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# Differing Attitudes of Adolescents Towards Marriage Expectations

## Abstract

*Indications of a rising divorce rate and changing attitudes towards and expectations of marriage amongst adolescents in South Africa formed the background for the research reported in this article. Main objectives were to determine to what degree differences concerning the idea of marriage exist between subjects of varied cultural and home backgrounds and to investigate whether these relate to intra- and interpersonal adjustment. The article establishes that most subjects regard marriage as a positive institution but the need for more distinct social norms and improved school guidance programmes is revealed in divided views on the desirability of cohabitation.*

## Résumé

*La multiplication des divorces et les changements d'attitude à l'égard du mariage et des attentes qu'il nourrit chez les adolescents d'Afrique du Sud forment la toile de fond de la recherche décrite dans cet article. Ses principaux objectifs visaient à déterminer les différences sur le concept du mariage qui existaient entre les sujets de différentes cultures et milieux sociaux et d'examiner si ces différences se rapportaient à des ajustements intra et interpersonnels. L'article montre que la plupart des sujets considèrent que le mariage constitue une institution positive; les divergences d'opinions sur la cohabitation traduisent la nécessité de mieux définir les normes sociales et d'améliorer les programmes d'encadrement scolaire.*

## Abstrak

*Aanduidings van 'n stygende egskeidingsyfer en veranderende houdings jeens en verwagtinge van die huwelik onder adolessente in Suid-Afrika het die agtergrond gevorm vir die navorsing wat in hierdie artikel gerapporteer word. 'n Poging is aangewend om vas te stel in watter mate verskille ten opsigte van die konsep van die huwelik bestaan tussen subjekte van ver-*

*skillende kulturele en huislike agtergronde en om te ondersoek of sodanige verskille met intra- of interpersoonlike aanpassing verband hou. Die gevolgtrekking word gemaak dat die meeste subjekte die huwelik as 'n positiewe instelling beskou maar die behoefte aan duideliker sosiale norme en verbeterde skoolvoorligtingsprogramme word uitgelig in verskillende sieninge ten opsigte van saamwoon.*

Adolescent attitudes towards and expectations of marriage are currently of great significance. Several authors (cited in Kieren & Badir, 1976) have indicated that these attitudes and expectations are formed during adolescence. According to Mooney (cited in Malony, 1978) the uncertainty regarding a future marriage is one of an adolescent's greatest problems. This uncertainty, as well as factors such as the ever-rising divorce rate and the continually changing attitudes towards and expectations of marriage, necessitate the continuation of research in this field and the adjustment of guidance programmes where necessary.

A shift in attitudes towards marriage, from the previous emphasis on the discharging of one's own responsibilities to an accentuation of an individual's right of personal choice and lifestyle, was reported by Chase-Lansdale and Vinovskis (1987). Similarly, expectations of marriage have shifted from the traditional marriage, in which the husband had more authority and in which male and female duties and responsibilities were divided and defined, to the modern marriage of companionship or partnership, in which there is less differentiation between male and female roles and more weight is attached to equality, economic interdependence, and the affective bond between marriage partners (Kiely, 1984).

In other countries outside South Africa (where this research was conducted), the results of studies pertaining to attitudes towards marriage indicate significant differences between young people who are cohabitating and others (Abernathy, 1981; Hollander & Vollmer, 1974); different cultural groups (Harrell-Bond, 1976), and socio-economic groups (Sarsby, 1972); adolescents from intact and broken homes (Wallin, 1954); adolescents from child-care institutions and nuclear families (Snow, 1973); and boys and girls (Ganong, Coleman, & Brown, 1981).

Likewise research on marriage expectations shows that differences in this respect can be ascribed to cultural factors (Edington & Hays, 1978; Schab, 1970); socio-economic status (Sterrett & Bollman, 1970); age differences (Sterrett & Bollman, 1970); sex differences (Herzog, Bachman, & Johnston, 1983; Kieren & Badir, 1976); and whether care was given by both parents or an institution (Snow, 1973).

As in many other countries, the present divorce figures in South Africa (approximately 1.6 per 100 marriages in 1987) are higher than ever before

(Pieterse, 1989) and a 336% rise in the figure for cohabitation from 1970 to 1980 (Zeeman, 1989) indicates that more and more couples are living together rather than marrying (Walters & Walters, 1980). Various guidance programmes like the Family Guidance Programme of the Cape Education Department (Department of Education, 1978) and the National Family Programme for South Africa (Committee for Marriage and Family Life of the South African Welfare Council, 1989) are currently offered to promote social adjustment and marriage preparedness of children and adolescents.

The necessity for the present study arose from the issue of whether the increase in the frequency of divorce has possibly led adolescents to consider divorce as an acceptable solution for marriage conflict, or to argue that it is better not to get married, as marriage is associated with unhappiness and a lack of freedom. If research on the topic can bring to light negative attitudes or significant differences between adolescents from different groups, then guidance programmes may be adjusted to accomplish changes in student attitudes, to convey information, or to attempt to reconcile conflicting expectations. The aims of the present research were (a) to study adolescent attitudes towards marriage; (b) to determine whether pupils from different school environments, boys and girls, Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking pupils, and pupils from intact and broken homes differ regarding marriage attitudes and expectations; (c) to determine whether a relationship exists between marriage attitudes and expectations and pupils' intrapersonal and interpersonal adjustment; and (d) to determine whether there is a relationship between marriage attitudes and marriage expectations.

### Hypotheses Tested

The research questions developed for testing were structured as null hypotheses. For each of them the level of significance was set at .05. They were:

**Hypothesis 1.** There is no significant difference in the average scores of the different groups of pupils (from urban and rural areas, the two sexes, the two language groups [Afrikaans and English], different kinds of schools, and those from intact and broken homes) on both the questionnaires on marriage attitudes and marriage expectations.

**Hypothesis 2.** No significant correlation exists between the scores obtained by pupils on both the questionnaires on marriage attitudes and marriage expectations.

**Hypothesis 3.** No significant correlation exists between the scores obtained by the pupils on (a) both the questionnaires on marriage attitudes and marriage expectations and (b) the relations questionnaire.

The sample ( $N = 378$ ) consisted of final year (grade 12) pupils of four ordinary high schools (urban [ $n = 168$ ] and rural [ $n = 125$ ]) and one special school ( $n = 85$ ) in the Cape Province. In the special school a more practically orientated education is given to pupils with a below average intellectual ability. The sample included both language groups (Afrikaans-speaking [ $n = 234$ ] and English-speaking [ $n = 144$ ]), both sexes (boys [ $n = 166$ ] and girls [ $n = 212$ ]) and pupils from different family backgrounds (parents divorced/separated [ $n = 44$ ]; one parent deceased [ $n = 25$ ]; children's homes [ $n = 3$ ]; foster care [ $n = 4$ ]; intact homes [ $n = 300$ ]; parents' marital status unknown [ $n = 2$ ]). The majority of pupils ( $n = 344$ ) were 17 or 18 years old. The rest ( $n = 33$ ) were 16 or 19 years old, and one pupil was 20 years old.

### Research Instruments

The four questionnaires described below were administered to groups of pupils by the researchers at each of the schools involved. Unfortunately a few of the pupils could not complete all the questionnaires.

***Attitudes towards Marriage Scale (ATMS).*** The ATMS consists of 35 items on the meaningfulness and acceptability of marriage, cohabitation and divorce, and on attitudes regarding matters such as finance, communication, companionship, self-disclosure, conflict, and security.

***Marriage Role Expectation Inventory (MREI)*** (Dunn & DeBonis, 1979). The MREI is intended to evaluate a person's expectations of himself/herself and of a future marriage partner in order that this information can be used in premarital counselling. It consists of 71 items of which 34 are associated with a companionship-equalitarian relationship and 37 items which evaluate traditional-patriarchal expectations. Eight spheres of behaviour are evaluated: the exercising of authority, homemaking, education of children, personality traits, social participation, sexual relations, own education, and employment and support. High scores indicate expectations of companionship and equality while low scores are connected with traditional expectations. Five items relating to a sexual relationship were omitted in the present study but all of the remaining 66 were retained.

***Attitude to Marriage Scale (ATMS)*** (Hill, 1951). This is a Guttman scale consisting of nine items. It evaluates an individual's attitude regarding issues such as the abandonment of personal freedom, adjustment to responsibilities, the prospect of happiness in a marriage, and whether it would be advisable to marry.

***The Personal, Home, Social and Formal Relations Questionnaire (PHSF).*** The PHSF reflects an individual's intrapersonal and interpersonal adjustment in the sense that it indicates how successful and mature the

relationships are within an individual and also between an individual and his/her environment (Fouche & Grobbelaar, 1970). In this research only eight of the PHSF components were considered, namely, Self-Confidence, Self-Esteem, Nervousness, Family Influences, Personal Freedom, Sociability-G, Sociability-S, and Moral Sense.

**Results of the Study**

*Significance of the differences between the scores obtained by different groups of pupils on the ATMS (N = 356) and on the MREI (N = 337).* The scores obtained by the entire sample and the different subgroups (compare Hypothesis 1) on the ATMS and the MREI were subjected to an analysis of variance to determine whether significant differences between the different groups exist. The results are reported in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
*Summary of the Analysis of Variance of the Scores of Different Groups Recorded on the ATMS (N = 356) and on the MREI (N = 337)*

Groups compared	ATMS		MREI	
	F	df	F	df
5 schools with one another	27.52**	4; 351	29.95**	4; 332
Pupils: Afr. & Eng. (grade 12 only)	.25	1; 277	5.29*	1; 253
Boys from 5 schools	9.06**	4; 151	17.21**	4; 145
Girls from 5 schools	1.64	4; 195	15.27**	4; 182
Boys/Girls	1.64	1; 354	28.23**	1; 335
Urban/Rural (grade 12 only)	.77	1; 277	.05	1; 335
Ordinary/Special schools	156.82**	1; 354	152.34**	1; 335
Pupils from intact homes/ Parents divorced or separated	10.93**	1; 313	2.12	1; 293

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

df = degrees of freedom

The results in Table 1 suggest that with respect to both questionnaires significant differences were found between the pupils of the five schools, between the boys of the five schools taken separately, between the girls of the five schools taken separately, and between the special school pupils as a group and the pupils of the ordinary schools as a group. In the case of the ATMS a significant difference was found between pupils from intact homes ( $n = 279$ ,  $M = 130.42$ ) and those whose parents were divorced/estranged ( $n = 40$ ,  $M = 123.20$ ). In the case of the MREI the mean scores of the Afrikaans-speaking subjects ( $n = 121$ ,  $M = 247.33$ ) and the English-speaking subjects ( $n = 134$ ,  $M = 253.46$ ), as well as the mean scores of boys ( $n = 150$ ,  $M = 236.48$ ) and girls ( $n = 187$ ,  $M = 249.71$ ) differed significantly. With respect to these groups Hypothesis 1 was rejected.

Scheffe's method of *post hoc* comparisons of the mean scores obtained on both questionnaires showed that the significant differences may be attributed to the fact that the pupils from the special school obtained a lower mean score than the pupils from each of the ordinary schools in the case of both questionnaires. This also applies to the girls from the special school when compared to the girls from ordinary schools, and also for the boys from the special school when compared to the boys from ordinary schools. In the latter case there was one exception, however; the mean score of the boys from the special school ( $n = 43$ ,  $M = 115.16$ ) on the ATMS did not differ significantly from that of the boys from the English-speaking urban school ( $n = 23$ ,  $M = 126.13$ ). Similarly, in the case of the mean scores on the MREI, the former group ( $n = 50$ ,  $M = 220.24$ ) did not differ significantly from the latter group ( $n = 22$ ,  $M = 234.23$ ). Save for this exception the pupils from the special school thus obtained significantly lower scores than matriculants on the ATMS and on the MREI. When only the scores of the pupils from intact homes were compared, the scores of special school pupils on both questionnaires were again significantly lower.

***Differences between pupils whose parents are divorced/estranged and pupils from intact homes.*** *Post hoc* comparisons according to Scheffe's method showed no significant differences between pupils from different family backgrounds (children's homes or foster care, single-parent homes, parents divorced/estranged, and married), but the *t*-test for independent groups ( $t = 2.20$ ;  $df = 313$ ;  $p < .01$ ) pointed out a significant difference between pupils from intact homes ( $n = 275$ ,  $M = 130.51$ ) and those whose parents are divorced/estranged ( $n = 40$ ;  $M = 123.20$ ). These were the only two groups in the case of which a significant difference in respect of mean scores on the ATMS was found, which indicates that pupils whose parents are divorced/estranged achieved lower scores on the ATMS than those from intact homes.

Analysis of variance showed no significant differences in the case of the MREI between the mean scores obtained by pupils from different family backgrounds ( $F[4;321] = .76$ ). A pupil's expectations of marriage are therefore not affected by his/her parents' divorce/estrangement.

*The differences between boys and girls regarding marriage expectations.* The mean scores obtained by the total group of boys and the total group of girls on the different subscales of the MREI were compared by means of the *F*-test and the *t*-test for independent groups. The results are summarized in Table 2.

The results in Table 2 show that only in the case of the subscale Homemaking the scores of the two groups do not differ significantly. The significantly higher mean scores of the girls indicate that they give preference throughout to a marriage relationship of equality and companionship, except in the case of domestic duties.

**Table 2**  
*Comparison of the Scores of the Total Group of Boys and Girls on the Different Subscales of the MREI (N = 337)*

Subscale	M		M F df = 1; 335	t df = 335
	(boys)	(girls)		
Authority	35.26	36.28	4.35*	2.07*
Homemaking	33.48	32.62	2.91	1.69
Children	35.83	37.97	21.93**	4.65**
Personality	26.61	30.16	50.28**	7.05**
Social Participation	29.59	30.66	6.45*	2.52**
Sexual Relations	7.49	8.06	13.87**	3.70**
Education	36.47	38.88	20.41**	4.49**
Employment & Support	31.75	35.07	62.57**	7.86**

\* *p* < .05

\*\* *p* < .01

df = degrees of freedom

*The correlation between marriage attitudes and marriage expectations.* The Pearson correlation coefficient between the scores on the ATMS and the MREI was calculated by making use of variance and covariance within groups in order to eliminate the differences between groups. A significant correlation (*r* = 0.222; *df* = 319; *p* < .001) was found between marriage attitudes and marriage expectations; Hypothesis 2 was therefore rejected.

*The correlation between inter- and intrapersonal relationships and marriage attitudes and marriage expectations.* Pearson correlation coefficients between PHSF scores and the scores obtained on the ATMS and the MREI were calculated. To eliminate the influence of the differences between groups, within group variance and covariance were used and the results are reported in Table 3.

Table 3

*The Correlation between the PHSF Scores and the Scores Obtained on the ATMS (N = 352) and on the MREI (N = 333)*

PHSF component	ATMS	MREI
	<i>r</i> , <i>df</i> = 350	<i>r</i> , <i>df</i> = 331
Self-confidence	.265***	.119*
Self-esteem	.160**	.029
Nervousness	.268***	.124*
Family Influences	.160**	.053
Personal Freedom	.148**	.121*
Sociability-G	.117*	.072
Sociability-S	.002	.055
Moral Sense	.196***	.135**

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

\*\*\*  $p < .001$

*df* = degrees of freedom

From Table 3 it is evident that a significant positive Pearson correlation was found between marriage attitudes and all the included PHSF scales, with the exception of Sociability-Single Person of the Opposite Sex. Significant positive correlation coefficients between marriage expectations and the PHSF components Self-Confidence, Nervousness, Personal Freedom, and Moral Sense were found, but it is evident from Table 3 that there is a stronger connection between these relationships and marriage attitudes than between the former and marriage expectations.

Concerning attitudes towards marriage, Hypothesis 3 must thus be rejected, except in the case of an individual's relationship with a specific person of the opposite sex. Concerning marriage expectations, Hypothesis 3 may only be rejected in the case of the PHSF components Self-Confidence, Nervousness, Personal Freedom, and Moral Sense.

*Attitudes towards marriage as reflected in Hill's questionnaire.* A favourable outlook on marriage was reflected by the fact that 97% of all pupils expect to be happy or very happy in marriage. However, 36% of the total sample expressed doubt about their own chances to be happily married.

*Attitudes towards marriage as reflected by responses on the Draft Questionnaire on Attitudes towards Marriage.* Favourable responses were the following: 75% of the total sample indicated that marriage is a cornerstone of society, 94% regarded it as an institution created by God, 86%



viewed fidelity as realistic, 92% judged that marriage is worthwhile, 91% did not regard divorce as an inevitable alternative in the case of marital conflict, and 84% felt that a marriage offers more security than cohabitation.

Less favourable responses were the following: 30% of the sample agreed that marriage is an outmoded institution, 52% judged that contemporary marriage is a more superficial and empty relationship and 56% that it entails a weaker bond than before, 54% indicated that people avoid marriage because it involves tension and sacrifice, 47% adopted the standpoint that living together is beneficial and provides an opportunity to test a relationship, and 74% indicated that clearer norms in society with regard to marriage could lead to happier marriages.

### Conclusions and Discussion

Final year pupils from the special school showed significantly less favourable attitudes towards marriage than those from ordinary schools. In addition, the special school pupils as compared to pupils in ordinary schools expect a traditional marriage relationship to a significantly greater degree. Possible explanations for the special school group's lower scores should be investigated. These include factors such as poor reading ability, inadequate social insight, limited abstract reasoning ability, less favourable socio-economic circumstances, a poor self-image, and limited social experience. The implications of these results are that guidance at school levels should be presented on a differentiated basis to meet the needs and expectations of special school pupils.

The latter implication also applies to pupils whose parents are divorced/estranged, because it can be concluded that they manifest significantly more negative marriage attitudes than others from intact families. However, this does not apply to marriage expectations as these are apparently not significantly affected by the divorce/estrangement of a pupil's parents.

With respect to marriage expectations, significant differences between Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking subjects and between boys and girls were found. The results reveal that the former of each of these groups give preference to the traditional rather than a companionship marriage. Only in the subscale Homemaking did girls not give preference to an equal division of duties and privileges. Other researchers (Kieren & Badir, 1976; Rooks & King, 1973; Sterrett & Bollman, 1970) also found this and the deduction was made that girls have confidence in their own competence in this sphere and therefore wish to avoid male intervention or competition. The contents of guidance programmes should therefore be revised in order to make provision for the exploration and possible reconciliation of conflicting expectations of different cultural groups and the two sexes.

To the extent that the results of this study showed no significant differences between the marriage attitudes and expectations of urban and rural pupils, it may be argued that, as regards family guidance and marriage preparation, no differentiation between these groups is necessary. It is suspected that environment as such does not affect marriage attitudes and expectations to the same extent as the media, family circumstances, and sex differences. It can be deduced from the significant positive correlation which was found between marriage attitudes and marriage expectations that a person who exhibits a favourable attitude towards marriage would probably be more inclined to expect an equalitarian rather than a patriarchal marriage relationship.

A significant positive relationship was found between marriage attitudes on the one hand and factors such as an individual's confidence in his/her ability, influencing by family relationships, the experience he/she has that he/she is not restricted by parents, spontaneous participation in group interaction, and the judging of his/her own behaviour as in accordance with social norms. On the other hand pupils who are poorly adjusted in these fields, and therefore maintain ineffective relationships, are probably in need of more assistance in preparing them for marriage. Marriage expectations are apparently influenced to a greater degree by one's own sex or cultural group than by intra- or interpersonal relationships.

It is suggested that an adolescent's relationship with a specific person of the opposite sex is mainly determined by immediate social and emotional needs and that this explains why this relationship did not show a significant connection with marriage attitudes and expectations.

On Hill's questionnaire the pupils in this sample showed a more positive than negative attitude towards marriage. Practically everyone expects to be happy when married, but even so more than one-third have doubts about their individual prospects of being happy when they marry.

The responses on the provisional questionnaire on attitudes towards marriage showed that most pupils regard marriage as a Divine institution and a meaningful relationship. Attitudes towards the contemporary marriage and cohabitation are, however, less favourable: about half the pupils indicated that young people shrink away from marriage today, that living together is a profitable experiment, and that the contemporary marriage is a more superficial relationship than that of yesteryear. Great store is still set on fidelity, and divorce is not seen as a logical solution for marital problems. Most of the pupils have a need for more distinct social norms with regard to marriage.

As no data relating to previous South African studies on this subject could be traced, no conclusion can be drawn whether the results of this study represent any shift in adolescents' attitudes towards marriage and cohabitation. Further research in this field should be encouraged as this could contrib-

ute to effective guidance, the development of life skills, and the obviation of marital problems.

#### NOTE

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