

Understanding the Association of Crying Proneness with Empathy and Histrionic Personality among Adults

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ABSTRACT

Crying is one of the common emotions displayed in several contexts, ranging from emotional situations to distress. It is often correlated with empathy as well as with theatrical and manipulative behaviour, which is a characteristic of individuals with a histrionic personality. This study examines age and gender differences in crying proneness, histrionic personality, and empathy among adults in India. The sample consisted of the age group 18–60 (N = 100) through purposive sampling. The Crying Proneness Scale (CPS) by Denckla et al. (2014), the Brief Histrionic Personality Scale (BHPS) by Ferguson & Negy (2014), and the Perth Empathy Scale (PES) by Brett et al. (2022) have been administered to measure crying proneness, histrionic personality, and empathy, respectively. A cross-sectional design was used, and the data were analysed using the t-independent test and Pearson's correlation coefficient. The findings indicated non-significant gender differences in crying proneness and empathy, whereas males scored higher in histrionic personality. The findings indicated significant age differences where younger adults have scored higher on histrionism and older adults have scored higher in empathy, whereas insignificant differences are reported in crying proneness. Crying proneness has a significant correlation with empathy. No significant correlation was found between histrionism and crying proneness, as well as empathy.

Keywords: *Empathy, Histrionic Personality, Crying Proneness, Adults*

Crying is one of the common emotions displayed in several contexts, ranging from emotional situations to distress. Often, in cultures it is aggravated as a response to negative events such as being helpless (Vingerhoets et al., 2016). The present study focuses on how crying proneness is related to social compasses like empathy and across the spectrum of tendencies of histrionic personality.

Crying Proneness: A Dilemma

Crying proneness refers to the likelihood that an individual tends to cry when subjected to a particular context, or sensing feelings related to it. Furthermore, there is focus on the determinants of emotional crying which differentiated between various kinds of tears: attachment, societal, compassionate, and moral or sentimental tears (Denckla et al., 2014). Being prone towards crying might be suggestive of people that the crier has an inability to regulate their emotions or face the situation with courage (Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2003).

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Received: December 10, 2023; Revision Received: February 10, 2024; Accepted: February 14, 2024

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Studies show that crying as an emotion acts as a social glue that helps the bonds to sustain and collectively experience the intensity of the emotion (van de Ven et al., 2017; Vingerhoets et al., 2016; Zickfield et al., 2021). Studies reflected that participants when asked were in favour of people who cry and express their vulnerabilities than those who do not, but the regression analysis suggested the contrast results to the former and thus, obtained mixed results (Hendriks, Croon & Vingerhoets, 2008).

The functions of crying change as people go through transitioning from infancy to adulthood and becomes less related to immediate survival demands (Rottenberg & Vingerhoets, 2012). However, crying behaviour helps to elicit both caregiving and emotional support. In addition to this as people age, they are able to regulate their emotions and give them room to be strategic with their crying behaviour and respond to only those who genuinely care for them (Rottenberg & Vingerhoets, 2012; Zeman & Shipman, 1996; Tamir, 2009).

According to Gijsbers van Wijk (1995), women tend to have greater negative affectivity and more reasons to cry. Women typically express more acute grief (as well as other feelings), and they more frequently state that they feel helpless and powerless (Fischer, 1993), despite the evidence about melancholy prevalence in both sexes appearing to be equivocal.

On the other hand, men tend to put back their fragile emotions as elicited through the cultural notions about masculinity and crying behaviour. For instance, there are signs that men are reluctant to acknowledge their nervousness. The artificially low frequency of these diseases in males can be attributed to the masculine avoidance of presenting with phobic complaints or their differential expression of sadness (Bekker, 1996; Oliver & Toner, 1990; Vredenburg et al., 1986).

Tenets and Tendencies of Histrionic Personality in Adults

Disturbances in affectivity, cognition (perceives self, others, or events wrongly), impulse control, or interpersonal functioning would be signs of deviation from cultural expectations resulting in alteration of personality. (Cale & Lilienfeld, 2002).

According to Millon, Grossman, Millon, Meagher, and Ramnath (2004), histrionic personality is characterised by dramatic behaviour, attention-seeking interpersonal behaviour, flighty cognitive style, gregarious self-image, shallow representations of others, dissociative regulatory mechanisms, a disjointed psychic structure, and changeable mood and temperament.

Histrionic behaviour is significantly correlated between leadership and creativity commonly seen among young age as is considered as a fundamental aspect of development of social skills (Feldhusen & Pleiss, 1992).

Both men and women are affected equally, indicating that earlier reports of a higher frequency in women were an example of the ascertainment bias observed in hospital-based studies. The diagnosis is supported by unambiguous signs of emotional, behavioural, and social dysfunction (Nestadt et al., 1990). Studies also reflect that women are actually under pressure from culture to adopt and display histrionic behaviour, but if they do, they are stigmatised as mentally ill (Gibson, 2004).

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Empathy in Adults

Empathy involves “understanding a person from his or her frame of reference rather than one’s own, or vicariously experiencing that person’s feelings, perceptions, and thoughts. Empathy does not, of itself, entail motivation to be of assistance, although it may turn into sympathy or personal distress, which may result in action. In psychotherapy, therapist empathy for the client can be a path to comprehension of the client’s cognitions, affects, motivations, or behaviours” (APA, 2022).

Research findings show a mixed trend with empathy, maturity and age. In self-report data (Birditt & Fingerman, 2005; Gross et al., 1997; Lawton, Kleban, Rajagopal, & Dean, 1992) and experience-sampling research (Carstensen, Pasupathi, Mayr, & Nesselrode, 2000), older persons frequently report having greater emotion management abilities than young adults. These results imply that elderly persons may have greater empathy than younger adults.

However, some research indicates that the capacity of older persons to integrate complex emotive information is typically reduced (Labouvie-Vief & Marquez, 2004), and a propensity to rely more on stereotypical information (e.g., Blanchard-Fields, Baldi, & Stein, 1999; von Hippel, Silver, & Lynch, 2000) than younger adults do. The results point to potential limitations in older people's capacity for empathy comprehension.

Research findings show a considerable amount of gender differences in empathy, reflecting females more empathetic than males due to cultural expectations about gender role (Christov-Moore et al., 2014), although there are research studies which also support that there are no significant differences in empathy (Eckel & Grossman, 1998) and are based on evolutionary and developmental processes (Christov-Moore et al., 2014).

Relationship between Crying Proneness, Histrionism and Empathy

Crying proneness is often correlated with emotions such as appreciation, being inspired and moral values such as empathy, altruistic behaviour, sacrifice and are posed as some of the common factors associated with emotional crying (Schnall et al., 2010; Seibt et al., 2017). According to previous studies, crying helps to display warmth, acceptance and empathy. Therefore, those who cry seem to be optimistic and morally virtuous (Van Roeyen et al., 2020). A study by Zickfield and colleagues (2021) reported positive correlations between crying proneness and moral evaluations which involve empathy and compassion ($r = .27$), and altruistic behavioural tendencies ($r = .20$).

In a study, to evaluate participants' responses to the open-ended question related to empathy, a coding framework was created with vignettes. A "correct," "partially correct," or "incorrect" response was represented by the codes. Overall, the findings indicated that all illnesses had different identification reactions. The highest incidence of "correct" identification was for PTSD and the rate of identification for histrionic personality disorder was zero percent (Furnham & Sjokvist, 2017).

Theatrical and manipulative behaviour, frequently accompanied by crying, is a characteristic of individuals with personality disorders, such as borderline or histrionic personality disorders (Alexander, 2003).

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The present study examines the difference between the student and working population in India for crying proneness, histrionic behaviour and empathy among the adults and also aims to understand the relationship between crying proneness, empathy and histrionic behaviour.

Hypothesis

- H1: There are no significant differences in crying proneness among the young and elderly population of adults.
- H2: There are no significant differences in crying proneness among the male and female population of adults.
- H3: There are no significant differences in empathy among the young and elderly population of adults.
- H4: There are no significant differences in empathy among the male and female population of adults.
- H5: There are no significant differences in histrionic personality among the young and elderly population of adults.
- H6: There are no significant differences in histrionic personality among the male and female population of adults.
- H7: There is no significant correlation between crying proneness, empathy and histrionism among the adult population of India.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sampling technique utilised is purposive sampling involving age and gender differences in understanding the association of crying proneness with empathy and histrionic personality from age groups: 18-39 (N=66) and 39-60 (N=34). The total number of participants in the present study are (N=100) respectively. The male and female participants from the adult population are (N=30, N=70) respectively. The inclusion criteria involve male and female adults aged from 18-60 (Wikipedia Contributors, 2019) and are citizens of India whereas other age groups were in the exclusion criteria. (Refer to Table 1).

Measures

- ***Crying Proneness Scale (CPS)***: As crying is one of the most common human emotions experienced, Denckla et al. (2014) formulated and developed Crying Proneness Scale (CPS) to understand the multidimensional construct of crying as a phenomenon in relation with age, empathy and attachment. A 27-item scale (was 28-item scale at the inception of development) and involves positive antecedents and negative antecedents of crying. It utilises a 7-point Likert scale, where the scores range from 1 (very unlikely) to 7 (very likely). There was no specific time frame allotted to participants for answering the questions from this scale.
- ***Brief Histrionic Personality Scale (BHPS)***: The Brief Histrionic Personality Scale (BHPS) was developed to understand tenets of histrionic personality disorder symptoms, developed by testing on non-clinical populations (Ferguson & Negy, 2014). During the inception 36 items were developed and later was finalised as an 11-item scale. According to BHPS's Likert Scale, 1 represents "never true", 2 represents "seldom true", 3 represents "very often true" and 4 represents "always true". All scored items are added to obtain the final score.

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- **Perth Empathy Scale (PES):** Perth Empathy Scale (PES) is developed by Brett et al. (2022) to understand empathy as a multidimensional construct. It studies both cognitive and affective empathy. It is a 20-item scale and its Likert Scale scoring ranges from 1 “almost never”, 2 “sometimes”, 3 “about half of the time”, 4 for “most of the time” and 5 for “almost always”. Empathy is scored after the total of all items to comprehend the ability to recognise and share other’s emotions (Brett et al., 2022).

Procedure

Correlational research is utilised in the study where Google forms were developed according to the scales for crying proneness, The Crying Proneness Scale (CPS), for histrionic personality, Brief Histrionic Personality Scale (BHPS) and for empathy, Perth Empathy Scale (PES) among adult population in India, across age and gender differences. The Crying Proneness Scale (CPS), Brief Histrionic Personality Scale (BHPS) and Perth Empathy Scale (PES) were completed during a single data collection point at which time participants' other demographic data were also recorded. The participants completed all the tests, and their scores were recorded. Data analysis was done using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for measuring the age and gender differences across the variables, t-test for independent samples was administered. Furthermore, Pearson’s correlation coefficient was calculated between crying proneness, histrionic personality and empathy.

RESULTS

Crying Proneness

Crying proneness was measured using Crying Proneness Scale (CPS) among the adult population aged from 18-39 (N=66), and 39-60 (N=34) where it showed insignificant differences between them. The mean crying proneness score for the adult population aged from 18-39 is (M= 100.2, SD= 27.6) and for ages 39-60 is (M= 96.8, SD= 38.92). The difference in crying proneness scores between the adult population aged from 18-39 and 39-60 is (t(98) = .46, p>.05). This indicates insignificant age differences for crying proneness among the adult population in India.

The male adult population (N=30) and the female adult population of India (N=70) has mean crying proneness score for the male adult population is (M= 87.02, SD= 39.96) and for the female adult population is (M= 100.9, SD= 29.71). The difference in crying proneness scores between the male and female adult population is (t(98) = -1.47, p>.05). It shows insignificant gender differences between them for crying proneness (Refer to Table 2A and 2B).

Histrionic Personality

Histrionic Personality in the adult population of India was measured using Brief Histrionic Personality Scale (BHPS) among the adult population aged from 18-39 (N=66), and 39-60 (N=34) where it showed significant differences between them. The mean score on Brief Histrionic Personality Scale for the adult population aged from 18-39 is (M= 21.04, SD= 4.18) and for ages 39-60 is (M= 18.93, SD= 4.38). The difference in the scores between the adult population aged from 18-39 and 39-60 is (t(98) = 4.46, p<.05). This indicates significant age differences for histrionic personality among the adult population in India (Refer to Table 2A and 2B).

The male adult population (N=30) and the female adult population of India (N=70) has mean histrionic personality score for the male adult population is (M= 23.03, SD= 5.37) and

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for the female adult population is ($M= 19.86$, $SD= 3.98$). The difference in histrionic personality scores between the male and female adult population is ($t(98) = 2.74$, $p<.05$). It shows significant gender differences between them for histrionic personality.

Empathy

Empathy in the adult population of India was measured using Perth Empathy Scale (PES) among the adult population aged from 18-39 ($N=66$), and 39-60 ($N=34$) where it showed significant differences between them. The mean score for empathy in the adult population aged from 18-39 is ($M= 58.23$, $SD= 10.85$) and for ages 39-60 is ($M= 63.41$, $SD= 12.12$). The difference in the scores between the adult population aged from 18-39 and 39-60 is ($t(98) = -2.09$, $p<.05$). This indicates significant age differences for empathy among the adult population in India (Refer to Table 2A and 2B).

The male adult population ($N=30$) and the female adult population of India ($N=70$) have mean empathy scores for the male adult population is ($M= 59.92$, $SD= 11.27$) and for the female adult population is ($M= 59.96$, $SD= 11.59$). The difference in empathy scores between the male and female adult population is ($t(98) = -.01$, $p>.05$). It shows insignificant gender differences between them for empathy.

Relationship between Crying Proneness, Histrionic Personality and Empathy in Adults

Table 3 illustrates the relationship between crying proneness, histrionic personality and empathy among the adult population of India. There has been a significant positive correlation between crying proneness and empathy ($r(98)=.281$, $p<0.05$), there are insignificant positive correlations for crying proneness and histrionic personality ($r(98)=.126$, $p>0.05$) and empathy and histrionic personality ($r(98)=.102$, $p>0.05$).

DISCUSSION

In the present study, the association of crying proneness with histrionic personality and empathy among the adult population of India. Crying proneness was measured by Crying Proneness Scale (CPS) developed by Denckla et al. (2014), it was hypothesised that there are no significant differences in crying proneness among the young and orderly population of adults and there are no significant differences in male and female population of adults. Our findings were more congruous to the study by Rottenberg & Vingerhoets (2012) where the mean of crying proneness in young adults is more than the older adults. Another study by Gijbbers van Wijk (1995), supports that prevalence of crying proneness in both sexes appears to be equivocally present. Although various studies have also stated that there are significant differences in crying proneness among males and females, women tend to express more grief and feel helpless and powerless (Fischer, 1993).

Histrionic personality is measured by The Brief Histrionic Personality Scale (BHPS) developed by Ferguson & Negy (2014), it was hypothesised that there are no significant differences in empathy among the young and orderly population of adults and there are no significant differences in empathy among the male and female population of adults. The present study's findings are similar to findings by Feldhusen & Pleiss (1992), histrionic personality is significantly seen among young age than older people. The studies also display that both males and females are affected equally, supported by unambiguous signs of emotional, behavioural, and social dysfunction (Nestadt et al., 1990).

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Empathy is measured by Perth Empathy Scale (PES) as developed by Brett et al. (2022), it was hypothesised that there are no significant differences in histrionic personality among the young and elderly population of adults and there are no significant differences in histrionic personality among the male and female population of adults. The present study's results are aligned with studies by Carstensen et al. (2000), Gross et al., (1997) and Birditt & Fingerman (2005) which support that older persons frequently report greater empathy than younger adults. The research findings also support that there are no significant gender differences in empathy (Eckel & Grossman, 1998) which are based on evolutionary and developmental processes. Other findings suggest considerable amount of gender differences in empathy, reflecting females more empathetic than males due to cultural expectations about gender role (Christov-Moore et al., 2014).

The relationship between crying proneness, histrionic personality and empathy among the adult population of India was measured and it was hypothesised that there is no significant correlation between crying proneness, empathy and histrionism among the adult population of India. The findings from the present study show that there has been a significant positive correlation between crying proneness and empathy and there are insignificant positive correlations for crying proneness and histrionic personality and empathy and histrionic personality. A study by Zickfield and colleagues (2021) reported positive correlations between crying proneness and moral evaluations which involve empathy and compassion. In a study by Furnham & Sjkovist (2017) the rate of identification of empathy in people with histrionic personality was zero percent. In a study by Alexander (2003), theatrical and manipulative behaviour seen in histrionic personality is frequently accompanied by crying behaviour. However, in our study, there are insignificant positive correlations for crying proneness and histrionic personality.

Despite the valuable findings of the present study regarding crying proneness, histrionic personality and empathy among the adult population in India, there are still numerous possibilities that could serve as implications for future research. It would be useful to measure the concept of crying proneness and empathy across different cultures and regions to gain a deeper understanding of the topic. The fact that this study was limited to largely adults and was unable to recruit participants from a variety of perspectives posed an additional restriction. Furthermore, the sample size could have been larger and may have contributed to more comprehensible findings, contributing to a richer understanding of the association of crying proneness with empathy and histrionic personality among the adult population of India.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to understand the association of crying proneness with empathy and histrionic personality among the adult demographic population of India. There are insignificant differences in age and gender-based samples although the mean is higher in younger adults and females supported by studies. There are significant differences in age and gender based samples suggesting young adults and males more prone towards histrionic personality. The findings also show that significant differences in age based samples (more in older adults) although insignificant differences are reported in gender based samples, slightly higher mean in females. There is significant positive correlation between crying proneness and empathy and non-significant positive correlation of histrionic personality between empathy and crying proneness.

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Acknowledgment

The authors would like to express their gratitude to Dr. Reshma NS, Assistant Professor at Kasturba Medical College, Mangalore, for her consistent guidance, patience and assistance throughout the entire process. Without her knowledge and ideas, we would not have reached our goal. Finally, this endeavour would not have been possible without the research participants. We express our deep thanks to the people who took time out to be a part of this process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Sharma, A. (2024). Understanding the Association of Crying Proneness with Empathy and Histrionic Personality among Adults. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 12(1), 924-934. DIP:18.01.086.20241201, DOI:10.25215/1201.086

APPENDIX

Table 1 Sample Characteristics based on Demographic Variables

	Frequency	Percent (%)	Valid Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent (%)
Age				
18-39	66	66	66	66
39-60	34	34	34	100
Total	100	100	100	
Gender				
Male	30	30	30	30
Female	70	70	70	100
Total	100	100	100	
Educational Qualifications				
High school degree or equivalent	18	18	18	18
Bachelor's degree	38	38	38	56
Master's degree	27	27	27	83
Doctorate	17	17	17	100
Total	100	100	100	

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among Adults**

Table 2A A comparison of mean factor scores on dimensions of crying proneness, histrionic personality and empathy for age differences among the adult population of India

	Adults aged from 18-39 (N=66)		Adults aged from 39-60 (N=34)		t-test (df = 98)
	M	SD	M	SD	
Crying Proneness	100.2	27.6	96.80	38.92	.46
Histrionic Personality	21.04	4.18	18.93	4.38	4.46*
Empathy	58.23	10.85	63.41	12.12	-2.09*

Table 2B A comparison of mean factor scores dimensions of crying proneness, histrionic personality and empathy for gender differences among the adult population of India

	Male Adults (N=30)		Female Adults (N=70)		t-test (df = 98)
	M	SD	M	SD	
Crying Proneness	87.02	39.96	100.9	29.71	-1.47
Histrionic Personality	23.03	5.37	19.86	3.98	2.74*
Empathy	59.92	11.27	59.96	12	-0.01

Table 3 Correlation between dimensions of crying proneness, histrionic personality and empathy among the adult population of India

Variable	1.	2.	3.
Crying Proneness	-	.126	.281*
Histrionic Personality		-	.102
Empathy			-