

# Marital Adjustment Test (MAT)

15-item self-report measure

The Marital Adjustment Test (MAT), often referred to as the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Scale or the Short Marital Adjustment Test (SMAT), is a 15-item measure designed to assess marital adjustment in married couples. This original version of the measure includes items aimed at assessing the extent of agreement or disagreement between partners on several issues including sex, leisure and money. The measure also explores thoughts and feelings regarding the marriage and one's spouse.

	Internal consistency	Test-retest reliability	Validity	Sensitivity to change
Psychometric features	✓	✓	?	✓

	Brevity	Availability	Ease of Scoring	Used in the UK
Implementation features	✓	✓	✓	✓

\*Please note that our assessment of this measure is based solely on the English version of the MAT. Translated versions of this measure were not assessed and therefore it should not be assumed that they would receive the same rating.

## What is this document?

This assessment of the Marital Adjustment Test (MAT) has been produced by the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) as part of guidance on selecting measures relating to parental conflict and its impact on children. To read the full guidance report and download assessments of other measures, visit: <https://www.eif.org.uk/resource/measuring-parental-conflict-and-its-impact-on-child-outcomes>



- The MAT is one of the earliest relationship quality measures, which is still being used to this day. Questions have, however, been raised regarding whether some of the language and concepts remain relevant today (Freeston & Plechaty, 1997; Graham et al., 2011).
- We found insufficient evidence to establish that the MAT is a valid measure.

# About the measure

 <p><b>Author(s)/ developer(s)</b></p> <p>Locke, H.J., &amp; Wallace, K.M.</p>	 <p><b>Publication year for the original version of the measure</b></p> <p>1959</p>	 <p><b>Type of measure</b></p> <p>Self-report.</p>
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<b>Outcome(s) assessed</b>	This measure has been designed to assess marital adjustment in married couples.
<b>Subscales</b>	N/A
<b>Mode of administration</b>	This measure can be completed in person or via telephone interviews.
<b>Example item</b>	'State the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your mate on Handling Family Finances.'
<b>Target population</b>	This measure was originally developed for married couples.
<b>Response format</b>	<p>The MAT is comprised of varying response scales, including both ordinal and Likert scales.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Item 1 uses a 7-point Likert scale (from 'Very Unhappy' to 'Perfectly Happy').</li> <li>• Items 2–9 use a 6-point ordinal scale (from 'Always Agree' to 'Always Disagree').</li> <li>• Items 10 asks respondents to select one of three options.</li> <li>• Item 11 uses a 4-point ordinal scale (from 'All of Them' to 'None of Them')</li> <li>• Item 12 asks respondents to select one of two options in relation to themselves and their partner.</li> <li>• Items 13 uses a 4-point ordinal scale (from 'Frequently' to 'Never')</li> <li>• Item 14 and 15 asks respondents to select one of three options and one of four options, respectively.</li> </ul>

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**Strengths & limitations****Strengths:**

- The MAT is a reliable measure which is sensitive to change in short interventions.
- The MAT is free and easy to score, with the total score being the sum of the individual responses.

**Limitations:**

- We found insufficient evidence to establish that the MAT is a valid measure.
- The MAT is one of the earliest relationship quality measures (developed in the 1950s), with some items no longer appropriate to modern relationships (Freeston & Plechaty, 1997; Graham et al., 2011).
- According to some authors (Shapiro & Gottman, 2005), the MAT is inappropriate for assessing outcomes in most marital interventions. The reason for this contention is that there are two ways of getting a high score on this scale:
  1. to rate one's relationship as closer to perfectly happy (the scale ranges from 0 [very unhappy] to 15 [happy] to 35 [perfectly happy]);
  2. to be conflict averse and not disagree very much, rating the following items closer to agree (on a scale that ranges from always disagree to always agree): handling family finances, matters of recreation, demonstrations of affection, friends, sex relations, conventionality, philosophy of life, and ways of dealing with in-laws.

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**Link**

N/A

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**Contact details**

N/A

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**Copyright**

Based on our review of the evidence, it appears that the developers did not provide information on copyright. The key reference (included below) should be cited when using the measure.

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**Key reference(s)**

Locke, H.J., & Wallace, K.M. (1959). Short marital adjustment and prediction tests: Their reliability and validity. *Marriage and Family Living, 21*, 251–255.

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# Psychometric features in detail

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## Internal consistency



We found a number of papers (Freeston & Plechaty, 1997; Graham, Diebels, & Barnow, 2011; Grych et al., 2003; Harold et al., 2004; Jiang et al., 2013; Locke & Wallace, 1959; Shelton & Harold, 2008a; Shelton & Harold, 2008b) reporting good internal consistency for the MAT, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.62 to 0.90. Locke & Wallace (1959) examined internal consistency through the split-half technique and corrected the result by the Spearman-Brown formula. They reported that the final coefficient was 0.90. This study was conducted with a sample of 118 husbands and 118 wives from the Los Angeles area. The sample was primarily young, White, well educated and professional.

Freeston & Plechaty (1997) reported that in White et al. (1994) the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.69 for husbands and 0.72 for wives, and that in Cross & Sharpley (1981) the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.83. This study was conducted with a sample of 114 married caregivers (71.9% women, 96.5% employed, 56.2% currently employed). The average age of caregivers was 52 years (SD = 11.5), and they were married or in a relationship for an average of 23.8 years.

Graham, Diebels, & Barnow (2011) reported that the MAT had a mean Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.78. This study was a systematic review conducted with 1,031 selected studies.

Grych et al. (2003) reported that in their study the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.83 for husbands and 0.84 for wives. This study was conducted with a sample of 389 parents living in the UK. The sample was primarily White.

Harold et al. (2004) reported that the Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from 0.77 for husbands to 0.81 for wives. This study was conducted in the UK with a sample of 389 parents. 36% of mothers and 32.9% of fathers completed secondary education only, 29.8% of mothers and 37.9% of fathers completed university training.

Jiang et al. (2013) reported that the Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from 0.62 to 0.74. This study was conducted with a sample of 134 caregivers (71.9% female, 96.5% white, 56.2% currently employed) married to a patient with brain tumour. The average age of caregivers was 52 years (SD = 11.5), and the average length of the marriage was 23.8 years (SD = 14.3).

Shelton & Harold (2008a) reported that in their study the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.78 for husbands and 0.79 for wives. This study was conducted in the UK with a sample of 352 parents and teachers. The sample was primarily White European (99.1 %), with the remaining proportion (0.9%) of other nationality (e.g., India, Pakistan).

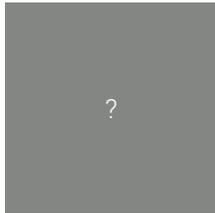
Shelton & Harold (2008b) reported that in their study the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.81 for husbands and 0.79 for wives. This study was conducted in the UK with a sample of 236 partners (given that the husbands and wives were not related spouses, the sample represents 236 marriages).

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**Test-retest reliability**

Coleman & Miller (1975) reported that test-retest reliability, measured over a one-month interval, was 0.82 for men ( $n = 37$ ) and 0.84 for women ( $n = 37$ ). This study was conducted with a clinical sample of 154 couples attending an outpatient mental health clinic in Canada (average age = 38.2 years for men and 35.2 years for women; average education = 8.1 years for men and 8.5 years for women; average length of marriage = 18.9 years).

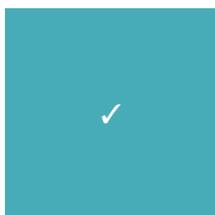
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**Validity**

Although the available evidence on the validity of the MAT is reassuring, we did not consider it sufficient to establish that the MAT is a valid measure.

The MAT has been evaluated by Coleman & Miller (1975) against the Beck Depression Inventory (21 items). The authors reported that the correlation coefficient between MAT and the Beck Depression Inventory was  $-0.38$  ( $df = 82$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Although the correlation was moderate, we would not expect high correlation between such measures given that they do not assess the same constructs. The correlation, furthermore, appeared consistent with the correlation between therapists' ratings of depression and marital maladjustment ( $r = 0.31$ ). The authors reported also a correlation coefficient of  $-0.48$  between MAT and the therapists' ratings of marital maladjustment, and a correlation coefficient of  $-0.52$  between MAT and the Biographical Data Sheet on Marital Conflict. This study was conducted with a clinical sample of 154 couples attending at an outpatient mental health clinic in Canada (average age = 38.2 years for men and 35.2 years for women; average education = 8.1 years for men and 8.5 years for women; average length of marriage = 18.9 years and average socioeconomic level = Class III).

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**Sensitivity to change**

There is evidence that the MAT can detect changes after participation in short communication and parenting interventions.

Anastopoulos (1993) reported that the MAT detected changes ( $F(1, 27) = 4.59$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) after participation in a parenting intervention. The authors conducted an RCT to evaluate the effectiveness of a nine-session behavioural parenting programme with regard to marital adjustment. The MAT results showed a significant difference favouring the intervention group. This study was conducted in the US with 32 mothers (mainly Caucasian and from the middle class).

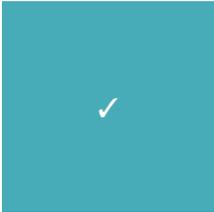
Shapiro & Gottman (2005) reported that the MAT detected changes after participation in a psycho-communicative-educational two-day couples' workshop with couples experiencing the transition to parenthood ( $F(1, 32) = 7.42$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ,  $t(32) = 2.53$ ,  $p < 0.02$ ). They reported that MAT stayed stable in the workshop group, but in the control group MAT results declined steadily and linearly for wives. This study was an RCT conducted in the US with a sample of 38 expectant and new parents from Seattle (12% Asian American couples, 5% Hispanic American couples, and 5% of other non-Euro-American background).

# Implementation features in detail

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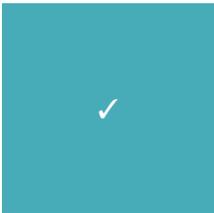
## Brevity

This measure has 15 items.



## Availability

From the papers we have assessed it appears that this measure is free to use and does not require a clinical licence.

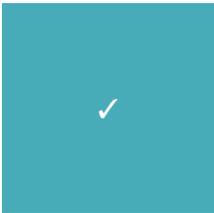


## Ease of scoring

The MAT has simple scoring instructions involving basic calculations. It does not need to be scored by someone with specific training or qualifications.

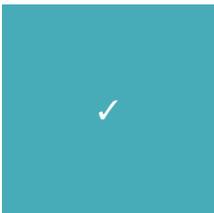
The total score is the sum of the responses' point values and can range from 0 to 158. Higher scores indicate higher levels of marital adjustment.

It is not clear if there is any information about the cut-offs of the MAT for the UK population; there are, however, cut-offs for the US population.



## Used in the UK

From our review, it appears that the MAT has been used in more than 2 UK studies (Grych et al., 2003; Harold et al., 2004; Shelton & Harold, 2008a; Shelton & Harold, 2008b).



<b>Language(s)</b>	The MAT is available in English but as far as we are aware, the developers did not translate the MAT into other languages. The measure has, however, been translated into Persian by people other than the developers (Freeston & Plechaty, 1997; Lim & Ivey, 2000; Sademi et al., 2012).
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## References

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