



Live-In- Relationships And Their Impact: A Sociological Study

Abhishek Gupta

LLM

Department of Law, Arihant Law College
Veer Madho Singh Bhandari Uttarakhand Technical University
Dehradun, India

Abstract: Live-in Relationships have become a sought-after alternative to marriage by the modern generation. As the lives of Individuals are becoming more and more exhaustive, the society has witness progression from the traditional norms and shifted towards concepts which better suit the demanding lifestyle of present-day individuals. One such concept is “Live-in Relationships” which have become a widely accepted concept, so much so that even the traditionalist countries, which would otherwise have seen it as a stigmatized concept; have adopted it into their societies. The term itself has a wide connotation, but the general understanding of a Live-in relationship can be the following:

"An arrangement of staying under a single roof together for the betterment of their future lives liberally without getting married."

Although it has been a long-established tradition in many areas of the world, the trend of individuals living together independently is gaining appeal in modern times. Through this paper we will evaluate this rising trend of individuals opting for live-in relations rather than opting for the traditional marriage. We will delve into the culture of live-in relations across the world, and how the society has been impacted by such relations. The advantages and disadvantages, as well as the key challenges of the Live-in relationship, connected to social life and families are also explored thoroughly in this article.

Index Terms – Live-in Relationships, Concept, Comparative Analysis, Impact

I. INTRODUCTION

A live-in relationship is defined as "a romantic partnership consisting of two individuals who have an informal agreement to cohabitate without pursuing a formal institution such as marriage." The very concept finds its genesis in the Western culture that historically has witnessed the practice of two individuals, residing together under a similar roof without being married. These individuals living together are not married but said to be in a live-in relationship which somewhat mimics the marriage itself without and binding commitments. This is progressively becoming recognised as an alternative to marriage, offering a life free from duties and obligation, which are key parts of marriage.

“Live in relationships are walk-in, walk-out relationships. There are no strings tied to these partnerships, as the connection is free from any legal commitment between the parties.” This partnership does not impose the traditional duties of a marriage. The notion of living without marriage, in partnerships is not new to any culture; the only difference is that while people were careful in exposing their status before, which may be connected to the fear of society, now the individuals are open about this sort of arrangement. This has made a profound impact on how relationships are perceived in the society. Taking the example of India which is a culturally rooted country, where marriage is a sacrosanct bond between individuals, the concept of live-in

relationships could not be fathomed to be accepted even a decade ago. However, with globalization and rapid urbanization, the thought-process of individuals have shifted which in turn has also shifted the perception of the society. Suddenly these relations are not so foreign anymore.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sources:

The primary sources of data used for this paper are secondary sources. Several research articles, journals, reports, and newspapers have been cited to substantiate the argument presented in the paper. The key research question of this critical evaluation is to understand

- What is a live-in relationship?
- The social effects and ramifications that couples endure as a result of this form of relationship?

Objective of the study

- Understand the core concept of live-in relationships
- Analyse the culture of live-in relationships in different countries.

III. DEFINITION

Relationships based on arrangements where unmarried couples live together in a long-term relationship without any legal provision binding them are termed living relationships. These relationships appeal to a large number of people. However, it is crucial to understand the culture of these relationships in order to analyse their impact.

Some definitions of Live-in relationship are provided below:

1. American Psychological Association (APA) defined it as:

"a living arrangement in which an unmarried couple lives together in a long-term relationship that resembles a marriage."¹

2. Cambridge dictionary defined it as:

"Two people cohabit in the same house and have a sexual relationship, but are not married. They often referred to like live-in partners"

3. Oxford dictionary:

"To live in the same house to share a home and have a sexual relationship without getting married"

4. Pew Research Center defined it as:

"Unmarried couples who live together in a long-term relationship and share a household"²

5. As per Merriam-Webster Dictionary:

"an arrangement in which two people live together as if married"³

Analysing these definitions, it's evident that live-in relationships involve unmarried couples living together in a committed, long-term partnership akin to marriage. While they share a household and often engage in similar responsibilities as married couples, they do not have the legal recognition or obligations associated with marriage. Based on these definitions, we can form a conclusive definition of live-in relationships:

Conclusive Definition: A live-in relationship is a domestic arrangement where unmarried couples choose to live together in a long-term partnership, sharing a household and often resembling a marital relationship in terms of commitment and shared responsibilities, without the legal formalities of marriage.

¹ American Psychological Association, "Cohabitation: Consequences for Children, Adults, and the Family"

² Pew Research Center, "The Cohabitation-Go-Round: Cohabitation and Family Instability Across the Globe"

³ Merriam-Webster Dictionary, "Live-In"

IV. A CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW

Live-in relationships can be very dynamic across various cultures since they are influenced by the norms of society, the legal precedents, and the preferences of individuals who form society itself. At its core, the relationship solely depends on the decision of unmarried partners as to where their preference lies, be it the traditional marital arrangement or an alternative akin to a marriage, i.e. the living relationship. It is this shift in preference itself which has made living relationships. Adaptable to various cultures and societies. The concept that was once looked upon with scepticism has now become increasingly prevalent, reflecting the shift in society's attitude towards marriage⁴.

With marriage comes a bouquet of distinct rights and responsibilities for partners who share equal burdens; however, this formality is lacking in a live-in relationship. This very aspect of living relationships makes it appealing to individuals⁵. Individuals who prefer flexibility and better control over their affairs tend to shift towards these arrangements. However, while the concept of living relationships might seem lucrative in terms of having a more liberating relationship, it also disposes of the benefits of marriage, such as inheritance and financial security. The growing practice of living relationships arises from multifaceted reasons ranging from fulfilling the emotional needs of an individual, be it companionship or intimacy, to practical considerations such as shared living expenses and convenience. Another reason this type of arrangement is preferred is to test partners' compatibility and assess whether they can commit themselves to a long-term relationship.

Although the preference for living relationships has grown exponentially in recent years, the arrangement itself does not come without challenges. Since these relationships are without any commitment or are legally binding, questions of autonomy, decision-making, and property ownership can always lead to conflicts⁶. Being a non-traditional concept, the partners residing in a live-in relationship may face a stigmatised view of society and familial expectations to enter into a marital arrangement and commit to each other. Win the pros and cons of a living relationship. It can be concluded that this relationship offers a modern outlook on intimate partnership, which is characterised by cohabitation, sharing responsibilities and varying degrees of commitment of partners towards each other. Concurrently, these relationships also come with unique challenges, and if not resolved amicably, they can lead to constant conflicts and irrevocable damage.

V. A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS ACROSS DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

As discussed above, the concept of live-in relationships has gained traction across the world in recent decades. The fundamental. Elements of live in Relationships have challenged the traditional notions of marriage and partnership itself. Across the globe, various cultures and societal factors shape the acceptance and prevalence of cohabitation outside of marriage in different countries. This section of the article will explore various landscapes of living relationships in different countries while highlighting their implications towards cultural norms and societal attitudes.

United States

As a Western country, the United States has vastly accepted the concept of live-in relationships. They have become increasingly common, particularly among the younger generations. The country has witnessed a cultural shift, owing to which Americans have shifted towards individualism, which has also impacted their views on marriage⁷. The research conducted by the Pew Research Centre shows that the country has witnessed an increase in the percentage of unmarried couples living together from 0.4% in 1962 to 7.3% in 2020.

India

India is a traditionalist country that presents a complex landscape for live-in relationships. Since the country harbours traditionalist sentiments that often clash with modern attitudes, it offers a distinguished approach to live-in relationships. The acceptance of living relationships is divided into two segmented sections of society. While the rural areas have stigmatised living relationships, it has found acceptance in urban centres like Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore. The Indian Statistical Institute conducted research revealing that the number of live-in relationships has been steadily increasing in metropolitan cities⁸.

⁴ Cherlin, A. J. (2004). The deinstitutionalization of American marriage. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66(4), 848-861.

⁵ Smock, P. J., Manning, W. D., & Gupta, S. (1999). The effect of marriage and divorce on women's economic well-being. *American Sociological Review*, 64(6), 794-812.

⁶ Rhoades, G. K., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (2009). Couples' reasons for cohabitation: Associations with individual well-being and relationship quality. *Journal of Family Issues*, 30(2), 233-258.

⁷ Pew Research Center, "The Cohabitation-Go-Round: Cohabitation and Family Instability Across the Globe."

⁸ Indian Statistical Institute, "Changing Patterns of Cohabitation in India: Evidence from Indian Human Development Surveys."

Sweden

Shifting towards the European continent, society's acceptance of live-in relationships is observed to be highest here. One of the European countries, Sweden, has integrated living relationships into its societal norms. The country has a progressive attitude towards gender equality and individual autonomy. Hence, it has fostered an environment where living relationships are seen as a natural progression in seeking lifelong partnerships. With approximately 55% of children born to unmarried parents, Sweden has one of the highest rates of live-in cohabitation in Europe.⁹

Brazil

The South American country Brazil has recognised and protected given relationships by law. Recognised as "união estável", Brazil has provided rights and responsibilities to unmarried couples mirroring those of married spouses. The society believes in a stable and committed relationship, regardless of a couple's marital status. The concept of living relationships has been integrated into the people's cultural norms, which has led to its widespread acceptance and a legitimate form of companionship. The Ministry of Justice in Brazil reported an increasing number of "união estável" over the past decade¹⁰, reflecting the growing acceptance of Brazilians towards live-in relationships.

Japan

Japan is another traditionalist country like India, where cultural norms and societal values are of paramount importance to its people. However, these deeply ingrained cultural values are more orthodox than those in India, reflected in the less prevalent concept of live-in relationships. Society sees marriage as a sacrosanct bond and a cornerstone of family life. Often referred to as "Konkatsu", the live-in relationships have gained some traction among the younger urban population. However, the pressure to conform to traditional norms often discourages unmarried couples from openly pursuing them. Service conducted by the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare has revealed that the attitudes towards marriage and cohabitation gradually shift among the younger generations.¹¹

Table 1 Comparative Analysis of Countries over the concept of Live-in Relationships

Aspect	United States	India	Sweden	Brazil	Japan
Acceptance	Increasing among younger generations	Growing in urban areas, still taboo in rural	Widely accepted as a natural step in partnerships	Widely accepted, cultural norm	Less prevalent due to cultural emphasis on marriage
Legal Framework	Varies by state, some offer domestic partnerships	Limited recognition and protection for unmarried couples	Extensive rights and protections for unmarried couples	Recognized and protected by law, similar to marriage	Limited legal recognition and protection for cohabiting couples
Societal Norms	Shifting towards individualism and autonomy	Traditional values clash with modern attitudes	Emphasis on gender equality and autonomy	Emphasis on stable partnerships, regardless of marital status	Pressure to conform to traditional marriage norms
Examples	Hollywood celebrities living together before marriage	Urban couples cohabiting to test compatibility	Cohabiting couples with children sharing parental responsibilities	Stable, long-term partnerships without marriage	Young couples in urban areas choosing cohabitation
Data	According to Pew Research Center, over 7 million unmarried couples	Limited data due to societal stigma and underreporting	Statistics Sweden reports a steady increase in cohabitation rates over the years	Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) reports a significant rise in live-in relationships	Limited official data due to cultural factors and underreporting

⁹ Eurostat, "Fertility statistics."

¹⁰ "União Estável: Legitimidade e Garantias," Brazilian Civil Code.

¹¹ "The Changing Japanese Family," Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare.

	cohabit in the U.S.				
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Analysing the acceptance and prominence of living relationships across various countries, it can be concluded that the concept itself is a complex interplay of cultural, legal and social factors. Many Western countries, such as Sweden and the United States, have shown a wider acceptance towards living relationships while also providing Legal recognition to the expression of romantic partnership. Other more traditionalist countries suggest Japan and India have partially or completely forfeited their acceptance towards living relationships. These countries still value the sacrosanct nature of marriage. After analysing the societal shift towards the idea of marriage, which is evolving globally, it can be said that the concept of live-in relationships will gain acceptance and reshape the dynamics of partnerships and family life within society.

VI. IMPACT OF LIVE-IN RELATIONSHIPS ON SOCIETY

We have discussed the definition of live-in relationships extensively. Subsequently, we have also delved into the dynamics of living relationships in various countries. In order to gain an enriching insight, an attempt was made to take study countries which have polarised views and opinions on the concept of live-in relationships. We have accumulated statistical data showing how these relationships are perceived in different societies, from traditionalist communities to modern cultures. It can be inferred that live-in relationships are perceived strongly by societies. It is not a matter of personal choice or preference but extends to societies' economic, legal and cultural landscapes. These relationships have rooted themselves in the nooks and crannies of societal norms and policies, which need to be explored to understand how much they impact society.

- *Economic Dynamics:* When couples cohabit together, they not only share their living expenses, such as rent and bills, but they also cut costs on utilities, groceries, and other daily expenses. As a result, they are able to save a lot more by cohabiting together rather than living alone and maintaining separate households¹². This becomes a lucrative opportunity for individuals to have financial security in today's world, where the cost of living has become exponentially high, especially in urban areas where housing options are few and expensive, taking out a huge chunk of an individual's income. Additionally, sharing households also provide emotional fulfilment, where the decision-making is collaborative by both partners in terms of saving and long-term financial planning. This not only allows couples to pool their financial resources and save more, but also provides them with financial security in terms of making investments and purchasing assets.
- *Legal Frameworks:* The law has mostly been silent on the concept of Live-in relationships. Jurisdictions on the validity and legality of these relationships vary across countries and sometimes even states. However, in recent times, these relationships have gained recognition from the law and have attained an autonomous identity¹³. This has also facilitated the individuals pursuing such arrangements to attain certain rights and benefits which are otherwise only available to married couples. Rights to own property, to be a beneficiary in bank accounts, and to have a nominee in insurance, inheritance, and taxation are fundamental rights that should not be restricted within the bounds of marriage. Conversely, in places where live-in relationships are not given recognition, couples can face several challenges and vulnerabilities which come with the lack of formal recognition of live-in relationships.
- *Cultural Attitudes:* Societies are integral in reining the culture of live-in relationships. The general cultural attitude of societies and individuals towards this arrangement determines the extent of acceptance of live-in relationships and their integration into social norms. If the society is conservative or traditional, its acceptance of live-in arrangements may be stigmatized owing to the deeply rooted cultural norms and broader social values towards family and morality surrounding it¹⁴. Hence, cultural attitudes not only change the perception of individuals towards such relations but also shape the outlook of society. Subsequently, these norms also mould legislative provisions and societal policies

¹² Rajib. "Impact of Live-in Relationship on Indian Traditional Society." (2015)

¹³ Smock, Pamela J., and Wendy D. Manning. "Living Together Unmarried in the United States: Demographic Perspectives and Implications for Family Policy." Law & Policy, vol. 28, no. 1, 2006, pp. 87–117.

¹⁴ Rabbiraj. "Marriage and Family: The Foundation of Indian Culture and Tradition." (2014).

towards live-in relations. A progressive cultural attitude can foster gender equality and acceptance, providing a support system for unmarried couples¹⁵.

VII. CONCLUSION

When Live-in relationships are gaining so much traction, from societies around the world their perception oscillates as per the fundamental norms of the society. A traditionalist society may not be adaptable to such arrangements owing to the deeply ingrained cultural values around marriage. Whereas, a society with a modern outlook can welcome this practice as a progressive step towards marriage; where partners would want to test their dynamics before committing to marriage. Marriage is a daunting step which needs to be pondered upon, and if there lies an alternative which can provide a sense of surety to individuals and reaffirm their choice in partners, it can be seen as a viable step for individuals. The society plays an integral role in determining the prevalence of live-in relationships, depending upon the cultural norms that are rooted into their beliefs. It is this very implication that has caused a distortion in the social fabric of many communities. While some societies have openly accepted this concepts, there are still places where living together without marriage is stigmatised and frowned upon.

While analysing the impact of Live-in relationships on societies, an empirical approach was taken and a sample of five countries who have inherently different cultural norms and belief which shape their perception towards live-in arrangements. Their acceptance varies across the spectrum of acceptance, ranging from stigmatization to illumination. All in all, the concept of Live-in relationships has infiltrated all nooks and crannies of societies, whether accepted or not, they have become a norm in themselves. In todays fast paced world, where individuals have accepted this arrangement as it accommodates their preferences and lifestyle toto. Backed by the legal provisions which have recognized and provided legal sanction to live-in relationships, the future of this arrangements can only be progressive.

VIII. REFERENCES

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¹⁵ Artis, Julie E., and Debra A. Reid. "Legal Marriage versus Cohabitation: Income and Relationship Outcomes." *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 66, no. 1, 2004, pp. 236-241.