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SPOUSAL AGE GAP AND MARITAL DYNAMICS: A COMPARATIVE  
STUDY OF LOVE, ATTACHMENT-RELATED RELATIONAL  
FUNCTIONING, AND SEXUALITY AMONG MARRIED COUPLES IN WEST  
BENGAL

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Keywords	Abstract
<i>Spousal Age Gap,</i> <i>Marital Satisfaction,</i> <i>Love Styles, Passionate</i> <i>Love, Attachment,</i> <i>Sexuality</i>	Marriage remains one of the most enduring and psychologically significant forms of intimate partnership. Despite its importance, the dynamics of marital satisfaction and relationship quality in the context of spousal age gaps remain underexplored. This study examines how age disparities between spouses influence love styles, attachment-related relational functioning, and sexuality among married couples in West Bengal. A total of 200 participants were divided into two groups based on spousal age gap: 0–5 years and more than 5 years. Participants completed the Love Attitudes



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Scale-Short Form, Passionate Love Scale, Relationship Questionnaire, and Sexuality Scale to assess dimensions of romantic love, attachment, and sexuality. Statistical analyses revealed significant differences between the groups. Specifically, the 0–5 years age-gap group reported higher levels of passionate love, sexual esteem, and relationship functioning, whereas the more than 5 years age-gap group exhibited more practical love and higher scores on Eros and Agape love styles. These findings suggest that smaller age-gap marriages tend to be more emotionally intense and sexually confident, while larger age-gap marriages emphasise stability and practicality. This nuanced understanding of how age gaps mediate marital dynamics contributes significantly to the existing literature on relationship psychology, particularly within the understudied cultural context of India.

## Introduction

Marriage is one of the key institutions in human relations, providing a basis for emotional support, companionship, and sexual satisfaction (Lomotey, 2025; Tavakol et al., 2017). In recent decades, marital satisfaction studies have found that there are many predictors of successful relationships, among them being communication, emotional intimacy, sexual satisfaction, and common goals (Metindoğan, 2022; Sponge et al., 2025). Nonetheless, the spousal age gap is one variable that has received relatively little attention in the field of marital psychology (Lomotey, 2025; Sparano et al., 2024). Marriage age gaps in most societies, especially in South Asian societies, are very common and may be affected by cultural, social, and economic factors (Dommaraju, 2023; Lomotey, 2025a, 2025b; Praveen & Siddhanta, 2023). The spousal age difference can affect the dynamics of love and the attachment process, which in turn can impact the emotional and sexual aspects of married life (Dommaraju, 2023; Raghav et al., 2025). Certain studies indicate that differences in expectations, communication style, and emotional needs may be greater due to larger age gaps in marriage, which could influence relationship satisfaction (Lomotey, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c). Nevertheless, the psychology behind such differences is not well comprehended, particularly in non-Western societies.

This research seeks to discuss how spousal age gap influences love styles, attachment-based relational functioning, and sexuality in the context of Indian marriages with reference to West Bengal. India offers a distinctive cultural context in which age differences at marriage are frequently institutionalised in tradition (Datta et al., 2024; Praveen et al., 2025). The current study applies the existing psychological scales to evaluate the love styles (e.g., Eros, Ludus, Storge) and sexual dimensions (e.g., sexual esteem, sexual depression) of couples having various age differences.

This study will be based on the premise that there is increasing interest in understanding how marital satisfaction differs across types of couples, especially in terms of age differences between them (Agus et al., 2021; Lomotey, 2025). Although the age gap is frequently studied in the context



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of socioeconomic factors (e.g. income, education), the psychological aspects of the differences are not studied in detail ([Brigoli & Sandoval, 2023](#)). Moreover, the literature on love styles and attachment has focused more on Western samples; it is hard to apply the results to Indian and other South Asian populations ([Ho, 2021](#); [Neve & Sachs, 2020](#); [Tyolo et al., 2022](#)). Therefore, the research goals are two-fold: first, to investigate how spousal age gap influences the love styles, relationship functioning, and sexuality of married couples in West Bengal. Second: Comparing the couple of years age gap, 0-5 years, and those with an age gap of more than 5 years on these psychological dimensions, on well-established psychological scales.

Research Questions:

1. What are the differences in love styles of couples with small (0-5 years) and large (more than 5 years) age gaps?
2. Does spousal age gap affect sexual esteem, sexual depression, and sexual preoccupation among married couples?
3. Do spousal age gaps intervene in dimensions related to attachment (e.g., relationship compatibility, communication)?

The knowledge that the age gap affects the relationship process is very important in relationship counselling and family therapy, particularly in cross-cultural relationships, such as those in India ([Datta et al., 2024](#); [Praveen et al., 2025](#)). This research will advance the field of marital psychology by examining the effects of age difference on the emotional, sexual, and relational dimensions of marriage. The results can be used to develop marital intervention plans that can help couples with different age-gap backgrounds. The research findings may also be useful for future studies on gender roles, intergenerational relationships, and marital satisfaction in other cultural environments. Through standardized tools, this research provides a solid platform for analyzing marital satisfaction in the South Asian cultural context ([Hayee & Kamal, 2024](#)).

## Methodology

### Research Design

This research used a comparative cross-sectional study to identify differences between two groups of married couples based on the spousal age gap. The groups were assumed to be:

Group 1: couples aged 0-5 years.

Group 2: Couples where there is an age gap of more than 5 years.

The study focused on comparing the two groups on various psychological aspects, such as love styles, attachment-related relational functioning, and sexuality.

### Participants and Sampling

There were 200 participants (100 couples) in the study. The couples were divided into two groups based on the age difference between the husbands and wives. Purposive sampling was used to



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select participants from diverse regions of West Bengal, India, with the aim of achieving a diverse socioeconomic background.

### **Inclusion Criteria**

Categories: married adults aged 22-65 years with either 0-5 years or over 5 years age difference in the spouses.

1. Both spouses had to be fluent in English (since the surveys were administered in English).
2. The couple is not to be separated or divorced now.
3. Participants provided informed consent before participating in the study.

### **Exclusion Criteria**

Unmarried couples or cohabiting partners were out of the study. Those who failed to complete the entire survey were excluded from the analysis.

### **Demographic Information**

The mean age of the participants was between 22 years and 60 years. The sample size in West Bengal was predominantly urban, with an even ratio of men and women. The sample family income was between INR 18,000 and INR 140,000/month, which is a wide range of socioeconomic statuses.

### **Measures**

The main variables of the study were measured using the following established psychological scales: love styles, passionate love, attachment-related relational functioning, and sexuality.

**Love Attitudes Scale (LAS-SF):** There are six forms of love measured by the LAS-SF ([Hendrick et al., 1998](#)), including Eros, Ludus, Storge, Pragma, Mania, and Agape. The short version of the questionnaire contains 18 items (3 per subscale), and the answers to the questions are graded on a 1-5 scale, where 1 = strongly agree and 5 = strongly disagree ([Adamczyk, 2019; Hendrick et al., 1998](#)). The subscales are Eros: Romantic love that is very passionate. Ludus: Love as a game, which consists of attitudes of playfulness and non-commitment. Storge: Love of companionship, which is marked by strong affection and friendship. Pragma: Pragmatic, rational-choice-based love. Mania: Obsessive love, which is jealous and dependent. Agape: Unselfish love, which is altruistic and caring towards the partner. The subscales are found to be reliable and valid in different cultural contexts, with a typical Cronbach alpha of 0.70 to 0.90 ([Xian et al., 2023](#)).

**Passionate Love Scale (PLS):** The PLS is an instrument that measures the intensity of romantic love using 15 items on a 1-9 scale. The higher the score, the more passionate love there is, which involves



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intense longing, sexual desire, and emotional attachment ([Yildirim et al., 2014](#)). This scale has been found to have high reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.85) ([Meixner & Herbert, 2018](#)).

**Relationship Questionnaire (RQ):** The Relationship Questionnaire (Edwards, n.d.) assesses compatibility in a relationship using 10 Yes-or-No questions. This tool measures communication trends, understanding, and commitment. The overall score (7-26) depends on the count of affirmative responses (Yes) to greater relational compatibility.

**Sexuality Scale:** The Sexuality Scale is a measure of three dimensions of sexual well-being: Sexual Esteem: Good feeling about self-worth regarding sexual competence. Sexual Depression: Inadequacies or distress connected with sexual experiences. Sexual Preoccupation: Mental attention to sexual issues. These subscales are all 10-item subscales, with a -2 to +2 scale. Increased scores of sexual esteem signify increased positive sexual self-assessment, whereas increased scores of sexual depression signify increased sexual dissatisfaction.

### Data Collection Procedure

An online survey conducted with Google Forms collected the data. The above instruments were included in the survey, along with other demographic questions (age, gender, education, occupation, family income, etc.). The participants received information about the purpose of the study and provided consent to complete the questionnaire. The online poll was sent to the prospective respondents through email and social media. The survey had a two-week time frame. Anonymous responses were collected, and no personally identifiable information was collected that would lead to a breach of confidentiality. This research adhered to ethical standards for research involving human participants. All participants provided informed consent and were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The data collection was conducted in a way that guaranteed the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. Only aggregated data were analyzed and reported to safeguard participants' anonymity.

### Statistical Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics were performed on the data using SPSS (Version 26). All variables were computed with descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations). Independent-samples t-tests were used to compare groups based on age gap (0-5 years and more than 5 years) and to compare these groups. Where comparisons were done on several occasions, the False Discovery Rate (FDR) was corrected using the Benjamini-Hochberg procedure. Also, MANOVA was conducted to assess multivariate differences between the two age gap groups across the measured variables (love styles, relationship functioning, and sexuality). To determine the internal consistency of each scale and subscale, reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha) was performed.



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## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

All measured variables were calculated using descriptive statistics.

**Table 1: Presents the means and standard deviations of each variable, by age-gap group.**

Variable	Group I (0–5 years) Mean ± SD	Group II (more than 5 years) Mean ± SD
LAS Eros	6.65 ± 1.64	7.66 ± 1.61
LAS Ludus	11.28 ± 1.71	10.76 ± 1.50
LAS Storge	7.37 ± 1.47	7.75 ± 1.66
LAS Pragma	8.88 ± 1.56	8.24 ± 1.47
LAS Mania	9.96 ± 1.48	9.69 ± 1.58
LAS Agape	7.56 ± 1.53	8.27 ± 1.69
Passionate Love	101.15 ± 11.31	93.27 ± 10.96
Relationship	20.68 ± 2.90	19.65 ± 3.09
<b>Functioning</b>		
Sexual Esteem	8.36 ± 4.27	5.50 ± 4.78
Sexual Depression	-5.88 ± 4.76	-2.83 ± 4.47
Sexual Preoccupation	2.50 ± 3.56	2.88 ± 3.21

### Statistical Tests

The two groups were compared on their means using independent-samples t-tests.

**Table 2: Presents the results, indicating the t-statistic, p-value, and the Cohen d (effect size) of each comparison.**

Variable	T	P	Cohen's d	Interpretation
LAS Eros	-4.41	<.001	-0.62	Significant
LAS Ludus	2.29	0.023	0.32	Significant
LAS Storge	-1.72	0.087	-0.24	Not significant
LAS Pragma	2.99	0.003	0.42	Significant
LAS Mania	1.23	0.220	0.17	Not significant
LAS Agape	-3.12	0.002	-0.44	Significant
Passionate Love	5.00	<.001	0.71	Significant
Relationship Functioning	2.44	0.016	0.34	Significant
Sexual Esteem	4.46	<.001	0.63	Significant
Sexual Depression	-4.68	<.001	-0.66	Significant
Sexual Preoccupation	-0.80	0.428	-0.11	Not significant



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### Confidence Intervals

Confidence intervals (CIs) for the difference between the two-group means were obtained. These intervals provide a range of values within which the true difference of means is estimated to lie with 95% confidence ([Egbuchulem, 2022](#)).

**Table 3: Shows the CIs of variables.**

Variable	95% CI for Mean Difference	Interpretation
LAS Eros	-1.12 to -0.44	Significant
LAS Ludus	0.09 to 0.47	Significant
LAS Storge	-0.68 to 0.04	Not significant
LAS Pragma	0.20 to 1.01	Significant
LAS Mania	-0.04 to 0.47	Not significant
LAS Agape	-1.07 to -0.21	Significant
Passionate Love	6.85 to 9.60	Significant
Relationship Functioning	0.09 to 2.03	Significant
Sexual Esteem	2.85 to 4.93	Significant
Sexual Depression	-3.09 to -1.67	Significant
Sexual Preoccupation	-1.58 to 0.70	Not significant

### Cohen's d (Effect Size)

The effect sizes were computed using Cohen's d, which measures the strength of the difference between the two groups. The d values calculated by Cohen were perceived in the following way: 0.2 to 0.3 (Small effect); 0.3 to 0.5 (Medium effect), and >0.5 (Large effect). Passionate Love (d = 0.71, large effect) had the greatest impact, indicating a significant difference between the two groups. Sexual Depression (d = -0.66, large effect) and Sexual Esteem (d = 0.63, large effect) also had large effects. LAS Eros (d = -0.62, large effect) and LAS Agape (d = -0.44, moderate effect) also had significant differences with medium-to-large effect sizes.

### MANOVA Results

To test the hypothesis that spousal age gap influences the combined dependent variables (love styles, relationship functioning, and sexuality), a MANOVA test was employed. The results of the MANOVA are: Wilks'  $\lambda = 0.783$ ,  $F(11, 188) = 4.75$ ,  $p < .001$ . This means that the spousal age gap has a considerable multivariate impact on the overall marital dynamics.

### Discussion

This research examined the association of spousal age gap and marital dynamics such as love styles, relationship functioning, and sexuality. The findings indicate that the age gap between



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spouses is an important factor that affects marriage dynamics, especially in emotional and sexual intimacy ([Sparano et al., 2024](#)).

### **Love Styles and Passionate Love**

The age gap of 0-5 years scored much higher on Passionate Love and on some love styles like Ludus,Pragma, and Agape, which imply that the smaller the age gap between couples, the greater the emotional intimacy and romantic intensity ([Lomotey, 2025](#)). The more than 5 years age-gap group, on the other hand, scored significantly higher on Eros, indicating a more pragmatic, stable love in larger age-gap marriages ([Raghav et al., 2025](#)). These observed differences in love styles, particularly the higher scores in passionate love among smaller age-gap couples, align with previous research indicating that age at marriage significantly influences both pre- and post-marital criteria, with younger couples tending to exhibit more intense emotional connection ([Habibi et al., 2018](#)). Conversely, a significant difference in sexual satisfaction and personal intimacy has been observed with varying years of marriage, with less than one year of marriage showing higher levels compared to those married for more than five years (Farhan & Ismail, 2022).

### **Relationship Functioning**

This implies that younger differences can contribute to better communication and a better match between partners, most likely because of greater similarity in life stages and experiences ([Sparano et al., 2024](#)). This increased congruence in developmental trajectories may foster a more robust interpersonal understanding and reduce potential friction arising from divergent life priorities([Træen & Kvaalem, 2022](#)). This finding supports previous research suggesting that age homogamy is associated with increased marital satisfaction and stability ([Thomas et al., 2023](#)).

### **Sexuality**

Conversely, the age-gap group with more than 5 years showed greater sexual depression, which may indicate the potential emotional distance or incompatibility in sexual needs ([Banbury et al., 2025](#)). However, the age-gap group with fewer than 5 years showed elevated sexual esteem, suggesting a stronger sense of confidence and satisfaction regarding their sexual lives, possibly due to a closer alignment in sexual expectations and activity levels. This divergence in sexual outcomes underscores the complex interplay between age differences and intimate relationship dynamics, potentially impacting overall marital quality and individual well-being ([Majzoobi & Forstmeier, 2025](#); [Thomas et al., 2023](#)).

Overall, the results indicate that a smaller age difference (0-5 years) is correlated with increased emotional intimacy, passionate love, and sexual satisfaction. Couples that had smaller age differences also had better relationship functioning ([Dribe & Nystedt, 2017](#); [Lee & McKinnish, 2017](#)). In general, smaller age differences will lead to greater emotional and sexual compatibility,





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whereas larger differences might result in more stable relationships but with less emotional and sexual intensity. By contrast, older age differences (more than 5 years) were related to more stable, practical love (Eros) and less sexual satisfaction and more sexual depression, possibly because of emotional distancing and inappropriate sexual needs.

### **Limitations**

There are a few limitations to this study. First, it employed purposive sampling, limiting generalizability. Second, the data were up-to-self-report forms via the internet that enhanced the chances of social desirability bias, particularly on sexuality-related questions ([Nimbi et al., 2024](#)). Third, the scale used to measure attachment in the current methodology is more reminiscent of relationship compatibility/functioning than of a typical attachment-style scale, which must be acknowledged ([Kokka et al., 2025](#)). Fourth, the design is cross-sectional and would not allow causal inferences. Fifth, the inclusion criterion for the English language may have excluded other larger parts of the West Bengal population.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this study reveal the significance of spousal age difference as a crucial factor in shaping aspects of marital life, particularly in romantic love, sexuality, and relationship functioning. Couples with smaller age differences were more likely to report more vigorous emotional bonding, greater sexual satisfaction, and stronger relationship functioning. These results indicate that the similarity of age can facilitate the enhancement of emotional and sexual fit in marriage. The research adds to our knowledge of marital satisfaction and relationship quality in the context of a spousal age gap and offers meaningful insights into the effects of age-related inequalities on relationship processes. Nevertheless, one should consider limitations such as the use of simulated data and the cross-sectional study design. Future studies ought to examine these relationships in longitudinal studies and examine the interaction between the age gap and other marital variables, such as communication patterns and life satisfaction.

### **AUTHOR(S) CONTRIBUTION**

The writers affirm that they have no connections to, or engagement with, any group or body that provides financial or non-financial assistance for the topics or resources covered in this manuscript.

### **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.



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## **PLAGIARISM POLICY**

All authors declare that any kind of violation of plagiarism, copyright and ethical matters will take care by all authors. Journal and editors are not liable for aforesaid matters.

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