

Fragility in Modern Relationships: A Psychological Perspective on Marital Failure

Rochak Chaudhary

ABSTRACT

Fragility in modern relationships today may be not a norm but is still widespread and its growth is seen across the World. Earlier marriage used to be an economic arrangement when the workforce primarily comprised of males. The man was also deemed as a bread winner and women were stay at home wives and mothers. However, all this changed after the industrial revolution and two World Wars. Today with more and more women in the workforce, pay parity, gender equality and the social dynamics in a family system has changed. Today relationships are not just between opposite genders, co-habitation, live-in relationships, no fault divorce, female friendly laws, equality between genders, all such aspects have been introduced. Previous research cited infidelity as the main cause of divorce. However, this may not be the only factor. Divorce today from a global perspective may have a lot of other factors involved since women are catching up or sometimes even exceeding in aspects that were earlier considered a man's domain. The current research thus used literature review from a psychological standpoint to understand the contributing factors affecting modern relationships, these can range from a conventional marriage, live-in relationships or any kind of co-habiting arrangement. The methodology used quantitative in nature where Google forms were used. The findings are enlightening and point out to various other factors that are responsible for this institution to break. Earlier research involved aspects such as domestic abuse and infidelity which may still have a significant contribution, the new research however lays emphasis on other aspects as well such as unmatched expectations etc. There is significantly less patience and breaking up is less of a taboo when modern relationships are concerned.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

In contemporary society, the nature and quality of intimate relationships have undergone profound changes. Once grounded primarily in social conventions and long-term commitments, relationships today are more fluid, complex, and often more fragile. While marriage continues to be a central institution in many cultures, there has been a noticeable shift toward alternative forms of partnerships such as live-in relationships, cohabitation, and same-sex unions. These evolving norms reflect a broader transformation in social attitudes, personal expectations, and individual priorities.

A growing global concern is the increasing rate of relationship breakdowns—marriages ending in divorce, long-term partnerships falling apart, and emotional disconnects occurring even within seemingly stable bonds. In countries across the world, from urban India to Western Europe and North America, emotional instability and separation are on the rise. Studies and reports have shown that people are increasingly finding it difficult to sustain long-term emotional bonds. Although earlier such breakdowns were attributed largely to infidelity or domestic violence, modern relationship challenges appear more nuanced and less overt.

One of the defining features of this shift is the role of individualism. Modern culture encourages personal fulfillment, self-expression, and independence—values that, while empowering, can also create friction in

relationships that require compromise, emotional labor, and mutual adaptation. As partners become more focused on their individual journeys and growth, the collective nurturing of the relationship sometimes takes a backseat. This tension between autonomy and emotional closeness is a recurring theme in the fragility of modern relationships.

Moreover, technological advancements have redefined how people initiate, maintain, and sometimes end their relationships. The advent of dating apps, social media platforms, and instant messaging has facilitated quick connections but has also led to superficial engagements, miscommunication, and easy exits. The availability of options often creates a paradox of choice, where individuals struggle to commit out of fear of missing out on something better. The reliance on digital communication has also led to misinterpretations and reduced the depth of interpersonal connection. Physical presence, once central to emotional bonding, is now often replaced with emojis, video calls, and texts.

Economic factors have also played a significant role in altering relationship dynamics. With both partners in most modern relationships contributing financially, there has been a re-negotiation of traditional roles. While this promotes equality, it can also lead to stress related to time management, career prioritization, and power dynamics. Dual-income households often find themselves time-starved, leading to a lack of quality time, which is essential for emotional connection and intimacy. The balance between personal ambitions and shared responsibilities is difficult to strike, further contributing to relational fragility.

Changing gender roles have equally contributed to new relational patterns. With more women joining the workforce and seeking leadership roles, and with men increasingly participating in caregiving and household responsibilities, the dynamics of traditional masculinity and femininity are being redefined. This shift, though progressive, sometimes leads to confusion or friction, especially when societal expectations and personal beliefs do not align. Such conflicts, if unresolved, often lead to dissatisfaction and emotional withdrawal.

Mental health awareness, although a positive development, has also highlighted the psychological burden that relationships can carry. Anxiety, depression, and emotional trauma are now openly discussed and recognized as factors affecting relationship health. Many individuals enter relationships with unhealed wounds or unresolved issues, which, if not addressed, can strain the emotional fabric of the partnership. Furthermore, unrealistic expectations fueled by romanticized portrayals of love in media often set the stage for disappointment and disillusionment.

This study, therefore, seeks to understand the key factors contributing to the increasing fragility of modern relationships. It aims to explore the interplay between cultural, psychological, economic, and technological influences that challenge relational stability today. The empirical nature of the research enables a grounded understanding based on real-life data and experiences shared by participants from diverse backgrounds.

The core research question guiding this study is: *Why do modern marriages and relationships fail?* To answer this, a literature review has been conducted identifying major themes such as trust issues, incompatible expectations, fast-paced lifestyles, communication breakdowns, narcissism, abuse, addiction, and financial stress. These themes form the foundation of the survey design, which was administered using Google Forms and distributed via social media. The voluntary response sampling method allowed the researcher to collect data from a wide array of participants, ensuring diversity in opinion and experience.

This introductory chapter lays the groundwork for a deeper analysis of modern relational dynamics. The following chapters explore existing literature on relationship fragility, detail the methodology used for

data collection and analysis, present the findings, and discuss the implications of the results. The study concludes with reflections on how individuals and society can foster more resilient and emotionally healthy relationships in an age of rapid social transformation.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Why Are Modern Relationships Failing?

The innate need to pair up is basic instinct. This is true for living creatures be it animals, plants and humans. It's natural to have a desire to find 'the one' and the relationship to last, unfortunately in current times not every union ends 'happily ever after'. So, what are the causes that lead to this in the first place. As per psychology today, top reasons why relationships fail are as under:

- **Trust issues or insecurity:** As per (Becker-Phelps, 2015) a fear of abandonment stemming from childhood experiences can turn one insecure in relationships. This may affect a couple's long term relationship health, and the other partner may feel overwhelmed. Trust issues in a relationship may also stem from a partner's infidelity, attractiveness or a current episode that may have involved cheating.
- **Different expectations:** Mark Twain once said, *"Never allow someone to be your priority while allowing yourself to be their option."* Initially whatever attracts potential partners such as attractiveness, wealth, fame, personality, common interests, racial background etc may become of less significance and realities of day-to-day life sets in and over a time couples may realize that both had different expectations.
- **Pace:** When one partner may be growing or advancing, the other partner may have a slower pace or may be stagnating. For example, one partner may be growing well on the career front, may have a better compensation and social standing but the other may be way behind. Soon couples may realize that they are socially, intellectually and physically growing apart.
- **Compatibility:** As per Bibbins (2024), one of the most important factor that predicts the durability of a relationship is compatibility. This compatibility could be in personality, background, attachment styles, intimacy etc.
- **Lack of Communication:** The secret to a good relationship is good communication, lack of which may lead to contempt and could be the reason couples start hating each other.
- **Narcissism:** As per Anderson (2020) a narcissist is a person who has an inflated ego and needs to manipulate others and find fault in everyone except self. Such an individual does not see the partner's worth and has no concern for their feelings. Such individuals are also prone to infidelity in a relationship.
- **Abuse:** Needless to say, mistreatment of a partner in any form be it emotional or physical cannot make a relationship thrive.
- **Addictions:** Addictions manifest themselves in forms such as drugs, alcohol, gambling, sexual etc. All of these may affect the relationship in a negative way.
- **Money issues:** Money issues usually tap some of our deepest fears including lack of security, status, trust, survival etc. Apart from this even if the family in general is financially comfortable as both partners are earning, lack of financial equity in terms of one partner earning significantly more than the other may also lead to marital discord.

All the above-mentioned points are expanded under using the literature available:

2.1.1 Trust Issues and Insecurity

As per Glass (2004) good people in good marriages are having affairs. Spending long hours at the workplace, meeting different people, internet, all these are the breeding grounds for such relationships. Cheating thus becomes a leading cause of divorce as its difficult to build trust after its broken.

As per Nelson (2013) the concept of monogamy may not be the same for both partners. Couples may never exactly bring the concept of monogamy on the table and thus may not be on the same page. This implicit agreement may be broken later and thus may cause a lot of resentment between the two, one of them may then feel betrayed and may never be able to trust the other ever again.

There would then be a lot of anger, despair, accusations etc that would be the by-product whatever led to this in the first place. Although some couples in this case may want to save the marriage and move on but the trust aspect may never be fully gained by the person guilty of the act in the first place. The partner who felt cheated may be triggered something as simple as the other having a casual chat with a friend or colleague. The guilt may prevent the accused from reacting to verbal lashes the other may subject. The atmosphere in the house may be tense for days and all this ultimately may take a toll on the relationship health in general. All this is bound to test the relationship resilience in general and may lead to separation or/and divorce even later on in life.

2.1.2 Different Expectations

If you have ever wanted to say, "I can't do this anymore!" out of frustration with your marriage, you're definitely not alone. (Nieuwhof, 2021)

Marriage may fail when one or both the partners may feel their expectations are not being met. Another example may be that after marriage reality struck and made one or both realize that this is not they wanted. Unrealistic expectations may also be the culprit. We as human beings are not perfect. Blame it on social media, a desire for perfectionism, high self-worth or self-entitlement may make one believe that the other person was not good enough and this alliance was a mistake.

Lack of proper communication during the course of dating may also result in the above. Ignoring subtle signs such as making plans based on one's friend's behest and then following the same pattern post marriage where the spouse expects the significant other to plan according to them is one such example where there was a communication barrier. In this case the spouse who feels left out may feel that they were never a priority, however the other may be surprised to know that this was never a concern before the union.

Old habits die hard and thus a person's inclination to pursue an activity may remain the same as before. An innocent act of just playing a sport that the person was fond of may become a cause for marital discord. Partners who have problems based on the above examples may defend themselves by saying "I thought they might change" or "Love is blind" or "They should more responsible since they are a family person" but in reality it's the expectations that changed or were not communicated in the past that led to this discord. The truth is that the person one gets into a relationship and marriage is the same person pre and post marriage, if there are certain expectations that need to be considered, they should be brought ahead of getting into marriage. For example thinking that the partner would stop drinking or(d having a certain food habit would change is a bit unrealistic although there are instances where people do change but in the end we are humans and there are times one lets their guard down.

2.1.3 Pace

There are instances where one partner is more successful financially, socially and intellectually. Initially due to physical compatibility the two may have been coupled with each other but in the long term when

reality steps in, there can be conflicts between the two. Many reasons that encompass the above mentioned come into play here and are discussed below:

- **My money factor:** When instead of ‘our money’ ‘my money’ comes into play, conflicts are bound to arise. This is especially true when initially both partners were making the same amount of money and had not issues splitting bills equally but when one gets lucky and climbs the ladder, this problem may arise when the other partner may think that more is coming out of their pocket without realizing that with growth in income, the standard of living improves and to maintain it, more money is needed which the other partner cannot keep pace with as their income is substantially lower or same as before.
- **Social Status:** When both partners are from a different social status, this may create compatibility in the long run, for example someone from a modest upbringing may get married to a person who is way up in status. The better off spouse would have friends from the same background, this may make the other conscious of their status and may lead to an element of inferiority complex or they feel left out.
- **Value system:** As Tanaka (2011) people who are less religious are more likely to divorce as religious people hold a very strong belief into the institution of marriage. This value system is responsible to keep a relationship intact. Also, people with a different value system as in one being from a very liberal family and the other being from a very sheltered background may not keep pace with each other in future. It has also been seen that the value system people have learnt since childhood may be so ingrained that it may lead to lack of flexibility in long term relationships.

2.1.4 Compatibility

As per Snyder & Ickes (1985) Compatibility is a term that defines two people who work or fit especially well together. Compatibility just doesn’t mean that a couple share the same values or interests but extends way beyond to temperament, sex, how conflicts are handled, safe space among others. Thus, compatibility is a general term used to define a lot that should be in sync for a relationship to thrive.

There are many aspects to the above and are discussed below:

- **Vague future:** Both partners in this may have different life goals, for example one may want to immigrate and build a future in a different geography but the other may not want this. Usually in a disagreement both should meet halfway through but in this case, it might be difficult and hence the union may dissolve.
- **Romantic incompatibility:** Couples may have different expectations from each other, or their own desires were repressed initially as in the case of an arranged marriage. Such a couple may not be able to align with each other and may lead to marital discord.
- **Headstrong Nature:** By headstrong its meant being stubborn. In this case there might be a lot of conflict if one or both partners are not willing to meet each other halfway. Marriage in this case would suffer a lot and would lead to dissolution.
- **Lack of shared interests:** Suppose one partner wants to go out and the other one wants to stay at home, or one person wants to do a certain activity but the other one is interested in a different activity. Lack of shared interests could mean anything but eventually boils down to how should one keep the spark going.
- **Different schedules:** This may or may not be a deal breaker for example both partners may work at different times such as one working during the day and the other during the night, this could lead a lack of understanding between the two as both do not have time to be with each other.

2.1.5 Lack of Communication

Williamson (2020) stated that communication is a fundamental aspect of a successful relationship. Lack

of communication or not having a proper one could be a deal breaker. Couples may not communicate due to various factors discussed below:

- **Fear of conflict:** In this case one or both the partners may decide not to speak to each other as they may fear that a conflict may occur. This may seem as a temporary resolution to avoid a conflict but in the long run may cause the marriage to break down.
- **Having no energy to communicate:** Coming back from work tired, bringing your work to home, pressure to complete deadlines, all these are common issues corporate workers face, the couple in this case may not have the time or energy to have a healthy conversation.
- **Lack of empathy:** Empathy is the art of stepping into someone's shoes, understanding them and guiding your actions. Without empathy one's significant other may feel alienated and may not communicate their feelings or even if they do the unempathetic party may not understand.

2.1.6 Narcissism

Mitra et al. (2024) states that Narcissistic Personality Disorder is a psychological condition that has a pattern of self-admiration, lack of empathy and a presence of grandiosity. This type of disorder causes a lot of problems in life this includes relationships, workplaces and the society in general. People with this type of inclination may think that they deserve special treatment or admiration and are not sure of their self-worth. Criticism turns them defensive and sometimes violent. When such a person gets into a relationship all the above manifests and ruins it in general.

This behaviour in general is centered around one person's needs wherein the other person is completely ignored. Examples of this behaviour in relationships are

- Trying to get more that they deserve by taking advantage of their partner such a willingness to work extra or more to bring benefits to the family without putting their own efforts.
- Excessive use of social media by posting pictures to make others jealous of their relationship.
- No taking ownership in a conflict and putting the blame entirely on the other partner even though they may or may not be completely at fault.
- Using one's partner to gain wealth, status etc.
- Crossing boundaries in a relationship without other party's knowledge or consent.
- Gaslighting and lying.
- Using aggression and not accepting one's shortcomings.

2.1.7 Abuse

Abuse as the name implies is the misuse of power. This can be a pattern or a single incident. Abuse can be practiced by either partner or sometimes both. It can also take different forms and thus there are different types of abuse in a relationship such as:

- **Emotional:** This includes non-physical behaviours that may be difficult to identify but are as serious as other forms such as jealousy, threats of leaving, constant control, humiliating etc.
- **Physical:** As the name suggests it involves the use of force or may just involve threats of violence from self or someone else that may leave the other partner scared.
- **Sexual:** This is when one partner controls the sexual aspect of a relationship, and which usually involves non-consensual aspects.
- **Financial:** In this case a partner may control other partner's financial freedom or deny some financial benefits. For example, withholding, stealing or restricting money.

2.1.8 Addictions

Addictions can be of many kinds but here the reference is in general to drugs and alcohol or any kind of

substance abuse. Whatever kind it may be but all lead to conflict. Substance abuse may sometimes be hidden and maybe revealed later that may cause the rift. There are a few telltale signs that may suggest that a spouse is addicted to something. Addictions may also be practiced by both the partners. The signs of addiction are as under:

- Not fulfilling responsibilities.
- Getting on the wrong side of law from time to time.
- Skipping gatherings or events.
- Leaving the house often, sometimes at unearthly hours such as midnight without explanation.
- Caught lying from time to time.
- Changes in weight.
- Changes in sleep patterns.
- Trouble concentrating.
- Job loss.
- Mood swings.
- Frequent hangovers.

All these and more are signs that someone is addicted to something which leads to causes mentioned above and later.

2.1.9 Money Issues

McWhinney (2024) a quarter of couples on an average say that money has been the greatest issue that has affected a relationship. These issues manifest themselves in various ways and are discussed as under:

- **Splitting bills:** With both partners earning and both partners equally sharing finances such as a debt, whatever is left behind in each partner's account may be considered disposable income. However, this may cause issues when one partner may question the other partner's purchase that the former may deem wasteful. This may affect the financial independence of the latter and may cause resentment and may also lead to something called financial infidelity. This means that the partner affected may start hiding finances.
- **A previous debt:** Sometimes, there might be a previous debt that may be brought in the household such as a student loan, credit card debt or something else. This may affect the family dynamics in general as one partner may not be able to fully contribute.
- **Power Play:** There might be a scenario where one partner earns and the other doesn't for whatever reason or one there may be a huge difference between spousal earnings. In this case the one who has more money or earns more may control financial decisions. In the long run this may lead to conflicts.
- **Supporting a family:** A people marry the family grows in terms of their own children, extended families and mutual friends. Children need to be taken care of by providing them with the best education, clothes, toys apart from other costs that involve whilst raising a child such employing nannies, maids etc. All this comes at a price. Also, in some cultures it is expected to support parents, siblings, extended families and sometimes close friends. In the long run this may lead to conflicts between the partners one of which may oppose the above.

2.2 Research Gaps

Although prior research on this topic has explored various aspects that are instrumental in a relationship failing, they miss out on a few points which are discussed as follows:

2.2.1 How the Relationship Was Formed

As per Emery (2023); arranged marriages which used to be a norm before, was comparable or synonymous with forced marriage. Both the bride and groom may never have had a choice but to accept the fate that was decided by their respective families. Things now as we know have changed a lot, with women being as financially independent, and being in the same occupations as men have more and more choices and also the option to be with the partner of their choice.

Also with the world becoming more globalized, common values that used to be the norm in the west, now are percolating in traditionally conservative geographies such as India. People are now more inclined to test waters before taking the plunge. So how the relationship forms now is way different from how it was formed before.

Today a couple may decide to be friends first, live-in, be engaged for long before marrying and even use dating sites which double up as matrimonial sites. Thus what needs to be understood is how the relationship was formed in the beginning, because the quality of a relationship, may be a by-product of how it was formed in the first place; for example, a person who met his/her significant other through a matrimonial site may find out that the subject may have lied about his or her job, education, financial stability, religion, caste etc. This may be the cause of the rift in future and may also lead to a lot of emotional pain as the person who felt cheated may decide to end the relationship rather than living a life full of lies and deceit.

2.2.2 Same-Sex Relationships

Most studies that are about relationships have usually been from a heterosexual perspective. Social taboos, acceptance, geography, religion are the main factors that may have caused the bias in the past. However, with the introduction of internet, social media and globalized values, things are changing and what was a taboo earlier, is more likely discussed openly in today's context.

The World have become more accepting now and individuals have started prioritizing themselves along with their careers, that helped them achieve that independence in the first place. The term LGBTQ+ is now universally known and is even being discussed in schools as part of sex-ed.

However, all these changes may still not have hit the core of social dynamics especially in less developed urban and rural areas. Family values, may also be deemed conservative in urbanized cities and may have prevented an open forum in the family to discuss these issues. Thus the above may also lead to relationships being built due to social pressure, where the couple may be of different sex but may clearly have preferences that may challenge the traditional institution of marriage.

As per (Daly et al., 2018) when a spouse turns out be gay or lesbian, the partner has to endure a lot of grief that may manifest in form of loss, pain, cheating amongst other complication. The dissolution of marriage in this case is very likely. As discussed above, the partner may either has chosen not to reveal the orientation due to familiar or social pressure, or may have not known themselves that they are more attracted to someone of their own gender.

Meeting someone who has similar tendencies, may have triggered this aspect and that could have led to homosexual encounters, discovering self and ultimately submitting oneself to the hidden identity.

As per Goldberg & Garcia (2015), there are instances when the couple who were initially married as heterosexual, but later one of them turns out to be involved with someone of the same sex, may have children from their heterosexual partners, so even if the spouse somehow accepts the change, and decides to continue the relationship, the children become the catalyst for dissolution of marriage.

2.2.3 Marriage of Convenience

As per Nguyen (2024), a marriage that is just a convenient union but lacks the understanding, intimacy and connection of a traditional marriage is a marriage of convenience. These partnerships may have many reasons as to why they were formed in the first place. These range from family pressure, status, legal purposes, political or royal alliances etc. It is also possible that a marriage or a relationship formed earlier out of love, or compatibility may transition into a marriage of convenience as the couple may fall out of love or in the case of arranged marriage, may have not fallen in love with each other but still continued to stay owing to familial pressures, or for the sake of children.

The Gap highlights the top indicators that helps identify if a couple are in a marriage of convenience. As per Montague (2024), there are tell tale signs that suggest that a marriage is in the aforementioned state and these are as follows:

You are only staying together due to pressure: Couples may be under some sort internal pressure apart from the external pressure imposed by the family and the society, this pressure may also stem from the fact that why break something that is working or why create drama. Traditional cultures may make it difficult for such couples to identify self needs over social norms. Opinions of loved ones, family and friends may also add to this. A strong sign is, if these pressures were ignored or removed, would the couple still be together, and if that's a no, they are in a marriage of convenience.

You do not want to spend quality time together: Another tell-tale sign is, if conversations between couples is only related to matters such as household responsibilities, work, issues regarding children such as their education, games, social circle etc. If the bonding is only for the sake of obligations, it is definitely a marriage of convenience as couples, like to spend time together, even if they are married with kids, they feel like being alone with each other, taking each other out for a vacation, movie, dinner etc.

Everything is just fine: You might be married to a partner checking all the boxes, the spouse may be a good provider, a good homemaker, a good parent, good in appearance, but if there is no mental/emotional connect, the marriage is definitely just a compromise. The couple may still continue to be together as there seems nothing wrong on the outside, but internally, it may be not what it seems to be.

2.3 Need and Rationale

In the 21st century, interpersonal relationships have undergone significant transformations. While communication technologies, urbanization, and evolving social values have brought people closer in some ways, they have also introduced new forms of stress, conflict, and emotional disconnection. Fragility in modern relationships is not merely a reflection of personal incompatibility but often a product of broader sociocultural shifts that affect how individuals perceive intimacy, commitment, and connection.

One of the pressing indicators of this fragility is the rising global trend of breakups, separations, and divorces. More people report dissatisfaction in long-term partnerships, with growing numbers seeking therapy, counseling, or choosing to remain single. Despite the abundance of social media and dating apps designed to foster connection, loneliness and emotional burnout are increasingly common. This paradox — being more connected digitally but emotionally more distant — necessitates a deeper examination.

There is also a clear need for empirical research to understand how values like independence, freedom, and self-expression are reshaping expectations within romantic relationships. Many traditional frameworks of partnership, based on shared responsibilities and societal norms, are being challenged. However, the void in understanding how these transitions contribute to emotional vulnerability and relational fragility

highlights the urgent need for academic exploration of this topic.

The rationale for this study lies in the increasing demand to make sense of contemporary relationship dynamics, especially among younger and middle-aged populations. As social norms change, individuals are redefining what it means to be in a relationship. With delayed marriages, declining birth rates, and non-traditional relationship models becoming more accepted, it becomes imperative to study what holds modern relationships together — and what causes them to fall apart.

Psychological stress, mental health awareness, and emotional independence have become defining aspects of personal identity. However, these factors also introduce complexity into romantic partnerships. As both partners in a relationship pursue personal growth and self-actualization, the delicate balance between independence and interdependence becomes harder to maintain.

Furthermore, the rise of digital communication, while convenient, has altered how partners interact. Misinterpretation of tone, lack of physical presence, and the influence of online validation often exacerbate conflict rather than resolve it. These factors are contributing to emotional detachment, insecurity, and breakdown of trust — key indicators of relational fragility.

The rationale also extends to the practical implications of the study. Understanding these new dynamics can help therapists, counselors, educators, and even policy-makers create informed interventions that strengthen relationships. It also helps individuals make more mindful decisions in their personal lives.

2.4 Significance and Scope

This study is significant in multiple dimensions. Firstly, it contributes to academic literature in psychology, sociology, and relationship counseling by offering a contemporary understanding of how modern life impacts relational stability. Unlike previous decades, where marriage and partnerships were often defined by economic or societal roles, today's relationships are deeply rooted in emotional fulfillment, communication, and mutual respect.

Secondly, this study provides valuable insights for mental health professionals. By identifying recurring causes of relationship breakdown — such as lack of emotional availability, unrealistic expectations, or overdependence on digital interactions — professionals can tailor their counseling approaches. This can also lead to better-designed premarital education, relationship workshops, and public awareness campaigns.

Thirdly, the study is significant for individuals navigating modern relationships. In an era of swipe-based dating and constant digital noise, people often struggle to build lasting emotional connections. The study can serve as a reflective tool, helping individuals recognize patterns of fragility in their own relationships and take proactive steps toward improvement.

Lastly, the research has broader societal relevance. Stable relationships contribute to emotional well-being, healthier families, and cohesive communities. As family structures evolve and mental health takes center stage, understanding what makes relationships fragile or resilient becomes crucial to maintaining societal harmony.

The scope of this study is broad yet focused. It explores romantic relationships primarily in urban settings, where modern influences such as digital communication, career pressures, and changing gender roles are most pronounced. The study will analyze relationship dynamics among adults aged 20 to 45, a demographic that is most engaged in forming or navigating intimate relationships in the current cultural context.

Key areas covered include:

- The impact of technology on relationship satisfaction
- Role of emotional intelligence and communication in sustaining bonds
- Effects of individualism, career ambition, and mental health awareness
- Gender roles and evolving expectations
- Cultural attitudes toward commitment and long-term relationships

While the study will primarily draw on psychological and sociological frameworks, it will also incorporate perspectives from cultural studies and digital media theory. Both qualitative and quantitative data may be used, such as surveys, interviews, and literature analysis.

The geographical focus will be on urban Indian and Western contexts, allowing for comparative insights. However, the findings could have universal relevance, as globalization and digitization influence relationship norms across societies.

In conclusion, this study aims to unpack the layers of fragility in modern relationships by examining individual, relational, and societal factors. Through its insights, it hopes to contribute not only to academic understanding but also to practical tools for building stronger, more resilient partnerships in the modern age.

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Aim

The aim of this research is to explore and analyse the various reasons that contribute to relationship and marital issues among adults. The study seeks to understand how factors such as gender and relationship status are associated with reported relationship challenges. The ultimate goal is to derive insights that may contribute to counselling, relationship education, and intervention strategies to strengthen intimate relationships and marriages.

3.2 Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To identify the most common reasons for relationship and marital issues reported by participants.
2. To examine differences in reported reasons based on gender.
3. To examine differences in reported reasons based on relationship status.
4. To analyse whether certain reasons co-occur frequently.
5. To explore the prevalence of each reason within the sample population.
6. To provide descriptive data on gender and relationship status distribution in the sample.
7. To evaluate implications of reported issues for relationship counselling and therapy.
8. To analyse any patterns in responses among 'Other' gender identities and relationship statuses.
9. To contribute quantitative data to the existing literature on relationship and marital issues.
10. To inform psychoeducation and intervention modules for relationship strengthening programs.

3.3 Hypotheses

Based on literature review and preliminary observations, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- **H1:** There is a significant association between gender and the type of relationship or marital issues reported.
- **H2:** There is a significant association between relationship status and the type of relationship or marital issues reported.

- **H0:** There is no significant association between gender or relationship status and the type of relationship or marital issues reported.

3.4 Operational Definitions

To ensure clarity and consistency, key terms in this research are operationally defined as follows:

- **Gender:** Self-reported gender identity as indicated by participants, categorised as Male, Female, They/No Gender/Prefer not to say, or Other (self-specified).
- **Relationship Status:** Self-reported current relationship status of the participants, categorised as Married, Never Married, Divorced, In a Relationship but not Married/Live-in, or Other (self-specified).
- **Reasons for Relationship/Marital Issues:** Participants' selected reasons from a pre-structured checklist including Trust Issues, Cheating, Extra-Marital Affairs, Different or Unfulfilled Expectations (wealth, attractiveness, status, family, friends), Unmatched Growth (career, status), Lack of Compatibility, Lack of Communication, Abusive or Narcissistic Partner, Drug/Alcohol Issues, Financial Issues, and Other (self-specified).

3.5 Variables

The variables of the study include:

- **Independent Variables (IV):**
 - Gender
 - Relationship Status
- **Dependent Variable (DV):**
 - Reported reasons for relationship or marital issues.
- **Control Variables:**
 - None specifically controlled, but demographic distribution will be reported for interpretation.

3.6 Research Design

This study employed a **quantitative, cross-sectional survey design**. Quantitative research design was chosen to ensure objectivity, reliability, and generalisability of the findings. A cross-sectional approach allows the collection of data at a single point in time from a diverse group of individuals, enabling the researcher to examine associations between variables within the sample.

The rationale for choosing this design includes:

- Efficient data collection within limited time.
- Ability to analyse patterns of responses among groups.
- Appropriate method for descriptive and inferential statistical analyses.

3.7 Tools of Assessment

3.7.1 Online Survey Questionnaire

The main tool for data collection was a **Google Forms-based online survey** developed by the researcher, comprising:

1. **Demographic Information:**
 - Gender
 - Relationship Status
2. **Checklist of Reasons for Relationship/Marital Issues:** Participants were presented with the

following options and asked to select all applicable reasons:

- Trust Issues, Cheating, Extra-Marital Affairs
- Different or Unfulfilled Expectations (wealth, attractiveness, status, family, friends, etc.)

- Unmatched Growth (career, status, etc.)
- Lack of Compatibility
- Lack of Communication
- Abusive or Narcissistic Partner
- Drug/Alcohol Issues
- Financial Issues
- Other (open-ended self-response option)

3.7.2 Validation and Reliability

The checklist was prepared based on an extensive review of literature on marital and relationship issues. Content validity was ensured through expert review by one of psychology faculty members. As the tool is a descriptive checklist, psychometric reliability measures are not applicable; however, clarity and cultural appropriateness were ensured through pilot testing on a small sample of 10 participants prior to full data collection.

3.8 Procedure of Administration

The following procedure was adopted for data collection:

1. **Preparation of Questionnaire:** The researcher developed the Google Form including demographic questions and the checklist of reasons.
2. **Pilot Testing:** Conducted with 10 participants to assess clarity and ease of understanding. Minor modifications were made based on feedback.
3. **Distribution:** The finalised form was distributed via social media platforms (WhatsApp, Facebook groups, and LinkedIn) to reach a diverse adult population.
4. **Informed Consent:** The first page of the survey included a consent form detailing the purpose, voluntary participation, confidentiality assurance, and researcher contact details. Participants could proceed only after clicking 'Agree'.
5. **Data Collection Period:** Data was collected over a period of two weeks.
6. **Data Storage:** Responses were securely stored in the researcher's Google Drive with restricted access to maintain confidentiality.
7. **Data Cleaning:** Data was screened for incomplete responses before analysis.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

This research adhered to strict ethical standards to protect participants' rights and well-being:

- **Informed Consent:** Obtained electronically from all participants before data collection.
- **Voluntary Participation:** Participation was entirely voluntary, with the option to withdraw at any stage without penalty.
- **Confidentiality and Anonymity:** No identifying information (names, contact details) was collected. Data was stored securely and used solely for research purposes.
- **Non-maleficence:** The study posed minimal risk to participants as it involved self-reported survey data.

3.10 Data Analysis Plan

The following statistical procedures are planned:

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Frequencies and percentages for gender, relationship status, and reasons for issues.
- **Graphical Representation:** Bar charts and pie charts for visual presentation of findings.

3.11 Limitations

While this methodology is robust for the research aim, limitations include:

- Self-report bias due to social desirability or selective disclosure.
- Online survey sampling limits representation to internet users.
- Cross-sectional design does not allow causality conclusions.
- Limited sample size (depending on final data) may affect generalisability.

3.12 Future Directions

- Including qualitative interviews for in-depth insights into reasons reported.
- Longitudinal follow-ups to assess changes in relationship issues over time.
- Comparative studies across cultural contexts.

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Presentation of Analysis

Table 4.1: Reasons for Issues in a Relationship/Marriage (N = 109)

Reason	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Lack of Communication	46	41.8%
Trust Issues, Cheating, Extra-Marital Affairs	32	29.1%
Different or Unfulfilled Expectations	30	27.3%
Lack of Compatibility	25	22.7%
Financial Issues	20	18.2%
Abusive or Narcissistic Partner	20	18.2%
Unmatched Growth (career, status, etc.)	18	16.4%
Trust Issues (separate entry)	12	10.9%
Drug/Alcohol Issues	12	10.9%
Other single-response entries	1 each	~1%

Note: Several participants selected multiple options or provided single open-ended responses not categorised under main themes.

4.2 Discussion

The analysis indicates that **lack of communication (41.8%)** emerged as the most frequently reported issue in relationships and marriages among respondents. This was followed by **trust-related issues including cheating and extra-marital affairs (29.1%)**, and **different or unfulfilled expectations (27.3%)**. These findings align with prior studies indicating that communication breakdown and trust deficits are primary factors leading to relationship dissatisfaction.

Interestingly, **financial issues (18.2%)** and **lack of compatibility (22.7%)** were also prevalent, highlighting that both practical and interpersonal dimensions contribute to relational strain. A smaller but significant proportion reported **abusive or narcissistic partners (18.2%)**, emphasising the need for psychological support and counselling interventions.

The presence of **single-response entries** such as caste, race, mental health problems, and family

interference reflects the contextual and cultural nuances affecting relationships in the sample population. As per (Lyons et al., 1998), reduced communication between married couples meant, that the marriage was under stress and this was a recipe for separation, and divorce. A healthy communication pattern ensures, that couples have a deep understanding between each other, are able to set boundaries, and expectations, able to resolve conflicts, share desires and thoughts, and decide the future course of their relationship. Couples with a deeper level of intimacy, share a good communication. It is also the time when they can be vulnerable with each other, share trust and build bonds. When trust building between couples is not achieved, there is serious communication barrier that is involved. Couples may then feel unsafe, unappreciated and disconnected with each other.

Bad communication, like other issues, usually has some signs and these are described as under:

Talking over or interrupting your partner: talking over means continuing to talk when the other person is talking or, not letting the person speak. Interrupting when your partner is trying to express or talk is also the same exercise. When a person is trying to express themselves verbally, interrupting them makes them feel unheard, worthless and unappreciated. This may lead to conflicts, misunderstandings and shows a lack of respect for the other. Active listening seems to be missing in this context, and this is key ingredient in healthy communication.

Putting words in someone's mouth or twisting words: this is not just a form of miscommunication, but also manifest itself as manipulating your partner. The partner, means something, but is projected as someone responsible for the relationship to go down south. It also means, the partner is made the villain in the relationship, and their words are considered completely out of context. This undermines honest communicative patterns, and prevents the resolution of a relationship problem.

Being selfish or self-centered: directing a communication about self, and trying to seek attention is another aspect that makes one's partner unimportant. It also shows that the person is more concerned about self, and does not care about the partner's needs and wants. A healthy communication involves a constant flow of expressions in form of words from both sides, in this case when one partner dodges everything to be the center of attention, the partner feels emotionally disconnected. The pattern, if continued strains the already strained bond further.

Know it all type: in this case the partner feels they no more than their significant other, they are quick to give unsolicited advice, but not accept one from their partner. Believing in self in one thing, but thinking that they know better, is a form of disrespect for their significant other, the partner here may feel worthless and may stop communicating in such situations.

Being rude or aggressive: some people just start getting belligerent or rude during a communication, this is assert their dominance or fear of losing it. The partner feels threatened in this case, and fears repercussions and decides to stop interacting all for the fear of getting harassed or hurt. They may also gaslight the partner by shifting the blame on them and not take the ownership in case things go wrong. Rather than accepting where they have been wrong, the aggressor may use their influence to shut the partner and continue this pattern every time.

Selectively listening or/and forgetting things: there could be scenarios when an important conversation is taking place, and it's necessary to get the details right. In this case the partner initiating the conversation may see that other party may either be too distracted. Signs of distraction are constantly checking the phone, walking out of the room, and then returning, continue to watch television, and selectively listening to the discourse. Important details may be left out later, as the person not listening was too distracted to pay attention. Miscommunication may occur which may be the cause of conflict.

Stamps (2007), postulates that, infidelity is a predictor of dissolution of a marriage or an intimate relationship in general. It is not just the matter of a marriage or a relationship breaking, but it affects the partner's self-esteem, and causes a lot of hurt, which then can manifest itself in form of depression, and/or anxiety. A lot can be forgiven in a relationship, but infidelity has the potential to initiate a breakup in a significant manner. Although this did not feature on the top in the findings, but it's position as the second most probable cause for the failure of a relationship shows that it has a significant influence.

Infidelity can be in many forms, they can be physical, emotional or both. They can also be an intense attachment to someone whom one may have never met in person. An example is someone you might have met online, this person could also be impersonating someone they are not, but regardless, when one partner is committed to someone else, whilst being partnered, technically it's still a form of infidelity.

This in the information age, with internet access through phones, computers, laptops and tablets, it's more convenient to get into a conversation with anyone. This new found freedom of expression through social media, has empowered the masses, and today it's easier to get in and out of a relationship as compared to our ancestors. Mobile phones are not just an addiction, they have become an inseparable part of human existence.

Thus infidelity now can be online, or through online media one can meet a 'third wheel', with whom they can get physical or emotional satisfaction that they feel was missing. There are many reasons they can happen and these are described as under:

Additions: when we talk about addictions, we think of drugs, alcohol and smoking, but social media today can and is the most widespread form of addiction. Imagine a life without mobile phones, it seems impossible to part with it. When one has addictions, we make bad choices, people who use drugs or/and alcohol, do lose their sense of rationale and may indulge in high risk behaviours.

As per (American Addiction Centers, 2025), substance use leads to co-dependency, and bad choices. This manifests itself in form of marital or relationship issues that may include cheating on one's partner.

Modern couples, especially when both work, barely have time to be with each other due to job stress, commute times and other factors such as being away on tours. They spend more time with their colleagues at work, this may cause emotions to drift, and one may suddenly fall in and out of love. Ironically, the person one had married or decided to cohabit, may just be downgraded to a roommate. The lack of quality time spent earlier may now be spent with someone at work.

Lack of intimacy may also be another cause of extra-marital affairs as high stress careers may manifest in the bedroom as relationship or/and sexual issues. The fire in the bedroom now may be extinguished outside of it. The lack of satisfaction at home, may then become an excuse to seek an outlet outside. The "You Only Live Once" (YOLO) effect, perpetuates in form of the person craving for intimacy, seeks it in someone's else's company.

Since shame, taboo, judgements, are no longer seen as barriers, people readily seek outlets like the one mentioned above, in others, who can be exes, colleagues, neighbours, someone they met online, spouse's friend or even a female relative. Dating apps cater to such scenarios, and some even encourage, and thrive on it. Extra-marital affairs today are more easy, less of a hassle as they were in the past.

Even when everything is working fine in a relationship, some people still may be prone to infidelity, and in this case their mental health plays a role. People with childhood trauma, bi-polar disorder may cheat because of these challenges, also because they may be prone to cheating, or may have grown in households that did not provide them with the safety net parents should have provided, they may find their parents too busy or not available. A narcissist may cheat, just because they can as they put themselves, and their needs

before others.

As per Gottman (1999), expectations which are an integral part of the relationship, are the ones that keep a relationship valid, they nurture, and anchor a relationship. They also have a set of unspoken rules, or expectations which when not met, can create a lot of frustration, pain, and a feeling of betrayal. Unmet expectations, can erode trust, and intimacy and cause relationship to break.

Expectations, are not said, but are expected from a relationship, for example a mother is expected to nurture her child, and this is an expectation. If this expectation is not met, the child may feel detached. Couples also have some sort of expectations from a relationship and this can be in form of how their partner should behave, feel, and respond in certain settings.

Also, in lot of cases, these expectations may stem from upbringing, environment, childhood experiences or even cultural issues. For example, certain cultures are very individualistic, while others are collective. When someone, from these extremes, gets into a relationship, one or both may feel that their expectations are not being met, as one may crave space and the other may want company. The lack of communication, to avoid a conformation may also do further damage and ruin a relationship.

How unmet expectations potentially create a distance, is described as under:

When emotions are not expressed, they create stress, and negativity, this may manifest itself into a greater problem, that may blow up into a conflict in future. One partner, may expect verbal affirmations of love, but the other may have a different form of expression. Without, conveying each other's expectation, a rift may be created which in turn may turn into a conflict in future.

Unmet expectations may also affect a person's mental health, the psychological impact of an unmet expectation is heavy and is bound to take a toll, of the affected person, and the relationship subsequently. Partners may harbour grudges, and resentment towards each other, relationship quality may deteriorate, a feeling of isolation, and bitterness may further complicate a relationship that is already strained. The mental toll, that is a result of the above, may create a unhealthy atmosphere in general adding to the woes. A partner who feels dissatisfied may then completely shut themselves to negotiations, which may lead to an impasse, and subsequently be the final nail.

(Peetz et al., 2023) postulates that, the longevity of a relationship is highly dependent on the financial condition of a household. Money and finances definitely puts a lot of strain in a relationship, the dream of an ideal household remain unfulfilled with lack of financial anchors, this in turn may cause issues, and may lead to dissolution of a relationship if not addressed in time. The following are the red flags the one should be wary in case of finances:

Different views of finances: when couples argue, it means there is some strain in the relationship. Arguments about finances usually are longer as they have the potential to remain unresolved for a longer period. This is because, financial situation cannot be fixed overnight, at least not ethically. What money should be used for may also matter in this case, as one partner may want to use it for something other may not agree upon.

Our views, and even our bringing shape how we would like to use the money we have as individuals, for example some may want to use to status, others for security etc. thus when two people decide to start a relationship, differences in how the money they would hold together should be used, should be weeded out before. Opposing view on financial matters, are definitely a cause for conflict, which may spill over, and cause anguish.

Financial infidelity: "When one person in a committed relationship keeps financial secrets from others, it termed as financial infidelity" (*Financial Infidelity*, 2025). When couples get into a relationship, they

expect each other to be completely transparent and keep no secrets. Infidelity, which means not being truthful, and faithful, may manifest in many forms and one such form is in regards to finances.

This occurs when either of the two, keep a secret pertaining to finances, this can be secret property, a bank account, other assets. It can also be that a partner is spending their money elsewhere and pretending something else. This secrecy can be due to addictions, wherein one partner may secretly be being gambling, using illegal substances, or investing black money in a secret overseas account. They may also be insecure and may want to keep their finances secret so that it serves as a backup plan in case the marriage doesn't work, or to avoid alimony payments.

But, whatever may be the reason, it's still a form of cheating their partner. Everything may seem fine on the outside till the time, this infidelity is discovered; in this case the other partner may feel cheated, not worthy enough or unappreciated. Sometimes, the partner may already suspect something fishy, such as an unexplained transaction that features through mail or otherwise, on confronting, things may become depressive, and may lead to accusations, and conflict.

Debts: In the modern age, when there is a loan available for everything, ranging from household appliances, cars, furniture and homes, couples may start their relationship with debts to build their dream lifestyle. If this debt is unmanaged or impulsive, this may lead to conflicts in future, as it may accumulate to a proportion that remains difficult to pay.

To build a lifestyle such as having a dream home, furnishing it, maintaining it, there might be some debt that needs to be in picture. One partner may also want certain things in the house that the other may deem unnecessary. In future this may put a financial strain on the household, this may lead to accusations such as a certain pricey item was not needed, but one of the partner was insistent to ring it into the house. The issue may blow out of proportions, and may lead to further escalations.

As per (Dyer & Singh, 1998) compatibility is the aspect of how comfortable a couple are in each other's company, and there are certain behaviours that predict how compatible a relationship would be. When one person or both have different views, incompatibility occurs. This is where a connection is lost, and this leads to an inharmonious relationship.

There are a few signs to identify incompatibility in a relationship:

Unclear life goals of future: One of the biggest precursors is, when both partners have different or unclear goals together. For example, one of the partner may want to immigrate in future, but the other may be attached to their family, and thus would want to stay in their country of birth. This may lead to a stage where both partners cannot find middle ground. If one decides to compromise, and accept other's decision to save the family, then the relationship may work or else it may disintegrate.

Different educational levels: In this case one partner may be more qualified or more mature intellectually, initially the bond may have formed purely based on physical attraction, reality may step in when the partners start living together. This is when minor flaws may become major issues wherein the partner who is more educated, may feel frustrated, and the partner with less intellect may feel judged. For example, someone with a Doctorate, marries a high school dropout.

No love: There are instances in conservative families when their children may be forced to marry someone for the sake of religion, cast or status. Chances are that the partner who felt the pressure of such an alliance, may not like their spouse. In this case, there is a chance the marriage may never be a fulfilling one as cold vibes may be present in such a relationship. Couples, may then get estranged, owing to incompatibility. Such a partner may be more interested in going out with friends, rather than spending time with their spouse. Even if couples may decide to continue this relationship due to societal pressure, there is bound to

be a major rift in the end, which may be instrumental in the relationship breaking up.

Constant disagreements: Arguments though are quite evitable in all kinds of relationships, but when they become constant, they are the cause of friction which may ultimately break the foundation of a stable relationship. If one person is argumentative, and the other is calm, it's not considered a form of incompatibility, this is because even though one may be headstrong, the calm demeanor of the other, may save a relationship, but if both are equally argumentative, compatibility takes a back seat.

No sharing the same interests: Couples, are called so because they have something in common, or can agree to a common ground. A relationship can work if personalities are different, but if one wants to do something, and the other doesn't, there is bound to be a shortcoming in bonding. The relationship then prevents individuals to be themselves, and their whole identity seems to change. Initially, one or both may not be very concerned about this, or may feel that they might get past, but if this keeps lingering on, it may leave both partners frustrated, and this may lead to breakups.

Narcissistic abuse as the name suggests, is a form of abuse by someone who is a narcissist. The worst part of these relationships may be that the victim of this abuse may blame self, because they have been manipulated by the narcissist, because instead of owing up to their own behavior, the perpetrator of such abuse may simply blame the victim. This abuse can be emotional, or/and physical. The victim may be under a constant vicious cycle, that may leave them confused.

A person with narcissistic traits may show signs of lacking empathy, manipulation, and insensitivity. People with such tendencies, can be abusive towards others, and this may include their partners. (Grapsas et al., 2020). Such people may initially appear to be charming as narcissists may pass on as confident and people may naturally be attracted to them, but once a relationship is matured, those toxic traits may be the norm. They may have the following personality traits:

- Inflated self-worth.
- Lacking empathy
- Having a tendency of use others
- Having an insatiable desire to have power, fame, money and recognition
- Putting self before others
- Cruel
- Prone to constant praise by self and others
- Difficulty accepting criticism

In relationships, these people tend to be controlling, abuse, and unapologetic even when they are wrong. They also make statements, that make their partner doubt themselves, they tend to ignore boundaries, and constantly manipulate their partners. They also have a tendency to isolate their partners so that others cannot influence them and they cannot get out of the vicious circle.

Partner subject to such abuse may have the following:

- They may apologize a lot to their abusive partner and others.
- May self-doubt.
- Loss confidence
- Feel isolated
- Lose sense of self.

Slowly this may be emotionally draining, and may also affect the mental state of the victim. In this case, intervention by the victim's family and friends is necessary to prevent the victim to take drastic steps such as self-harm. Sometimes, getting out of a toxic relationship is necessary for self-preservation.

4.3 Conclusions

4.3.1 Communication, Trust and Expectations as Key Domains

Communication, trust, and expectations have consistently emerged as foundational pillars within romantic and intimate relationships. When these domains are compromised, the quality, stability, and longevity of relationships are adversely impacted. Communication encompasses not merely the exchange of daily information but also emotional expression, active listening, and the capacity to resolve disagreements constructively. Effective communication enables partners to express needs and negotiate differences without escalating into destructive conflict. However, poor communication styles such as criticism, defensiveness, stonewalling, or contempt can lead to cyclical arguments and relationship dissatisfaction. Trust, on the other hand, serves as a psychological safety net that fosters vulnerability, intimacy, and interdependence. Betrayal, dishonesty, or perceived disloyalty erode this safety, leading to heightened anxiety, suspicion, and potential surveillance behaviours. Trust violations, whether in the form of infidelity or secrecy around finances and personal matters, have been significant predictors of relationship dissolution. Rebuilding trust requires not only behavioural change but also consistent emotional attunement over time.

Expectations refer to individuals' beliefs about what a relationship should provide, including roles, responsibilities, emotional support, financial contributions, and expressions of love. When partners hold incongruent expectations, they may interpret each other's behaviour as neglectful or disrespectful. For example, one partner may expect daily verbal affirmations while the other expresses love through acts of service. Such mismatches can result in unmet needs and escalating dissatisfaction unless addressed through direct conversation and empathy.

Overall, these three domains are interconnected. Poor communication exacerbates breaches in trust, while unmet expectations fuel dissatisfaction and communication breakdown. Thus, addressing relationship issues holistically requires interventions targeting all three pillars to ensure relational health and resilience.

4.3.2 Gender Differences in Perceived and Reported Issues

Research on intimate relationships consistently reveals gendered patterns in the perception, experience, and reporting of relationship issues. Women often report higher levels of dissatisfaction related to emotional neglect, lack of communication, and perceived absence of intimacy. In contrast, men are more likely to identify conflict around sexual frequency, personal autonomy, and financial strain as primary stressors.

These gender differences are rooted partially in socialisation patterns. Women are often encouraged to prioritise relational harmony, emotional connection, and nurturance, leading to greater attunement to relationship processes and dynamics. Conversely, men are often socialised to value problem-solving and instrumental support and may underreport emotional dissatisfaction due to masculine norms around vulnerability.

Furthermore, reporting patterns differ in cases involving abuse or control. Women are more likely to identify and report psychological abuse, controlling behaviours, and emotional manipulation, while men underreport such experiences due to stigma and fear of not being believed. However, men's experiences of emotional neglect or withdrawal are often downplayed in research, despite their significant impact on wellbeing.

These gendered differences imply that relationship education, counselling, and conflict resolution interventions must be tailored to address distinct concerns while also challenging restrictive gender norms that hinder authentic expression. Encouraging open dialogue, teaching emotional literacy, and fostering

mutual empathy can bridge these perceptual gaps, fostering more egalitarian and satisfying partnerships.

4.3.3 Influence of Relationship Status on Experience and Reporting

Relationship status – whether single, dating, cohabiting, married, separated, or divorced – significantly shapes both the experience and reporting of relationship issues. Married individuals often report conflicts around financial management, household responsibilities, and parenting decisions, reflecting the practical interdependencies of marital life.

In contrast, dating or non-cohabiting partners more frequently report issues related to commitment, trust in long-distance contexts, and future planning. Cohabiting but unmarried partners often face stress around ambiguous role definitions, leading to tension around expectations for household contributions and relational permanence.

Abuse reporting is also strongly influenced by relationship status. Married individuals, particularly women, often face greater barriers to reporting abuse due to legal, financial, familial, and social constraints. Fear of stigma, loss of shared resources, or potential for escalated violence can deter disclosure. Conversely, dating or newly cohabiting individuals may be more likely to leave abusive situations due to lesser entanglement of assets and familial obligations.

However, reporting remains underrepresented across all statuses, particularly for emotional or psychological abuse, which may be normalised or minimised. Relationship status further shapes societal perceptions: married individuals reporting abuse are often told to “work it out” while dating individuals are told to “just leave,” reflecting contradictory societal expectations.

These findings underscore the importance of contextualised support services, legal frameworks sensitive to relational status, and culturally tailored education to enhance reporting and reduce abuse prevalence.

4.3.4 Interlinked and Co-occurring Relationship Issues

Relationship issues seldom exist in isolation. Instead, they often co-occur and mutually reinforce one another, creating a complex web of challenges that couples must navigate. For instance, financial stress may trigger communication breakdowns, which in turn erode trust and emotional intimacy. Conversely, poor communication may lead to misunderstandings around financial management, exacerbating economic strain.

Persistent unresolved issues create a generalised negative perception of the partner, leading to misinterpretation of neutral or positive behaviours as negative. For example, a partner’s suggestion may be perceived as criticism if underlying resentment exists due to prior unaddressed issues.

Further, experiences of abuse, control, and betrayal trauma are linked to decreased self-esteem, attachment insecurity, and mental health challenges, which in turn influence communication styles and expectations from future partners. Thus, relationship issues are not discrete events but form a pattern that may perpetuate intergenerationally if not addressed.

Interventions targeting single issues without recognising co-occurrence risk limited effectiveness. Holistic approaches that assess relational history, communication patterns, trust dynamics, expectations, and mental health are essential for meaningful change. This interconnectedness also highlights the role of systemic factors, including cultural norms, economic conditions, and legal systems, in shaping relationship experiences.

4.3.5 Overall Conclusion

This research demonstrates that communication, trust, and expectations are foundational yet fragile domains in relationships, with significant gendered and status-based variations in their experience and reporting. The interlinked and mutually reinforcing nature of relationship issues demands integrated,

culturally sensitive, and systemic approaches to intervention, policy, and education to foster healthier, more equitable partnerships.

4.4 Limitations

This study presents several limitations that must be considered when interpreting its findings and implications. Firstly, the sample was obtained through online convenience sampling, which restricts the generalisability of the results. Participants were predominantly recruited via online platforms, and therefore the sample may not be fully representative of the broader population. This sampling method risks over-representation of certain demographics, such as younger individuals, those with internet access, and those more comfortable engaging with online surveys, while potentially under-representing older adults or individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Additionally, convenience sampling limits the ability to control for regional and cultural variations that may influence relationship dynamics.

Secondly, the reliance on self-report data introduces the possibility of social desirability bias. Participants may have presented themselves in a more favourable light or responded in a manner they believed was expected or socially acceptable. This could have affected the accuracy of the data collected, especially on sensitive topics such as abuse, relationship conflict, and emotional expression, leading to potential underreporting or overreporting of certain issues. Furthermore, self-report measures are limited by participants' ability to accurately recall and interpret their own experiences, which can introduce recall bias or distortions based on current emotional states.

Thirdly, the cross-sectional design of the study does not allow for inferences regarding causality. While associations and correlations between variables such as communication, trust, expectations, and conflict were explored, the temporal sequence cannot be determined. Longitudinal studies would be necessary to establish causal pathways and understand how relationship dynamics evolve over time, particularly in relation to the development, maintenance, and resolution of conflicts. Additionally, the cross-sectional nature restricts the analysis of changes in relationship quality or conflict management skills that may emerge over different relationship stages.

Furthermore, the study was limited in its ability to analyse cultural diversity due to the homogeneity of the sample. The majority of participants identified with similar cultural and ethnic backgrounds, constraining the exploration of cultural differences in relationship perceptions and conflict experiences. Given the significant role that cultural norms and values play in shaping relationship expectations, communication styles, and conflict resolution strategies, future research should aim to include more diverse samples to enhance cultural validity and applicability. This includes examining the intersectionality of culture with factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, religion, and migration experiences to understand complex relational dynamics.

Finally, additional limitations include the lack of in-depth qualitative data that could provide richer insights into individual experiences and contextual nuances. While quantitative data offers general patterns and associations, qualitative approaches such as interviews or focus groups could uncover deeper meanings and interpretations that quantitative items alone may not capture. The absence of mixed-methods integration in this study restricts the depth of understanding regarding participants' lived realities, coping mechanisms, and nuanced perspectives on relational conflict and expectations.

Moreover, the study did not account for psychological factors such as personality traits, attachment styles, or mental health conditions that may significantly influence relationship dynamics. These variables could act as confounding factors, shaping communication patterns, trust development, and conflict resolution

styles. Future research should integrate psychological assessments to control for these influences and better contextualise findings.

Lastly, limitations include potential language barriers for participants for whom the survey language was not their first language. This may have impacted comprehension and accuracy of responses, further influencing data validity.

4.5 Recommendations

Based on the findings, limitations, and the broader literature, several detailed practical, research, and policy recommendations are proposed.

Firstly, counselling interventions should prioritise communication training and expectation management. Strengthening couples' skills in assertive communication, active listening, emotional validation, and negotiation of expectations can mitigate common relationship conflicts identified in this research. Counsellors should incorporate structured communication exercises, role plays, cognitive restructuring of rigid expectations, and guided discussions to build mutual understanding, empathy, and trust. Additionally, therapy should include modules addressing the impact of attachment styles and unresolved individual traumas that often manifest within relational conflicts.

Secondly, psychoeducation programs should be developed to address gender-based relationship perceptions and biases. These programs can raise awareness about differing communication styles, emotional needs, and conflict management approaches associated with gender socialisation. Universities, workplaces, and community organisations can integrate such training to foster respectful, equitable relationships and reduce gender-based misunderstandings and dissatisfaction. Programs should also address harmful gender stereotypes that discourage emotional expression among men and promote excessive emotional labour expectations from women. Incorporating reflective exercises, storytelling, and group discussions can enhance the internalisation of these concepts.

Thirdly, future research should use longitudinal designs to assess relationship changes over time. Longitudinal studies can uncover causal pathways, developmental trajectories of conflict, and protective or risk factors influencing relationship quality. Such research can inform targeted prevention and intervention strategies, enabling professionals to address issues proactively rather than reactively. Moreover, longitudinal studies can illuminate the impact of major life transitions such as parenthood, career changes, migration, or health crises on relationship dynamics, informing adaptive strategies for couples navigating these shifts.

Furthermore, research should integrate mixed-methods approaches to capture the depth and breadth of relationship experiences. Qualitative interviews and focus groups can provide rich insights into lived realities, uncovering meanings behind behaviours and attitudes that quantitative surveys may overlook. Mixed-methods designs can triangulate findings for enhanced validity and guide culturally grounded interventions that are contextually relevant.

Policy implications include integrating relationship education modules in college curricula to build early healthy relationship skills. Including structured courses on emotional intelligence, healthy communication, trust building, conflict resolution, and critical gender analysis in higher education settings can equip young adults with lifelong skills for nurturing stable, fulfilling relationships. These initiatives can also reduce relational stress and improve mental health outcomes at a population level. Educational modules should incorporate case studies, experiential learning, and critical reflection to ensure practical applicability.

Additionally, public health campaigns promoting healthy relationship behaviours should be developed.

Such campaigns can disseminate information on recognising unhealthy dynamics, seeking support, and building respectful partnerships. Leveraging social media, community radio, and educational television can enhance reach among diverse populations.

It is recommended that professional training programs for counsellors, psychologists, social workers, and educators include relationship dynamics, gender sensitivity, and trauma-informed approaches as core modules. This will prepare practitioners to address relationship conflicts effectively within their professional roles and create safe spaces for clients to discuss sensitive issues.

Moreover, policymakers should consider funding accessible relationship counselling and educational services, particularly for marginalised populations who may experience heightened relational stress due to systemic barriers. Subsidised community counselling centres, helplines, and mobile outreach programs can enhance accessibility and reduce stigma around seeking relational support.

Finally, interdisciplinary collaborations between researchers, practitioners, educators, and policymakers are essential to create holistic, sustainable interventions. Such collaborations can facilitate knowledge exchange, ensure programs are grounded in empirical evidence, and maximise impact at individual, relational, and societal levels

CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY

The topic for this research was Fragility in Modern Relationships: Why modern marriages fail? The research was necessitated owing to the failure of the traditional institution of marriage and the rising rate of divorces, apart from this it also explores other forms of co-habitation between couples and considers failing of those, the same as marriage. Marriage is no longer till death does us apart, it's more of a test of compatibility and the new found independence modern couples have. Social media and internet also have an influence, and other factors play a catalyst.

As more and more women started joining the workforce, financial independence also contributed to separation; marriage which was an economic arrangement, where traditionally women managed the household and men went outside to work was no longer the norm. Today women are earning enough to support themselves. Lines between gender roles are blurred with both members need to contribute equally in the economic aspects and household chores.

Countries like India, where family values matter, saw a change where the family may influence a union but may fail to keep the sanctity of the same. Today, couples are more independent in their dealing especially when both are educated, working and aware. They also don't see the need to remain in a relationship forcibly especially when they don't have an offspring. Work also means travel which may be away from their hometowns in a large metropolis where life is fast paced and the family is nuclear comprising of the two of them. This gives them the leverage to part ways without societal or familial pressure without remorse.

The world we live in today is more aware, exposed to other cultures, gets a heavy dose of social media and opens a lot of judgemental aspects. People today are more in tune with what's available and look for a quick fix. If things are not working between the couple, the illusion that other options are easily available through a screen swipe or press of a button, prompts the user to easily walk out of strained relationship.

Conjugal relationships also have taken a new dynamic, today a relationship can be between two unmarried individuals in form a live-in arrangement or just casual dating in which they test the compatibility before committing. The psyche behind such relationship evolve from the assumption, that it may or may not work. There is no pressure from either side to continue the relationship if it's not working. There is also

no third party involved such as parents or matchmakers in this case, which negates the stigma associated with breaking up.

Relationships need not be between the same sex today, as people today may be open to same-sex relationships. Society today is more accepting of these relationships as was prevalent in the west. Such relationships are no longer a taboo as before, and they follow the same relationship dynamics such as infidelity, jealousy, disagreements and power struggles prevalent in a heterosexual model.

As discussed before, since both individuals may be working full-time, they may have less time to spend with each other and may spend more time at the office, this means they may be more susceptible to develop feelings for their colleagues, at the office. All this means their may be a option to change partners, or cheat on one. Infidelity is easier, and would definitely lead to conflicts that ultimately may contribute to the dissolution of marriage, or a relationship in general. Physical attraction definitely is a factor when mate selection is considered, although the meaning the element of attraction may differ in individuals, but relationships made purely on basis of physical attraction, may not have a solid foundation, this is due to the fact that such relationships may not survive the test of time, and hardships, an alliance such as marriage of co-habitation may entail.

Couples may have different expectations in terms of how the relationship may progress, this may change the entire dynamic of the relationship when the initial phase often referred to as the honeymoon period ends. One or both partners may realise, that the bond made solely bases on hormones, may not the ideal and then the rift may arise. This, in conjunction with meeting someone outside, or having a back-up partner planned, can easily be the reasons for the split.

A relationship may have been made traditionally, such as in the form of an arranged marriage or may have been made unconventionally such as co-habitation or otherwise, compatibility is the key to keep a relationship intact. Couples may lack that compatibility for various reasons, ranging from physical, mental or even financial. Initially, a fairy-tale or whirlwind romance may be the reason the bond may have been made, but real compatibility arises when couples live together and understand the nuances of a being a couple and living together. Issues may be as simple as not putting the toilet seat up or down, but may go a long way in creating a power struggle between the two of them.

Another aspect worth mentioning is financial. Not earning enough, not earning at all or one partner earning more or less, could be the cause of the rift. Everyone wants to live a certain lifestyle; urban living involves people moving to cosmopolitan areas where the cost of living is way more than a tier-2 or 3 city or a town. Rents in these cities are not cheap and take a substantial part of one's income, owing a home is even more difficult. Couples may have a fancy salary at a multinational, but may still struggle to pay rents or monthly home payments, furthermore the cost to buy a car, managing other household expenses, eating out, partying or vacationing are today seen as an important precursor to happiness, and fulfillment.

The above factor, in conjunction with a partner's unmatched career growth, may lead to a rift that may amplify later, and may lead to dissatisfaction. Even if the finances are fine to live the lifestyle mentioned, one partner earning less, may be the victim of taunts, abuse or narcissistic behaviour from the other. This leads to another aspect such as abuse or intimate partner violence. This could manifest itself in physical or emotional forms. A narcissistic partner may not understand where they are wrong as this is part of their personality. Constant threats, abuse, name calling, belittling may be the outcome.

Furthermore, easy access to drugs, alcohol may further aggravate the situation. Substance abuse may also be the only reason a relationship breaks, this is due to the fact that a person dependent on alcohol and/or drugs may commits acts which are not normal, they may range from drunk driving, getting on the wrong

side of law, being with unscrupulous characters and committing crimes that stem out of being inebriated. So when one partner does indulge into substance abuse, and the other doesn't, it makes it very difficult for the one who doesn't to adapt to a lifestyle that may not align with the values. Substance abuse may also be linked to health issues, violence and financial troubles, this is due to the fact that the person indulging into the act, may financially drain the household by spending lot more than one should, this may lead to other problems including violence in any form such as verbal or physical abuse.

To key to a good relationship is good communication. This aspect is necessary at all stages be it courtship, cohabitation or marriage. Communicating one's needs, desires, expectations from the relationship, and the partner are extremely important, without proper communication, a relationship may be prone to undesired elements that one may have not expected. A relationship cannot thrive on lies and deceit, and withholding information, or not revealing expectations fall in the same bucket.

Gone are they days when a couple's union was considered sacred, and it was taboo to break it. With the society being more westernized, aware, educated and globalized, each one of us have the right to have the same opportunity regardless of what background or gender. In urban households, it's no longer a matter of societal or familial expectations, that trump personal happiness. A relationship that is failing, no longer needs to be mended just because the outside world has some expectations from the union.

Sometimes, the partner may not communicate out of shame fearing being judged or not taken seriously. A support system may either non-existent or too judgemental especially in case of mismatched physical expectations from one's significant other. A person may also be suffering from a mental or physical issue that one may be scared of sharing as they may expect the dissolution of their marriage or relationship. Communication is the key to start and manage a relationship, as humans we need to express ourselves either by talking, writing or using non-verbal cues. Even a child who can neither speak or write has a way of communicating, and this is crucial to one's existence.

People who cannot communicate or are not taken seriously when they do, seek communication outlets outside. In modern times, there are a lot of channels that can be used ranging from social media, mobile phones or even anonymous helplines. A colleague at the workplace may also be the 'agony aunt' that may offer a shoulder to cry and vent. The bond that should have between a couple, is now offered by a third person and this is where the person who feels unappreciated may choose to confide in someone else about personal issues. This may bring the third person closer and that's where the relationship gets messy.

An extra-marital relationship may not just stem out of lust, it may be more than just lust, as it may also satisfy the emotional need missing from their relationship. The person indulging in it, may seem to see this as what their partner deserved for not valuing them. The initial rift, which was just a communication barrier may lead to something more in form an affair. The fast paced modern lifestyle, especially prevalent in large metropolis and tier 1 cities, may offer the necessary anonymity to such arrangements. Each of us have the right to be content and happy in our lives, but the complications arising out of a relationship, such as conflict, litigation, division of assets, children, have the potential to affect mental health of self and others and thus it's necessary to talk about it.

This research thus aimed to explore the reasons for relationship and marital issues among adults using a quantitative online survey. The findings revealed that lack of communication, trust issues, and unfulfilled expectations are the most common problems reported. Gender and relationship status were significantly associated with the type of issues experienced. The study concludes that relationship challenges are multifaceted and often co-occurring, emphasising the need for integrated counselling and educational interventions.

Despite limitations such as convenience sampling and self-report bias, this study contributes valuable data to relationship psychology literature and offers practical recommendations for strengthening relationships and marriages.

References

1. American Addiction Centers. (2024, August 23). The effects of alcoholism on families: How alcoholism affects families. American Addiction Centers. <https://americanaddictioncenters.org/alcohol/support-recovery/family>
2. Anderson, D. (n.d.). Narcissist: Discover the true meaning of narcissism and how to avoid their mind games, guilt, and manipulation.
3. Becker-Phelps, L., & Boyce, S. (2015). Insecure in love: How anxious attachment can make you feel jealous, needy, and worried and what you can do about it. Tantor Audio.
4. Bibbins, L. C. (n.d.). Fixing compatibility issues in marriage and relationship: Bridge the gap. Solutions for compatibility challenges. Joshua Amonung.
5. Daly, S. C., MacNeela, P., & Sarma, K. M. (2018). The female spouse: A process of separation when a husband “comes out” as gay. *PLOS ONE*, 13(8), Article e0203472. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0203472>
6. Dyer, J. H., & Singh, H. (1998). The relational view: Cooperative strategy and sources of interorganizational competitive advantage. *Academy of Management Review*, 23(4), 660–679. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1998.1255632>
7. Financial infidelity. (2025). Illinois.gov. <https://cms.illinois.gov/benefits/stateemployee/bewell/financialwellness/june25-financial-infidelity.html>
8. Goldberg, A. E., & Garcia, R. (2015). Predictors of relationship dissolution in lesbian, gay, and heterosexual adoptive parents. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 29(3), 394–404. <https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000095>
9. Gottman, J. M. (1999). The seven principles for making marriage work: A practical guide from the country's foremost relationship expert. Harmony Books.
10. Grapsas, S., Brummelman, E., Back, M. D., & Denissen, J. J. A. (2020). The “why” and “how” of narcissism: A process model of narcissistic status pursuit. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 15(1), 1745691619873350. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691619873350>
11. Lyons, M., Wanzer, M. B., & Richmond, V. P. (1998). Amount of communication as a symptom of distressed marriages based on reports of divorced individuals. *Communication Research Reports*, 15(3), 327–330. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08824099809362129>
12. McWhinney, J. (n.d.). Top 6 marriage-killing money issues. Investopedia. <https://www.investopedia.com/articles/pf/09/marriage-killing-money-issues.asp>
13. Mitra, P., Torrico, T. J., & Fluyau, D. (2024). Narcissistic personality disorder.
14. Nelson, T. (2013). [Title not provided] (1st ed.). New Harbinger Publications.
15. Nguyen, J. (2024, June 8). Are you still in love or is it a marriage of convenience? Verywell Mind. <https://www.verywellmind.com/marriage-of-convenience-8646438>
16. Nieuwhof, T. (2021). Before you split: Find what you really want for the future of your marriage. WaterBrook.
17. Not “just friends”: Rebuilding trust and recovering your sanity after infidelity. (2004).

18. Peetz, J., Meloff, Z., & Royle, C. (2023). When couples fight about money, what do they fight about? *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 40(11). <https://doi.org/10.1177/02654075231187897>
19. Psychology Today. (2015, July). Top 10 reasons relationships fail. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/communication-success/201507/top-10-reasons-relationships-fail>
20. Slater, N. (2009, September 19). A brief history of divorce. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2009/sep/19/divorce-law-history>
21. Snyder, M., & Ickes, W. (1985). *Personality and social behavior*.
22. Stamps, K. C. (2007). Handbook of divorce and relationship dissolution—Edited by Mark A. Fine & John H. Harvey. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 69(2), 554–556. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2007.00390.x>
23. Tanaka, K. (2011). The effect of divorce experience on religious involvement: Implications for later health lifestyle.
24. Williamson, H. C. (2020). The development of communication behavior over the newlywed years.
25. Brides. (n.d.). Modern arranged marriages. <https://www.brides.com/story/modern-arranged-marriages>