

MEDIA RELEASE

HELPING INDIVIDUALS RECOVER FROM MARITAL INFIDELITY

SINGAPORE, 16 February 2014 – TOUCH Family Services (TFS), an affiliate of TOUCH Community Services, has released the findings of a research on individuals affected by marital infidelity, focusing specifically on the recovery and rebuilding process of the affected marriage.

Conducted between July 2012 and early 2013, the research aims to provide marriage therapists, counsellors and social workers with evidence-based understanding of individuals or couples affected by marital infidelity. Researchers from TFS worked on findings from a survey of 164 individuals who were affected by their spouse's infidelity.

Ms Teo Seok Bee, Senior Manager of TFS, said, "Marital infidelity is an extremely distressing and painful experience for couples to go through. We hope that the research findings will help counsellors and social workers gain better understanding of the issues arising from infidelity and to tailor programmes that will strengthen the family unit and prevent the occurrence of infidelity in marriages."

The seven-month long research revealed several findings:

Resilient marriages in Singapore

Of the 164 respondents, 61% were still married and living with the infidel spouse. This showed the resilience of marriages in Singapore and that couples still believed in the institution of marriage. While the survey did not specifically address reasons for couples to stay married, TFS believes that couples may choose to maintain the marriage status to allow the children to grow in the environment of a complete family. It could also be due to the financial dependency of the affected individual on the infidel spouse or simply because the affected person has healed and moved on.

Contrary to what is commonly known as the "seven-year-itch", the survey findings revealed a mode of two years and a median of 5 years as the duration of marriage when the affair was committed by the infidel spouse. This seems to reflect that couples are now susceptible to infidelity much earlier in the marriage. There also appears to be a lack of commitment to the long-term as more people tend to focus on how they feel at the present moment.

"The first two years of marriage appears to be most risky for couples as major adjustments take place when two people live together. Living together takes a lot of commitment and to stay happily married, couples need to work through differences, find unity in values, decisions and dreams, and even give up some of the rights or privileges they used to enjoy when they were living apart. With such challenges, it is easy for couples to throw in the towel at the first major disagreement or conflict if they do not focus on the big picture and make a decision to sustain the marriage in the long haul," explains Ms Teo.

Infidelity has long-lasting effects on individuals

While the majority of respondents (56.3%) have healed from their spouse's or ex-spouse's infidelity, they shared that the bad experience will always leave a scar. In addition, 51.1% of divorced respondents are still extremely anxious about being hurt again. 24.1% of the respondents have moved on to a new relationship but reported that the quality of the new relationship was not as good as the early days of the previous marriage.

Infidelity and divorce carries a high social cost, affecting not just the individual but also the children and family, and not just at the time of discovery but also when it comes to fostering new relationships

Appropriate counselling support can help individuals

The majority of respondents (65.2%) did not seek professional counselling after learning about their infidel spouse. Reasons cited by respondents include not knowing where to seek help, too embarrassed to speak with a third-party or simply wanting to be self-reliant in the recovery process.

Of those who received professional counselling support, 54.5% found the counselling to be somewhat helpful. It was also noted that the more the counsellor encouraged honest communication about the affair, the more helpful the counselling sessions were found to be.

Ms Teo says, "From our past experience, couples tend to seek help only when their relationship has deteriorated. This may be due to the Asian mindset where individuals prefer to keep problems to themselves. We advise couples to find support when they encounter marital problems as continued dissatisfaction in the marriage may be a reason for one party to stray and infidelity to occur."

"We believe that more can also be done to raise awareness of the benefits of professional counselling, remove the stigma associated with counselling as well as highlight where people can seek support. At the same time, counsellors and social workers, involved in providing marriage counseling services, can seek specialised training in understanding extramarital affairs so as to be better equipped to help couples affected by infidelity."

Apart from marriage counselling services, TFS also provides marriage enrichment seminars and marriage preparation courses to help couples understand the challenges of a marriage journey as well as to equip them with tips to build a strong and lasting marriage. More than 190 individuals attended TFS' marriage preparation course in 2013.

Moving forward, TFS will be highlighting the risks of marital infidelity in its marriage preparation programmes and incorporating topics to help couples affair proof their marriage.

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About TOUCH Community Services

TOUCH Community Services is a not-for-profit charitable organisation, officially registered in 1992 and a member of the National Council of Social Service since 1994. With more than 200 employees and 1,600 regular volunteers, TOUCH reaches out to people of all ages, races and backgrounds through a network of 17 services located in different parts of Singapore. In 2013, TOUCH served some 32,000 clients and 231,000 service users, including children from low-income or single-parent families, youths at risk, needy families, people with special and healthcare needs, and the frail elderly. For more information on TOUCH and our services, please visit www.touch.org.sg.

About TOUCH Family Services

TOUCH Family Services (TFS), an affiliate of TOUCH Community Services, is committed to building strong families, and promoting the well-being of individuals and families in need. TFS supports families through adoption services, counselling support and family life education including marriage preparation courses and family enrichment seminars. For more details on TFS, please visit www.touch.org.sg/family_service_group.

**A SUMMARY OF THE
Research by TOUCH Family Services on
RECOVERING FROM AFFAIRS & REBUILDING MARRIAGES
2013**

Objective :

To provide family counsellors, therapists & social workers with evidence-based understanding of individuals or couples affected by marital infidelity, to aid in the recovery process of people affected by marital infidelity.

About the Research:

Time Period : July 2012 to early 2013
Method : Online questionnaire (both English & Chinese)
Target respondents : Individuals affected by infidelity of spouse/ ex-spouse

Limitations of Research:

- a) Although 973 people responded to the survey, only a total of 164 responses were deemed suitable and fulfilled the requirements of having been married before and a history of their spouses having had an affair. Hence, the sample size is limited.
- b) As the survey was administered online, this tends to attract respondents who are likely to be more educated or Internet savvy.

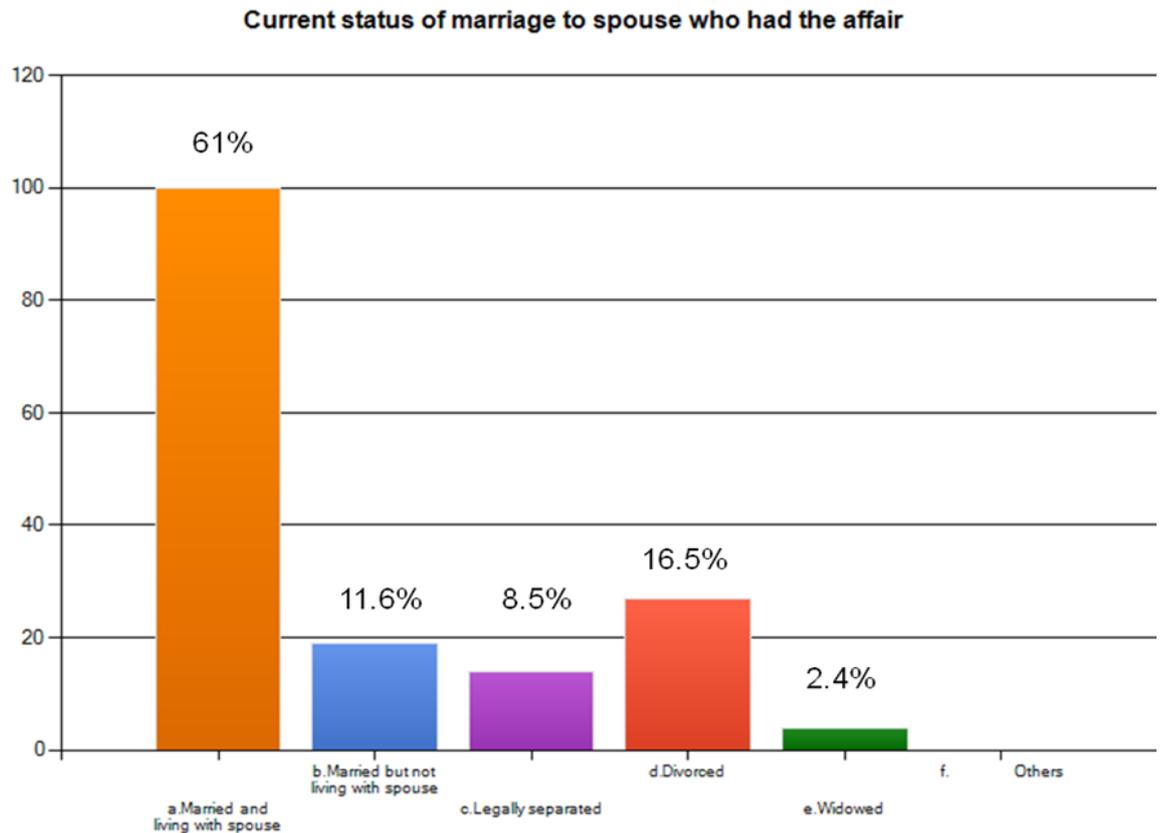
Profile of Respondents:

Respondent's majority profile –
Female (63%), Chinese (81%), tertiary or professional qualification (67%), first marriage (88%), has a religion (80%), working in professional/clerical positions (51%).

Key Findings & Implications:

1) Marital Status

a) Current marital status



61% are currently married & living with the infidel spouse. This augured well for marriages in Singapore and shows the resilience of marriages and that couples still believe in the institution of marriage although it is not clear the reasons why they stay married – whether they have healed and moved on, or stay married because of faith or their children or because they are dependent upon their spouse.

b) Time taken to make a decision

Time taken to make a decision after the discovery of the affair	
Less than 3 months	42.3%
3 months to 6 months	25.0%
6 months to 1 year	17.3%
More than 1 year	15.4%
Total	100.0%

67.3% of respondents made a decision to either stay married or divorce within 6 months. In fact, 42.3% made the decision within 3 months. Affairs constitute a crisis and for any crisis, timing is important. Early intervention or support is therefore crucial in managing a marital crisis.

- c) The mean duration of marriage was 7.5 years when the affair was committed by the spouse. The median was 5 years and the mode was 2 years. The range was from 0.5 to 36 years. It appears that we may have to rethink about the saying of "7-year itch". Marriage enrichment programmes may have to be introduced earlier in the marriage.

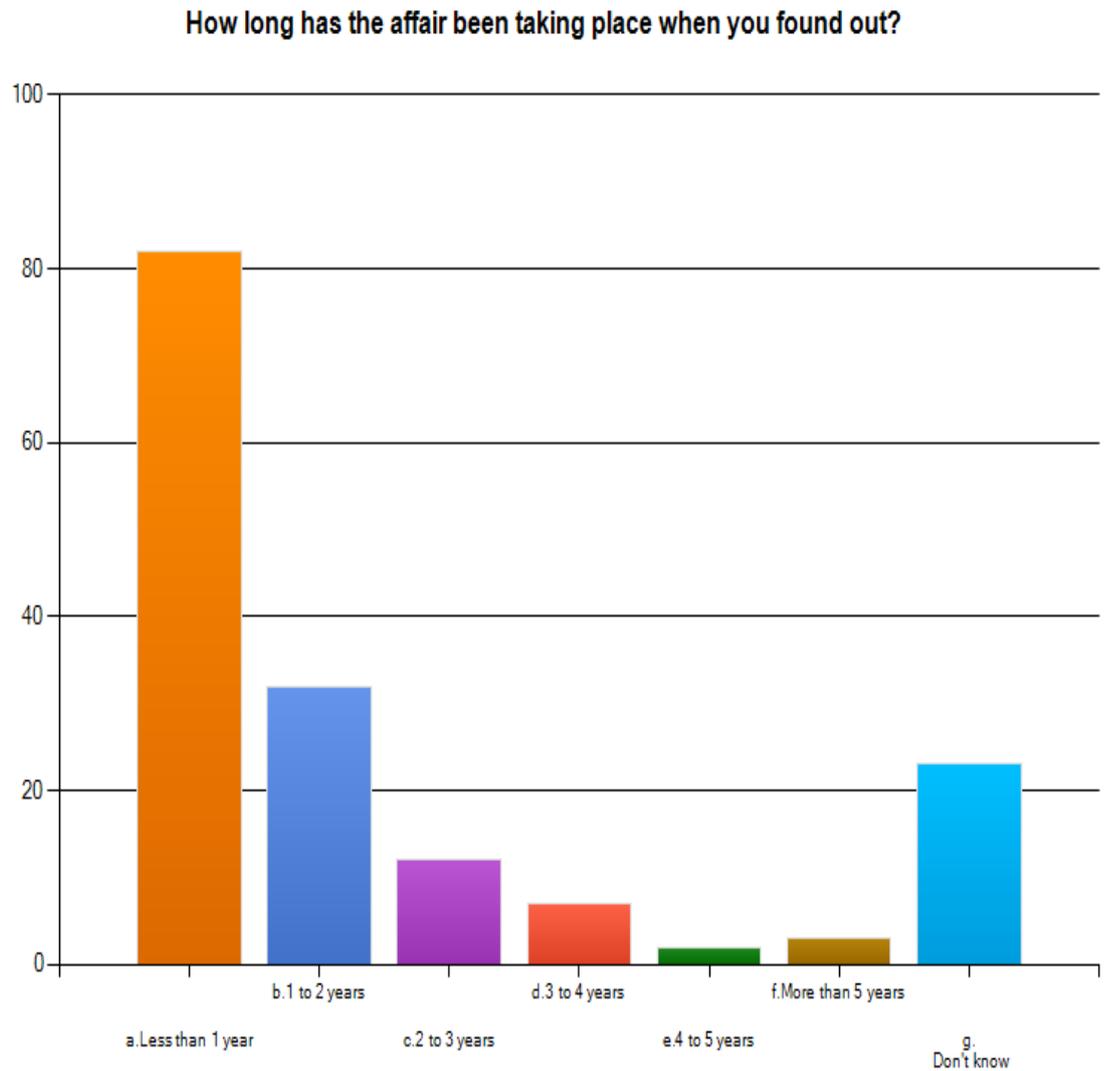
2) Third party & type of affair

a) With whom was the affair committed

With whom was the affair committed?	
Co-workers	31.7%
Friends	24.8%
Ex- boyfriends/ ex-girlfriends	6.2%
Prostitutes	4.3%
Strangers	15.5%
Don't know	17.4%

Combined majority of the affair was committed with familiar people with co-workers (31.7%) & friends (24.5%) coming out tops. This would alert one to the danger zones when there are frequent opportunities of contact and time spent with the third party. This would indicate that there needs to be greater awareness of one's vulnerability when dealing with familiar people and the importance of drawing boundaries and affair-proofing one's marriage.

b) How long has the affair been taking place?



Generally, most found out about the affair within a year it happened mainly through changes in spouse's attitudes and behaviours (43.1%) and a gut feeling that something was wrong (29.3%).

c) Type of affair

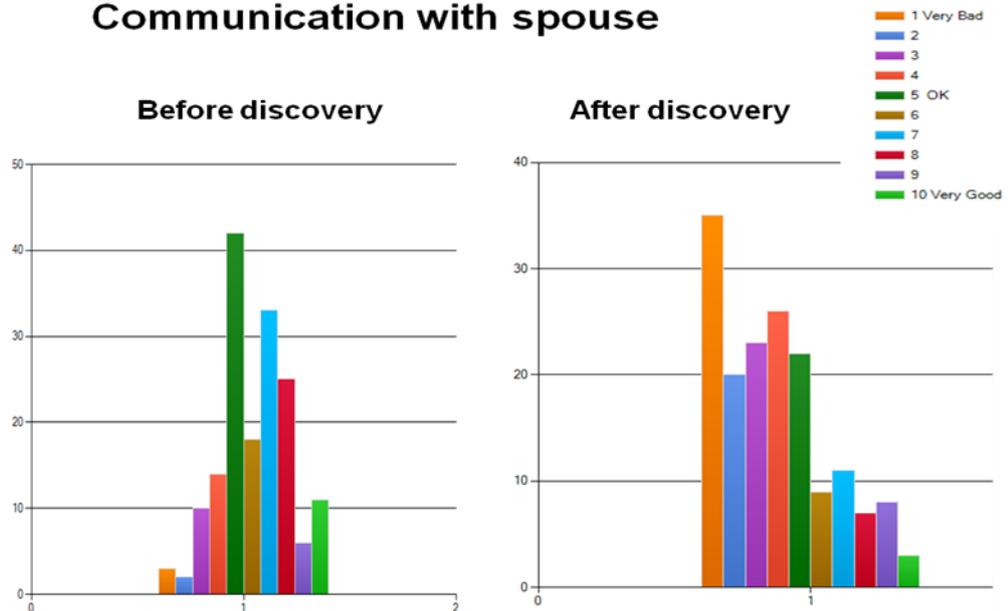
Type of affair committed		Decision		
		Stay married	Divorce	Undecided
Sexual involvement with emotional attachment to 3 rd party	32.3%	35%	41%	24%
Sexual involvement with no emotional attachment to 3 rd party	21.1%	70%	12%	18%
Emotional attachment only to 3 rd party	22.4%	50%	28%	22%
Don't know	22.4%			
Others	1.9%	40%	20%	40%

32.3% had sexual involvement with emotional attachment to the third party; 22.4% had emotional attachment only to third party. 21.1% had sexual involvement with no emotional attachment to the 3rd party. It was also found that where there are both sexual involvement and emotional attachment, divorce was a choice most made (41%) as compared to the other scenarios where most choose to stay married.

3) Communication

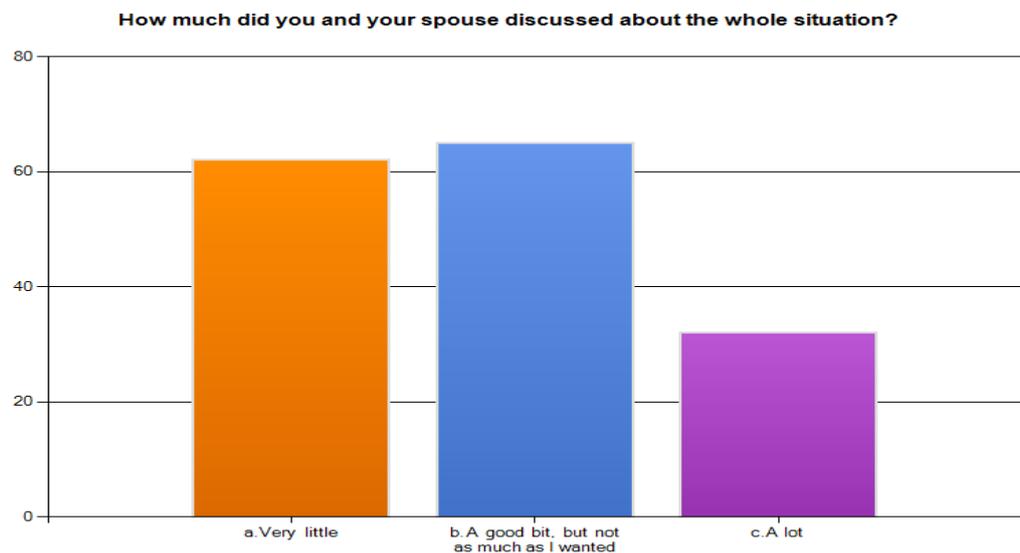
a)

Communication with spouse

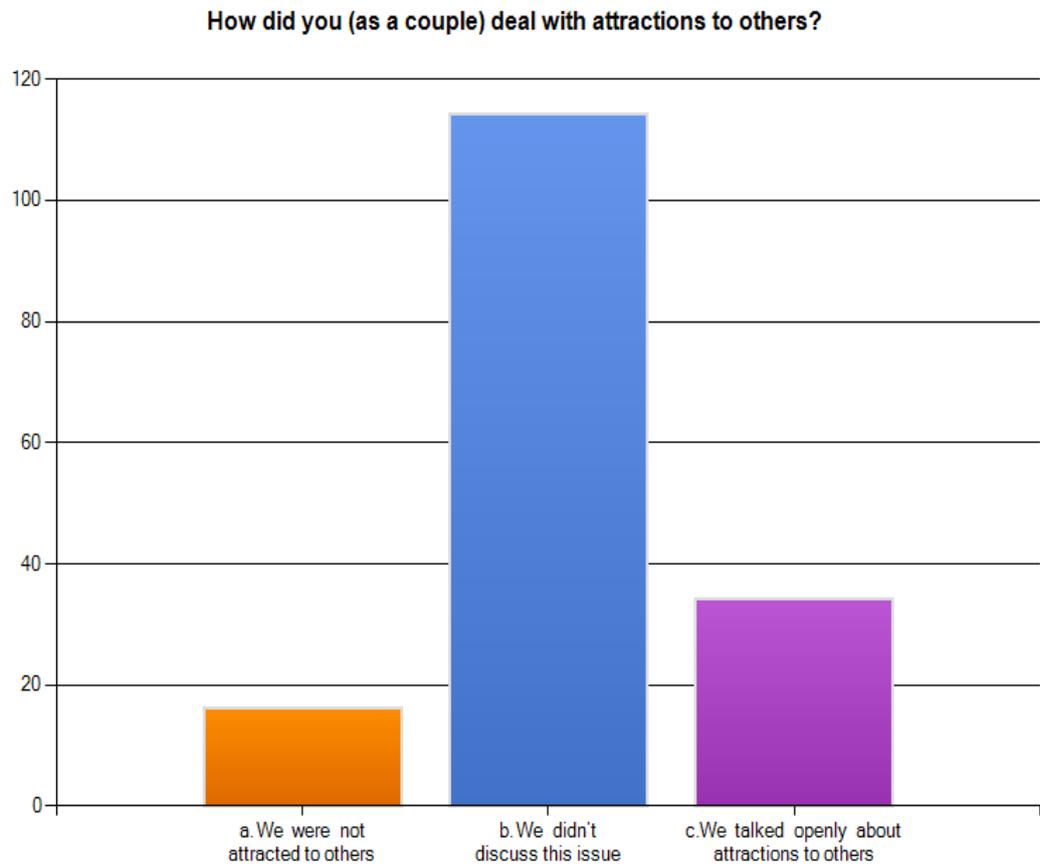


Communication with spouse deteriorated from 82.4% scoring a 6 or more before discovery of the affair to 62.5% scoring 4 or below after the affair.

b) Only 20.1% of the couples discussed a lot about the whole situation as compared to 39% of “very little” & 40.9% of “a good bit but not as much as I wanted”.



- c) Majority (69.5%) don't talk about issue of attraction to others before or during marriage.



- d) More open communication and accountability would be necessary for a good marriage and discussion of attraction to others may be worth introducing at marriage preparation programmes.

e) Knowing details about the affair

10 denotes wanting to know every detail about the affair and 1 denotes a preference not to know any details about the affair.

Knowing details about affair		
Rating from 1 to 10	Percentage	
1	10.1%	23.9%
2	4.4%	
3	3.1%	
4	6.3%	
5	22.7%	53.4%
6	7.5%	
7	9.4%	
8	6.3%	
9	5.7%	
10	24.5%	
Total	100%	

Some people prefer not to know details of the affair (23.9% who rated 4 and below) while others would like to know everything about the affair (53.4% who rated 6 and above). There appeared to be gender differences in the need to know. Male respondents mostly (29.3%) only wanted to know some details (mid-point rating of 5) while female respondents mostly (28.7%) wanted to know everything (highest rating of 10).

4) Children

- a) The average number of children in families affected by marital infidelity was 1.32. The mode and median were 1 and the range was from 0 to 4 children.
- b) 65.8% of respondents had children while 34.2% did not have children when the affair was discovered. For those who had children, many of these children were below 12 years old.
- c) Majority of the parents preferred not to tell their children about the affair, giving the reason that the children were too young and would not understand.

Were the children told about the affair?	
Didn't tell them	59.6%
Told them but only very little information	27.9%
Told them most of the facts of the situation	12.5%
Total	100.0%

- d) There were mostly adverse effects on the children when they knew of the affair.

How were your children affected by the news of the affair?
They sided with me **
There were negative behavioural changes **
They were angry with the unfaithful parent *
Their school work were affected *
They felt betrayed *
They felt a sense of guilt
They sided with the unfaithful parent
Others ***

5) Income

It is noteworthy that 91% of the respondents come from a dual-income family where most of the respondents (67%) as well as their spouse (59%) earn a monthly income equal to or below \$5,000. The hectic lifestyle of working professionals may have caused couples to spend less time with each other, putting a strain on their relationship.

6) Impact

a) Healing & moving on

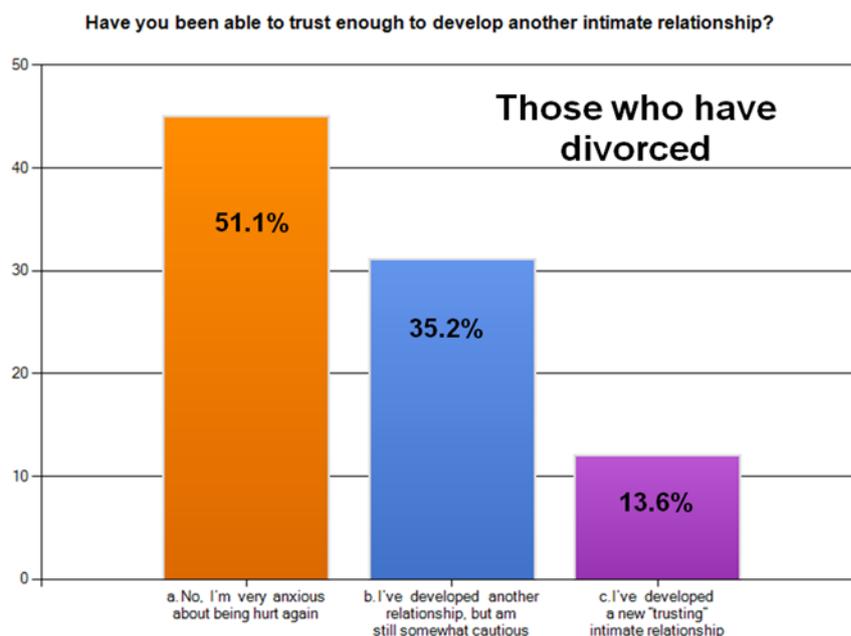
	Male	Female	%
No, I am still in great pain.	20.7%	14.0%	16.5%
I've healed somewhat but feel I will always carry a scar.	56.9%	56.0%	56.3%
I've mostly healed and have grown in many ways.	22.4%	30%	27.2%

Most affected parties (56.3%) have healed somewhat but feel they will always carry a scar.

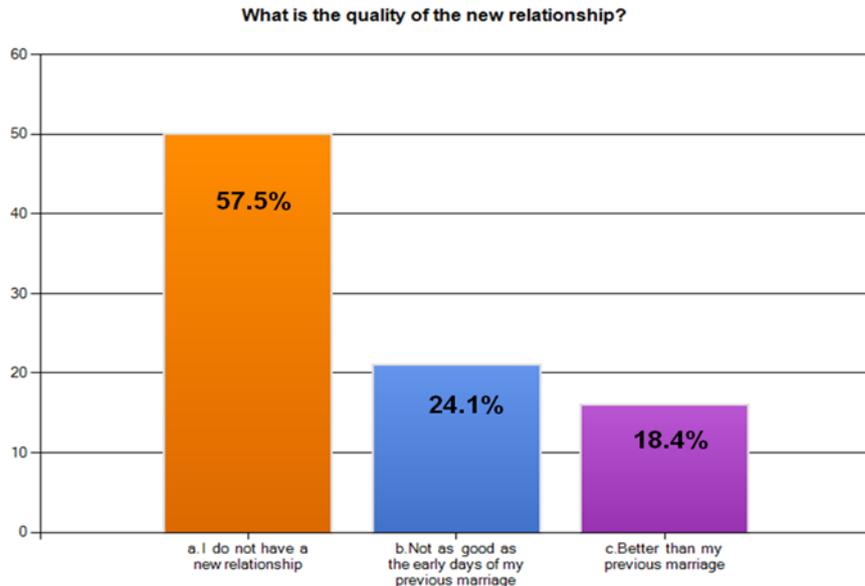
b) Betrayed wives appear to be able to heal better than betrayed husbands.

c) Where contact with the third party has been cut off, it is more likely for the betrayed spouse to regain trust for their spouse.

d)



For those who have divorced, 51.1% are still very anxious about being hurt again.

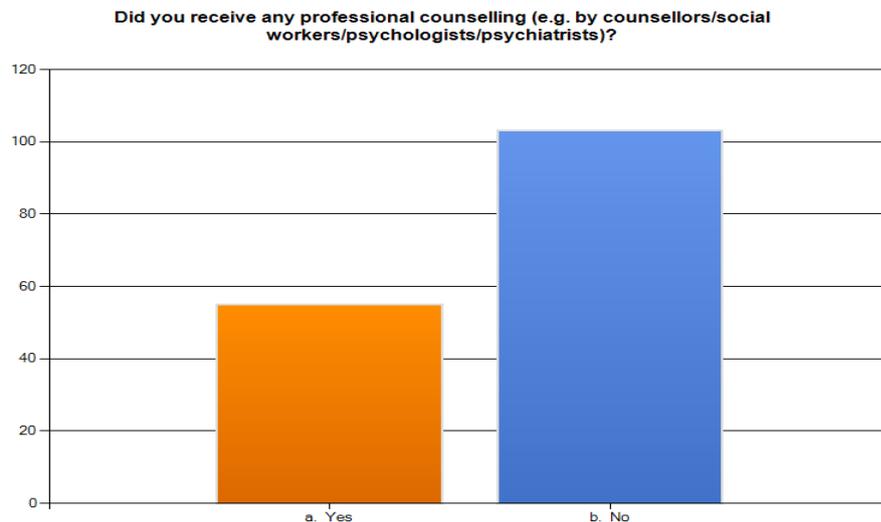


57.5% do not have a new relationship, 24.1% has a new relationship but the quality of the new relationship was not as good as the early days of their previous marriage.

- e) Infidelity and divorce carries a high social cost, affecting not just the individual at time of discovery and when fostering new relationships but also the children. It takes years to build a relationship but days to tear it apart.

7) Counselling

- a) Overall, the majority (65.2%) of respondents did not receive any professional counselling. Only 34.8% did.



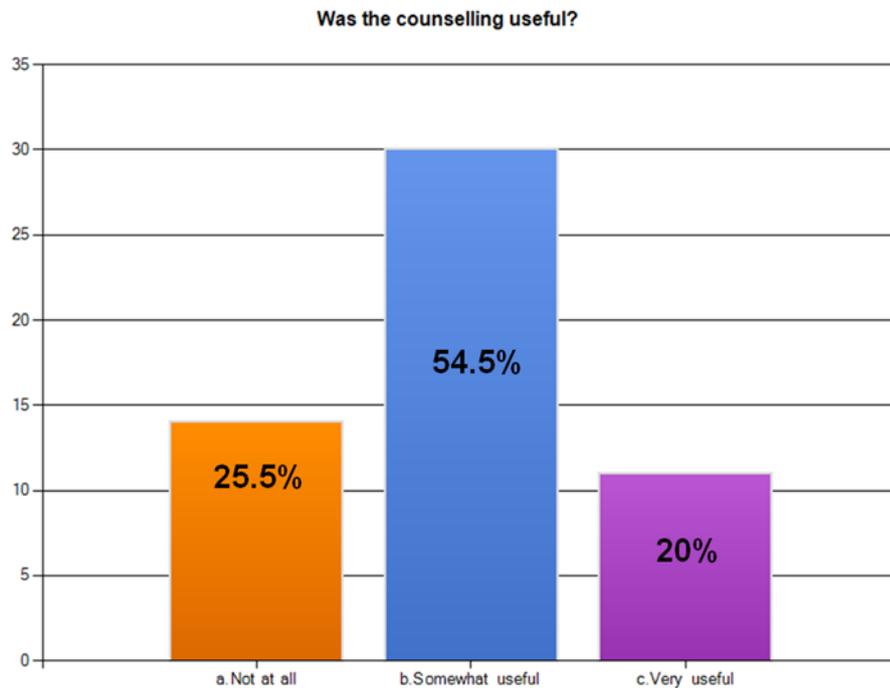
Some of the reasons for not seeking counseling include the following:

- Not sure if it were helpful
- Did not think of it
- Do not know who to go to for help
- Too shy to approach a stranger for help
- Wanted to rely on self
- Spouse refuses to go for counselling

More can be done to raise awareness of the benefits of professional counseling and where people can seek help as well as remove the stigma associated with it.

b) For those who seek counselling, most (45.5%) were initiated by the betrayed spouse, with 58.2% attended by both husband & wife.

c)



Majority (54.5%) found the counselling to be somewhat useful or very useful (20%). The remaining 25.5% did not find the counselling sessions useful. It is noted that the more the counsellor encouraged honest communication about the affair, the more useful/helpful the counselling was found to be.

d) For the professional helpers, there is a need to have specialised training in the area of extramarital affairs.

Conclusion:

Infidelity is likely to be one of the most traumatic events in the life of a married person. For some, it signals the end of a marriage. For others who choose to stay married, it often takes many years for trust to be regained and the marital relationship to be repaired.

Hence, prevention is better than cure. Therefore, more needs to be done to help couples “affair-proof” their marriages. Public education, marriage preparation, and marriage enrichment can also be strengthened and promoted. For professional helpers, there is a need to have more specialised training in the area of extra marital affairs.

Finally, life is short, one needs to cherish one’s family.