

## Level of Empathy among Married Men and Women: An Exploratory Study

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**Abstract:** The present research explores the Level of Empathy among Married Men and Women. Empathy in marriage is putting yourself in your partner's shoes as they vent by remembering all the variables that make them who they are. Empathy allows you to better connect with people's thoughts and feelings and also makes you a more pleasant person to be around. Therefore the study included Married Couples in the age range of 35-50 years (N=60) as they would be in the stage where they manage Work-role adjustments, Adjusting on pattern of authority, Financial adjustment, Social and Psychological Adjustment. Since marital roles of husband and wife are reciprocally intertwined, the attitudes and actions of each partner affect the role performance of the other. Multidimensional Emotional Empathy Scale (MDEES) developed by Caruso & Mayer (1998) was used to measure empathy. Out of 60 participants, there were 30 women and 30 men participants. t-test was used to analyze the differences of empathy between the variables using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The obtained result 1.4 shows that there is no significant difference between Married men and Married women participants in Level of Empathy. Based on the obtained results, it can be concluded that Married Couples had an average level of empathy.

**Keywords:** Marriage, Empathy, Adjustment, Married Couples

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### Introduction

Alfred Adler said, "Empathy is seeing with the eyes of another, listening with the ears of another and feeling with the heart of another."

Empathy is the ability to understand the other person by listening and sitting in their perspective. It is "putting yourself in someone else's shoes", to feel with your spouse. Empathy fits into a romantic relationship because listening with an empathetic ear will give your spouse a feeling of, "Wow, he/she gets it. My spouse understands me." That feeling will bring you closer thus driving connection in your marriage. The lack of connection to the feelings of another can sabotage relationships. It can in fact, make a person less socially attractive. When you're able to display empathy, people are likely to see you as someone they can trust and bond with.

If you recognize the need to better empathize with your spouse, consider these three A's to feel empathy:

- Awareness — Be aware of what your spouse is feeling and what's behind that feeling.
- Agenda — Set aside your own agenda and focus on the needs of your spouse.
- Action — Take action on meeting the needs of your spouse.

As long as your mind is on how "wrong" your partner is during a conversation, you won't be in the right mindset to discuss the real issue at hand. Conflict is sure to follow. The enemy mindset doesn't help them get what they want. Everyone wants trust, respect, understanding, intimacy in a relationship. Empathy would tell you to take a pause and understand why your partner is acting this way. This would help you resolve your conflicts better.

In addition to reducing frequent arguments and conflict, empathy makes relationships more resilient, meaning they're better equipped to withstand difficult times such as illness, job loss, or financial troubles. This is because couples who are good at empathizing with one another have more understanding of each other's needs during tough times and greater communication skills overall. As a result, they're better equipped to handle whatever life throws their way as a team instead of letting difficult times tear them apart.

### How to Show Empathy in Marriage:

1. Listen actively: Listen to your partner actively and try to understand their perspective, repeating back what your partner has said to show that you understand.
2. Validate their feelings: Acknowledge your partner's feelings and let them know that you understand.

3. Put yourself in their shoes: Try to put yourself in your partner's shoes and see things from their perspective.
4. Be patient: Give your partner time to express themselves and be patient with them.
5. Show physical affection: Show physical affection to your partner, such as hugging, holding hands, or cuddling.
6. Offer emotional support: Be there for your partner emotionally and provide them with the support they need.
7. Practice forgiveness: Practice forgiveness and let go of grudges. This helps in creating a more empathetic and loving environment.
8. Communicate your feelings: Use "I" statements instead of "you" statements to communicate your feelings without blaming your partner.

### **Exercises and Activities to Strengthen Empathetic Skills**

- **Role Reversal Exercise:** Take turns role-playing each other's perspectives in a recent disagreement. This helps in understanding and appreciating each other's viewpoints.
- **Emotion Sharing Routine:** Set aside time each day to share one significant emotion you felt during the day and discuss why you felt that way. This practice fosters emotional intelligence and understanding.
- **Empathy Circles:** Create a safe space where each partner can express their thoughts and feelings without interruption or judgment. The listener's role is to understand and reflect back the emotions and content shared.

### **Regular Empathy-Building Practices**

- **Shared Journaling:** Keep a journal where both partners can write down their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. This can be a powerful tool for understanding each other's inner worlds.
- **Gratitude Sharing:** Regularly express gratitude for each other, specifically mentioning actions or qualities you appreciate. This practice not only builds empathy but also reinforces positive aspects of your relationship.

### **Fostering Empathy through Effective Communication**

- **Reflective Listening:** This involves actively listening to your partner and then reflecting back what you've heard. It shows that you are not only listening but also processing and understanding their perspective.
- **Validating Feelings:** Acknowledge and validate your partner's feelings, even if you don't fully understand them. Saying things like "I can see how that would make you feel upset" is validating.

### **Addressing Barriers to Empathy**

Personal biases and prejudices, often stemming from our backgrounds, experiences, or even societal norms, can hinder our ability to empathize with our partner. These biases might manifest as preconceived notions about how a partner should think or feel in certain situations, leading to misunderstandings and conflicts.

### **Recognizing and Overcoming These Barriers**

- **Self-Reflection:** Regularly take time to reflect on your own biases and how they might be affecting your relationship. Acknowledge that these biases are normal but can be unlearned.
- **Open Dialogue:** Have open and honest discussions with your partner about your biases. This can help in understanding each other's perspectives and experiences better.
- **Seeking External Help:** Sometimes, it might be helpful to seek guidance from a counselor or therapist to work through deeply ingrained biases and prejudices.

## **Method**

### **Problem**

To study the Level of Empathy among Married Men and Women.

### **Aim and Objective**

Explore the Level of Empathy of Married Couples.

### Variables

Independent variable: Gender  
Dependent variable: Empathy

### Hypothesis

There is no significant difference between Men and Women Married couples on Empathy.

### Participants

The participants were 60 Married Couple (30 women and 30 men) in the age group of 35-50 years. Out of which women scored above average on the Empathy tool. Therefore their responses were chosen for further analysis. The participants were asked to fill demographic form along with a consent form for participation in the main research.

### Materials

The tool which was used to accomplish the purpose of the study is Multidimensional Emotional Empathy Scale (MDEES) by Caruso & Mayer (1998).

**Description of the tool:** The items for the present scale was developed by categories such as "items denote a person who responds emotionally to others, who cries when they are sad, laughs when they are happy, and feels for animals, children and so forth".

Six negatively-worded items were included in the scale in order to reduce response. An attempt was made to include positive as well as negative emotional. A five-point response scale was used, where 1 was "Strongly Disagree" and 5 was "Strongly Agree".

Each response has a particular score assigned to it. The questions 4, 9, 13, 16, 20 and 27 are scored reverse like 5,4,3,2,1 The new empathy scale measures emotional aspects of empathy and can be used by researchers interested in a general measure of empathy as well as providing detailed subscales.

### Procedure

For the purpose of this study, Married Couples in the age group of 35-50 years were contacted. The participants were approached with the consent form to take their permission for voluntary participation. Research questionnaires and queries of the participant were answered via Google forms. The responses were taken and the participant was thanked for their valuable time and support for the study. The filled responses scoring for each individual was done according to the purpose of the study. Thereafter, Independent Sample t-Test was used to identify if there is any significant difference between Men and Women in the Level of Empathy.

### Results and Discussion

The present study wanted to understand the Level of Empathy among Married Couples. Therefore, Independent 't' test was used to study the difference between Married men and Married women.

**Table showing Mean and Standard deviation of Empathy scores of Married Men and Married Women and 't' value for the difference between two groups on Level of Empathy.**

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	't'
Level of Empathy	Married men	30	119.0	11.4	1.4 (NS)
	Married women	30	115.0	12.0	

Table shows no significant difference was found in 't' value 1.4. The obtained mean value of Married Men participants is 119.0 with standard deviation of 11.4 and the obtained mean value of Married Women participants is 115.0 with standard deviation of 12.0.

The Intermediate values of degrees of freedom (df) is 59 and Standard Error of difference (SE) is 3.02. This reveals on analyzing the data that the obtained difference value is considered to be not statistically significant. Therefore, the results show that there is no difference on Level of Empathy between Married men and Married women.

### Limitations and Future Suggestions

The limitation of the research is the limited sample size and it can be modified in the future on perceptions of other genders can be studied and compared with the findings of the present study. The study did

not take into consideration factors like religious orientation, culture and social norms that influence Level of Empathy according to gender roles.

Since, the study was limited assessing only Empathy another study relating to conflict, relationship building, marital satisfaction and self-actualization should be good area for further research. Married Couples aged 35-50 years from Bengaluru districts were selected as participants for the study, a larger sample of Married Couples representing different part of India may yield better results and hence could be more generalizable.

### **Implication and Conclusion**

A total of 60 samples were taken from the population among which 30 were Married men and 30 were Married women participants. Multidimensional emotional empathy scale by Caruso & Mayer (1998) was used for the present study. The data collected was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Parametric tests such as Independent Sample 't' test was used for analysis of data. The analyzed results was interpreted and discussed. The findings indicate that there is no significant difference of Empathy between Married men and Married women. The mean score of both Married men and Married women level of Empathy is at somewhat similar level, suggesting that both the groups are Empathetic at a moderate level.

Psycho-Education, Family and marital therapy workshops can be organized at workplace or community centers for employers, employees, housewives, retired individuals to generate a better understanding and coping mechanism to deal with various issues in marriage life with their significant other effectively by incorporating the importance of Empathy in their life. Further research can be done to generate findings that can support the developmental projects which can lead to preventive measures.

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