

Research Paper

## Perceived Stress, Frustration Tolerance and Relationship Quality in Marital and Romantic Relationships: A Comparative Study

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to understand the complex relationships between perceived stress, frustration tolerance, and relationship quality in the context of marriages and romantic relationships. An online survey was administered using standardized questionnaires, including the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), the Frustration Discomfort Scale (FDS), and the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS). Married individuals reported higher perceived stress and frustration discomfort, along with lower relationship quality, compared to those in romantic relationships. Perceived stress negatively correlated with relationship quality in both groups, with stronger effects among married participants. Frustration discomfort was also linked to reduced relationship quality, particularly in marriages. These findings suggest that stress is a significant predictor of relationship quality, reinforcing the importance of stress management in romantic relationships. While frustration tolerance correlates with relationship quality, it does not emerge as a strong predictor, indicating that other factors may mediate its effect.

**Keywords:** *Stress, Frustration tolerance, Relationship, Marriages, Romantic Dating, Couples*

This study investigates the extent to which perceived stress and frustration tolerance influence relationship quality in both married and unmarried romantic relationships. By analyzing differences between these relationship types, the study aims to provide insight into the psychological dynamics that contribute to relationship satisfaction or strain.

### Hypotheses

1. There will be a significant negative correlation between perceived stress and relationship quality in both married and unmarried individuals.
2. Married individuals will report higher levels of perceived stress, lower frustration tolerance, and lower relationship quality compared to unmarried individuals in romantic relationships.

Modern marital and dating relationships exist in a complex and rapidly changing landscape. Traditional models are evolving, with increased acceptance of diverse relationship structures and a greater emphasis on individual needs and happiness. Dating, often facilitated by

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technology, can be both exciting and overwhelming, presenting a vast pool of potential partners but also posing challenges like superficiality and “ghosting”. Marriages, while still valued by many, are occurring later in life, if at all, with cohabitation and singlehood becoming more common choices. Both dating and marital relationships face pressures from societal expectations, financial strain, and the pervasive influence of social media. Communication, often mediated through screens, can be both a bridge and a barrier. Navigating these complexities requires open communication, mutual respect, and a willingness to adapt and grow, both as individuals and as a couple. The emphasis on self-care and personal well-being also plays a crucial role in fostering healthy and fulfilling relationships in today's world.

Modern marital and dating relationships present a complex tapestry of positive and negative aspects. On the positive side, increased societal acceptance of diverse relationship structures allows for greater individual choice and happiness, with technology facilitating connections across geographical boundaries and shared interests. There's also a growing emphasis on equality and shared responsibilities within relationships, fostering deeper emotional intimacy and partnership. However, these relationships also face significant challenges. The constant connectivity and curated online personas can create unrealistic expectations and pressures. Increased economic pressures and work-life imbalances often strain relationships, while readily available alternatives and a culture of instant gratification can contribute to decreased commitment and higher rates of dissolution. Furthermore, the blurring of traditional gender roles and expectations, while positive in many respects, can also lead to confusion and conflict if not navigated with open communication and mutual respect. Ultimately, navigating modern relationships requires conscious effort, communication skills, and a realistic understanding of both the joys and challenges they present.

In today's fast-paced world, marital and dating relationships face unique challenges due to reduced frustration tolerance and increased stress. These factors can significantly impact relationship quality.

### **Reduced Frustration Tolerance:**

- **Instant Gratification:** Modern society emphasizes instant gratification, leading to lower frustration tolerance. This can make it difficult to handle disagreements and conflicts constructively.
- **Emotional Regulation:** Reduced frustration tolerance can hinder emotional regulation, leading to impulsive reactions and difficulty managing emotions in a relationship.

### **Increased Stress:**

- **Work-Life Balance:** The demands of work and personal life can create stress, affecting the time and energy available for nurturing relationships.
- **External Pressures:** Financial difficulties, social expectations, and other external pressures can strain relationships and reduce overall satisfaction.

### **Impact on Relationship Quality:**

- **Communication:** Reduced frustration tolerance and increased stress can hinder effective communication, leading to misunderstandings and unresolved conflicts.
- **Intimacy:** Stress and emotional reactivity can affect intimacy and emotional connection between partners.

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- **Commitment:** The inability to manage stress and frustration can impact commitment and increase the likelihood of relationship dissolution.

Overall, navigating modern relationships requires understanding the impact of reduced frustration tolerance and increased stress. By developing coping mechanisms, practicing effective communication, and prioritizing emotional well-being, couples can foster healthier and more fulfilling relationships.

### ***Perceived Stress***

The hum of modern life is often characterized by a relentless pace, a constant barrage of information, and an ever-present sense of urgency. We are connected 24/7, yet paradoxically, often feel more disconnected than ever. This constant connectivity, coupled with societal pressures and economic uncertainties, creates a breeding ground for stress. What was once considered a temporary reaction to challenging situations has now become a chronic condition for many, permeating nearly every facet of our existence. This pervasive stress doesn't simply disappear after a long day at the office; instead, it follows us home, seeps into our personal lives, and quietly chips away at our overall well-being. The consequences of this chronic stress are far-reaching, impacting not only our physical and mental health but also significantly affecting our work performance, the quality of our relationships, and our ability to find joy and fulfillment in our personal lives.

Perceived stress in relationships refers to the level of stress that individuals feel in a relationship, based on their personal perceptions and experiences of the relationship's dynamics. It's not necessarily about the objective or actual stressors present, but how a person interprets or reacts to them. In relationships, perceived stress can be influenced by various factors, including communication problems, unmet expectations, conflicts, financial issues, emotional distance, or lack of support.

For example, if one partner feels unsupported during a challenging time, they may perceive this as a significant stressor, even if the other partner doesn't see it as a big issue. This perception can affect emotional well-being and the overall health of the relationship. Chronic perceived stress in a relationship can lead to feelings of frustration, anxiety, or even burnout, potentially affecting relationship satisfaction and longevity.

### ***Frustration Tolerance***

It's very common to encounter situations that don't go our way. Life inevitably presents us with situations that don't align with our expectations, from minor daily irritations to significant setbacks. Life is full of moments that can lead to frustration. How we navigate these moments hinges on our frustration tolerance, a crucial aspect of emotional regulation. Think about the last time you were stuck in traffic, had a technology glitch, or faced an unexpected change in plans. These are everyday examples of situations that can test our patience. Everyone experiences frustration, but the degree to which it affects us varies significantly. In our contemporary, fast-paced world, where instant gratification is often the norm, many individuals find their patience wearing thin. Social media, constant connectivity, and the pressure to achieve can contribute to a sense of urgency and intolerance for delays or setbacks.

Frustration tolerance, simply put, is the ability to endure feelings of frustration without becoming overwhelmed or resorting to destructive behaviors; it's the capacity to persist

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despite delays, obstacles and disappointments. Essentially, it's how well you can handle things not going your way. Those with high frustration tolerance can manage their emotions effectively, problem-solve constructively, and maintain perspective, while those with low tolerance may react impulsively, become easily angered, or give up quickly. It is a learned skill, and can be improved. Frustration tolerance plays a crucial role in healthy relationships. This skill is particularly vital in relationships, where it significantly influences interpersonal dynamics. Individuals with high frustration tolerance are better equipped to handle conflicts and disagreements, fostering healthier connections. Conversely, low tolerance can lead to increased arguments, difficulty resolving conflicts, and impulsive reactions. The prevalence of instant gratification, social media pressures, increased stress levels, and diminished in-person social skills contribute to a decline in frustration tolerance in modern times. This, in turn, impacts relationships by increasing conflict, hindering long-term commitments, and fostering a reliance on superficial connections. Ultimately, cultivating frustration tolerance is essential for navigating the complexities of modern life and building meaningful, lasting relationships.

### ***Relationship Quality***

We all seek fulfilling connections, whether with partners, friends, or family. The desire for strong, supportive relationships is a fundamental human need. But not all relationships are created equal. Some bring joy, stability, and growth, while others are marked by conflict, dissatisfaction, and even pain. This difference lies in what we call "relationship quality."

Relationship quality refers to the overall assessment of a relationship's health and satisfaction. It encompasses various factors that contribute to a positive and fulfilling connection. It's not just about the absence of conflict, but rather the presence of positive attributes like trust, intimacy, communication, and mutual support. A high-quality relationship is characterized by a sense of security, emotional connection, and shared values. It involves feeling understood, accepted, and valued by the other person. Conversely, a low-quality relationship is marked by frequent conflict, emotional distance, lack of trust, and dissatisfaction.

Relationship quality profoundly influences our well-being. High-quality relationships contribute to our happiness, mental health, and even physical health. They provide a buffer against stress and offer a sense of belonging and support. On the other hand, poor-quality relationships can lead to anxiety, depression, and a diminished sense of self-worth.

In modern times, relationship quality faces unique challenges. While technology connects us in unprecedented ways, it can also create emotional distance and distractions. The constant barrage of information and social media comparisons can lead to unrealistic expectations and feelings of inadequacy. The fast-paced nature of modern life leaves less time and energy for nurturing relationships. Additionally, the rise of individualism and a focus on personal achievement can sometimes overshadow the importance of interdependence and mutual support.

Relationship quality can be poorer these days due to several factors. These include:

- **Technology and Social Media:** Constant connectivity can lead to distractions, reduced face-to-face interaction, and unrealistic comparisons.
- **Increased Stress and Time Constraints:** Busy schedules and work-life imbalances can leave little time for nurturing relationships.

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- **Changing Expectations:** Modern relationships often face higher expectations for fulfillment and personal growth.
- **Reduced Communication Skills:** Over reliance on digital communication can impede the ability to have healthy in person communication.
- **Individualism:** Increased focus on personal achievement can lead to a lack of compromise and mutual support.

Poor relationship quality directly affects the health and longevity of connections. It can lead to:

- Increased conflict and arguments.
- Emotional distance and loneliness.
- Decreased trust and intimacy.
- Increased likelihood of breakups and divorce.
- Negative impacts on mental and physical well-being.

Therefore, consciously cultivating positive communication, empathy, and mutual respect is vital for maintaining healthy and fulfilling relationships in the modern world.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Research has consistently shown that psychological stress can adversely affect interpersonal relationships. According to Randall and Bodenmann (2009), stress not only impacts individual well-being but also spills over into dyadic interactions, reducing relationship satisfaction. Karney and Bradbury (1995) observed that chronic stress contributes to negative communication patterns and conflict escalation among couples.

Perceived stress, as defined by Cohen et al. (1983), is the extent to which individuals view their life circumstances as overwhelming or uncontrollable. South et al. (2010) found that higher levels of perceived stress predict lower relationship satisfaction and greater emotional disengagement. Similarly, Whisman and Uebelacker (2009) reported a strong link between stress and depressive symptoms in couples with discordant relationships.

Frustration tolerance, though less extensively studied, is another critical factor in relationship health. Ellis (2003), who developed the concept within Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), emphasized that low frustration tolerance contributes to impulsive reactions and conflict. Baucom et al. (2008) extended this view, arguing that emotional regulation capacities like frustration tolerance predict couples' ability to manage disagreements constructively.

In a systematic review, Sighinolfi et al. (2014) found that poor emotion regulation, including low frustration tolerance, was associated with decreased relationship satisfaction across cultures. The increasing prevalence of instant gratification and digital communication has further eroded frustration tolerance, leading to lower commitment and conflict resolution skills (Simpson & Overall, 2014).

Relationship quality, a multidimensional construct including satisfaction, intimacy, and commitment, has been shown to buffer the negative effects of stress. Arriaga and Agnew (2001) demonstrated that committed relationships are more resilient to stress-related deterioration. However, when individuals lack coping mechanisms, stress and frustration can overwhelm relationship resources (Bodenmann, 2005).

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While the individual variables of perceived stress, frustration tolerance, and relationship quality have been examined in previous studies, there remains a gap in understanding how these variables interact within different relationship types. This study attempts to address that gap by comparing married and unmarried romantic couples on these dimensions.

### METHOD

#### *Participants*

The study included 200 participants (100 married and 100 in dating/romantic relationships), aged between 18 and 35 years ( $M = 27.75$ ,  $SD = 4.36$ ). Participants were recruited through social media platforms, online forums, community centers, and university campuses. Inclusion criteria required participants to be fluent in English and in a romantic relationship (married 2–5 years, cohabiting, or dating). Participants with diagnosed psychiatric conditions or anxiety disorders were excluded. A non-experimental, quantitative design was used.

**Procedure:** A convenience sampling technique was employed. Participants completed an online survey administered via Google Forms. All participants provided informed consent prior to participation. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study.

#### *Measures*

- **Socio-demographic Data Sheet:** Collected participants' age, gender, education, occupation, relationship duration, and marital status.
- **Perceived Stress Scale (PSS):** A 10-item self-report tool developed by Cohen et al. (1983) measuring perceived stress.
- **Frustration Discomfort Scale (FDS):** A 28-item scale assessing frustration intolerance, developed using rational-emotive behavior theory.
- **Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS):** A 7-item instrument evaluating satisfaction in romantic relationships.

**Data Analysis:** Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 26.0. Descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlations, and independent samples t-tests were conducted.

### RESULTS

The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between perceived stress, frustration tolerance, and relationship quality in the context of marital and romantic relationships. The sample comprised 200 participants, equally divided between married individuals and those in non-marital romantic relationships. Descriptive statistics, correlation analyses, and independent samples t-tests were conducted using SPSS to examine the data.

*Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for Married and Unmarried Individuals*

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD
Perceived Stress (PSS)	Married	100	19.90	6.79
	Unmarried (Dating)	100	15.91	6.08
Relationship Quality (RAS)	Married	100	24.77	7.36
	Unmarried (Dating)	100	29.40	5.03
Frustration Discomfort (FDS)	Married	100	87.61	15.02
	Unmarried (Dating)	100	82.58	12.97

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Descriptive statistics revealed distinct patterns across the two groups. Married individuals reported a higher mean score on the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS;  $M = 19.90$ ,  $SD = 6.79$ ) compared to unmarried individuals in romantic relationships ( $M = 15.91$ ,  $SD = 6.08$ ), indicating that married participants perceived their lives to be more stressful. Regarding relationship quality, as measured by the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS), unmarried individuals scored higher ( $M = 29.40$ ,  $SD = 5.03$ ) than their married counterparts ( $M = 24.77$ ,  $SD = 7.36$ ), suggesting greater satisfaction, intimacy, and commitment in dating relationships. On the Frustration Discomfort Scale (FDS), married individuals again scored higher ( $M = 87.61$ ,  $SD = 15.02$ ) than unmarried individuals ( $M = 82.58$ ,  $SD = 12.97$ ), indicating lower frustration tolerance in the married group.

**Table 2 - Correlation Matrix for Key Variables  
Unmarried (Dating) Individuals**

Variables	PSS	FDS	RAS
Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)	-----	.218	-.484
Frustration Discomfort Scale (FDS)		----	-.022
Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS)			----

**Married Individuals**

Variables	PSS	FDS	RAS
Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)	-----	.534	-.616
Frustration Discomfort Scale (FDS)		----	-.469
Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS)			----

*Note:*  $p < .05$ ,  $p < .001$

Correlation analyses further illuminated the relationships among the variables. In unmarried individuals, perceived stress was significantly and negatively correlated with relationship quality ( $r = -0.484$ ,  $p < .001$ ), while it was positively correlated with frustration discomfort ( $r = 0.218$ ,  $p = .031$ ). There was no significant relationship between frustration discomfort and relationship quality ( $r = -0.022$ ,  $p = .827$ ). In contrast, among married individuals, perceived stress had a stronger negative correlation with relationship quality ( $r = -0.616$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and a stronger positive correlation with frustration discomfort ( $r = 0.534$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Additionally, frustration discomfort was significantly and negatively correlated with relationship quality ( $r = -0.469$ ,  $p < .001$ ), highlighting a more interconnected dynamic among the variables in the married group.

**Table 3 Independent Samples t-Test Results Between Married and Unmarried Individuals**

Variable	t	df	p-value	Mean Difference
Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)	-4.335	194	<.001	-3.99
Frustration Discomfort Scale (FDS)	5.144	194	<.001	4.63
Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS)	-2.509	194	0.13	-5.03

Independent samples t-tests revealed significant differences between the two relationship groups. Married individuals reported significantly higher perceived stress than unmarried individuals,  $t(194) = -4.335$ ,  $p < .001$ . Similarly, they exhibited significantly higher frustration discomfort,  $t(194) = -2.509$ ,  $p = .013$ . In contrast, unmarried individuals reported significantly higher relationship quality,  $t(194) = 5.144$ ,  $p < .001$ . These findings confirm

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both proposed hypotheses and provide a comprehensive view of the interplay between stress, frustration, and relationship satisfaction across relational contexts.

### DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide empirical support for the hypothesized relationships among perceived stress, frustration tolerance, and relationship quality in both married and romantic relationships. The significant negative correlation between perceived stress and relationship quality in both groups confirms the first hypothesis. This relationship was stronger in the married group, suggesting that the cumulative demands and responsibilities associated with marriage may amplify the detrimental effects of stress on relational satisfaction. These results align with previous literature that has consistently demonstrated a negative link between stress and relationship functioning (Randall & Bodenmann, 2009; Neff & Karney, 2007).

The second hypothesis—that married individuals would report higher levels of perceived stress, lower frustration tolerance, and lower relationship quality compared to those in romantic relationships—was also supported. Married individuals reported significantly higher stress and frustration discomfort and significantly lower relationship satisfaction. This is consistent with research suggesting that marital relationships, while often fulfilling, can be characterized by higher levels of obligation, financial pressure, and life stressors, particularly in the early years (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). In contrast, romantic relationships may involve less shared responsibility and more focus on emotional connection and intimacy, which can enhance perceived relationship quality.

The findings of this study are in line with existing literature. Cohen and Williamson (1988) emphasized that higher perceived stress is linked with various adverse psychological outcomes, including strain on interpersonal relationships. Likewise, Karney and Bradbury (1995) discussed how stress acts as a barrier to effective communication and problem-solving in couples, potentially reducing relationship satisfaction.

Interestingly, the correlation patterns reveal that frustration tolerance plays a more significant role in married individuals. Among this group, frustration discomfort was negatively associated with relationship quality, indicating that the ability to handle frustration may be a crucial factor in maintaining marital satisfaction. This finding supports cognitive-behavioral models of relationship distress, which emphasize the role of emotional regulation in interpersonal interactions (Baucom, Epstein, LaTaillade, & Kirby, 2008).

The stronger associations among variables in the married group suggest a heightened interdependence between emotional well-being and relational health in long-term, committed partnerships. These findings highlight the importance of interventions focused on stress management and frustration tolerance, particularly for married couples, as a means of preserving relationship quality.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that perceived stress and frustration tolerance are key psychological factors influencing relationship satisfaction in both marital and non-marital romantic relationships. Married individuals are more vulnerable to the negative impacts of stress and frustration, which in turn diminish relationship quality. These results underscore

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the importance of fostering emotional resilience and stress regulation within intimate partnerships.

This study provides valuable insights into the complex relationship between stress, frustration tolerance, and relationship satisfaction. The findings suggest that **stress is a significant predictor of relationship quality**, reinforcing the importance of stress management in romantic relationships. While frustration tolerance correlates with relationship quality, it does not emerge as a strong predictor, indicating that other factors may mediate its effect.

These results have practical implications for **relationship counseling and stress management interventions**. Couples may benefit from stress-reduction techniques such as **mindfulness, emotional regulation strategies, and communication training** to mitigate the negative impact of stress on their relationships. Future research could further investigate the role of **coping mechanisms, emotional resilience, and the influence of external stressors** in shaping relationship quality over time.

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***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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