

**Marital adjustment of women with hearing disabilities In the light of some variables**

**Prepared by**



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## **Abstract**

This study explored marital adjustment of women with hearing disabilities in Tabuk, KSA. Participants were 20 married women with hearing disabilities who were chosen intentionally based on their consent. Using the descriptive correlational method, the authors administered the Marital Adjustment Scale (Abu-Mousa, 2008) to collect the required information about marital adjustment of married women with hearing disability. Statistical tests used in the treatment of data included the t-test, Mann-Whitney test, Wilcoxon test and Kruskal-Wallis test. Results revealed that participants had low level of marital adjustment. No significant differences in marital adjustment were found by severity of the disability, the husband's condition, age, the educational level and years of marriage.

**Keywords:** marital adjustment, women with hearing disability, marriage of persons with disabilities.

## **Introduction**

There are several types of disabilities, e.g., mental disability, hearing disability, visual disability and autism with each disability having unique characteristics. Research and daily communication with disability groups have shown that persons with intellectual disabilities, autism and multiple disabilities need special care and that they have difficulty establishing successful marital life. Persons with visual, hearing or motor disabilities, on the other hand, are closer to normal persons. All they need is to adapt to the disability. Like normal persons, persons with such disabilities think of having families. El-Waal (2008: 1) suggests that if disability does not prevent a person from assuming an active role in society, s/he has the right to have a family and live normally.

Like other social systems, marriage has social, cultural, economic, and educational goals. The spouses need to exert efforts, so marriage can continue successfully. Successful marital life depends on the extent to which the spouses adjust with emergent life changes. They need to flexibly change their social roles to suit the nature of marital life. Adjustment between spouses is positively reflected on children.

Children reared in families where there is adjustment between parents are more likely to be good citizens when they grow up. If the relationship between spouses is based on love, understanding and mutual care, marriage is more likely to be successful (Belkheir, 2017: 91).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Successful marriages of persons with hearing disabilities (deaf and hard of hearing) help to integrate them into society and to increase the likelihood of their having a safer future. If left to chance, such marriages can transfer disabilities to their children. Marriage is a human right that the constitution guarantees for all. However, the marriage of persons with disabilities needs to be researched (Abu Mousa, 2008: 4). This provided the impetus for conducting the present study that addressed the marital life of women with hearing disabilities. This issue is important because it has significant individual, familial and social reflections. It bears significance for persons with disabilities and for the society as a whole. Such an investigation can provide theoretical and empirical knowledge that can, if used judiciously, provide people with insight of how to make the marriage of persons with disabilities successful. This can contribute to the stability of marriages and in the same time reduce the likelihood of incoherent family relationships. Knowing about adjustment of spouses with disabilities and how to secure it can eliminate relationship-breaking factors that apply to marriage in general and those that are specific to the marriage of persons with disability. This is an important issue given the numerous problems that are prevalent in the contemporary family, e.g., family disintegration, spiritual and actual divorce and high incidence of familial violence (Al-Hattaniyah, 2015: 205-372). This study aimed to shed light on marital adjustment of women with hearing disabilities in Tabuk, KSA where the authors communicated with a number of women with hearing disabilities who were married or about to get married. Those women spoke about

problems with marital adjustment, which drove the authors to research the issue. Specifically, the study addressed the following questions:

1. What is the level of marital adjustment of women with hearing disabilities?
2. Are there significant differences in the marital adjustment of women with hearing disabilities by severity of disability, the husband's condition, the educational level, age and years of marriage?

### **Significance of the Study**

It is important to research the rights of persons with hearing disabilities, including their right to have families if their financial, professional and psychological capabilities are favorable. Persons with hearing disabilities are able to assume marriage responsibilities whenever they meet the conventional conditions of marriage, e.g., equivalence and the ability to bear the responsibility of having a family. Successful marriage enables persons with hearing disabilities to achieve themselves, integrate in their communities and maximize their potentials. Marriage also protects them from any sexual or behavioral deviations that may interfere with their social and psychological functioning. The impetus to do this research stemmed from the authors' conviction of the importance of the psychological and social stability of women with hearing disabilities. The study is hopefully expected to provide research information and experiences in the field of the marriage of persons with disabilities. This research-based knowledge can be used when developing counseling programs for women with disabilities who are about to get married. This training can prepare them to have successful marriages. This study is hopefully expected to add to research into the social life of persons with disabilities. To the best of the authors' knowledge, no previous studies addressed marital adjustment of persons with hearing disabilities in Tabuk.

### **Aims of the Study**

- Enriching studies in the field of social adjustment of women with disabilities by exploring their marital adjustment.
- Identifying differences in the marital adjustment of women with disabilities by severity of disability (deaf and hard of hearing), the husband's condition, the educational level, age and years of marriage.
- Providing workers in the field of special education, family counseling, and social service with information about the marital adjustment of persons with disabilities.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

The study was conducted on a sample of married women with hearing disabilities in Tabuk, KSA during the year 2019.

### **Literature Review**

Marriage is a biological and social necessity. It is the basis for having a family for Muslims and most people from other religions. If successful, marriage is a source of happiness for the wife, the husband and children. Islam and contemporary psychology consider marriage the basis of the mental health of the spouses who, if in harmony, support each other psychologically. Marital adjustment is a reflection of positive social interaction between the spouses. Marriage which is a reciprocal relationship between two persons with independent personalities entails mutual understanding in order to be successful (Hudebel, 2011: 227).

Like normal persons, persons with hearing disabilities have the right to get married and have a family. Marriage is their means to achieve psychological and emotional stability away from undesirable behaviors. However, the marriage of persons with disabilities arouses many tensions given that they have limited capabilities with current living conditions. Furthermore, families have negative attitude towards the marriage of persons with disabilities, as they believe the disability will lead to the failure of marriage. They also have the fear that marriage of persons with disabilities will transfer disabilities to children (Al-Hawari, 75: 2019).

Marriage is an important issue for persons with disabilities who have the right to a decent life. Most laws in different countries guarantee the right of persons with disabilities to have families and children. This right and others have recently captured the interest of people working with this group. Also, there has been a growing recognition of the rights of persons with disabilities and the importance of improving the quality of their life (Al-Sanhouri 1: 2009).

Marital adjustment is an important factor of successful marriage and an indicator of mental health in the family. It refers to the ability of the spouses to adapt to marital life. This concept has emerged recently with social changes that have come to focus on human adjustment. Adjustment refers to the ability to adapt to oneself "psychological adjustment" and to the social environment "social adjustment". It is an ongoing process by which a kind of balance is set between the individual and his environment (Solyman, 2005: 20). As to marriage, it is a concept that is based on two criteria: legitimacy and the intention to continue in the relationship. Legitimacy is imposed by divine legislation or secular law. The intention to continue the relationship begins with publicity of marriage (Abu Amrah, 2011: 26). Marriage is a social arrangement for a permanent relationship between men and women to regulate intimate human relations, including satisfaction of the sexual needs of the spouses in a legitimate way. This relationship is characterized by a degree of stability and conformity to social standards. It is the means by which the society organizes and secures a number of responsibilities and rights, e.g., sexual intercourse, the rights of the wife, the rights of the husband, reproduction and inheritance. Marital adjustment means relative agreement between the spouses in their marital relationship and positive interaction in achieving common goals of their marital lives. (El-Khouli, 2016: 55).

Studies reported that about 95% of Deaf persons prefer to get married to persons from their group, so they can communicate with one another using the sign language.

They view themselves as a distinctive group and marriages among them are stable because of their shared mode of communication (Al-Hawari, 75: 2019). A number of studies addressed the issue of marital adjustment of persons with disabilities in different societies. Al-Hawari (2019) explored marital adjustment and communication in a sample of mixed Deaf spouses in Gaza. Results reported a high level of marital adjustment and communication between the normal husband and his Deaf wife. The level of marital adjustment and communication between the normal wife and her Deaf husband was average. Significant differences in marital adjustment and communication were found between normal husbands and Deaf wives on hand and normal wives and Deaf husbands on the other in favor of the latter. The study also revealed a positive effect of marital adjustment on family communication among mixed Deaf spouses.

Muayyad (2018) studied marital adjustment and its relation to self-esteem of persons with motor disabilities in Bethlehem and Hebron in the light of some independent variables: gender, age, place of residence, educational level, severity of disability and governorate. Results showed that marital adjustment of persons with motor disabilities in Bethlehem and Hebron was high. Statistically significant differences were found in marital adjustment in favor of males. No statistically significant differences in marital adjustment were found by age, educational level, severity of disability and governorate. As to self-esteem, there were significant differences by place of residence and educational level. However, no significant differences in self-esteem were found by gender, age, and severity of disability. A positive correlation was found between marital adjustment and self-esteem. Finally, marital adjustment proved to have a strong effect on the self-esteem of people with motor disabilities. Arezoo et al., (2018) investigated the effect of training on life skills on the marital satisfaction of Deaf women in the Iranian Deaf Association (IDA). Results revealed that training on life skills improved marital satisfaction among the Deaf.

Al-Ma'ayta (2015) explored the level of marital adjustment and the attitude towards disabilities among families of children with hearing disabilities and its relation to the achievement motivation of their children with hearing disabilities. The level of marital adjustment and the attitude towards disabilities were moderate. Furthermore, a weak positive relationship was found between marital adjustment and the attitude towards disabilities on one hand and achievement motivation of children on the other. In a study (Sofie et al., 2016) titled 'Deaf and unwanted? Marriage characteristics of deaf people in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Belgium: a comparative and cross-regional approach', the marriage characteristics of Deaf men and women born in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Belgium are compared to each other, as well as to a group of non-deaf siblings and a group of Swedish deaf persons. The aim is to determine the extent to which the marriage pattern of Deaf persons lined up with that of non-disabled persons and to see how experiences of disablement interacted with the environment in which persons dwelt. This article challenges the belief in a universal disability experience by arguing that although deaf individuals generally encountered more difficulties in finding a marriage partner, marriage chances were significantly dependent on personal characteristics such as gender, living environment and birth date.

Al-Jaafara (2016) sought to identify the attitude of families towards the marriage of their children with disabilities and its relation to quality of life. The attitude was found to be negative. The relationship between the attitude of families towards the marriage of their children with disabilities and the level of quality of life was negative and unaffected by gender and type of disability. Mosier (1999) assessed similarities and differences in marital adjustment between Deaf-Deaf and Deaf-hearing married couples. Although there were no statistically significant differences between the two groups, Deaf-Deaf couples tended to have higher marital adjustment mean scores than Deaf-hearing couples. Deaf-hearing females reported the lowest



levels of marital adjustment. A qualitative component of the study yielded information concerning what Deaf-Deaf and Deaf-hearing couples consider the most important factors contributing to marital happiness. Both Deaf-Deaf and Deaf-hearing couples reported that language and cultural compatibility is the most important quality of a successful marriage.

Tambs (1992) explored the husband's perceptions of the effect of his partner's hearing impairment on their relationship. The majority of participants identified a number of communication difficulties during their marriage, e.g., repeating themselves extensively in conversation with their hearing impaired partners (97%), raising the volume of their voices (83%), and the need to maintain direct contact with their spouse (74%). These difficulties also led to negative feelings in marriage. Sixty nine percent of participants reported feeling frustrated because of the difficulties they faced owing to the partner's hearing impairment. Seventy one percent of participants reported anxiety or fear about the safety of their hearing impaired partners, e.g., not hearing alarms or warning bells. Participants also reported that a partner's hearing impairment could develop negative feelings in marriage. Therefore, audiologists should be aware of the perceptions of hearing spouses when providing auditory rehabilitation for spouses with hearing impairment and their partners, which can prevent dissonance in marriage.

In their study with the title 'Marital status and birthrate of Deaf people in two Swedish counties: the impact of social environment in terms of Deaf community', Carlsson, Danermark and Borg (2005) recorded the birthrate and the proportions of married and divorced people among Deaf people in two Swedish counties: Narke, which had a strong Deaf community, and Varmland, whose Deaf community was weak. In both counties, the authors found that deafness was associated with low marriage rates and low birthrates. Further, in Narke, 99% of the people in the sample were married to another deaf person; only 10% were in Varmland. In Narke, the

divorce rate among Deaf people was about the same as that of the reference population (i.e., the county's marriage-age population). In Varmland, Deaf people had a relatively low divorce rate.

### Method

The descriptive correlational method was used in the study. The research population was married women with hearing disabilities in Tabuk, KSA. The researchers could not find a reliable source identifying the number of married women with hearing disabilities in the population of Tabuk. A total of 20 married women with hearing disabilities (Deaf and hard of hearing) participated in the study. They were intentionally selected. The following table lists their characteristics.

Table 1. Characteristics of the sample

Severity of Disability		Husband's Condition			Educational Level				
Deaf	Hard of hearing	Deaf	Hearing	Illiterate	Elementary	Intermediate	Secondary	University	
16	4	11	9	3	3	4	10	0	

### The Instrument

The Marital Adjustment Scale developed by Abu Mousa (2008) was used for the collection of required data about marital adjustment of women with hearing disabilities. It consists of three dimensions: (1) affection, love, and understanding, (2) marital satisfaction and happiness and (3) the ability to solve marital disputes. The authors validated the scale in the present study. Its validity was checked by computing correlations among items and total scores of the dimensions they belonged to (internal consistency). The correlation coefficients ranged between 0.40 and 0.80. Reliability was established using alpha Cronbach. Reliability coefficients ranged

between 0.960 and 0.979. All validity and reliability values were high, hence indicating that the scale was valid and reliable.

**Results:**

*The level of marital adjustment of women with hearing disabilities*

To identify the level of marital adjustment of married women with hearing disabilities, Wilcoxon Tests was used. These results are shown in table 2.

Table 2. Wilcoxon test for the level of marital adjustment of married women with hearing disabilities

Variable		Sample Size	Mean of ranks	Sum of ranks	Z- Value	Probability	Result
Marital adjustment	Neg. Ranks	13 <sup>a</sup>	14.00	182.00			Low
	Pos. Ranks	7 <sup>b</sup>	4.00	28.00	-2.883 <sup>a</sup>	.004	

It is clear from table 2 that the level of marital adjustment of participants was low. This finding is consistent with the study of Tambs (1992) where hearing spouses reported problems of communication with their partners with hearing disabilities, e.g., repeating themselves extensively in conversation with their hearing impaired partners (97%), raising the volume of their voices (83%), and the need to maintain direct contact with their partners (74%). These problems reduced the level of adjustment between spouses. This finding is somehow inconsistent with the studies of Muayyad (2018) and Al-Ma'ayta (2015) where adjustment of spouses with hearing disabilities was moderate. This finding is nonetheless inconsistent with the finding reached by Al-Hawari' (2019) where a high level of marital adjustment and communication was found among Deaf spouses with Deaf or hearing partners. Other studies reporting an inconsistent finding were the studies conducted by Zahran

(2003), Attayb (1988) and Khair (2011). All three studies are cited in Khaled and Moaz (2018)

This result can be explained by the fact that participants had a number of negative feelings about their marriage. They conveyed these feelings in meetings and discussions with the two authors. Many participants had the fear that their marriage could fail owing to effects of their disability. Some of them reported that marriage for them was a dream that they thought would not come true. When they got married, they were afraid that their dream would turn into a nightmare. One of them commented "I thought I would never marry". Another said "I was terrified that my marriage would be a complete failure and that things would be rather difficult". Such feelings might have resulted in their having a sense of insecurity about their marriage. These fears and negative feelings undoubtedly interfered with their marital adjustment.

It seems that disability had a negative impact on participants' self-satisfaction, which, in turn, reduced their marital satisfaction. Participants also reported facing many problems in their marital life that they could not adapt to or solve. One of them said "there are problems that we leave unsolved hoping that time will solve it or that someone else will solve for us". Furthermore, they reported that they did not receive support from their partners in order to overcome the problems they faced with their marital life. In addition to problems caused by the disability, they reported facing many of the problems that normal spouses face. In sum, the authors concluded from the participants' comments that they were not confident about their ability to make a happy family. Logically, this expected failure interferes with the marital adjustment of married women with hearing disabilities.

Abu Mousa (2008) wrote that most marriages of persons with disabilities are not successful because many of them are initiated for utilitarian gains and exploitation.

Many normal persons choose partners with disabilities because they cannot defend themselves. They want to have the upper hand with completely submissive wives. It is, therefore, imperative that persons with disabilities receive rehabilitation prior to their marriage. They need to be instructed about the concepts of marriage, family and responsibility. Families also have a significant role to play in this respect. Parents should teach their children with disabilities about the rights of the spouses and the way to deal with family problems. They should impart to them that they have the right to get married and have families exactly like normal persons. That is, they should eliminate the expected negative impact of disability on the marriage of their children with disabilities. To succeed in this, they should dispel any erroneous beliefs or conceptions their children with disabilities might have about marriage.

*The effect of severity of disability on marital adjustment of women with hearing disabilities*

To explore differences in marital adjustment of women with hearing disabilities by severity of disability, the Mann-Whitney test for dependent samples was used. These results are presented in table 3.

Table 3. Mann-Whitney test for differences in marital adjustment of women with hearing disabilities by severity of disability

	Severity of disability	Sample size	Mean ranks	Sum of ranks	U	Z-value	Possibility	Result
Marital Adjustment	Deaf	16	10.53	168.50	31.500	-.048-	.962	Not sig.
	Hard of hearing	4	10.38	41.50				

Data in table 3 shows that there were no statistically significant differences in the marital adjustment of women with hearing disabilities by severity of disability. This finding is consistent with the finding reported by Muayyad (2018) where no statistically significant differences were found in marital adjustment of persons with motor disabilities in Bethlehem and Hebron owing to severity of disability. Severity of disability (Deaf and hard-hearing) also did not have a significant effect on psychological adjustment of persons with hearing disabilities (Moaz, 2018). A possible explanation for this finding is that persons with hearing disabilities accept each other. They share many things, e.g., schools and associations that serve them. They have a sense of common destiny. Even the term hearing disabilities unifies them. Furthermore, they use the sign language in their communication regardless of the severity of disability. What they have in common makes them in good terms with each other.

*The effect of the husband's condition on the marital adjustment of women with hearing disabilities*

To explore differences in the marital adjustment of women with hearing disabilities by husband's condition, the Mann-Whitney test for two unequal samples was used. These results are presented in table 4.

Table 4. Mann-Whitney test for differences in marital adjustment of women with hearing disabilities by husband's condition

	Husband's condition	Sample size	Mean ranks	Sum of ranks	U	Z-value	Possibility	Result
Marital Adjustment	Deaf	11	11.27	124.00	41.00	-.654	.513	Not sig.

t	Hearing	9	9.56	86.00
		20		

It is obvious from the above table that there were no statistically significant differences in the marital adjustment of women with hearing disabilities by the husband's condition (with hearing disability or normal).

This finding is inconsistent with the finding reported by Abebi, et al., (2018) who explored marital satisfaction among the Deaf by surveying studies tackling the topic from 1978 and 2017. The survey revealed that marital satisfaction among partners with Deaf spouses was higher than that among partners with normal spouses. Carlson et al., (2005) concluded that Deafness affects social interactions, including adjustment and the desire to have children. This finding is also inconsistent with the study conducted by Tambs (1992) who concluded that the more severe the hearing disability, the more frustrated are hearing impaired patterns with hearing spouses. A possible explanation for this finding is that husbands with normal hearing show good consideration and understanding of their wives' conditions. This can be a characteristic of husbands in the study population.

*The effect of the educational level on the marital adjustment of women with hearing disabilities*

Kruskal-Wallis Test was used to explore differences in the marital adjustment of women with hearing disabilities by educational level. These results are listed in table 5.

Table 5. Kruskal-Wallis Test for differences in marital adjustment of women with hearing disabilities by educational level

	Educational level	Sample size	Mean ranks	df	Chi	Possibility	Result
Marital	Illiterate	3	11.67	3	1.698	.637	Not

Adjustment	Elementary	3	7.67	sig.
	Intermediat e	4	8.62	
	Secondary	10	11.75	
	Total	20		

It is obvious from the above table that there were no statistically significant differences in the marital adjustment of women with hearing disabilities by the educational level. This finding concurs with the studies by Muayyad (2018), Mousa (2008), Khaled and Moaz study (2018), Hashem (2001) and Al-Amoudi (2001). However, it is not in line with the study by Sahaf (2015) where significant differences in the marital adjustment of a sample of married couples in Mecca were attributed to the educational level of the husband.

The standards that individuals adopt when choosing their partners differ. E.g., love, beauty or money. Most people prefer the presence of cultural and educational accord. Such individuals prefer partners with good qualifications. Often, individuals who think of getting married get confused about whether to choose partners with inferior educational and cultural level given that some men prefer an educated wife and see her more capable of bearing the responsibility of rearing children. By the same token, the woman prefers a husband who fits her culturally, so they can discuss decisions together. Other men see that an educated woman is arrogant and cannot be easily persuaded and for this reason they prefer women with lower educational levels. Some women are reluctant to get married to a man with higher educational level than hers, which makes her inferior to him. However, we still witness husbands and wives who lack intellectual or cultural accord, but their marriage is successful. That is, the educational level is not always a condition of successful marriage. Success, happiness and adjustment can depend on other criteria rather than similarity in educational backgrounds.



*The effect of age on the marital adjustment of women with hearing disabilities*

Kruskal-Wallis Test was used to explore differences in the marital adjustment of women with hearing disabilities by age. These results are listed in table 6.

Table 6. Kruskal-Wallis Test for differences in marital adjustment of women with hearing disabilities by age

	Age	Sample size	Mean ranks	df	Chi	Possibility	Result
Marital Adjustment	Less than 20	6	8.58	2	3.917	.141	Not sig.
	21-25	9	13.33				
	More than 26	5	7.70				
	total	20					

Data in table 6 reveals that there were no statistically significant differences in the marital adjustment of women with hearing disabilities by age. This finding concurs with the studies by Muayyad (2018) and Khaled and Moaz (2018) which explored the psychological adjustment of people with hearing disabilities in general.

Many researchers believe that marital adjustment tends to stabilize during the life cycle. The early stage of marriage is characterized by closeness and interdependence, while the late stage is characterized by confrontation, debate and negotiation regarding control and power. It is natural that time causes a kind of routine, apathy and lack of joint activities and decisions. It seems that people who are happy in their marriage become less admiring towards their partners with time, while unhappy people view their partners as absolutely undesirable (El-Khouly, 2000).

*The effect of years of marriage on the marital adjustment of women with hearing disabilities*

Kruskal-Wallis Test was used to explore differences in the marital adjustment of women with hearing disabilities by years of marriage. These results are shown in table 7.

Table 7. Kruskal-Wallis Test for differences in marital adjustment of women with hearing disabilities by years of marriage

	Years of marriage	Sample size	Mean ranks	df	Chi	Possibility	Result
Marital Adjustment	1	5	9.70	4	1.546	.818	Not sig.
	2	4	11.12				
	3	4	8.50				
	4	2	9.25				
	5	5	12.90				
	Total	20					

Data in table 7 reveals that there were no statistically significant differences in the marital adjustment of women with hearing disabilities by years of marriage. This finding is in line with the studies by Muayyad (2018), Musa (2008) Al-Lladaa (2002).

It is expected that progression in marriage increases marital adjustment. Marital relations in their beginnings go through many problems owing to variations in personality, preferences, habits and behaviors. These can be a source of conflict between the spouses. Thus many people mention that the first years in marriage are the most difficult. The information the authors obtained from participants during the interviews revealed that the early years of their marriage were dominated by surprise and the desire to succeed and satisfaction. They reported that progression in marriage increased their confidence and adjustment.

## Conclusions

- 1- Marital adjustment of married women with hearing disabilities in Tabuk is low.
- 2- There were no significant differences in marital adjustment by severity of disability (Deaf and hard of hearing).
- 3- There were no significant differences in marital adjustment by the husband's condition.
- 4- There were no significant differences in marital adjustment by the educational level.
- 5- There were no significant differences in marital adjustment by age.
- 6- There were no significant differences in marital adjustment by years of marriage.

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