



Advancing the Art & Science of Psychotherapy

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Sexual Betrayal, Deception and Lies

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2 CE Hours

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Intimate Partner Betrayal Trauma

Summary of research conducted by Sheri Keffer, Ph.D., MFT, CCPS, CSAT, EMDR
and Kevin Skinner, Ph.D., MFT, CSAT, EMDR

DrSheriKeffer.com | BraveOne.com

Background

Although disclosing the details about an infidelity is viewed as an important aspect of improving one's marriage, learning about a partner's sexual betrayal is still a troubling and traumatic event. Beyond the initial discovery, the dishonesty that follows is oftentimes one of the most painful aspect of the experience for partners. The current research evaluates women's experiences with sexual betrayal trauma.

Study Design

Data was collected from women attending conferences on sexual betrayal at locations throughout the United States. Women were asked to complete a brief questionnaire, and their participation was both anonymous and voluntary. In total, 100 women completed the survey.

Sample Demographics

The majority of women were **married** (76%), **non-Hispanic White** (78%) and had obtained at least a **college degree** (61%). Women ranged between **29-72 years old** (average age of 48.49). Most women had been **married for approximately 20 years**.

Experiences with Childhood Trauma

Using the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) questionnaire, women reported prior experiences with trauma, specifically during childhood.

- The ACE evaluates trauma relating to emotional and physical abuse/neglect, and household challenges, such as parental separation or divorce and domestic violence.
- ✓ **20** women reported no ACEs (16/20 reported clinical-level symptoms of PTSD)
- ✓ **51** women reported between 1-4 ACEs (36/51 reported clinical-level symptoms of PTSD)
- ✓ **28** women reported 5-10 ACEs (24/28 reported clinical-level symptoms of PTSD)

79% of the women reported at least one adverse childhood experience.

Study Measures

Women completed the Trauma Inventory for Partner's of Sex Addicts (TIPSA V.2; Skinner, Keffer, Knowlton & Manning, 2016): a 76-item questionnaire that evaluates an individual's experience with a partner infidelity. The scale evaluates experiences reliving the infidelity, engaging in avoidance behaviors, negative feelings, emotional arousal, and reports of deceit and blame. Other measures included the PTSD Checklist for DSM-V, the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale, the Satisfaction with Life Scale, and a relationship satisfaction scale.

Participants also indicated whether *the knowledge* of the infidelity or the *continued pattern of lying* following the infidelity was more damaging.

Study Findings

- *Higher* TIPSA scores were associated with *higher* PTSD symptoms, and *lower* relationship satisfaction, relationship integrity and life satisfaction.
- Importantly, the **denial, deceit and blame** scale was also associated with these outcomes – providing evidence that **partners' lies about sexual betrayals are associated with worse psychological adjustment**.
- The majority of women (88%) indicated they would be willing to remain with their partner, if he stopped lying.

65% of women reported that the continued pattern of lies was more damaging to them

- **Intimate Deception Betrayal Trauma (IDBT)TM** is a term coined by Dr. Sheri Keffer in 2014 to identify the impact of Denial, Deceit, Blame and Gaslighting tactics used to hide sexually deceptive acts. In my experience the old adage "*addicts lie, they lie a lot*" does not adequately convey the level of harm, psychological abuse, or higher level of symptoms for PTSD associated with deception.
- Scores on PTSD measure suggested that **76% of women reported clinical-level symptoms of PTSD**. Although the measure is not appropriate for making clinical diagnoses of PTSD, this does suggest that the majority of women were experiencing severe symptoms of distress associated with their partner's sexual behaviors.

Summary: These preliminary results suggest that many women **find the continued pattern of lying following an infidelity to be quite damaging**. Feelings of deceit and blame are associated with *higher* levels of PTSD symptoms, as well as worse marital and life satisfaction.