



EXPLORING THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN ROMANTIC BELIEFS, MATE PREFERENCES, AND ATTITUDES TOWARD MARRIAGE IN YOUNG INDIAN WORKING ADULTS

Psychology

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ABSTRACT

Romantic beliefs, mate preferences, and attitudes toward marriage are three closely related psychological constructs that shape how young adults think about love and relationships. However, very few studies in India have examined all three together in the same sample. The current study focuses to explore the associations among these three variables in a sample of young Indian adults aged 22 to 28 years. A total of 65 participants (28 males, 37 females) were recruited using purposive sampling from Pune, India. Data were collected using three standardized instruments: the Romantic Beliefs Scale (Sprecher & Metts, 1989), the Mate Preference Questionnaire (Buss, 1989), and the Marital Attitude Scale (Braaten & Rosen, 1998). Due to not normal distribution of scores on the Marital Attitude Scale, Spearman's rank-order correlation was used for all analyses. Results revealed a significant negative correlation between marital attitude and romantic beliefs ($\rho = -0.433, p < .001$). Individuals with more favourable viewpoints toward marriage tended to have lower levels of idealized romantic ideas. There were no significant connections discovered between mate preference and marital attitude, or mate preference and romantic beliefs. These findings suggest that pragmatic attitudes about marriage and idealized romantic thought may reflect distinct, even competing, psychological tendencies in this population.

KEYWORDS

romantic beliefs, mate preferences, marital attitudes, young adults, India, Spearman's correlation

INTRODUCTION

Human beings are naturally drawn toward forming close, emotional bonds with others. Among all interpersonal relationships, romantic partnerships and marriage hold a particularly important place across cultures and historical periods. From an early age, individuals begin to form ideas about what love means, what a good partner looks like, and what marriage should be. These ideas are shaped by family values, cultural norms, religious beliefs, media exposure, and personal experiences (Sprecher & Metts, 1989).

In recent decades, rapid social changes have significantly altered how young people in India perceive love and marriage. India is a country undergoing significant transformation, where traditional values such as arranged marriages and family-based partner selection now coexist with modern ideas about individual choice, romantic love, and personal freedom (Uberoi, 2006). Young Indian working adults aged 22 to 28 are often caught between family expectations of marriage and their own evolving romantic beliefs and preferences. In this context, understanding how their psychological orientations toward love, partner selection, and marriage are connected becomes especially important.

Three psychological constructs are particularly relevant to this intersection. First, romantic beliefs refer to idealized notions about love, such as belief in a soulmate, love at first sight, and the idea that love can overcome all obstacles (Sprecher & Metts, 1989).

Second, mate preferences refer to the qualities and characteristics that an individual considers desirable or important in a potential romantic partner, including physical attractiveness, emotional warmth, intelligence, and financial stability (Buss, 1989).

Third, attitudes toward marriage refer to an individual's overall evaluation of marriage as an institution, including beliefs about its necessity, permanence, and emotional value (Willoughby & Carroll, 2012).

While each of these constructs has been studied individually, very few studies in India have examined all three together in the same sample. Most Indian research has focused on mate preferences within the arranged marriage system (Banerjee et al., 2013) or examined marital attitudes in isolation (Dalmia & Lawrence, 2001). The contribution of romantic beliefs as a related variable in this picture has been largely overlooked in the Indian psychological literature. The present study was designed to fill this gap by examining the associations among romantic beliefs, mate preferences, and attitudes toward marriage in a sample of young Indian working adults.

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Research on romantic beliefs has consistently shown that these beliefs

are shaped by cultural and media influences and are associated with relationship expectations and outcomes. Sprecher and Metts (1989) developed the Romantic Beliefs Scale and found that individuals with higher romantic beliefs resulted greater initial relationship satisfaction but also with more intense disappointment when relationships did not live up to their idealized expectations. Knee (1998) extended this work by distinguishing between destiny beliefs (the idea that partners are either meant to be or not) and growth beliefs (the idea that relationships can be developed with effort). Individuals with stronger destiny beliefs were more likely to end relationships at the first sign of difficulty. In the Indian context, Kaur and Shruti (2018) found that exposure to Bollywood films was positively associated with higher romantic beliefs, particularly on the Love at First Sight and One and Only dimensions, with females scoring higher than males.

Research on mate preferences has been shaped largely by evolutionary psychology. Buss (1989) conducted a landmark cross-cultural study across 37 cultures and found that men tended to prioritize physical attractiveness and youth, while women tended to prioritize financial resources and social status. Both genders universally valued kindness, intelligence, and emotional stability. In India, Banerjee et al. (2013) found similar patterns in matrimonial advertisements, though younger and more educated individuals also showed growing preference for psychological compatibility and shared values. Buunk et al. (2008) further noted that the gender gap in mate preferences tends to be smaller in more egalitarian societies, which is relevant for understanding how urbanization may be reshaping mate preferences among Indian young adults.

Willoughby and Carroll (2012) discovered that more favourable marriage attitudes predicted earlier marriage, higher marital satisfaction, and less divorce consideration. Dalmia and Lawrence (2001) discovered that Indian students had considerably more positive opinions regarding marriage than American students, emphasizing the social and familial factors. Uberoi (2006) found that urban Indian young adults are increasingly delaying marriage in order to pursue career aspirations, as well as a growing acceptance of love marriages and emotional compatibility as a basis for marriage.

Regarding the interplay between these constructs, Eastwick and Finkel (2008) found that individuals with stronger romantic beliefs were more consistent between their stated partner ideals and actual choices. Fletcher et al. (2004) found that higher romantic beliefs were associated with more idealized partner standards, and that falling short of these standards led to greater relationship dissatisfaction. Chaudhary (2014) found that Indian young adults with higher romantic beliefs preferred emotionally expressive and psychologically compatible partners, while those with lower romantic beliefs showed greater alignment with traditional criteria such as family background.

Regarding romantic beliefs and marriage attitudes, Willoughby et al. (2015) found that stronger romantic beliefs were associated with more positive and enthusiastic marriage attitudes, though they also predicted earlier marriage and eventual dissatisfaction. Madathil and Benshoff (2008) found that Indian participants in arranged marriages showed lower romantic beliefs but equally positive or even more positive marriage attitudes compared to Americans in love marriages, highlighting the moderating role of cultural context.

Objectives and Hypotheses

The present study had the following objectives:

1. To assess levels of romantic beliefs, mate preferences, and attitudes toward marriage in young Indian adults.
2. To examine the relationship between marital attitude and mate preference.
3. To examine the relationship between marital attitude and romantic beliefs.
4. To examine the relationship between mate preference and romantic beliefs.

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between marital attitude and mate preference.

H2: There is a significant negative relationship between marital attitude and romantic beliefs.

H3: There is a significant positive relationship between mate preference and romantic beliefs.

METHOD

Participants

The sample consisted of 65 young Indian adults aged 22 to 28 years (M age not reported), comprising 28 males (43.1%) and 37 females (56.9%). Participants were engaged using purposive sampling from Pune, Maharashtra, India. The study included both students and working adults who were currently unmarried (single or in a relationship).

Individuals who were married, divorced, or employed only part-time were excluded from the sample. All participants voluntarily provided informed consent prior to participation and were assured of the confidentiality of their responses.

TOOLS USED

Three standardized self-report instruments were administered.

Romantic Beliefs Scale (RBS; Sprecher & Metts, 1989). The RBS is a 15-item Likert-type scale that measures the extent to which individuals holds idealized beliefs about romantic love. Items are rated on a 7-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The scale comprises four subscales: Love Finds a Way (6 items, $\alpha = .80$), One and Only (3 items, $\alpha = .79$), Idealization (3 items, $\alpha = .74$), and Love at First Sight (3 items, $\alpha = .57$). The full scale has a reported Cronbach's alpha of .81 (Sprecher & Metts, 1989). Higher total scores indicate stronger endorsement of romantic ideals. The scale has been validated across multiple cultural contexts, including India (Madathil & Benshoff, 2008).

Mate Preference Questionnaire (MPQ; Buss, 1989). The MPQ asks participants to rate the importance of 18 partner characteristics on a 4-point scale: 0 (irrelevant or unimportant), 1 (desirable but not very important), 2 (important but not indispensable), and 3 (indispensable). The 18 characteristics include traits such as emotional stability, dependable character, good looks, mutual attraction, ambition, financial prospects, and intelligence. The scale has been validated cross-culturally across 37 cultures with a total sample of over 10,000 participants (Buss, 1989), and has been used in Indian studies (Banerjee et al., 2013; Kamble et al., 2014).

Marital Attitude Scale (MAS; Braaten & Rosen, 1998). The MAS is a Likert-type scale designed to assess global attitudes toward marriage. A key advantage of the MAS is that it was specifically designed for use with both married and unmarried individuals, making it particularly appropriate for the present sample. The scale assesses beliefs about emotional intimacy, commitment, shared responsibilities, and the overall value of marriage. Reported Cronbach's alpha values across adaptations range from .82 to .85, and test-retest reliability has been established at .91 in the Turkish adaptation. Construct validity is supported by a correlation of $r = .77$ with the Attitude Toward Marriage scale (ATM; Braaten & Rosen, 1998). Higher scores indicate more favourable attitudes toward marriage.

PROCEDURE

Data were collected individually through a structured questionnaire booklet. Participants were provided with a written informed consent form explaining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. After obtaining consent, participants completed the demographic information sheet followed by the three scales in a fixed order (MAS, MPQ, RBS). Any questions or doubts raised by participants were clarified by the researcher. Completed questionnaires were collected and stored securely.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Data were analyzed using SPSS statistical software. Descriptive statistics including means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis were computed for all three variables. To assess the assumption of normality, the Shapiro-Wilk test was applied to each variable pair. Results indicated significant departures from normality for the MAS-MPS pair ($W = 0.866, p < .001$) and the MAS-RBS pair ($W = 0.831, p < .001$), largely due to extreme positive skewness and kurtosis in the MAS distribution. The MPS-RBS pair did not show a significant deviation ($W = 0.974, p = .136$). Given these violations of normality, Spearman's rank-order correlation (ρ) was employed as a non-parametric alternative for all three analyses to ensure consistency and robustness of findings. The level of significance was set at $p < .05$, with additional interpretation at $p < .01$ and $p < .001$ levels.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for all three variables are presented in Table 1. The mean score on the Marital Attitude Scale (MAS) was 25.34 ($SD = 8.47$), with scores ranging from 15 to 75. The distribution of MAS scores was markedly positively skewed (skewness = 3.19) and showed extreme leptokurtosis (kurtosis = 17.66), indicating that the large majority of participants endorsed relatively low marital attitude scores, with a small number of outliers at the upper end of the scale. The mean score on the Mate Preference Scale (MPS) was 30.51 ($SD = 9.40$), with scores ranging from 8 to 50. The MPS distribution was approximately symmetric (skewness = -0.005) and platykurtic (kurtosis = -0.024), suggesting a broadly uniform spread of mate preference scores across participants. The mean score on the Romantic Beliefs Scale (RBS) was 84.51 ($SD = 13.67$), with scores ranging from 53 to 119. The RBS distribution was slightly negatively skewed (skewness = -0.257) and slightly platykurtic (kurtosis = -0.270), indicating that most participants endorsed moderately high levels of romantic beliefs. The bimodal appearance of the RBS density plot suggested the possible existence of two subgroups within the sample.

Table 1 : Descriptive Statistics for MAS, MPS, and RBS (N = 65)

Statistic	MAS	MPS	RBS
Mean	25.34	30.51	84.51
Std. Error of Mean	1.050	1.165	1.695
Std. Deviation	8.469	9.396	13.67
Skewness	3.188	-0.005	-0.257
Kurtosis	17.66	-0.024	-0.270
Range	60.00	42.00	66.00
Minimum	15.00	8.000	53.00
Maximum	75.00	50.00	119.0

Note. MAS = Marital Attitude Scale; MPS = Mate Preference Scale; RBS = Romantic Beliefs Scale.

CORRELATIONAL ANALYSIS

Spearman's rank-order correlation was computed to examine the relationships among the three study variables. The full correlation matrix is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 : Spearman's Correlation Matrix for MAS, MPS, and RBS (N = 65)

Variable Pair	Spearman's rho	p-value	Significance
MPS-MAS (Mate Preference & Marital Attitude)	0.025	.842	Not significant
MAS-RBS (Marital Attitude & Romantic Beliefs)	-0.433***	< .001	Significant
MPS-RBS (Mate Preference & Romantic Beliefs)	0.081	.521	Not significant

Note. *** $p < .001$. Spearman's rho was used due to violation of normality assumptions (Shapiro-Wilk, $p < .001$).

HYPOTHESIS TESTING

- H1 predicted a significant positive relationship between mate preference and marital attitude. The Spearman's rho between MPS and MAS was $\rho = 0.025$, $p = .842$, which was not statistically significant. H1 was therefore not supported.
- H2 predicted a significant negative relationship between marital attitude and romantic beliefs. A statistically significant negative correlation was found between MAS and RBS ($\rho = -0.433$, $p < .001$). This indicated that participants with more favorable attitudes toward marriage tended to endorse lower levels of idealized romantic beliefs. H2 was supported.
- H3 predicted a significant positive relationship between mate preference and romantic beliefs. The Spearman's rho between MPS and RBS was $\rho = 0.081$, $p = .521$, which was not statistically significant. H3 was therefore not supported.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the associations among romantic beliefs, mate preferences, and attitudes toward marriage in a sample of 65 young Indian adults. Of the three hypotheses tested, only one was supported: the hypothesis predicting a significant negative relationship between marital attitude and romantic beliefs. The other two hypotheses, predicting relationships between mate preference and marital attitude, and between mate preference and romantic beliefs, were not supported.

MARITAL ATTITUDE AND ROMANTIC BELIEFS

The most significant finding of the present study is that the significant negative correlation between marital attitude and romantic beliefs ($\rho = -0.433$, $p < .001$). This finding means that individuals who hold more favorable attitudes toward marriage as a committed, practical, and long-term institution tend to endorse lower levels of idealized romantic beliefs such as love at first sight, belief in a soulmate, and the idea that love overcomes all obstacles. Conversely, individuals who hold more romantic and idealized views about love tend to report less favourable attitudes toward marriage as an institution.

This result is theoretically meaningful. It suggests that a pragmatic, commitment-oriented view of marriage and an idealized, passion-centered view of romantic love may be psychologically at odds with each other. As Sprecher and Metts (1989) and Willoughby et al. (2015) have observed in Western samples, romantic idealism and realistic appraisal of marriage may be distinct orientations. When someone views marriage as a practical partnership that requires sustained effort, compromise, and mutual respect, they may naturally be less inclined to subscribe to the fantasy-like narratives of romantic love. On the other hand, those who idealize romantic love may conceptualize it as something separate from and potentially incompatible with the mundane realities of a committed marital institution.

This finding also has interesting implications in the Indian context. Madathil and Benshoff (2008) found that Indian participants in arranged marriages held lower romantic beliefs but equally positive marriage attitudes compared to American participants in love marriages. The present finding is consistent with this pattern. Indian young adults who have been socialized to value marriage as a social, familial, and practical institution may approach it with pragmatic attitudes that are somewhat disconnected from romantic idealization. The inverse relationship found here may therefore partly reflect the cultural co-existence of pragmatic marriage attitudes and the separate, media-driven world of romantic fantasy in India.

MATE PREFERENCE AND MARITAL ATTITUDE

No significant relationship was found between mate preference and marital attitude ($\rho = 0.025$, $p = .842$). This suggests that the qualities individuals look for in a romantic partner do not necessarily align with their broader evaluations of marriage as an institution. This dissociation makes psychological sense. Mate preferences are shaped largely by evolved tendencies related to reproductive fitness, such as preferring partners who are healthy, kind, intelligent, and financially stable (Buss, 1989). These preferences operate somewhat independently of culturally shaped attitudes about whether marriage is a desirable or necessary institution. A young adult can have very clear ideas about what kind of partner they want without having strong feelings about marriage itself, and vice versa.

This finding is also consistent with the increasing phenomenon of young Indian urban adults who delay marriage for career goals while still holding clear mate preferences (Uberoi, 2006). The absence of a relationship between these two variables suggests that partner evaluation and institutional orientation are distinct cognitive systems, as noted by Eastwick and Finkel (2008).

MATE PREFERENCE AND ROMANTIC BELIEFS

The absence of a significant correlation between mate preference and romantic beliefs ($\rho = 0.081$, $p = .521$) is also informative. While one might expect individuals who idealize romantic love to also have more idealized partner standards, the present data do not support this. This may reflect the fact that mate preferences, as measured by the Buss (1989) instrument, tap into more concrete, evaluative criteria for partner selection, whereas romantic beliefs tap into more abstract, emotionally charged schemas about love. The two constructs, though both situated in the domain of romantic relationships, appear to operate through distinct psychological mechanisms.

Fletcher et al. (2004) had previously found connections between romantic ideals and idealized partner standards in Western samples. The absence of this association in the present Indian sample may point to cultural specificity. It is possible that among young Indian working adults, who may conceptually separate the romantic domain from the practical domain of partner selection, romantic beliefs and mate preferences are less tightly coupled than in Western populations.

LIMITATIONS

Several important limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, the sample was recruited using purposive sampling, which limits the generalizability of the findings. The sample may not be representative of the broader young adult Indian population, particularly those from rural areas, different socioeconomic backgrounds, or other cities. Second, the sample size of 65 participants, while adequate for detecting the moderate-to-large correlation observed for H2 ($\rho = -0.433$), may have been insufficient to detect smaller but theoretically meaningful effects for the other two hypotheses, potentially contributing to Type II errors. Third, the cross-sectional design precludes any causal interpretation. It cannot be determined from these data whether romantic beliefs shape marital attitudes, whether the reverse is true, or whether both are influenced by common third variables such as parental relationship models, media consumption, or relationship experience. Fourth, all data were collected through self-report instruments, which are susceptible to social desirability bias and limited self-insight. Fifth, the extreme positive skewness and kurtosis of the MAS distribution suggest the presence of outliers, which may have influenced the correlational findings.

CONCLUSION

The present study contributes to the growing body of research on romantic and marital cognitions in young Indian adults. The most important finding is the significant negative correlation between marital attitude and romantic beliefs, indicating that favourable attitudes toward marriage as a practical institution and idealized romantic thinking are psychologically distinct and even opposing orientations in this sample. The absence of significant relationships between mate preference and the other two constructs further suggests that partner evaluation processes operate independently of both romantic idealization and institutional orientation toward marriage.

These findings have practical implications for counsellors, relationship educators, and mental health professionals working with young Indian adults. Premarital counselling programs should consider addressing the gap between romantic idealization and the realities of committed partnership, particularly given the increasing tension between traditional marriage values and modern romantic ideals in urban India. Psychoeducational interventions that help young adults critically examine media-driven romantic ideals while developing realistic and commitment-based expectations may support healthier long-term relationship outcomes.

Future research should employ larger and more diverse samples using stratified or random sampling techniques. Longitudinal designs would be valuable in tracing how romantic beliefs and marital attitudes develop and shift over time. Including additional variables such as attachment style, media consumption, religious orientation, and actual relationship experience would help build a more complete picture of

these psychological dynamics. Qualitative approaches could also complement quantitative findings by providing richer insight into how young Indian adults construct and articulate their ideas about love, partnership, and marriage.

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