

Awareness of Live-In Relationships: Reasons, Challenges, and Coping Strategies among College Students

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Abstract

The present study titled “Contemporary Youth and Live-In Relationships: Awareness regarding Reasons, Challenges, and Coping Strategies Associated with Live-In Relationships among Undergraduate and Postgraduate Students” aimed to elicit the level of awareness among undergraduate and postgraduate students regarding live-in relationships, specifically focusing on their understanding of the reasons, challenges, and coping strategies associated with live-in relationships, and to design a brochure to create awareness regarding the same among youth. A descriptive research design was used to examine awareness regarding live-in relationships among undergraduate and postgraduate students aged 18–24 years. The sample consisted of 200 respondents. Data were collected using a self-developed semi-structured questionnaire on awareness regarding live-in relationships and a personal information proforma. Findings indicated moderate to high awareness among participants. Compatibility testing, emotional bonding, companionship, and spending quality time together emerged as key reasons for cohabitation. Major challenges included social stigma, family pressure, cultural disapproval, legal uncertainty, and concerns about future commitment. Communication, mutual respect, emotional maturity, and shared responsibilities were identified as important coping strategies. An awareness brochure was developed based on the findings.

Keywords: live-in relationships, awareness, college students, relationship reasons, challenges, coping strategies

Introduction

A live-in relationship refers to an arrangement in which two unmarried individuals live together in a relationship similar to marriage without entering into a formal marital union (Savita & Khan, 2020). Over the years, live-in relationships have gradually shifted from being viewed as taboo to becoming increasingly discussed among younger generations, especially among educated urban youth (Sharma & Singh, 2024). Several studies have identified multiple reasons for choosing live-in relationships, including compatibility testing, emotional closeness, financial convenience, freedom from traditional marital expectations, and avoidance of long legal procedures associated with divorce (Dholam, 2015; Gupta, 2024). According to Haskey (2001), the history of "live-in relationships" (cohabitation) in Great Britain since the

1960s is characterized by a significant structural change in demographic behavior and societal norms, transforming the practice from a stigmatized arrangement into a widely recognized and frequently recommended stage of life.

According to Tiwari et al. (2024), Live-in relationships have long been stigmatized in Indian society, which is historically based on conservative and family-centric values. It is believed that marriage is necessary for establishing relationships and having children. However, social attitudes have gradually changed as a result of urbanization, increased exposure to other cultures, and women's empowerment.

Research Objectives

1. To elicit the level of awareness among undergraduate and postgraduate students regarding live-in relationships, specifically focusing on their understanding of the reasons, challenges and coping strategies, associated with live-in relationships.
2. To design a brochure to create awareness among undergraduate and postgraduate students regarding live-in relationships.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The present study adopted a descriptive research design to understand the awareness of undergraduate and postgraduate students regarding live-in relationships.

Sample Size

The study consisted of 200 respondents between the age group of 18–24 years, 100 Undergraduate students and 100 Postgraduate students. Equal representation of males and females was included.

Sampling Technique

The study adopted purposive and snowball sampling technique for selecting respondents who fulfilled the inclusion criteria.

Inclusion Criteria

1. Undergraduate and postgraduate students between 18–24 years were included.
2. Male and female students were included.
3. Students willing to participate in the study were included.
4. Participants from urban educational settings were included.

Research Process and Development of Tool

The study used the following tools:

1. **Personal Information Proforma:** The proforma was developed by the researcher to obtain demographic details such as age, gender, educational level, and family background.
2. **Semi-Structured Questionnaire on Awareness regarding Live-In Relationships:** A self-developed semi-structured questionnaire was prepared based on extensive review of literature related to live-in relationships. The questionnaire focused on: Reasons, challenges and coping strategies associated with live-in relationships. The questionnaire included both close-ended questions.

Pilot Testing

Pilot testing was conducted before the final administration of the tool to ensure clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the items. Necessary modifications were made based on the feedback received.

Procedure for Data Collection

Consent was obtained from participants before data collection. Respondents were informed regarding the purpose of the study and confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process. Data was collected using printed questionnaires.

Plan of Analysis

The responses obtained from the respondents were analyzed using descriptive statistics including frequency and percentage analysis.

Results

Objective 1: To elicit the level of awareness among undergraduate and postgraduate students regarding live-in relationships, specifically focusing on their understanding of the reasons, challenges and coping strategies associated with live-in relationships.

Reasons for a live-in relationship.

When the youth was asked regarding the reasons of being in a live-in relationship, large majority of them stated To test compatibility before marriage – Couples want to understand each other’s habits and dynamics before committing [Undergraduate Youth (80%) Postgraduate Youth (76%)], majority of the undergraduate youth large majority of the postgraduate youth mentioned to spend more quality time together – partners choose cohabitation to strengthen their bond and deepen emotional intimacy [Undergraduate Youth (60%) Postgraduate Youth (71%)] [Refer to Table 1].

Challenges in a live-in relationship, according to youth (18-24 years)

When the youth was asked regarding the challenges of a live-in relationship, large majority of undergraduate youth and substantial majority of the postgraduate youth stated there are negative societal opinions - neighbours criticising an unmarried couple [Undergraduate Youth (73%) Postgraduate Youth (90%)], little more than half of the undergraduate youth and majority of the postgraduate youth mentioned there is family pressure or non-acceptance - parents disapprove of a live-in before marriage [Undergraduate Youth (54%) Postgraduate Youth (64%)] [Refer to Table 2].

Strategies to improve/maintain a Healthy Live-in Relationship

When the youth was asked regarding the Strategies of a live-in relationship, large majority of undergraduate youth and substantial majority of the postgraduate youth stated There should be clear communication of expectations - talking about household roles [Undergraduate Youth (76%) Postgraduate Youth (85%)], More of the undergraduate youth and Large majority of the postgraduate youth mentioned There should be a fair division of financial responsibilities - Sharing bills equally [Undergraduate Youth (56%) Postgraduate Youth (71%)] [Refer to Table 3].

Table No 1
Reasons for a live-in relationship, according to youth (18-24 years)

Reasons for a live - in relationship	Ungraduate Youth	Postgraduate Youth	Total Youth
	(n=100)	(n=100)	(n=200)

	f (%)	f (%)	f	%
To test compatibility before marriage – Couples want to understand each other’s habits and dynamics before committing.	80	76	156	78
To avoid responsibilities tied to marriage – Partners prefer companionship without the formal obligations of marriage.	32	42	74	37
To reduce living expenses – Sharing a home helps cut costs related to rent, bills, and daily expenses.	31	31	62	31
To maintain independence while being in a relationship – Live-in allows emotional closeness while preserving personal space and autonomy.	47	58	105	52.5
To spend more quality time together – Partners choose cohabitation to strengthen their bond and deepen emotional intimacy.	60	71	131	65.5
To manage long-distance challenges – Living together helps overcome the limitations of a long-distance relationship.	26	32	58	29
To assess compatibility with children or family dynamics – Couples with kids from previous relationships may cohabit to see how families blend.	25	24	54	27
To delay or avoid societal pressure for marriage – Partners prefer taking the relationship at their own pace without rushing into legal or traditional commitments.	28	37	65	32.5

Note: Multiple responses obtained

Table No 2
Challenges in a live-in relationship, according to youth (18-24 years)

Challenges in a live in relationship	Ungraduate Youth	Postgraduate Youth	Total Youth	
	(n=100)	(n=100)	(n=200)	
	f (%)	f (%)	f	%
There are negative societal opinions - Neighbours criticising an unmarried couple.	73	90	163	81.5
There are few laws that support live-in couples - Difficulty claiming maintenance or inheritance.	31	43	74	37
There are conflicts over household responsibilities - One partner doing most cleaning.	29	33	62	31
There is fear of breakup - One partner worries the other may leave easily.	50	45	95	47.5

There are financial disagreements - One partner spends excessively, causing tension.	36	34	70	35
There is uncertainty about future plans - One wants marriage; the other does not.	37	53	90	45
There is family pressure or non-acceptance - Parents disapprove of a live-in before marriage.	54	64	118	59
There are higher chances of breakups - Partners separate due to unresolved issues.	22	22	44	22
There are cultural and traditional barriers - Community criticism for “living together without marriage.”	40	50	90	45
There could be a mismatch in Expectations - One partner may treat it as a step toward marriage, while the other sees it as temporary.	43	42	85	42.5
There could be pressure of Independence Without Preparation - Managing finances, chores, and emotional needs without commitment can be overwhelming.	16	28	44	22
There is a higher Risk of Abuse - Cases of verbal and physical abuse exist	19	16	35	17.5
There is greater Emotional Risk for Women - Women may suffer more after a breakup due to societal norms, biological clock concerns, or loss of time and dignity.	22	34	56	28
Any other (please specify) - Abandonment risk & PTSD risk	0	2	2	1

Note: Multiple responses obtained

Table No 3

Strategies to improve/maintain a Healthy Live-in Relationship, according to youth (18-24 years)

Strategies to improve/maintain a Healthy Live-in Relationship	Ungraduate Youth	Post graduate Youth	Total Youth	
	(n=100)	(n=100)	(n=200)	
	f (%)	f (%)	f	%
There should be clear communication of expectations - Talking about household roles.	76	85	161	80.5
There should be a fair division of financial responsibilities - Sharing bills equally.	56	71	127	63.5
One should establish personal boundaries - Time alone to pursue hobbies.	48	70	118	59

One should discuss long-term relationship goals - Talking about marriage plans.	53	65	118	59
One should respect personal space - Allowing alone-time when needed.	51	69	120	60
One should be seeking couples counseling when needed - Consulting a therapist during major conflicts.	29	51	80	40
One should be making decisions transparently - Jointly deciding on big purchases or moving plans.	54	71	125	62.5
One should be practising healthy conflict resolution - Discussing issues instead of shouting.	40	67	107	53.5
One should be prepared for psychological outcomes - Partners should be emotionally ready to handle the psychological impact if the relationship does not lead to marriage.	45	47	92	46
There should be encouragement of education and social support - Increasing education and awareness can help individuals make informed decisions and reduce stigma around live-in relationships.	45	57	102	51
One should promote gender equality within the relationship - Address gender-based barriers by ensuring equal rights, financial fairness, and mutual respect between partners.	43	55	98	49
One should understand legal rights and responsibilities - Partners should be aware that cohabitators do not have automatic legal rights in India (e.g., inheritance, property, child custody) and must make arrangements accordingly.	42	52	94	47
Any other (please specify) - There should be equal equity among both the couples as well	0	1	1	0.5

Note: Multiple responses obtained

Objective 2

To design a brochure to create awareness among undergraduate and postgraduate students regarding live-in relationships.



Discussion

The findings of the present study revealed that undergraduate and postgraduate youth possessed moderate to high awareness regarding live-in relationships, particularly with respect to the reasons, challenges, and coping strategies associated with such relationships. The respondents largely perceived live-in relationships as a means to test compatibility before marriage, strengthen emotional bonding, and spend quality time together. These findings are consistent with the studies conducted by Savita and Khan (2020), Rahman (2016), and Dholam (2015), which emphasized compatibility testing, emotional closeness, and companionship as major reasons for cohabitation. Similarly, Gupta (2024) reported that young adults increasingly perceive live-in relationships as opportunities for emotional fulfilment, independence, and flexibility in relationships.

The present findings further support the Social Exchange Theory, which suggests that individuals evaluate relationships on the basis of perceived rewards and benefits. The respondents in the present study appeared to associate live-in relationships with emotional intimacy, companionship, autonomy, and practical understanding between partners. Additionally, the findings align with Self-Determination Theory, which highlights the importance of autonomy and personal choice in relationship decisions. Many respondents identified independence and freedom from traditional marital expectations as important reasons for choosing live-in relationships.

In relation to challenges, the majority of respondents identified negative societal opinions and family pressure as major difficulties faced by couples in live-in relationships. These findings are strongly supported by Abhijita et al. (2023), Sharma and Kaushik (2025), and Tiwari et al. (2024), who highlighted social stigma, moral policing, and lack of family acceptance as significant barriers associated with cohabitation in India. The findings indicate that despite increasing awareness among educated youth,

traditional social and cultural norms continue to strongly influence perceptions regarding intimate relationships.

The respondents also expressed concerns regarding legal ambiguity, fear of breakup, emotional insecurity, and uncertainty about future plans. Similar findings were reported by Savita and Khan (2020), who discussed the lack of formal legal protection and commitment in live-in relationships. Female respondents, in particular, demonstrated greater concern regarding emotional vulnerability, social judgment, and insecurity, supporting the observations made by Dahotre (2025) and Sharma and Kaushik (2025), who emphasized the gendered experiences associated with cohabitation.

With regard to coping strategies, the respondents emphasized the importance of clear communication, fair division of financial responsibilities, healthy conflict resolution, emotional preparedness, and mutual respect. These findings are consistent with Willoughby, Carroll, and Busby (2011), who identified communication and relationship congruence as important predictors of relationship quality. Similarly, Agnihotri et al. (2024) highlighted equality, transparency, and shared responsibilities as important factors in maintaining healthy cohabiting relationships.

A unique finding of the present study was that youth did not view live-in relationships only through the lens of romance or physical intimacy. Instead, many respondents associated cohabitation with emotional growth, teamwork, household management, and preparation for shared adult responsibilities. This finding differs from earlier societal stereotypes that often portrayed live-in relationships as temporary or irresponsible arrangements. The study therefore reflects a gradual shift among educated youth toward viewing live-in relationships as emotionally meaningful and practically oriented partnerships.

Another significant finding of the study was that postgraduate students consistently demonstrated greater awareness, openness, and informed understanding regarding live-in relationships compared to undergraduate students. This suggests that higher education and greater social exposure may positively influence perceptions regarding non-traditional relationship structures.

The present study further revealed that youth perceptions toward live-in relationships were not entirely supportive or entirely rejecting. Rather, respondents simultaneously acknowledged both the emotional benefits and social risks associated with cohabitation. This reflects the transitional nature of Indian society, where traditional cultural expectations coexist with modern individualistic values.

The brochure developed as part of the present study serves as an important educational intervention aimed at reducing misconceptions and promoting informed understanding regarding live-in relationships among youth. The brochure may contribute toward creating balanced awareness regarding emotional preparedness, legal rights, communication, equality, and healthy relationship practices among youth.

Contributions of the Study

1. The study contributed to understanding the awareness of undergraduate and postgraduate students regarding live-in relationships.
2. The study explored youth perspectives regarding the meaning, reasons, myths, benefits, challenges, coping strategies, and suggestions associated with live-in relationships.
3. The study highlighted the coexistence of modern relationship acceptance and traditional cultural values among youth.
4. The findings contributed to the development of an awareness brochure for undergraduate and postgraduate students.

5. The study may help educators, counsellors, psychologists, and youth professionals develop awareness programs related to healthy relationships.

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