

**ASSOCIATION BETWEEN EMOTIONAL  
INTELLIGENCE AND MARITAL QUALITY OF MARRIED  
COUPLES**

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**ABSTRACT**

Studies in the west have suggested a positive correlation between emotional intelligence and marital quality among couples; however there is not much research conducted in India. It is evident that marital quality is affected by the culture which creates skepticism if the results from the west are borrowed to the Indian context. This study examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and marital quality of couples and to analyze which domain of emotional intelligence was the best predictor of marital quality among husbands and wives. Forty four couples from Bangalore city, Indians were analyzed. Mangal Emotional Intelligence Inventory (2009) and Marital Quality Scale by Shah (1995) were used to measure emotional intelligence and marital quality respectively. Pearson's correlation coefficient method and regression model were used to analyze the data. The results indicated a positive correlation between emotional intelligence and marital quality among couples. Among all the sub-domains of emotional intelligence, intrapersonal awareness was the single most predictor of perceived marital quality of both husbands and wives. This study might open the discourse on the relationship of emotional intelligence & marital quality in Indian context and it might as well be relevant in emphasizing the role of emotional intelligence in marital quality.

**Keywords:** Emotional Intelligence, Marital Quality and Mode of Marriage

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## Introduction

In present scenario, people are turning away from marriages because it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain happy and stable unions (Amato, Johnson, Booth & Rogers, 2003). There has been a dramatic increase in the divorce rate in India (Nathawat & Mathur, 1993). Also, marital difficulties are one of the most common problems for which people seek psychological help (Veroff, Kulka and Dovan, 1981), and its deleterious effect on the psychological well being are also well documented (Bloom, Asher and White, 1978; Segraves, 1982). Therefore the question arises, “What makes happy marriages”?

As we know that marriage is the rich source of some of our deepest feelings and emotions, from love, hate, and anger, to fear, sadness, and joy. Therefore the extent to which the spouses understand, communicate, and manage all these and other powerful emotions play a crucial role in marital happiness. It is rightly put - relationship between couples is considered to be the greatest source of satisfaction if handled carefully.

When we talk about marital quality feeling, intuition, and knowledge and reason all these have a place in making sense of any relationships. In the past, most psychological research concentrated on knowledge, reasoning and various psychological capacities while neglecting the role of emotions. Emotions and feelings were generally treated as intrusive. More recent research, however, shows not just that emotional responses and feelings are important keys to our thoughts and actions, but that our feelings are probably more significant than our reasoning. One of the experimental studies in England on couples found that married couples identify each other more easily and accurately from the description of their emotional patterns and behavior than from biographical facts. Another study showed that couples' knowledge of each other's emotions rather than each other's history that influenced their stability in relationships (Burnett, 1990).

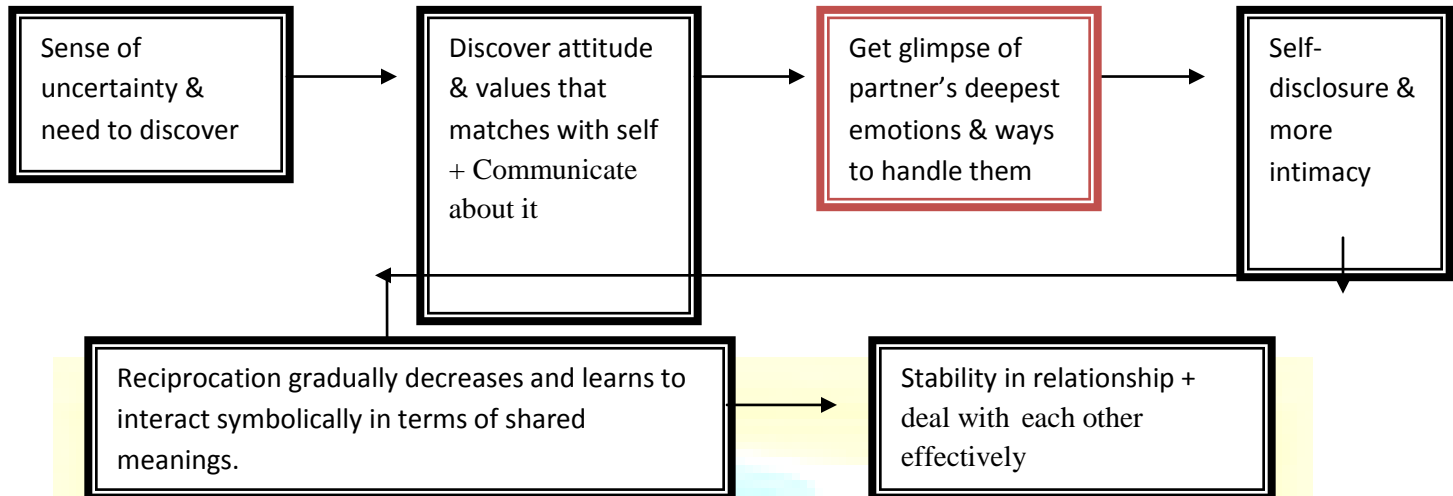
Emotions aids in marital quality in two different senses. Firstly, understanding what is important to partner (what they like, fear of, hopes for) helps to account for their actions and motives. For this, one can make use of one's own capacity to share and identify with the other's feelings. Using empathy in this way would be helpful in making sense of change in a partner's manner. Secondly, it is important to notice and interpret one's own feelings in order to gain

personal insights. It is important to recognize that power lies within, by putting oneself in the right mood, one can bring out the best in others (Burnett, 1990). This indicates that emotional awareness plays a role in relationship satisfaction (Croyle & Waltz, 2002). Apart from this, both presence and absence of certain specific emotions are related to marital distress that is the husband's rejection of wife, positive start-up by wife, lack of physiological soothing of male, lack of de-escalation of low intensity negative emotions of the wife by the husband all of which predict divorce. On the other hand positive effect seems to be the principal predictor of relationship satisfaction and stability (Gottman, Coan, Carrere and Swanson, 1998). The expression of emotions is also considered to be the fundamental to close relationship. Emotional expressions communicate our needs and desires to the partner and in turn, invite response from them. An inability to communicate emotions accurately or suppression of emotions is a critical feature of unhappy relationships (Gaelick, Bpdenhausen & Wyer, 1985; Mongrain & Vettese, 2003).

All this put together indicates that behavior within an intimate relationship is an interaction of cognition, emotion and conation. Hence if ever there is a context in which one might expect emotional intelligence to matter it is marriage. Supporting this view an Indian study by Suvarna Joshi and Nutankumar S. Thingujam (2009) as well as a study by Brackett, Warner, and Bosco (2005) indicated that anyone one of the partner with high Emotional Intelligence appeared to be sufficient to keep a relationship on track.

### **Theoretical conceptualization**

The present study was based on Filter and self-disclosure model (Duck, 1988; Vanlaer & Trujillo, 1986) and Emotion Focused Therapy.



*Filter models and self-disclosure (Duck, 1988; Vanlaer & Trujillo, 1986)*

Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) is one perspective that emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and expressing disowned feelings and needs. Emotional experience is seen as the organizing force for relationship behaviors and emotions are viewed as allies in the change process. According to EFT, marital conflict involves perceived inaccessibility and emotional unresponsiveness on the part of at least one partner. The goal of EFT is to access the emotional responses that underlie negative couple interactions, heightened emotional experience, restructure interactions, make partners more accessible and responsive to each other, and foster positive cycles of comfort and caring. This promotes intimacy, trust, and positive interaction cycles, all of which contribute to relationship satisfaction (Croyle & Walter, 2002; Greenberg, Ford, Alden & Johnson, 1993; Johnson & Greenberg, 1988; Halford, 2003).

### Goals and Objectives

This present study aimed to determine Emotional Intelligence and level of Marital Quality among catholic couples in Bangalore. The goal of the study is to analyze Emotional Intelligence and level of Marital Quality among catholic couples. The proposed study attempted to identify the following objectives: (1) to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and marital quality of couples, (2) to analyze which area of emotional intelligence is the best predictor of marital among husbands and wives.

### Rationale and significance of the study

**Rationale.** It is important to know what keeps the marriages and what breaks them and in order to know that, we ought to know what keeps the marriage going on. Since marital therapy research in India has gradually intensified and thus researchers and therapists need to identify ways that best help the couples who seek therapy for marital distress. It makes intuitive sense to argue for the importance of emotional intelligence in close relationships, but there has actually been very little scientific research specifically examining the role of emotional intelligence in this context. This is particularly surprising, given the rapidly growing body of literature emphasizing the central role of feelings and emotions in the initiation, maintenance and dissolution of close relationship. There are lots of literature focusing on the importance of emotions and feelings in marital quality but there are very few scientific studies especially in India on Emotional Intelligence in this context.

**Significance.** The study will help in understanding the couples and family dynamics within the Indian context with two significant components of emotional intelligence and marital quality. This study will also throw light on the relevant competencies required by couples for a better adjustment and marital quality. Such understanding would further help researchers as well as professionals working in this area to come up with or modify the relevant theories, develop appropriate assessment tools as well as improve models of couple and family counseling. It would also facilitate and encourage further research in this area.

### Methods

#### Research Design

The study was quantitative in nature, and applied correlation techniques and regression model. The study was carried out using questionnaires and data was collected using snow ball sampling method. The variables under study were emotional intelligence (independent variable) and marital quality (dependent variable).

### Participants

**Population.** The target population was any catholic couples from Bangalore. The access population was catholic couples from five churches in Bangalore.

**Sample.** The study comprised of 44 catholic couples in which 22 couples who had arranged marriage and 22 couples who had marriage by choice. The age group of the participants was 24 years and above.

**Sampling method.** Snow ball sampling procedure, one of the non probability sampling method was used to obtain the sample because of inaccessibility and time constraints.

**Inclusion criteria.** Catholic couples from Bangalore, who were living together in a nuclear family.

**Exclusion criteria.** Couples without suffering from any clinically diagnosed mental disorders.

### Instruments

The study used instruments like socio-demographic proforma to obtain socio-demographic information, MEII (Mangal Emotional Intelligence Inventory) to measure Emotional intelligence of couples and MQS (Marital Quality Scale) to measure marital quality of couples. The description of the questionnaires is as follows.

**The Mangal Emotional Intelligence Inventory by Mangal in 2009.** It consists of 100 items. It has been designed for the measurement of emotional intelligence (total as well as separately) in respect of four areas or aspects of emotional intelligence namely, Intra-personal Awareness (Knowing about one's own emotions), Inter-personal Awareness (Knowing about others emotions), Intra-personal Management (Managing one's own emotions) and Inter-personal Management (Managing others emotions) respectively.

Reliability has been checked by three methods as given below. Method used N Reliability Coefficient: Split half 600 0.89, K-R Formuale (20) 600 0.90 and Test – Retest 200 0.92. Validity: Validity has been checked by two differential Approach, as per below. Validity



Coefficients of the Inventory Measures Used Validity Coefficient: Adjustment Inventory for college students (N=400) -0.662 and Emotional Maturity Scale (N=400) -0.613

**Marital Quality Scale (Shah, 1995).** This is a multi-dimensional scale. It consists of 50 items in a statement form with a four-point rating scale which has ready formats for use by men and women. This scale gives a total score and subscale scores on twelve relationship dimensions. The dimensions of the scale are: understanding, rejection, satisfaction, affection, despair, decision making, discontent, dissolution potential, dominance, self-disclosure, trust and role functioning.

The scale provided two types of scores: (a) total scale score and (b) Score on 12 factors of the scale. The total score ranges from 50-200. Higher scores indicate poorer quality of married life. The scale has high internal consistency (coefficient alpha = 0.91) and high test-retest reliability ( $r = 0.83$  over a 6 weeks interval). It has well established content and construct validity. The tool has been developed and standardized on the Indian population and it successfully distinguishes between distressed and non-distressed couples. Further, it has been used in various researches on marital distressed couples in India (Isaac, 2004; Kalra, 2003).

### Procedure

Couples, who met the inclusion and exclusion criteria, were taken for the study. After explaining the purpose of the study, written informed consent was obtained. The socio demographic proforma, MEII (Mangal Emotional Intelligence Inventory) and MQS (Marital Quality Scale) were administered. After administering, these questionnaires were scored, interpreted and analyzed using appropriate statistical analysis. Later, the results were discussed and concluded.

### Ethical Guidelines

A General outline of the study in terms of the aims and objectives was explained to all the participants approached for the study. Written informed consent was obtained from all the

participants. They were assured of confidentiality of their data. They were also informed about the right to withdraw from the study anytime they wished to.

### Data Analysis

The data were coded and analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Procedure of Social Science). The participants were described using descriptive statistics (mean, median and standard deviation). Multiple regression and correlation techniques were used to analyze the dependent variables (marital quality) with independent variables (emotional intelligence).

### Limitations of the Study

Due to time constraints, non-probability sampling procedure was used hence the generalization needs to be done with caution. The sample consists of urban, English speaking educated participants from middle and upper socioeconomic status. The results of the study were limited to this population and, thereby, restricted to the generalizability of the findings. The study needs to be replicated in a larger sample that represents the population better. Though the present participants consisted of only catholic couples who were brought up in the same socio-cultural milieu, it could be generalized to others in India. However it needs to be applied with caution.

### Results and Analysis

Table 1 shows the correlation between emotional intelligence and marital quality of couples. As seen in the table, emotional intelligence of husbands was negatively correlated ( $r = -.581, p < 0.0001$ ) with their perceived marital quality and emotional intelligence of wives was also negatively correlated ( $r = -.655, p < 0.0001$ ) with their perceived marital quality. This showed that emotional intelligence and marital quality of both husband and wife was significantly correlated. Emotional intelligence of husbands was negatively correlated ( $r = -.550, p < 0.0001$ ) with their wives perceived marital quality and emotional intelligence of wives was negatively correlated ( $r = -.591, p < 0.0001$ ) with their husbands perceived marital quality. This showed that emotional intelligence of both contributed to the perceived marital quality of each other. Emotional intelligence ( $r = .744, p < 0.0001$ ) and marital quality ( $r = .736, p < 0.0001$ ) of husband and wife were positively correlated. Thus couples appeared to have similar levels of emotional intelligence and perceived marital quality.



Table 1. The correlation between emotional intelligence and marital quality of the couples

		EI of husband	EI of wife	MQ of husband	MQ of wife
EI of husband	Pearson Correlation	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
	N	44			
EI of wife	Pearson Correlation	.744**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000			
	N	44	44		
MQ of husband	Pearson Correlation	-.581**	-.591**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		
	N	44	44	44	
MQ of wife	Pearson Correlation	-.550**	-.655**	.744**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	44	44	44	44

Note: a. \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 shows two models that had been derived out of the regression model. As seen in the table, out of the each four sub domains of husbands and wives emotional intelligence, intrapersonal awareness of the husbands was the best predictor of their perceived marital quality as per the first model with R Square of .321,  $p < 0.0001$ . The second shows that intra personal awareness of husbands and intra personal management of wives explained husbands' perceived marital quality with R Square of .400,  $p = .001$  & .026 respectively. This result showed that if one best predictor of perceived marital quality of the husbands had to be chosen out of the each four domains of husbands and wife's emotional intelligence, the first model would be the one, but if the best predictor had to be chosen, then the second model stood out.

Table 2. The summary of regression model on the sub domains of emotional intelligence of the couples and marital quality of husbands

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R F	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.567 <sup>a</sup>	.321	.305	19.863	16.168
2	.632 <sup>b</sup>	.400	.370	13.641	15.389

Note: a. Predictors: (Constant), Intrapersonal awareness of husband, b. Predictors: (Constant), Intrapersonal awareness of husband, Intrapersonal management of wife and c. Dependent variable: Marital Quality of husband

Table 3 shows three models that had been derived out of the regression model. As seen in the table, out of the each four domains of husbands and wives emotional intelligence, intrapersonal awareness of the wives was the better predictor of their perceived marital quality as per the first model with R Square of .404,  $p < 0.0001$ . The second showed that intra personal awareness of the wives and inter personal management of husbands explained wives perceived marital quality with R Square of .491,  $p < 0.0001$  & .016 respectively. The third model showed that intra personal awareness of wives, interpersonal management of husbands and intra personal management of husbands explained wives perceived marital quality with R Square of .553,  $p < 0.0001$ , .003 & .023. These results showed that if one best predictor of perceived marital quality of wives has to be chosen out of the each four domains of husbands and wife's emotional intelligence, the first model would be the one, but if the best predictor had to be chosen, then the third model stood out.

Table 3. The summary of regression model on the sub domains of emotional intelligence of the couples and marital quality of wives

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R F	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.645 <sup>a</sup>	.416	.402	27.768	11.630
2	.703 <sup>b</sup>	.494	.470	19.256	10.925
3	.746 <sup>c</sup>	.557	.523	16.060	10.360

Note: a. Predictors: (Constant), Intrapersonal awareness of wife, b. Predictors: (Constant), Intrapersonal awareness of wife, Interpersonal management of husband, c. Predictors: (Constant), Intrapersonal awareness of wife, Interpersonal management of husband, Intrapersonal management of husband and d. Depend variable: Marital Quality of wife

## Discussion

It was also found that husband's emotional intelligence was positively correlated with his wife's marital quality and vice versa (refer table 1). That is spouse's emotional intelligence was related to each other's perceived marital quality as reported in a similar study by Smith, Heaven, & Ciarrochi in 2007.

Another pattern was found in the analysis that was emotional intelligences of both husbands and wives were positively correlated indicating that husband's emotional intelligence and wife's emotional intelligence were more or less similar. This would possibly be because of the emotional convergence which confirmed that husbands and wives really do mold themselves to each other. A study by Anderson (2003) on 60 heterosexual couples at the University of Wisconsin in Madison on emotional convergence reported that romantic partners virtually become same emotional person over time i.e., couples tend to have similar way of responding to positive and negative life situations. He also reported that although couples' emotions converged over time, similar emotions might have drawn them together in the first place and also stated that Couples who stayed together during the study were more emotionally similar than couples that broke up. A similar pattern was noticed in the present participants perceived marital quality as well (refer table 1).

An attempt was made to identify the best predictor of husband's perceived marital quality among the eight sub domains of emotional intelligence, in which, intra personal awareness of husband and intra personal management of his wife were found to be the best predictor (refer table 2). The same was done for the wife, in which intrapersonal awareness of wife, and intrapersonal awareness and management of her husband were found to be the best predictor (refer table 3).

Among all the eight sub-domains of emotional intelligence intrapersonal awareness were found to be the single most predictive of perceived marital quality of both husband and wife (refer table 2 & 3). As Goleman (1998) rightly reported “People with greater certainty about their feelings are better pilots of their lives”. He also stated that recognizing one’s own emotions is the keystone of emotional intelligence and the ability to monitor feelings from moment to moment was crucial to psychological insight and self-understanding.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, there was a relationship between emotional intelligence and marital quality among couples. This relationship seemed to be greater in wives emotional intelligence and their perceived marital quality. In all the sub domains of emotional intelligence, intrapersonal awareness was the single most predictive of both husbands’ and wives perceived marital quality and this effect was again greater in wives than husbands.

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