

Edwards Personal Preference Schedule (EPPS)

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September 26, 2025

RECOMMENDED CITATION

mohammad looti (2025). *Edwards Personal Preference Schedule (EPPS)*.
PSYCHOLOGICAL SCALES. Retrieved from <https://scales.arabpsychology.com/?p=28919>

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Primary Disciplinary Field(s): Psychology, Personality Assessment, Counseling Psychology

1. Core Definition

The Edwards Personal Preference Schedule (EPPS) is a widely recognized and extensively utilized personality inventory designed to assess an individual's relative standing on 15 specific psychological needs or motives. Developed by Allen L. Edwards and first published in 1953, this self-report questionnaire differentiates itself from many other personality assessments by its explicit focus on motivational aspects rather than merely descriptive traits. Its primary objective is to provide a nuanced profile of an individual's intrapsychic drivers, revealing which needs are most salient in shaping their perceptions, cognitions, and behaviors within various life contexts.

The structure of the EPPS is distinctive, employing a forced-choice format, where respondents are presented with pairs of statements and must select the one that is "more characteristic" of themselves. This methodology is a deliberate attempt to mitigate the influence of social desirability bias, a common challenge in self-report measures where individuals might tend to select responses that are perceived as more socially acceptable or favorable. By forcing a choice between two equally desirable or undesirable statements, the EPPS aims to elicit a more authentic reflection of an individual's inherent preferences and motivations, providing insights into their unique psychological landscape.

The comprehensive nature of the EPPS, with its 225 paired statements, allows for a thorough exploration of the respondent's motivational hierarchy. The resulting profile, which delineates the relative strength of 15 distinct needs, is particularly valuable in settings such as personal counseling, where understanding an individual's core drives can significantly inform therapeutic interventions and personal development strategies. Beyond clinical applications, its utility extends to research and, to a lesser extent, into organizational contexts for purposes such as team building or understanding individual work motivations.

2. Etymology and Theoretical Foundations

The conceptual framework underpinning the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule is deeply rooted in the influential personology theory of Henry A. Murray, specifically his comprehensive system of needs developed in the 1930s. Murray, a prominent figure in personality psychology, proposed that human behavior is largely driven by a complex interplay of basic psychological needs, which he meticulously categorized and defined. These needs, according to Murray, are internal forces that organize perception, thought, and action, directing individuals toward specific goals and activities. Edwards sought to operationalize and measure a subset of these needs through a standardized self-report instrument.

Edwards's primary contribution was not merely the replication of Murray's theory but the innovative adaptation of it into a psychometrically sound assessment tool. Recognizing the limitations of existing personality tests, particularly their susceptibility to respondents presenting themselves in a socially desirable light, Edwards devised the forced-choice format. This method involved pairing statements that were carefully equated for social desirability, based on empirical ratings. The intention was to ensure that regardless of which statement a respondent chose from a pair, the choice would reveal a genuine preference for one need over another, rather than a preference for a socially approved trait.

The development of the EPPS represented a significant advancement in personality assessment methodology at the time. By creating a tool that could quantitatively measure an individual's unique motivational profile, Edwards provided researchers and practitioners with a valuable instrument for understanding the complex dynamics of human personality. The EPPS thus stands as a testament to the enduring legacy of Murray's need theory and Edwards's ingenuity in translating theoretical constructs into a practical and empirically grounded assessment. Its origins highlight a continuous effort within psychology to develop more robust and less biased methods for capturing the multifaceted nature of individual differences.

3. The Fifteen Need Scales: Components of the EPPS

The core of the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule lies in its measurement of 15 specific psychological needs, each derived from Henry Murray's comprehensive theory of personality. These needs represent fundamental human drives that influence an individual's thoughts, feelings, and actions. The EPPS provides a relative ranking of these needs within an individual, rather than an absolute score, indicating which needs are most prominent in their motivational hierarchy. Understanding these scales is crucial for interpreting the results and appreciating the depth of the insights provided by the instrument.

The 15 need scales are: **Achievement** (n Ach), defined as the need to do one's best, to be successful, to accomplish tasks requiring skill and effort; **Deference** (n Def), the need to conform to custom, to yield to the influence of others, to follow instructions and accept leadership; **Order** (n Ord), the need to organize, to be neat and tidy, to have things planned and systematic; **Exhibition** (n Exh), the need to make an impression, to be seen and heard, to excite, fascinate, or amuse others; **Autonomy** (n Aut), the need to be independent, to resist coercion, to be free to act according to one's own desires and impulses.

Further scales include: **Affiliation** (n Aff), the need to form friendships and associations, to join groups, to participate in friendly activities; **Intracception** (n Int), the need to analyze one's own motives and feelings, to observe others, to understand how others feel; **Succorance** (n Suc), the need to be helped by others, to receive sympathy and attention, to be cared for; **Dominance** (n

Dom), the need to influence or control others, to persuade, to direct or supervise; and **Abasement** (n Aba), the need to feel guilty, to accept blame, to accept punishment, to belittle oneself. These ten needs cover a wide spectrum of interpersonal and intrapersonal motivations, reflecting the complexity of human interaction and self-perception.

The remaining five scales complete the comprehensive profile: **Nurturance** (n Nur), the need to help others, to take care of them, to be sympathetic and charitable; **Change** (n Chg), the need to do new and different things, to travel, to experience novelty and variety; **Endurance** (n End), the need to persist in a course of action, to complete tasks, to work long hours and overcome difficulties; **Heterosexuality** (n Het), the need to engage in social activities with members of the opposite sex, to fall in love, to participate in romantic relationships; and finally, **Aggression** (n Agg), the need to attack, injure, or kill another, to fight, to oppose forcefully, or to blame others. Collectively, these 15 scales provide a rich and detailed picture of an individual's fundamental psychological motivations, offering a robust framework for understanding their personality and behavioral tendencies.

4. Administration and Scoring Methodology

The administration of the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule is straightforward, typically involving a self-report format where individuals respond to a series of paired statements. The test comprises 225 pairs of statements, with each pair designed to present two distinct needs from Murray's theory. Respondents are instructed to choose the statement in each pair that they feel is more characteristic of themselves, even if both statements are somewhat descriptive or neither is entirely accurate. This forced-choice mechanism is central to the EPPS's design, aiming to minimize the influence of conscious impression management and social desirability. An additional 15 pairs are included to check for consistency in responses, providing a measure of the respondent's carefulness and sincerity during the test.

Scoring the EPPS yields a profile of 15 raw scores, one for each need scale. Each raw score represents the number of times a particular need was chosen over another in the paired comparisons. Importantly, these scores are ipsative, meaning they reflect the relative strength of needs within the individual rather than their absolute strength compared to a normative population. An ipsative score indicates that if one need is particularly high, it necessarily implies that other needs must be relatively lower for that individual. This characteristic differentiates EPPS from normative tests where scores are independent of each other and can all be high or all be low.

To make the ipsative scores interpretable, they are typically converted into percentile ranks using normative data gathered from various populations (e.g., college students, general adults). These percentile ranks allow for a comparison of an individual's intra-personal need hierarchy with the hierarchies commonly observed in reference groups. For instance, a high percentile rank for

"Achievement" would indicate that an individual's need for achievement is stronger relative to their other needs, and also that this internal prioritization is higher than that of a significant percentage of the norm group. This nuanced scoring approach provides a unique perspective on personality, emphasizing an individual's internal motivational landscape.

5. Applications Across Domains

The Edwards Personal Preference Schedule, with its detailed assessment of 15 psychological needs, has found diverse applications across various professional and academic domains since its inception. Primarily, it is highly valued in personal counseling situations, where understanding an individual's core motivations can significantly enhance the therapeutic process. Counselors utilize EPPS results to help clients gain self-awareness regarding their underlying drives, conflicts between needs, and how these internal forces influence their decision-making, relationships, and overall well-being. This insight can be instrumental in guiding career choices, addressing relational issues, or formulating personal development plans.

Beyond counseling, the EPPS has seen considerable use in organizational psychology and human resources, particularly as a recruitment tool or for professional development. While not a definitive selection instrument on its own, it can provide valuable supplementary information about a candidate's motivational fit within a specific job role or organizational culture. For example, a role requiring significant independent decision-making might favor individuals with a high need for **Autonomy**, while a collaborative role might benefit from a high need for **Affiliation**. It can also aid in team building, by identifying complementary motivational profiles within a group, or in leadership development programs, by highlighting key motivational strengths and areas for growth among managers.

Furthermore, the EPPS has been a staple in academic psychological research, contributing to a deeper understanding of personality theory, motivation, and individual differences. Researchers have employed the EPPS to explore correlations between specific needs and various behavioral outcomes, academic performance, occupational preferences, and mental health indicators. Its structured nature and theoretical foundation make it a robust instrument for quantitative studies, allowing for statistical analysis of how different motivational profiles manifest across diverse populations and circumstances. This ongoing research continues to validate and expand our understanding of the critical role that fundamental psychological needs play in human experience.

6. Psychometric Properties: Reliability and Validity

The utility and credibility of any psychological assessment hinge significantly on its psychometric properties, namely its reliability and validity. For the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule, considerable research has been dedicated to evaluating these aspects, providing insight into its

consistency and accuracy. Reliability, which refers to the consistency of a measure, has typically been assessed through internal consistency and test-retest reliability. Studies examining internal consistency, often using coefficients like Cronbach's Alpha, have generally shown moderate to good levels across the 15 scales, indicating that the items intended to measure a particular need tend to cohere well.

Test-retest reliability, which gauges the stability of scores over time, has also been investigated. Research typically reports satisfactory coefficients for the EPPS scales, suggesting that an individual's profile of needs remains relatively stable over periods of weeks or months. This stability is an important characteristic for a personality assessment tool, as it implies that the instrument is measuring enduring aspects of an individual's motivational structure rather than transient states. However, like all self-report measures, external factors or significant life events could potentially influence responses over very long periods.

Validity, concerning whether a test measures what it purports to measure, has been approached through various lenses for the EPPS. Construct validity, which assesses how well the test measures the underlying theoretical construct (in this case, Murray's needs), has been explored through factor analysis and correlations with other personality inventories. While factor analytic studies have sometimes yielded fewer than 15 distinct factors, suggesting some overlap among the scales, there is generally support for the conceptual distinction of the needs. Criterion-related validity, which involves correlating EPPS scores with external criteria, has demonstrated its utility in predicting various behaviors, such as academic success (e.g., high **Achievement** scores correlating with better grades) or vocational choices, lending empirical support to its practical applications in counseling and career guidance.

7. Criticisms, Limitations, and Ethical Considerations

Despite its widespread use and theoretical grounding, the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule has not been without its criticisms and recognized limitations. A primary point of contention revolves around its ipsative scoring format. While designed to reduce social desirability bias, ipsative scores inherently limit comparisons between individuals because they only indicate the relative strength of needs within one person. For instance, a person with a high score on **Achievement** and a low score on **Affiliation** might appear similar to another person with the same relative scores, even if the first person has universally strong needs and the second has universally weak needs. This makes it challenging to use EPPS scores for direct comparisons between individuals or for certain types of normative research where absolute levels of traits are crucial.

Another significant criticism centers on the lingering issue of social desirability. While Edwards explicitly designed the test to mitigate this bias by equating item pairs for social desirability, empirical research has shown that respondents can still manipulate their answers to present a

favorable image, especially in high-stakes situations like employment screening. The "Consistency" scale within the EPPS attempts to detect such inconsistencies, but it does not fully eliminate the potential for deliberate distortion. This limitation raises ethical concerns regarding its use in contexts where respondents may feel compelled to answer in a particular way.

Furthermore, some researchers have questioned the independence of the 15 need scales, suggesting that there may be significant overlap or intercorrelation among them, which could potentially reduce the discriminant validity of the instrument. Factor analytic studies have occasionally suggested that the EPPS might measure fewer than 15 truly distinct constructs. Ethically, practitioners must be aware of these limitations and avoid over-interpreting specific scale scores in isolation. It is crucial to use the EPPS as part of a broader assessment battery, integrating its insights with information from other measures, interviews, and observations to form a comprehensive understanding of an individual. Proper interpretation requires careful consideration of the ipsative nature of the scores and the context in which the test is administered, always prioritizing the well-being and accurate representation of the individual being assessed.

Further Reading

[Edwards Personal Preference Schedule - Wikipedia](#)

[Henry Murray - Wikipedia](#)

[Allen L. Edwards - Wikipedia](#)

[Personality Test - Wikipedia](#)

[Ipsative score - Wikipedia](#)

[Social desirability bias - Wikipedia](#)

[Psychometrics - Wikipedia](#)