reliability = 0.961) and excellent convergent validity (AVE = 0.891).

Investment Model Scale (IMS): This scale, developed by Rusbult et al. (1998), includes 22 main items (plus 3 preparatory items) and measures four subscales: satisfaction, quality of alternatives, investment size, and commitment. Items are scored on an 8-point Likert scale from 0 (strongly disagree) to 8 (strongly agree). Higher scores on satisfaction, investment, and commitment indicate greater relationship stability, while higher scores on alternatives reflect better perceived alternatives outside the relationship. The original version showed high reliability, with Cronbach's α values of 0.91 for commitment, 0.92 for satisfaction, 0.82 for alternatives, and 0.84 for investment, along with significant correlations with marital adjustment. For the Persian version, full standardization is lacking, but the scale was validated by experts for use in this study. In the current study,

all factor loadings exceeded 0.93 ($p < 0.001$), and the subscales were used to form a formative higher-order construct for "relationship survival."

Results

In the present study, there were 200 participants, including 102 women and 98 men. In terms of age group, 56 people were in the range of 25 to 30 years, 57 people were in the range of 30 to 35 years, 43 people were in the range of 35 to 40 years, and 44 people were over 40 years old. Also, in terms of education level, 51 people had an associate's degree, 50 people had a bachelor's degree, 55 people had a master's degree, and 44 people had a doctorate degree.

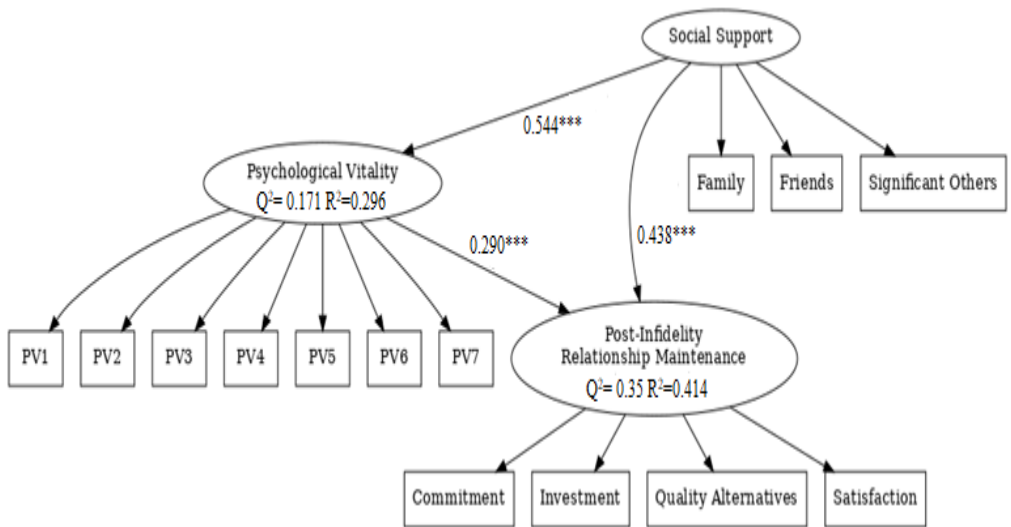


Fig. 1. Structural model results

Table 1: Reliability and Convergent Validity Indicators for Research Constructs

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Post-Infidelity Relationship Maintenance	0.969	0.969	0.977	0.915
Psychological Vitality	0.901	0.902	0.922	0.629
Social Support	0.939	0.939	0.961	0.891

Table 1 shows that the research constructs exhibit excellent psychometric properties. Cronbach's Alpha values range from 0.901 to 0.969, exceeding the conventional threshold of 0.7, indicating strong internal consistency. rho_A and Composite Reliability values are all above 0.9, confirming very good composite reliability. AVE values range from 0.629 to 0.915, demonstrating adequate convergent validity for all constructs. Overall, these results support the use of the constructs in subsequent path analysis.

Table 2: Factor Loadings and Significance Tests for Constructs

Construct	Factor Loading	t-value	p-value
Satisfaction	0.957	152.077	0.000
Quality_Alternatives	0.951	129.852	0.000
Investment	0.954	139.280	0.000
Commitment	0.965	180.906	0.000
Significant_Others	0.955	134.843	0.000
Family	0.942	118.654	0.000
Friends	0.935	107.408	0.000

Table 2 indicates that all items have high factor loadings ranging from 0.935 to 0.965, exceeding the conventional threshold of 0.7, which confirms their strong ability to measure the corresponding constructs. All t-values are very large and p-values are 0.000, suggesting that all loadings are statistically significant. These results, combined with previous reliability and validity indicators, support the psychometric soundness of the constructs and their suitability for path analysis and examining direct and indirect relationships.

Table 3: Correlation Matrix and Fornell–Larcker Criterion for Assessing Convergent and Discriminant Validity

	Post-Infidelity Relationship Maintenance	Psychological Vitality	Social Support
Post-Infidelity Relationship Maintenance	0.957		
Psychological Vitality	0.528	0.793	
Social Support	0.596	0.544	0.944

Table 3 demonstrates that the square root of AVE for each construct (main diagonal values: 0.957 for Post-Infidelity Relationship Maintenance, 0.793 for Psychological Vitality, and 0.944 for Social Support) is greater than the correlations between constructs (ranging from 0.528 to 0.596). This confirms that each construct is distinct from the others, indicating strong discriminant validity. In other words, the items specifically measure their intended constructs without overlap with other constructs.

Table 4: Path Coefficients and Significance of Structural Relationships

Path	β (Path Coefficient)	t-value	p-value
Social Support → Post-Infidelity Relationship Maintenance	0.438	7.022	0.000
Psychological Vitality → Post-Infidelity Relationship Maintenance	0.290	4.413	0.000
Social Support → Psychological Vitality	0.544	10.778	0.000

Table 4 indicates that all direct paths are statistically significant. Social support positively affects post-infidelity relationship maintenance ($\beta = 0.438$, $t = 7.022$, $p < 0.001$), and psychological vitality also has a direct positive effect on relationship maintenance ($\beta = 0.290$, $t = 4.413$, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, social support significantly enhances psychological vitality ($\beta = 0.544$, $t = 10.778$, $p < 0.001$). These findings suggest that social support, both directly and indirectly via psychological vitality, plays a key role in maintaining and stabilizing post-infidelity relationships.

Table 5: Predictive Performance Indicators of the PLS Model (R^2 , Q^2 , SSO, and SSE)

	R^2	Q^2	SSO	SSE
Post-Infidelity Relationship Maintenance	0.414	0.35	800	519.995
Psychological Vitality	0.296	0.171	1,400.00	1,160.07
Social Support	-	-	600	600

Table 5 indicates that the model explains 41.4% of the variance in post-infidelity relationship maintenance ($R^2 = 0.414$) and 29.6% of the variance in psychological vitality ($R^2 = 0.296$), suggesting medium to good predictive power. The Q^2 values for post-infidelity relationship maintenance ($Q^2 = 0.350$) and psychological vitality ($Q^2 = 0.171$) confirm that the model has predictive relevance and its results go beyond chance levels. Since social support functions as an exogenous construct in the model, R^2 and Q^2 values were not applicable. Overall, these results demonstrate that the model provides reliable predictions for the constructs of relationship maintenance and psychological vitality.

Discussion

As summarized in Tables 1–3, the measurement model demonstrated excellent reliability and validity, confirming the robustness of the research constructs. Structural results in Table 4 showed that social support directly enhanced post-infidelity relationship maintenance and psychological vitality, while psychological vitality also positively predicted relationship survival, highlighting its mediating role. Finally, as presented in Table 5, the model explained a meaningful proportion of variance in both relationship maintenance (41.4%) and psychological vitality (29.6%), indicating good predictive power. Overall, these findings confirm that social support, both directly and indirectly through psychological vitality, plays a crucial role in sustaining relationships after marital infidelity.

The present study sought to investigate the role of social support and psychological vitality in sustaining marital relationships after the experience of infidelity. Consistent with our hypotheses, the results confirmed that social support exerts both a direct effect on relationship maintenance and an indirect effect through the enhancement of psychological vitality. These findings are aligned with the stress-buffering hypothesis (Cohen & Wills, 1985), which posits that social support acts as a critical external resource by alleviating the detrimental impact of stressful life events and promoting adaptive coping responses. Perceived social support creates a sense of belonging, respect, and value, which not only reduces feelings of isolation but also provides the psychological foundation needed to engage in constructive relational repair after betrayal (Pillemer & Holtzer, 2016; Seidi et al., 2021).

More importantly, the results highlighted the mediating role of psychological vitality, underscoring its function as a dynamic inner resource that facilitates resilience and adaptive functioning. Drawing on Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), psychological vitality can be understood as a manifestation of autonomy, competence, and intrinsic motivation, which together foster the energy and agency required for effective coping. Individuals with higher vitality are better able to maintain emotional balance, resist destructive relational impulses, and actively engage in constructive dialogue and problem-solving. These findings are consistent with previous research in positive psychology (Ryan & Frederick, 1997; Popovych et al., 2021) showing that vitality reflects a conscious state of positive energy that strengthens psychological well-being and improves relational quality.

From a resource-based perspective (Hobfoll, 1989), the interaction between social support (an external, structural resource) and psychological vitality (an internal, personal resource) creates a synergistic effect that enhances couples' ability to withstand and recover from the severe psychological disruption caused by infidelity. Social support provides the external scaffolding of trust and belonging, while vitality supplies the

internal motivational force for constructive coping, emotional regulation, and relationship rebuilding. This dual pathway explains why the presence of both constructs significantly amplifies resilience and contributes to the sustainability of marital relationships.

Practically, these results underscore the need for dual-focused interventions. Programs designed for couples coping with infidelity should simultaneously aim to strengthen support networks (e.g., family, peers, therapeutic alliances) and foster psychological vitality through interventions that promote autonomy, positive affect, and intrinsic motivation. Such integrated interventions could reduce the risk of maladaptive outcomes such as depression, anxiety, or relational dissolution, while improving marital satisfaction and long-term relational stability.

In conclusion, this study provides empirical evidence that social support directly and indirectly, via psychological vitality, plays a pivotal role in post-infidelity relationship survival. By bridging external and internal resources, individuals can more effectively manage the emotional crisis of infidelity, sustain commitment, and restore relational trust. These findings contribute to filling a gap in the literature by clarifying the mechanisms linking social support and vitality to relational resilience. Future research may further explore these dynamics in diverse cultural contexts and examine how gender, personality, or coping styles moderate these relationships

Conclusion

In general, the present research showed that social support and psychological vitality, as complementary factors, can play a significant role in the stability of marital relationships and the improvement of the psychological well-being of individuals after experiencing infidelity. These findings not only corroborate previous results but also provide new avenues for the development of prevention and psychological intervention programs and emphasize that paying attention to both internal and external resources, especially in damaging conditions, can facilitate the process of relationship rebuilding and increase psychological resilience.

Conflict of interest

This study did not have any conflict of interest for the authors

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