

# Parental Infidelity and Children's Reactions: A Case Study in a Filipino Family

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## ABSTRACT

*Parents serve as the backbone of the development of children. Positive and negative childhood experiences influence the future behaviors and perceptions of the child. Particularly, negative experiences may be associated with detrimental outcomes for children. One of these experiences may be parental infidelity. Parental infidelity has both long and short term effects which include negative emotions, perceptions, distrust, low self-esteem, and loss of motivation. This study investigated a family case on the different emotions and perceptions of three siblings who have witnessed the infidelity of their mother. The researchers conducted interview and testing sessions among the siblings and were able to gather their perceptions and feelings towards an ideal family, upon their discovery of their mother's infidelity, towards their parents, relationship or marriage, trust, infidelity, and themselves. Findings of the study imply that infidelity, in general, does not only affect the parents but the children as well.*

**Keywords:** infidelity; exposure to infidelity; children; relationships; parents.

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## INTRODUCTION

Parents have the vital role in the child's experiences in terms of making sense of the world around them, engaging in proper socialization, and learning ethical values (Uwe, Asuquo & Ekuri, 2008). Main, Kaplan, and Cassidy (1985) contended that the guidance and support of the parents are needed throughout the formative years of the children. Hence, children are molded according to how their parents take care of them (Tulviste, 2013). However, children's sense of security may be challenged with the presence of infidelity in their respective families. Infidelity is defined as a sexual and emotional act occurring outside the primary relationship and is characterized by a breach of trust and

violation of the exclusivity of the relationship (Blow & Hartnett, 2005). Infidelity is labelled as one of the most severe violations and betrayal that a person can experience (Whisman & Wagers, 2005). The breach of trust is not only experienced by the couple but other individuals connected to the relationship as well, specifically their children and it is because infidelity has a ripple effect (Vangelisti & Gerstenberger, 2004) suggesting that infidelity cascades its detrimental effects on the children. Most adults failed to realize this involvement; hence, it is important to include children in studying this phenomenon (Duncombe & Marsden, 2004).

Childhood experiences influence children's future behaviors and perceptions. Negative childhood experiences like family conflict,

violence, sexual and physical abuse (Hughes & Vango, 1989) are associated with adverse health and psychosocial outcomes (Negash & Morgan, 2015), development of psychiatric disorder (Dube, Felitti, Dong, Giles, & Anda, 2003), and intimate partner violence (McCloskey, Figueredo, & Koss, 1995). The disappearance of one parent may bring about a difficulty in emotional adjustment (Amato & Keith, 1991), and behavioral problems like lower academic achievement, disengagement, and alienation (East, Jackson, & O'Brien, 2006). Thus, separation of parents influences the lives of children, and these separations may be one of the consequences of infidelity.

The act of betrayal (infidelity) destroys the children's sense of security and trust that they no longer see the world as safe and predictable (Sori, 2007). Affected children have difficulty in initiating and sustaining a relationship because the negative feelings that accompany their parents' infidelity inhibit them to trust potential partners which may lead to committing infidelity in their own relationship (Platt, Nalbone, Cassanova, & Wetchler, 2008). Children internalize actions observed and use these observations to guide their future behavior (Bandura, 1986). Having seen their parents commit infidelity, these children may perceive infidelity as normal behavior and may consider it normal to engage in infidel acts (Sori, 2007). Exposure to parents' infidelity may confuse children's values system that they may be unable to distinguish between right and wrong (Wallerstein, Lewis, & Blakeslee, 2000).

Children's exposure to infidelity may cause both short and long-term effects. These effects include academic difficulties, distress (Duncombe & Marsden, 2004), and unwillingness to communicate (Webster, 1995) which may be due to the embarrassment of their parents' infidelity and/or their inability to fully explain what they are going through (Wallerstein et al., 2000). Long-term damages among children include

trauma (Janoff-Bulman, 1992), loss of trust to the parent (Negash & Morgan, 2015), depression, and reduced self-esteem (Amato & Keith, 1991).

The bulk of studies on the debilitating consequences of children's exposure to their parents' infidelity focused more on adult children, who were 18 years old and above during the time of the study. These adult children reflected on their childhood experiences of parental infidelity to report its effects. However, these studies failed to consider the amount of time that has passed from the discovery of infidelity until the time of the study which may have affected the changes being observed (Greene, 2006). Greene (2006) recommended that studies be conducted nearer to the time that the parental infidelity was discovered so that the immediate impact may be looked into. Likewise, Duncombe and Marsden (2004) reported that most studies assess the children's feelings through their parents' perceptions which may result in unrealistic optimism about children's reaction rather than their real experience.

Considering the significant changes that these children experience, there are still limited studies about the views and perceptions of infidelity among children and how exposure to their parents' infidelity may have different impacts. According to Negash and Morgan (2015), infidelity can create different outcomes which include children presenting problem behaviors within the family, such as not going to school in order to have their parents engage in an effort to resolve the problem. The participants of this study were siblings who experienced parental conflict because of the infidelity of their mother. The present study aims to investigate, in detail, the perceptions and feelings of the three children towards various aspects of their lives in relation to their exposure to their mother's infidelity.

## METHODS

### *Research Design*

This study utilized multiple measures single-family case study. The study employed various sources of evidence such as interview and psychological tests, which may enable an in-depth investigation of a case (Yin, 1984).

### *Participants*

Greene (2006) suggested that future study should be done nearer to the time of the children's discovery of parental infidelity to provide clear and unfiltered reactions and perceptions. Accordingly, the participants were below 18 years old and discovered their mother's infidelity two years ago from the time of the study. The participants were three siblings, namely Anna, Maria, and John (not their real names), who were 16, 14, and 12 years old. The family transferred to their present location in 2010 and the infidelity of their mother was discovered in 2013. In 2014, the mother left the siblings to their father and had lived in a different house in the same city; she regularly visited the children but did not openly communicate with the father.

#### *Personal Background 1: Anna*

Anna was a 16-year-old female, a Grade 9 student in a night high school and the eldest among the siblings. Her parents separated due to the infidelity her mother was involved in. She discovered her mother's infidelity sometime in the year 2013 through text messages sent by the man with whom her mother was having an affair. With her discovery, she and her mother had frequent disagreements. Their disagreements intensified when her mother blamed Anna

for her miscarriage and therefore led her to disclose her mother's infidelity to her father sometime in 2014. The separation of her parents led her to take the role of her mother in doing the household chores and taking care of her father and siblings.

#### *Personal Background 2: Maria*

Maria was a 14-year-old girl, and the second child of the family. She plays video games as well as with other children in their neighborhood. Unlike her siblings, Maria was directly told by her mother about her affair with another man. She expressed to her mother her dislike about the affair, but she disclosed that her mother would not listen to her.

#### *Personal Background 3: John*

John was 12 years old and the youngest among the three siblings. He was in the first year of high school during the time of the study. John loves to play basketball with his neighbors. He is currently living with his father and two older sisters (Anna and Maria). John discovered his mother's infidelity when he saw his mother and her lover having sex in their living room. At that time, his mother thought he was sleeping and covered him in a blanket. The alleged guy frequently visited their home in the wee hours of the morning. Just like his sisters, John lost interest in his studies.

### *Measures*

Interview questions were structured to know the feelings and perceptions of the participants upon their discovery of parental infidelity. Questions were created by the researchers under

the guidance of a psychologist and were in vernacular form (see Appendix A). Standardized scales were also used to get more profile from the participants. All scales were presented to the participants one-on-one and were read aloud in both English and vernacular terms. Examples were provided verbally if there was a need to clarify a specific item. These scales are presented below.

The *Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict* (CPIC) is a scale that measures the children's perspective on the aspects of the interparental conflict. This scale is composed of 50 questions that assess children's thoughts and feelings towards the current situation of their parents' marital relationship. It is composed of three subscales, namely: conflict properties, threat, and self-blame (Fincham, 2013). CPIC is both a valid and reliable measure with reliability indices ranging from .85 to .95 across different studies (Moura, dos Santos, Rocha, & Mena-Matos, 2010).

The *Attachment Questionnaire for Children* (AQ-C) is a one-item self-report questionnaire for ages 9 to 18 (Muris, Meesters, van Melick, & Zwambag, 2001) and was based on a one-item measure of adult attachment style (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). It yields scores on three attachment categories: secure, ambivalent, and avoidant. The measure shows acceptable psychometric properties (Muris, Meesters, van Melick, & Zwambag, 2001).

The *Satisfaction with Life Scale* (SWLS) is a short 5-item instrument designed to measure global cognitive judgments of satisfaction with one's life. This scale provided cues that there is an underlying reason affecting the children's responses. This scale is noted to be suited to different age groups (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). The widely used SWLS has good psychometric properties (for a recent review, see Pavot & Diener, 2008).

The *Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale* (RSES) is a 10-item scale that measures children's global self-worth by measuring both positive and negative feeling about oneself. The scale uses a 4-point Likert scale with responses ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree (Rosenberg, 1965). RSES showed good validity and reliability indices among the adolescent population (Rizwan, Aftab, Shah, & Dharwarwala, 2012).

The *Satisfaction with Family Life Scale* (SFLS) is composed of 5 items on a Likert scale that assesses the individual's global judgment of family satisfaction. Family satisfaction was theoretically practiced to be dependent on one's comparison of his or her family life circumstances with one's standards and expectations. SFLS has a 5.5 reading level by Flesh-Kincaid grade level reading analysis, which means that an average ten-year-old can read and understand the scale (Zabriskie & Ward, 2013).

The *Spence Children's Anxiety Scale* (SCAS) assesses the severity of anxiety symptoms which includes generalized anxiety, panic or agoraphobia, social phobia, separation anxiety, obsessive-compulsive, and physical injury fears. This scale was included not to diagnose the children with an anxiety disorder but to see the extent of anxiety caused by parental infidelity. It also showed which anxiety symptoms the children are more inclined to. The SCAS has a 4-point frequency scale that ranges from never to always; it has 44 items and takes about 10 minutes to complete (Spence, Barrett, & Turner, 2003). The scale demonstrated excellent psychometric properties and can be administered to children and adolescents aged between 8 and 17 years old (Origiles, Mendez, Spence, Huedo-Medina, & Espada, 2012).

### *Procedure*

This study was approved by the University

of San Carlos Research Ethics Committee which was conducted from 2016-2017. Upon receiving the ethics clearance, the researchers sought for participants through personal referrals. Researchers recruited three children who had recently experienced exposure to their mother’s infidelity. The father signed the assent form admitting all three children to the study. Confidentiality and other ethical concerns were discussed and agreed upon. Sessions were conducted wherein the children, upon their consent, voluntarily underwent two or three sessions per day. Each session lasted for an average of thirty minutes with breaks in between each session. In every meeting, the researchers were accompanied by a psychologist. The

comfort, security, and privacy of the children were prioritized. A debriefing was conducted before and after each session. When all the sessions were done and accounted for, the collected data were encoded and stored in a computer that only the researchers can access.

RESULTS

This section provides the results and interpretations of the psychological tests and the interview that revolved around the children’s perceptions and/or feelings towards an ideal family, upon the discovery of their mother’s infidelity, towards their parents, relationship or marriage, trust, infidelity, and themselves.

Table 1. Summary of Scores for Psychological Tests

Tests	Anna	Maria	John
CPIC			
• Conflict Properties	27	did not answer	31
- Frequency	11		11
- Intensity	9		10
- Resolution	7		10
• Threat	19		27
- Perceived threat	6		11
- Coping efficacy	13		16
• Self-Blame	22		15
- Content	10		8
- Self-Blame	12		7
AQ-C	Avoidant Attachment	Secure Attachment	Ambivalent Attachment
SWLS	16 (Slightly Dissatisfied)	22 (Slightly Satisfied)	23 (Slightly Satisfied)
RSES	25	25	26
SFLS	13	17	29
SCAS	75		40
• Separation Anxiety	16		8
• Social Phobia	10		14
• Obsessive Compulsive	16		8
• Panic or Agoraphobia	17		2
• Physical Injury Fears	1		1
• Generalized Anxiety	12		5

Conversation during the meeting was in the Cebuano language. For easy understanding, the lines were translated into English.

### Results on the Psychological Tests

Table 1 below shows the summary of results of the psychological tests. These tests were intended to provide a profile of the participants. It has to be emphasized that low or high results are not necessarily direct results of their exposure to infidelity. Instead, the scores may provide a better understanding of the participants.

In the different psychological tests, Anna scored fair and/or moderate on self-esteem (see RSES), knowledge about parents' conflict and coping with it (see CPIC). She scored low on satisfaction with her family life (see SFLS). She scored high on anxiety (see SCAS), with the highest score on panic or agoraphobia which is closely followed by separation anxiety and obsessive-compulsive. In terms of CPCIC scores, Anna had a high level of knowledge about her parents' conflict and also indicated high self-blame on these conflicts. She exhibited slight dissatisfaction with her life (see SWLS) and indicated an avoidant style of attachment (see AQC).

Maria was unable to answer the CPIC and SCAS tests. Results of her psychological test showed a fair and/ or moderate level of self-esteem, satisfaction in life, and family life. She also exhibited a secure style of attachment.

John scored fair and/or moderate on knowledge of parental conflict as well as being threatened and self-blame on the said conflicts, self-esteem, and slight satisfaction on his life. He had high scores on coping to inter-parental conflict (see CPIC) and family life satisfaction. He scored low on the level of anxiety. John showed an ambivalent style of attachment.

### Results on the Interview Sessions

The interview revolved around their perceptions and feelings towards an ideal family, upon the discovery of their mother's infidelity, towards their parents, relationship or marriage, trust, infidelity, and themselves.

#### *Perceptions towards an ideal family*

Anna, Maria, and John held positive perceptions about an ideal family before the discovery of the infidelity of her mother. They described their mother as caring and their father as kind and hardworking, and their parents do not fight and always get along together, helping one another.

"That they would be intact and with no problem. But if there is a problem, they would be open in telling it to each other." (Anna, Case 1 Session 1 Lines # 113-114, 117)

"That they are intact... does not fight... and the mother and father get along" (Maria, Case 2 Session 1 Line # 92, 95)

"We are intact... help one another... if mother and father has something to say or has given you an errand it should be executed immediately." (John, Case 3 Session 2 Line # 177, 182, 184-185)

#### *Reactions on the discovery of infidelity*

Anna and Maria expressed doubt and confusion about the situation. They were afraid that their family will have trouble and will not be intact anymore. Anna and Maria were afraid to tell their father about their mother's infidelity and expressed confusion to whose side to choose whereas John expressed anger towards his mother's lover for destroying his family.

"I'm confused between them, I like my mother, and I also like my father. I'm confused as to whom to side... I don't know what to do... I don't know who is right, my mother or my father?" (Anna, Case 1 Session 1 Line # 247-249, 337; Case 1 Session 3 Line # 45-46)

"I don't want to say anything because I am afraid of my father, they might get into a fight." (Maria, Case 2 Session 1 Line # 173, 175, 177)

"I am angry with the guy... We had a family why does he have to steal it when he has already a family of his own." (John, Case 3 Session 1 Line # 131, 163-164)

### *Perception towards their parents*

The siblings held the same perception towards their father, pitying and hurting for him. Maria and Anna felt negative emotions (such as anger) towards their mother. Furthermore, Maria viewed her mother as a flirt and irresponsible; whereas, Anna viewed her mother negatively yet still respects her.

"I am angry with her but still pay respect because she is my mother." (Anna, Case 1 Session 1 Line # 235-239, 222)

"I am angry at her... why did she have to fall for that guy (Case 2 Session 1 Line #131, 142)... It has changed... she is flirty... she has no delicadeza. (Case 2 Session 1 Line # 173, 175, 177)"

"...I am hurt... I pity my father" (John, Case 3 Session 1 Line # 196, 200)

### *Perception towards relationship and/or marriage*

Anna and Maria held negative perceptions towards relationship and marriage because of what happened to their parents. Particularly, Anna

expressed her desire to improve her family's state and help her father in the future but does not see herself having her own family whereas Maria referenced her parents of having the perception of not getting married.

"...I don't want to get married... having a boyfriend is bothersome... I still have many responsibilities to think about." (Anna, Case 1 Session 2 Line # 31, 47, 54-55)

"No (marriage)... because... of what happened between my parents." (Maria, Case 2 Session 1 Line # 190, 192, 195)

### *Perception towards trust*

In relation to the perception of trust, only Anna stated that she used her gut feeling to know if someone can be trusted or not.

"I could feel if a person cannot be trusted." (Anna, Case 1 Session 2 Line # 62)

### *Perception towards infidelity*

The siblings expressed their negative views towards infidelity. Anna expressed anger; whereas, Maria and John expressed disapproval because of its negative outcome.

"I'm angry... they don't think about the effects of what they are doing." (Anna, Case 1 Session 2 Line # 85-86)

"It is not nice to look at... traitorous (infidelity)" (Maria, Case 2 Session 1 Line # 210, 212)

"If you already have a family you will not meddle with others." (John, Case 3 Session 2 Line # 223)



### *Perception towards self*

The siblings perceived themselves similarly; the struggle with what happened to their family resulted to having no motivation and focus in going to school (Anna, Case 1 Session 2 Line # 135-136; Maria, Case 2 Session 1 Line # 222).

"I'm not myself when I go to school, I lose my focus..." (Anna, Case 1 Session 2 Line # 125-126)

Yet, they hold views for a better future for themselves and their family (Anna, Case 1 Session 2 Line # 229-230, 232). Despite the worry and difficulty expressed by Anna, they expressed high hopes for a better future. John and Maria aspire to do better in their studies and to be what they want to be in the future (Maria, Case 2 Session 1 Line # 225; John, Case 3 Session 2 Line # 4, 11).

"I don't think so (future), because I feel tired at times... but I will strive... that the future will be bright." (Anna, Case 1 Session 2 Line # 212-213, 215)

## **DISCUSSION**

Infidelity has a ripple effect (Vangelisti & Gerstenberger, 2004); its detrimental consequences extend to the people associated with the couple, most especially their children (Brown, 2001; Duncombe & Marsden, 2004). Consequently, these detrimental effects on the children might be carried towards their adulthood (Angarne-Lindberg & Wadsby, 2009). The perceptions of children may provide insights on how the influences of infidelity persist through their adulthood.

The present study looks in-depth into the impact of exposure to parental infidelity to the different areas of the children's lives. Specifically,

it focuses on children's reactions and perceptions towards the discovery of infidelity, parents, relationship and/or marriage, infidelity, and themselves.

### *Perceptions to Discovery of Parental Infidelity*

Upon discovering their mother's infidelity, the children showed negative feelings as their reactions. These negative feelings include hurt and distress (Duncombe & Marsden, 2004), confusion (Ong, Poon, Sibya, & Macapagal, 2014), and fear that their family will be destroyed. Two of the children (Anna and Maria) in this study expressed anger towards their mother while the other child (John) showed more intense displeasure towards his mother's lover.

The feelings of hurt experienced by the children may be linked to the destruction of their sense of security. Infidelity is marked by betrayal (Whisman & Wagers, 2005). As the children witnessed infidelity, the deception that comes along with it led them to feel hurt, not only for themselves but also for their parent who was betrayed (father). The children were hurt and at the same time felt pity towards their father.

Likewise, distress may stem from the failure of the parents to provide good role models of behavior (Lusterman, 2005). By failing to provide good models of behavior, the children lose their sense of security (Sori, 2007) which may cause them feelings of distress. Consequently, the family should be the source of security for these children. Filipino adolescents valued connection, intimacy, care, and support (Garo-Santiago, Ressureccion, & Tan-Mansukhani, 2009) that a family typically provides; however, the disruption in the family brought about by infidelity causes distress to the children.

On the other hand, the confusion of the children may be attributed to the idea that their parents are their model for what is right and



wrong. The infidelity they witnessed (which is presumed wrong) led the children to be confused about what is right and wrong. The confusion stems from the parent (i.e., mother) committing the wrong act (infidelity) and who was supposed to teach them that infidelity is wrong (Ong et al., 2014). Furthermore, their ambivalence as to whose side they will remain loyal further confuses and distresses the children (Lusterman, 2005). Perhaps the reason why the two girls (Anna and Maria) expressed more anger towards their mother than John is that this feeling of confusion is more common in mother-daughter relationships than in mother-son relationships and father's relationship with children of either sex (Amato & Afifi, 2006).

Similarly, the children's fear of the destruction of their family could be linked to the confusion of taking sides. The children's confusion on taking sides and the consequences it brings to their family may also be the reason why the children initially remained silent about their mother's infidelity (Lusterman, 2005). Scenarios of disruption in the Filipino family who generally have close ties (Morillo, Capuno, & Mendoza, 2013) could be the least that children want to experience.

Another effect of discovering parental infidelity is the sudden decline of the academic performance of these children. The children's preoccupation with their family's situation led them to lose concentration which in turn leads them to do poorly in their studies (Emery & Forehand, 1994). Anna expressed that she was sometimes tired from household chores that led her to miss school. Anna takes care of the family or comes to the rescue of the family when occasions of difficulty (i.e., separation of parents) arise (Carandang, 1987 as cited in Tarroja, 2010). As a result, the children's seemingly loss of motivation to go to school was one of the main reasons why their father requested that all three be included

in the study. Hence, this suggests that their poor academic performance may also be their way to gain attention from their parents.

### *Perception towards Parents*

The children initially had positive perceptions towards their parents (e.g., good, caring, loving, and hardworking), especially their mother. After witnessing the infidelity of their mother, these children developed negative perceptions towards her, most especially.

Children see their parents as models of behavior (Bandura, 1986). However, if these role models showed questionable behavior, these children experience negative emotions developing negative perceptions towards their parents (Lusterman, 2005). Children experience embarrassment out of their parents' wrongdoing preventing them from interacting with others (Emery & Forehand, 1994). Finally, children lose trust in their parent who committed infidelity and may now see the world as dangerous (Sori, 2007).

Another factor to the development of negative perceptions towards the parents is the presence of interparental conflict. Interparental conflicts could be a cause or a consequence of infidelity (Amato & Booth, 2001). These conflicts hinder the children from establishing trust in their parents and may cause future relationship problems (Krishnakumar & Buehler, 2000). Furthermore, when conflicts are hostile and are child-related, they cause distress in children (Pryor & Rodgers, 2001).

### *Perception towards Relationship and/or Marriage*

Children who experienced their parents' infidelity have difficulty in initiating and sustaining a relationship in fear that infidelity may happen in their relationships. The children felt betrayed by their parents' infidelity (Whisman

& Wagers, 2005) and lost their sense of security (Sori, 2007) inhibiting them from trusting, initiating, or sustaining relationships (Walker & Ehrenberg, 1998). In the present study, children exhibited negative perceptions towards entering a relationship and/or marriage because of their mother's infidelity.

By being exposed to their mother's infidelity, children may believe that their parents were permitted to be unfaithful and that they can also do such. The participants' inability to see themselves settling down in the future may be attributed to the violation and betrayal that their mother did to their father. In a Bowenian perspective, a dysfunctional family (in this case, caused by parental infidelity) elicits negative feelings and unfavorable attitudes towards marriage (Hurst, Sawatzky, & Pare, 1996).

Major disruptions in the life of children (i.e., infidelity) may have consequences in their attachment style (Platt et al., 2008). Though the researchers are unable to assess previous attachment styles of the children, their current reported attachment styles vary. They reported secure (Maria) and insecure (Anna and John) attachment styles. Forming an insecure attachment style may be partly influenced by infidelity.

#### *Perception towards Trust*

The betrayal of trust is not only experienced by the partner of the infidel but also by their children (Vangelisti & Gerstenberger, 2004). Anna started losing trust not only to her mother but with other people as well. This mistrust held her from opening up to her peers (Walker & Ehrenberg, 1998). Anna avoided sharing her feelings and thoughts even to her closest friends because she dislikes being pitied upon. This fear of embarrassment and ridicule may be attributed to her mother's infidelity (Emery & Forehand, 1994; Wallerstein et al., 2000).

Consequently, the children's models in building relationships are their parents' relationship. When this model relationship shows dysfunction, children may develop low levels of trust in future relationships, holding to the idea that relationships work that way (Amato & Booth, 2001). The mother's infidelity destroys the children's sense of security (Lusterman, 2005) since they no longer receive it from their mother. Children who experience the disruption in their parents' marital relationship may lead them to experience anger and hostility (Hamama, & Ronen-Shenhav, 2012).

#### *Perceptions towards Infidelity*

Children view infidelity as a cause of the separation of their parents (Ong et al., 2014) and infidelity committed by the mother influenced the children's way of thinking towards their future relationships (Platt et al., 2008). In the present study, the children expressed a negative perception towards infidelity. They voiced hatred and anger towards people who do the act of cheating. However, the children also showed differences - while Anna and Maria deliberately expressed anger towards infidelity, John expressed more disgust towards his mother's partner. A plausible reason for this difference could be their perceptions towards their mother. The children do hold a negative perception towards their mother after the discovery of infidelity, but John exhibited a lesser negative perception towards her. He would instead express hurt directed to the change of his mother's demeanor towards her partner.

The children also became stringent in identifying and assessing as to which behaviors are considered as infidelity. Though she did not deliberately enumerate as to what actions are deemed unfaithful, Anna expressed contempt towards flirtatious girls. This strict view of proper

behavior may have been influenced by the experience of exposure to parental infidelity.

### *Perception towards Self*

Upon exposure to infidelity, the children may have reduced willingness to communicate (Emery & Forehand, 1994), reduced self-esteem, and may show signs of depression (Amato & Keith, 1991). The children's unwillingness to communicate may also be associated to their inability to fully explain what they are going through and the embarrassment about their parents' separation due to infidelity (Wallerstein et al., 2000). Due to the absence of their mother, children feel neglected and often experience loneliness, insecurity, vulnerability, and desire for more intimacy from their mother (Parrenas, 2001). These may have been some of the reasons the children lost motivation to do well in school. However, despite their experience, the children remained resilient and expressed hopes for themselves and their family in the future.

### *Limitations and implications of the study*

In general, the information gathered were substantial in providing insights regarding the immediate effect of infidelity towards children. However, the researchers failed to collect data from other sources such as parents, peers, and teachers. The father declined to be interviewed but gave his observation on the changes in his children's academic performance. Likewise, the father requested that the study be conducted outside their neighborhood to protect the family from gossiping neighbors. Hence, the researchers decided not to include the children's peers since most of their peers are composed of their neighbors; thus, if the researchers were to pursue them, the privacy of the family may be put at risk. Future studies may have to consider these factors.

Greene (2006) suggested that the closer the study is to the time of the discovery of infidelity, a more direct impact of cheating can be assessed. Despite some limitations, this study was able to look into the effects of children's exposure to infidelity in the shortest time possible. In general, the study provides insights on how the mind of children works after discovering parental infidelity. Exposure to infidelity also showed detrimental consequences. The findings thus serve as a guide for helping professionals in designing intervention programs for these children.

Instability in the family negatively affects the children's well-being leading them to experience behavior problems. Having a good relationship between the husband and wife may benefit not only the couple but also the entire family especially the children.

## **CONCLUSION**

Infidelity exists in our society. It threatens not only the couples but the children as well. Children had negative reactions and perceptions towards the discovery of their mother's infidelity. The way they looked up to their mother changed from positive to negative upon discovering her infidelity. Although the children expressed negative perceptions toward the relationship, trust, and themselves, they expressed hopes for the future – an interesting point that may need to be considered in future research. Finally, this study shows that looking into the effects of the children's exposure to their parents' infidelity will provide valuable insights into understanding and helping them.

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