



The fabric of commitment: How gender, religion, and marriage duration shape Thai marriages

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Abstract

Commitment, a central element of Sternberg's theory of love, plays a key role in shaping marital quality and emotional well-being. This study investigates gender differences in marital commitment, considering demographic factors that may account for such variation. The sample included 104 Thai heterosexual married couples, with equal representation of husbands and wives. Participants were recruited using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Each participant independently completed an online survey assessing romantic passion and demographic characteristics. Gender differences in romantic passion were analyzed using the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test. The results indicated a statistically significant difference in commitment levels between husbands and wives ($Z = -3.379$, $p < .001$), suggesting that the expression of marital commitment is gendered. Furthermore, religious affiliation and length of marriage were identified, through the analysis of Mann-Whitney U Test, as significant factors influencing commitment. The findings confirm that commitment is a multifaceted construct central to marital quality, yet its manifestation varies significantly by gender. The results underscore the role of cultural and contextual factors, specifically religion and marital duration, in shaping attitudes toward commitment, which encompasses responsibilities, sacrifice, and relationship maintenance within Thai marriages.

Keywords: Marital commitment, Gender differences, Triangular love scale

Introduction

According to Sternberg's triangular theory of love, commitment is a fundamental variable associated with the duration of romantic relationships [1]. It is an important factor in marriage quality and emotional health that constitutes a relational resource of resilience. Widespread evidence demonstrates that the more individuals who commit to one another are the same ones engaging in behaviors such as forgiveness, sacrifice, and proactive maintenance efforts—behaviors critical for upholding mutuality in satisfaction and trust [2]. Therefore, commitment serves not only as a psychological tether for individual and relational functioning, but also as an engine that facilitates maintenance of the marital union over time.

One important area of scholarly investigation is commitment to a marriage, and thus, there are three major areas that the research can be classified. The first (theoretical and measurement development) centers on the construction of strong conceptual models and validated measures [3–5]. The other addresses behavioral indicators and consequences, investigating associations between commitment and

trust, satisfaction, and pro-social acts such as forgiveness and sacrifice [2, 6]. The third domain involves contextual and demographic analyses, looking into how religion, gender, duration of marriage, and financial status influence the experience and articulation of commitment [7–10].

However, literature illustrates significant inconsistencies in these dimensions. For example, differences in gender are not consistent in findings with some exhibiting higher commitment in husbands [11], and others displaying wives reporting higher relational investment [6]. Similarly, economic variables also show conflicting effects; whereas some research finds a direct effect on commitment [9], others find no association whatsoever [8,24]. These contradictions can only suggest that commitment is not a one-factor construct but is predominantly controlled by socio-contextual, religious, and cultural variables. In answer to these deficiencies, this present research attempts to explore gendered variations in love and commitment attitudes as well as the impact of significant demographic variables within the Thai marital relationship. Of specific concern, this research answers the following questions:

Research question 1: Are there differences between husbands' and wives' attitudes toward love and commitment within marriage?

Research question 2: Which demographic characteristics of couples predict differences in attitudes toward love and commitment between husbands and wives?

The commitment dimension of love

Triangular theory of love is a key component in the study of romantic relationship psychology, combining important theoretical principles with robust empirical validation [1]. The development of the Triangular Love Scale (TLS) has enabled this model to be practically validated, with its structure consistently supported through confirmatory factor analysis [12,25]. This study focuses on the commitment component, which is located in the lower right corner of the triangle, according to the love triangle theory. It encompasses personal obligations and duties and serves as a major catalyst for producing a sense of stability and trust in the dyadic relationship.

Empirical research has always pointed to the importance of marital commitment, and it has found that higher commitment is highly correlated with increased levels of relationship satisfaction, reduced dissolution probability, and improved conflict resolution [13–14]. Further, commitment is an important mediating process for relational processes. For example, Lin [15] illustrated its function in converting particular behaviors into results that foster relationship stability, commitment can aid in bridging the positive connection that exists among compromise and disagreement. Thus, in the context of a marital relationship, commitment is associated with an increased sense of security, which promotes stability, satisfaction, and balance in the long-term relationship.

Methods

Inner Bangkok was identified as the area with the highest density of jewelry stores, particularly in the Suriyawong subdistrict, where four stores agreed to assist in distributing our online questionnaire to the target customer group. This study focused on married couples with direct experience purchasing wedding

rings, ensuring that the collected data was relevant and aligned with the research objectives. Since the population size could not be clearly determined, the sample size was calculated using Cochran's (1953) formula for an infinite population, with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 0.05. This resulted in an initial sample size of 382 participants. Subsequently, the snowball sampling technique was employed to approach the target sample size as closely as possible. In total, 104 Thai married couples (208 participants) took part in this study. The geographic area where data was collected is illustrated in Figure 1.

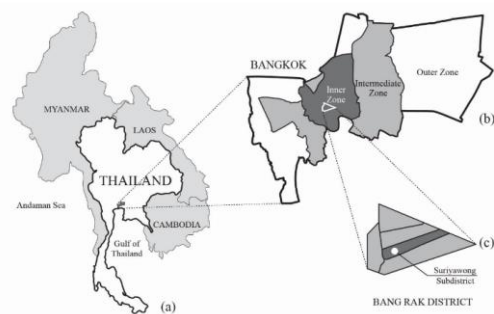


Figure 1. Distribution and location mapping of jewelry shops in Thailand: (a) National and provincial levels, (b) Bangkok metropolitan zones, and (c) Bang Rak subdistrict and Suriyawong subdistrict

The online questionnaire was divided into two main sections: first, demographic information participants provided details regarding gender, age, education level, religion, occupation, income, marital status, and duration of marriage; and second, commitment attitude assessment. This section was based on Sternberg's Triangular Love Scale (TLS), consisting of 15 items measured using a 9-point Likert scale to assess levels of agreement.

Participant selection and data collection:

Participants were required to be heterosexual couples (male and female) who were either legally married or cohabiting as spouses and had previously purchased or commissioned wedding rings from participating jewelry stores. To ensure data integrity and minimize response bias, each partner completed the questionnaire independently. Demographic information could be completed jointly for

convenience, but attitude-related items were answered individually. Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via cooperating jewelry stores. Prior to participation, respondents received an information sheet outlining the study’s objectives and provided informed consent. Only responses from both partners were included in the analysis; incomplete data sets were excluded. Preliminary analysis revealed that commitment scores were not normally distributed. Therefore, nonparametric statistical methods were employed to test the Research Question.

Research question 1: To examine differences in commitment scores between husbands and wives, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was employed, as this test is appropriate for comparing two related samples (matched pairs).

Research question 2: To analyze which demographic factors influenced differences in attitudes, the Mann-Whitney U Test (for dichotomous variables) were used to compare scores across independent groups.

Results

The final analytical sample comprised 208 Thai heterosexual individuals, representing 104 couples. Of these participants, 71.2% (n = 148) were legally married and 28.8% (n = 60) were in cohabiting relationships. The age of participants ranged from 24 to 65 years. In terms of educational attainment, the largest proportion (28.8%) held a bachelor's degree. The vast majority of the sample (91.3%) identified as Buddhist. Economically, 45.2% of couples reported a comparable monthly household income, falling within the range of 18,000 to 50,000 Thai Baht (THB). Data were collected over a three-month period, from December 2023 to February 2024, using structured online questionnaires designed to assess demographic characteristics, relationship history, and perceptions of love and commitment. Figure 2. Demographic Characteristics of the Couple Respondents. Descriptive statistics, comprising frequencies and percentages, were computed to summarize the sociodemographic profile of the sample. Inferential analyses were subsequently performed to examine differences in commitment levels between legally married and cohabiting individuals. The results indicated a statistically

significant difference in commitment scores based on relationship status.

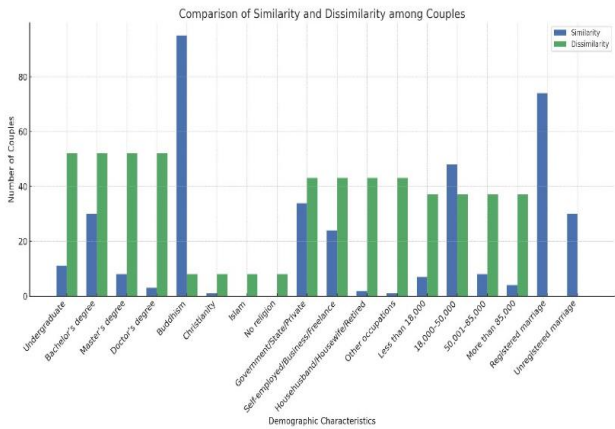


Figure 2. Demographic characteristics of the couple respondents

Research question 1: A Wilcoxon signed-rank test was conducted to examine differences in commitment, as measured by the Triangular Love Scale (TLS), between husbands and wives. Results indicated that husbands reported significantly higher commitment scores than wives, $Z = -3.379$, $p < .001$. This suggests that gender plays a significant role in reported levels of marital commitment. Descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Wilcoxon signed rank test results for comparing commitment scores

Group	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	Z	p	r
CW	42.67	2432.00			
CH	38.84	971.00	-3.379	<.001	-0.33

Note: PW = Commitment scores for wives; PH = commitment scores for husbands

Research question 2: A series of Mann-Whitney U tests were performed to assess whether demographic characteristics were associated with differences in attitudes toward love and commitment between husbands and wives. The analyses indicated that most demographic variables did not yield statistically significant effects, including age ($U = 519.50$, $Z = -1.06$, $p = .145$), education level ($U = 1342.50$, $Z = -0.06$, $p = .475$), occupation ($U = 1230.00$, $Z = -0.54$, $p = .294$), income ($U = 1146.50$, $Z = -0.64$, $p = .263$), and legal marital status ($U = 978.50$, $Z = -0.95$, $p = .172$).

Conversely, two variables were significant predictors. A significant effect was found for religion ($U = 246.00$, $Z = -1.69$, $p = .045$) and duration of marriage ($U = 1096.50$, $Z = -1.66$, $p = .049$) both demonstrated statistically significant effects. These

findings suggest that shared religion and duration of marriage may play a meaningful role in shaping commitment dynamics between partners. A full summary of these analyses is provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Differences in love and commitment by demographic

Demographic variable	Group	<i>n</i>	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	<i>U</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>
Age	Same age group (< 7 years)	90	53.73	4835.50	519.50	-1.06	.145
	Different age group (≥ 7 years)	14	44.61	624.50			
Education Level	Same level	52	52.32	2720.50	1342.50	-0.06	.475
	Different levels	52	52.68	2739.50			
Occupation	Same field	61	53.84	3284.00	1230.00	-0.54	.294
	Different field	43	50.60	2176.00			
Income	Similar levels	67	51.11	3424.50	1146.50	-0.64	.263
	Different levels	37	55.01	2035.50			
Religion	Same	96	53.93	5178.00	246.00	-1.69	.045*
	Different	8	32.25	282.00			
Duration of Marriage	≤ 10 years	50	47.43	2371.50	1096.50	-1.66	.049*
	> 10 years	54	57.19	3088.50			
Legal Marital Status	Legally married	74	54.28	4016.50	978.50	-0.95	.172
	Unregistered	30	48.12	1443.50			

Discussion

The central finding of this study addresses Research **Question 1**: Husbands reported significantly higher commitment scores than wives. This result aligns with prior research suggesting that men may express greater levels of marital commitment than women in certain contexts. For instance, Lin [15] found that among military couples, husbands demonstrated significantly higher commitment and marital quality than their spouses. Similarly, Stets and Hammons [16] emphasized the role of structural and cultural influences, proposing that the social status and power typically afforded to men may contribute to their elevated expressions of marital commitment.

Contrary to prior findings, this result shows that wives reported higher commitment scores. This pattern highlights the gendered nature of commitment and challenges the assumption of uniformity across partners. It supports the view that commitment is not an innate trait but a construct shaped by sociocultural norms and gendered marital roles [17]. Previous studies have consistently shown that gender roles and family responsibilities directly

shape how individuals perceive and enact commitment within relationships [18]. Moreover, broader sociocultural contexts influence what is considered appropriate or meaningful in expressing devotion and emotional investment, thereby shaping relational dynamics [19–20]. The present findings contribute to this body of literature by demonstrating that within a single marital union, commitment is not a uniform construct but is experienced and expressed differently by each partner depending on gender. The observed divergence in commitment levels also reaffirms the relevance of gender as a key variable in shaping how spouses experience and enact their marital relationships. This note can be described in terms of gendered socializations and role expectations that serve to push men and women to value and express relational maintenance differently [6, 21]. Furthermore, cross-cultural research consistently discovers that religious, economic, and cultural environments mediate the expression of commitment [9, 22, 23]. Overall, these results unsettle the notion of a universal construct of commitment felt equivalently by both men and women. Instead, commitment occurs in gendered forms that must be understood through specific

sociocultural spectacles.

With regard to Research Question 2, the analysis revealed that, aside from all previously highlighted demographic variables (which did not significantly predict differences in marital commitment), religious affiliation ($p = .045$) and marital duration ($p = .049$) emerged as statistically significant predictors. These findings are consistent with prior research suggesting that shared religious beliefs and practices serve as foundational mechanisms that strengthen marital commitment and promote relationship stability, particularly during periods of external stress [22, 23]. Furthermore, longer marital duration has been associated with the development of prosocial behaviors—such as dyadic maintenance, sacrifice, and forgiveness—which collectively contribute to enhanced relationship quality and enduring commitment [6, 8].

Although prior research has identified economic factors (e.g., financial stress, earnings) as predictors of marital outcomes [9], this study found that occupation and income were not significant predictors. This may reflect unique aspects of Thai cultural context, where marital stability is shaped less by economic status and more by shared values, religious beliefs, and socially constructed roles that guide relational behavior. Taken together, these findings suggest that marital commitment is not uniformly influenced by traditional socioeconomic indicators. Rather, it appears to be more strongly shaped by religiosity and the evolving dynamics within the marriage—factors deeply embedded in cultural narratives and interpersonal adaptation over time.

Conclusion

This study reaffirms commitment as a core element of marital quality and highlights significant differences between husbands and wives. Data from 104 married couples indicate that commitment is not uniformly experienced across partners but varies systematically by gender. Additionally, religious affiliation and marriage duration emerged as significant demographic predictors of commitment levels. These findings support the view that marital commitment is a complex, multidimensional construct—extending beyond the mere intention to maintain a relationship. It involves active processes

such as shared responsibility, sacrifice, and coordinated efforts to sustain relational stability and harmony [2, 17]. Consistent with prior research, individuals with high commitment are more likely to engage in behaviors such as accommodation, forgiveness, and relationship maintenance, which foster marital satisfaction and resilience. This study extends existing literature by demonstrating that differences in commitment between spouses, as well as demographic influences, are shaped by cultural, religious, and contextual factors rather than universal or biological ones. Marital commitment is thus an evolving process, continually constructed and reconstructed through social norms, shared belief systems, and accumulated relational experience. Overall, religious belief and marriage duration are affirmed as key determinants of commitment, reinforcing the notion that individual, relational, and sociocultural dimensions must be integrated into both theoretical models and clinical practices aimed at understanding and strengthening marital commitment.

Future studies using longitudinal or mixed-method approaches may offer deeper insights into how commitment develops over time. Reliance on self-report measures also presents a limitation, as responses may reflect cultural expectations rather than personal attitudes.

Incorporating qualitative interviews or observational methods could provide a more balanced view of marital dynamics. Cultural context may have influenced responses, particularly within Thai society where gender roles and family obligations are deeply embedded. Interpretations should be made with caution, and cross-cultural studies are recommended to assess generalizability.

Availability of data and materials

Data analyzed during this study are not publicly available due to confidentiality agreements with participants but are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Author contributions

NP: contributed to conceptualization, methodology, data curation, formal analysis, visualization, writing—original draft, and writing—review and

editing. AB: contributed to conceptualization, methodology, funding acquisition, supervision, validation, writing—review and editing, project administration, and resource provision.

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Ethics statement

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and was approved by the Ethics Committee of King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang (Approval Number: EC-KMITL_67_015; Date: 6 December 2023).

Generative AI statement

The authors acknowledge the use of generative AI in refining the language of this manuscript. All substantive content remains the original work of the authors, who assume full responsibility for its accuracy.

Competing interests

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Consent for publication

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study. All authors consent to the publication of this manuscript.

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