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Perceptions and attitude of young adults towards live-in relationships in Haryana

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Abstract

The present study was conducted to assess the awareness and perceptions of young adults regarding live-in relationships in Haryana. A total of 100 young adults aged 18–30 years were selected using a convenient sampling technique. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire comprising demographic information, awareness-related questions and a perception scale covering general attitudes, moral and cultural perceptions, personal acceptability and legal and social awareness. The findings revealed that the majority of respondents were aware of live-in relationships and viewed them as a reflection of changing societal values. Most participants believed that relationship choices should be respected and supported legal rights for live-in partners and children born from such relationships. However, many respondents perceived marriage as a more stable institution and felt that Indian society is not yet fully prepared to accept live-in relationships. Personal willingness to enter a live-in relationship was lower than general acceptance due to concerns regarding social stigma and cultural expectations. The study concludes that young adults in Haryana exhibit a moderate to positive perception of live-in relationships but traditional values and social norms continue to influence their attitudes and personal choices.

Keywords: Live-in relationships, young adults, perception, awareness, social attitudes, cultural values, Haryana

Introduction

The institution of family and intimate relationships has undergone substantial transformation in recent decades due to globalization, urbanization, increased educational opportunities, economic independence and changing social values. One of the most notable changes has been the growing acceptance of cohabitation or live-in relationships, in which unmarried couples live together in an intimate relationship without entering into a formal marriage. Although cohabitation has long been common in many Western societies, it is increasingly becoming visible in developing countries, including India, where traditional marital norms continue to influence social life (Rogers *et al.*, 2016) ^[1].

Young adulthood is a period characterized by identity exploration, relationship formation and experimentation with different life choices. Research suggests that emerging adults are generally more open to alternative relationship arrangements than older generations. Rogers *et al.* (2016) ^[1] reported that attitudes toward cohabitation among young adults were closely associated with their perceptions of emerging adulthood, independence and personal development. Individuals who viewed young adulthood as a time for exploration demonstrated greater acceptance of cohabitation and non-traditional relationship forms.

In India, marriage has traditionally been regarded as a sacred social institution that provides legitimacy to intimate relationships and family formation. However, rapid socio-

economic changes, increasing participation of women in higher education and employment, migration to urban centers and exposure to global media have contributed to changing perceptions regarding relationships and marriage. As a result, live-in relationships have gradually emerged as an alternative form of partnership among some sections of Indian society, particularly among educated urban youth (Ghosh, 2021) ^[2].

Research conducted among Indian youth indicates that awareness and acceptance of live-in relationships are increasing. Ghosh (2021) ^[2] found that young people generally viewed live-in relationships as a means of understanding compatibility, emotional adjustment and mutual expectations before marriage. However, the study also reported that marriage continued to be preferred over cohabitation as a long-term relationship arrangement, highlighting the continuing importance of traditional family values.

Similarly, Mandava and Banu (2018) ^[3] examined the perceptions of young adults toward live-in relationships and observed a mixture of positive and negative attitudes. While respondents appreciated the freedom, flexibility and opportunity to assess compatibility associated with cohabitation, they also expressed concerns regarding social acceptance, family approval, cultural values and long-term stability. The study concluded that young adults were becoming more open to the idea of live-in relationships, although traditional norms continued to influence their

perceptions.

Studies conducted across different countries have also highlighted the role of cohabitation as a stage of relationship development. International research suggests that many young adults perceive living together as a way to strengthen emotional bonds, share responsibilities and evaluate relationship compatibility before marriage. At the same time, societal attitudes toward cohabitation continue to vary depending on cultural values, religious beliefs and social norms (Rogers *et al.*, 2016) ^[1].

Despite increasing visibility, live-in relationships remain a socially sensitive issue in India. Public attitudes are often divided between acceptance of personal freedom and adherence to traditional cultural values. Young people may support the right of others to choose live-in relationships while simultaneously expressing reluctance to adopt such arrangements themselves because of family expectations, social stigma, and concerns regarding social approval. Contemporary discussions among Indian youth also indicate that live-in relationships are generally perceived as more acceptable in metropolitan areas than in rural and traditional communities.

The legal position of live-in relationships in India has also evolved considerably. Judicial decisions have recognized the right of consenting adults to cohabit and have extended certain legal protections to women and children involved in such relationships. However, legal recognition has not necessarily translated into widespread social acceptance, particularly in states where traditional family structures remain strong. This creates an interesting contrast between legal legitimacy and societal attitudes toward live-in relationships.

Haryana is a state known for its strong family-oriented culture, traditional values and close-knit social structure. At the same time, increasing educational opportunities, urbanization and media exposure are influencing the attitudes of young adults toward relationships and marriage. Understanding how young adults perceive live-in relationships is therefore important for examining the ongoing interaction between traditional norms and contemporary social change.

Although several studies have explored perceptions of live-in relationships among youth in metropolitan areas, limited research has been conducted among young adults in Haryana. Therefore, the present study was undertaken to assess the awareness and perceptions of young adults regarding live-in relationships in Haryana and to understand how they view this emerging relationship pattern within the context of contemporary Indian society.

Objectives of the study

To study the perception and awareness of young adults toward live-in relationships.

Materials and Methods

Sample and Sampling Technique

The study was conducted on a sample of 100 young adults who were unmarried belonging to the age group of 18–30

years residing in Haryana. A convenience sampling technique was used for selecting the respondents. Convenience sampling is a method in which participants are selected based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study. The questionnaire was distributed through Google Forms to respondents who fulfilled the required criteria of age and residence. Further, respondents were also requested to share the form with their friends and acquaintances who met the same criteria. Thus, a snowball approach was also indirectly followed to increase participation. The sample included both male and female respondents from rural and urban areas of Haryana. The anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents were maintained throughout the study.

Tool for Data Collection

A self-developed questionnaire was prepared to collect the data. The questionnaire consisted of two sections:

Section A: Demographic Profile

This section included information related to Gender, Marital status, Place of residence, Educational qualification and Family type

Section B: Perception Scale on Live-in Relationships

The perception scale consisted of statements related to:

1. General attitudes towards live-in relationships
2. Moral and cultural perceptions
3. Personal acceptability
4. Legal and social awareness

The questionnaire included 20 statements measured on a 5-point Likert Scale:

- Strongly Agree (SA) – 5
- Agree (A) – 4
- Neutral (N) – 3
- Disagree (D) – 2
- Strongly Disagree (SD) – 1

The scale was designed to assess the perceptions, acceptance level, awareness and cultural viewpoints of young adults regarding live-in relationships.

Method of Data Collection

The data were collected through an online Google Form. The questionnaire link was shared personally with respondents through social media platforms and online communication channels. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and participation was kept voluntary. The collected responses were organized, coded and analyzed using percentage and frequency distribution methods for interpretation of the findings.

Ethical Considerations

Confidentiality and anonymity of all respondents was ensured. No personal identity information was disclosed and the data collected were used only for academic purposes.

Results

Section A – Demographic Profile

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents

Demographic variables	Frequency (N = 100)	Percentage
1.Age Group		
18–21 years	23	23%
22–25 years	66	66%
26–30 years	11	11%
2. Gender		
Female	55	55%
Male	45	45%
3. Current relationship status		
Single	86	86%
In a relationship	14	14%
4. Place of residence		
Rural	63	63%
Urban	37	37%
5. Educational qualification		
Undergraduate	48	48%
Postgraduate	43	43%
Ph.D.	7	7%
Any other	2	2%
6. Family Type		
Nuclear	59	59%
Joint	38	38%
Single- parent	3	3%

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 100 young adult respondents included in the study.

With regard to age, the majority of respondents (66%) belonged to the age group of 22–25 years, followed by 23 per cent in the age group of 18–21 years and 11 per cent in the age group of 26–30 years. This indicates that the sample predominantly comprised individuals in early adulthood, a developmental stage characterized by exploration of intimate relationships and evolving perspectives regarding marriage and alternative relationship arrangements.

In terms of gender, females constituted a slightly higher proportion (55%) than males (45%). The relatively balanced gender distribution facilitated the inclusion of diverse viewpoints regarding live-in relationships.

Regarding relationship status, the vast majority of respondents (86%) reported being single, while only 14 per cent indicated that they were currently in a relationship. This suggests that most participants were evaluating live-in relationships from an observational or conceptual perspective rather than through direct relationship experience.

Concerning place of residence, nearly two-thirds (63%) of respondents belonged to rural areas, whereas 37 per cent resided in urban areas. The higher representation of rural youth provides valuable insights into perceptions of live-in relationships in regions where traditional social norms continue to exert considerable influence.

Educationally, almost half of the respondents (48%) were pursuing or had completed undergraduate studies, while 43 per cent were postgraduates. A smaller proportion consisted of Ph.D. scholars (7%) and respondents with other educational qualifications (2%). The educational profile reflects a relatively well-educated sample capable of forming informed opinions on contemporary social issues.

Regarding family structure, the majority (59%) belonged to nuclear families, followed by 38 per cent from joint families and only 3 per cent from single-parent families. The predominance of nuclear family systems reflects changing family patterns among young adults in Haryana and may influence attitudes towards non-traditional relationship forms.

Overall, the demographic profile indicates that the respondents were predominantly educated young adults, largely single, residing in rural areas, and belonging to nuclear family systems.

Table 2: Awareness of Live-in Relationships among young adults in Haryana

7. Have you heard of live- in relationship?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	89	89%
No	11	11%
8. Do you personally know anyone in a live-in relationship?		
No	62	62%
Yes	38	38%

Awareness of Live-in Relationships among Young Adults

Table 2: Awareness of Live-in Relationships among Young Adults in Haryana

Table 2 depicts the level of awareness regarding live-in relationships among young adults in Haryana.

The findings reveal that a substantial majority of respondents (89%) had heard about live-in relationships, whereas only 11 per cent reported having no prior knowledge of the concept. This indicates that live-in relationships have gained considerable visibility among young adults, likely due to increased exposure through media, higher education, digital platforms, and changing social discourse.

When asked whether they personally knew anyone involved in a live-in relationship, 38 per cent of respondents answered affirmatively, while 62 per cent reported that they did not know anyone in such an arrangement. Although awareness was high, direct exposure to live-in relationships remained relatively limited. This finding suggests that live-in relationships are widely recognized among youth but are still not commonly encountered within their immediate social circles.

The results indicate that while knowledge of live-in relationships is widespread, practical familiarity remains comparatively lower, reflecting the transitional nature of societal acceptance in Haryana.

Section b -perception scale**Table 3: General Attitudes Towards Live-in Relationships**

	Frequency
1. Live-in relationships are a personal choice and should be respected.	
Strongly Disagree	7
Disagree	6
Neutral	20
Agree	43
Strongly Agree	24
2. Live-in relationships reflect changing societal values.	
Strongly Disagree	3
Disagree	3
Neutral	13
Agree	67
Strongly Agree	14
3. I see live-in relationships as equivalent to marriage.	
Strongly Disagree	15
Disagree	34
Neutral	24
Agree	25
Strongly Agree	2
4. I believe live-in relationships lead to emotional insecurity.	
Strongly Disagree	1
Disagree	34
Neutral	32
Agree	30
Strongly Agree	3
5. People in live-in relationships are judged unfairly in society.	
Strongly Disagree	2
Disagree	4
Neutral	10
Agree	57
Strongly Agree	27

Perceptions of Young Adults towards Live-in Relationships**General Attitudes towards Live-in Relationships****Table 3: General Attitudes towards Live-in Relationships**

Table 3 presents respondents' general attitudes towards live-in relationships.

A majority of respondents (67%) either agreed (43%) or strongly agreed (24%) that live-in relationships are a personal choice and should be respected. Only 13 per cent disagreed, while 20 per cent remained neutral. This indicates a generally supportive attitude toward individual autonomy in relationship decisions.

Similarly, 81 per cent of respondents agreed that live-in relationships reflect changing societal values, with 67 per cent agreeing and 14 per cent strongly agreeing. Only 6 per cent expressed disagreement. This finding suggests that young adults largely perceive live-in relationships as part of broader social transformation and modernization.

However, attitudes became more cautious when respondents were asked whether live-in relationships are equivalent to

marriage. Nearly half of the respondents (49%) disagreed with this statement, whereas only 27 per cent agreed and 24 per cent remained neutral. The findings imply that despite increasing acceptance, marriage continues to hold a distinct and valued social status among young adults.

Regarding emotional security, responses were divided. While 33 per cent agreed that live-in relationships lead to emotional insecurity, 35 per cent disagreed and 32 per cent remained neutral. The near-equal distribution suggests uncertainty among respondents about the emotional consequences of live-in arrangements.

A strong majority (84%) agreed that people in live-in relationships are judged unfairly in society. This highlights respondents' recognition of persistent social stigma and negative societal attitudes toward individuals choosing non-traditional relationship forms.

Overall, the findings indicate that young adults demonstrate increasing acceptance of live-in relationships as a personal choice but continue to differentiate them from marriage while acknowledging existing societal prejudice.

Table 4: Moral and Cultural Perceptions

	Frequency
6. Live-in relationships go against Indian cultural values.	
Strongly Disagree	4
Disagree	16
Neutral	21
Agree	43
Strongly Agree	16
7. Traditional marriage is more stable than a live-in relationship.	
Strongly Disagree	3
Disagree	17
Neutral	24
Agree	39
Strongly Agree	17
8. Live-in relationships promote immorality.	
Strongly Disagree	7
Disagree	34
Neutral	39
Agree	15
Strongly Agree	5
9. Indian society is not ready to accept live-in relationships.	
Strongly Disagree	0
Disagree	6
Neutral	9
Agree	65
Strongly Agree	20
10. Live-in relationships are more accepted in metro cities than rural areas.	
Strongly Disagree	4
Disagree	1
Neutral	7
Agree	62
Strongly Agree	26

Moral and Cultural Perceptions

Table 4: Moral and Cultural Perceptions

Table 4 examines respondents' perceptions regarding the moral and cultural implications of live-in relationships.

More than half of the respondents (59%) agreed that live-in relationships go against Indian cultural values, while 20 per cent disagreed and 21 per cent remained neutral. This suggests that traditional cultural norms continue to shape perceptions despite increasing awareness and acceptance.

Similarly, 56 per cent agreed that traditional marriage is more stable than live-in relationships, whereas only 20 per cent disagreed. These findings reflect the continued preference for marriage as the socially approved and stable form of union.

Interestingly, respondents largely rejected the notion that live-in relationships promote immorality. A combined 41

per cent disagreed with this statement compared to only 20 per cent who agreed, while 39 per cent remained neutral. This indicates a gradual shift away from viewing live-in relationships as morally inappropriate.

A striking majority (85%) agreed that Indian society is not yet ready to accept live-in relationships. This reflects a widespread perception that societal attitudes remain conservative despite changing individual viewpoints.

Likewise, 88 per cent agreed that live-in relationships are more accepted in metropolitan cities than in rural areas. This finding highlights the perceived urban-rural divide in the acceptance of alternative relationship arrangements.

Overall, the results suggest that while young adults increasingly view live-in relationships as a legitimate lifestyle choice, they continue to perceive significant cultural resistance and societal barriers to their acceptance.

Table 5: Personal Acceptability

	Frequency
11. I would consider being in a live-in relationship myself.	
Strongly Disagree	13
Disagree	29
Neutral	32
Agree	24
Strongly Agree	2
12. I would accept if a friend of mine chose a live-in relationship.	
Strongly Disagree	5
Disagree	6
Neutral	21
Agree	55
Strongly Agree	13
13. I would accept if my sibling chose a live-in relationship.	
Strongly Disagree	9

Disagree	14
Neutral	23
Agree	45
Strongly Agree	9
14. I believe live-in relationships can help partners understand each other.	
Strongly Disagree	3
Disagree	2
Neutral	19
Agree	61
Strongly Agree	15
15. I would fear social backlash if I were in a live-in relationship.	
Strongly Disagree	4
Disagree	13
Neutral	27
Agree	44
Strongly Agree	12

Personal Acceptability of Live-in Relationships

Table 5: Personal Acceptability

Table 5 presents respondents' personal willingness to accept or engage in live-in relationships.

When asked whether they would consider being in a live-in relationship themselves, 42 per cent expressed disagreement, while only 26 per cent agreed and 32 per cent remained neutral. This finding indicates that personal acceptance is considerably lower than general acceptance.

In contrast, respondents were more accepting of others' choices. A majority (68%) agreed that they would accept a friend choosing a live-in relationship, while only 11 per cent disagreed. This suggests greater tolerance toward others than willingness to personally adopt such arrangements.

Similarly, 54 per cent reported that they would accept a sibling choosing a live-in relationship, whereas 23 per cent expressed disagreement. Although acceptance remained

positive, respondents appeared somewhat less comfortable when the situation involved close family members.

A substantial majority (76%) agreed that live-in relationships help partners understand each other better before making long-term commitments. This indicates recognition of the practical advantages associated with cohabitation.

At the same time, more than half of the respondents (56%) reported that they would fear social backlash if they themselves entered a live-in relationship. This highlights the continuing influence of social norms and perceived societal disapproval.

The findings demonstrate a clear distinction between conceptual acceptance and personal adoption. Although respondents acknowledge potential benefits of live-in relationships, concerns regarding social judgment continue to discourage personal participation.

Table 6: Legal and Social Awareness

	Frequency
16. I am aware that live-in relationships are legal in India.	
Strongly Disagree	2
Disagree	6
Neutral	18
Agree	63
Strongly Agree	11
17. There should be legal rights for partners in live-in relationships.	
Strongly Disagree	3
Disagree	6
Neutral	16
Agree	61
Strongly Agree	14
18. Children born out of live-in relationships should have legal rights.	
Strongly Disagree	6
Disagree	7
Neutral	14
Agree	58
Strongly Agree	15
19. Live-in partners should have the same legal rights as married couples.	
Strongly Disagree	7
Disagree	25
Neutral	31
Agree	28
Strongly Agree	9
20. There should be more awareness about live-in relationships in India.	
Strongly Disagree	5
Disagree	6
Neutral	17
Agree	47
Strongly Agree	25

Legal and Social Awareness

Table 6: Legal and Social Awareness

Table 6 presents respondents' awareness of the legal and social dimensions of live-in relationships in India.

The majority of respondents (74%) reported awareness that live-in relationships are legally recognized in India, while only 8 per cent disagreed with the statement. This indicates a relatively high level of legal awareness among young adults.

A similarly high proportion (75%) agreed that partners in live-in relationships should be provided with legal rights and protections. This finding reflects support for safeguarding individuals involved in such arrangements.

Regarding children born from live-in relationships, 73 per cent agreed that they should be entitled to legal rights. This suggests that respondents prioritize the welfare and protection of children regardless of parental marital status.

However, support declined when respondents were asked whether live-in partners should receive the same legal rights as married couples. While 37 per cent agreed, 32 per cent disagreed and 31 per cent remained neutral. This indicates some hesitation in equating live-in relationships completely with marriage under the law.

Finally, a substantial majority (72%) agreed that greater public awareness regarding live-in relationships is needed in India. This finding underscores respondents' recognition of existing misconceptions and limited understanding surrounding the concept.

Overall, the results reveal relatively high levels of legal awareness and considerable support for legal protection of live-in partners and their children. However, respondents remain cautious about granting complete legal equivalence between live-in relationships and marriage.

Discussion

Awareness of Live-in Relationships among Young Adults

The findings revealed that a large majority of respondents were aware of the concept of live-in relationships. This high level of awareness may be attributed to increased exposure through social media, higher education, digital platforms, and popular culture. Although awareness was widespread, fewer respondents personally knew someone involved in a live-in relationship, indicating that while the concept has gained visibility, its actual practice remains relatively uncommon within respondents' immediate social circles. Similar findings were reported by Ghosh (2021) ^[2], who observed that Indian youth are increasingly familiar with live-in relationships despite limited personal exposure.

General Attitudes towards Live-in Relationships

The majority of respondents viewed live-in relationships as a personal choice that deserves respect and recognized them as a reflection of changing social values. This suggests a growing acceptance of individual autonomy in relationship decisions among young adults. These findings are consistent with Ghosh (2021) ^[2], who reported that Indian youth increasingly perceive live-in relationships as a modern lifestyle choice influenced by changing social norms. However, a considerable proportion of respondents did not consider live-in relationships equivalent to marriage. This indicates that marriage continues to hold greater social and

cultural significance despite increasing acceptance of alternative relationship forms. Similar observations were made by Mandava and Banu (2018) ^[3], who found that young adults accepted cohabitation but still viewed marriage as a more legitimate and socially valued institution.

The respondents also believed that individuals in live-in relationships are often judged unfairly by society. This perception highlights the persistence of social stigma associated with non-marital cohabitation. Previous studies have similarly reported that societal disapproval and fear of negative social judgment remain important barriers to the acceptance of live-in relationships in India (Narayan *et al.*, 2021) ^[4].

Moral and Cultural Perceptions

The findings indicated that many respondents perceived live-in relationships as being inconsistent with Indian cultural values and regarded marriage as a more stable relationship arrangement. These views reflect the continued influence of traditional norms and family-oriented values in Indian society. Narayan *et al.* (2021) ^[4] also reported that cultural expectations surrounding marriage continue to shape attitudes toward live-in relationships.

Interestingly, while respondents expressed cultural reservations, fewer considered live-in relationships immoral. This suggests that young adults are gradually separating moral judgments from traditional social norms. Similar findings were reported by Mandava and Banu (2018) ^[3], who observed a gradual shift toward greater tolerance despite continuing cultural concerns.

A large majority of respondents believed that Indian society is not yet fully prepared to accept live-in relationships and that such relationships are more accepted in metropolitan areas than rural settings. This finding supports previous research indicating that acceptance of live-in relationships is generally higher in urban areas due to greater exposure to diverse lifestyles and changing social values (Ghosh, 2021) ^[2].

Personal Acceptability of Live-in Relationships

Although respondents generally supported the right of individuals to choose live-in relationships, fewer expressed willingness to enter such relationships themselves. This difference between public acceptance and personal acceptance suggests the influence of social expectations and family pressures. Similar trends have been documented by Ghosh (2021) ^[2], who found that many young adults supported live-in relationships conceptually but preferred marriage for themselves.

Respondents were more accepting of friends or siblings choosing a live-in relationship than they were of personally entering such an arrangement. This reflects increasing social tolerance while highlighting the continued importance of cultural expectations in personal decision-making.

Most respondents agreed that live-in relationships can help partners understand each other better before marriage. This finding supports earlier studies suggesting that cohabitation is often viewed as a means of testing compatibility and strengthening relationship understanding before making a long-term commitment (Mandava & Banu, 2018) ^[3].

At the same time, many respondents reported fear of social backlash if they themselves entered a live-in relationship.

This finding indicates that concerns regarding family approval, social reputation, and community acceptance continue to influence relationship choices among young adults.

Legal and Social Awareness

The findings showed that respondents possessed relatively high awareness regarding the legal status of live-in relationships in India. Most respondents also supported legal rights for live-in partners and children born from such relationships. These findings reflect growing awareness of legal developments and increasing support for the protection of individual rights. Similar observations were reported by Narayan *et al.* (2021) ^[4], who emphasized the importance of legal safeguards for individuals involved in live-in relationships.

However, respondents were less supportive of granting live-in partners exactly the same legal status as married couples. This suggests that while legal protection is considered necessary, marriage continues to occupy a unique position within the social and cultural framework of Indian society.

The majority of respondents also emphasized the need for greater public awareness regarding live-in relationships. This finding indicates recognition of prevailing misconceptions and highlights the importance of educational initiatives aimed at promoting informed understanding of contemporary relationship patterns.

Conclusion

The present study explored the awareness and perceptions of young adults in Haryana regarding live-in relationships. The findings revealed that the majority of respondents were aware of the concept of live-in relationships and recognized them as a reflection of changing social values. Most respondents supported the idea that relationship choices are a matter of personal freedom and believed that individuals in live-in relationships should be treated with respect.

Despite this growing awareness and acceptance, traditional beliefs continued to influence respondents' attitudes. Many participants viewed marriage as a more stable and socially accepted institution and felt that Indian society is not yet fully prepared to accept live-in relationships. Personal willingness to engage in a live-in relationship was comparatively lower than general acceptance, largely due to concerns about social disapproval and cultural expectations. The study also found that respondents were generally supportive of legal rights for live-in partners and children born from such relationships and emphasized the need for greater public awareness on the subject. Overall, the findings indicate that young adults in Haryana are gradually developing more open and accepting attitudes toward live-in relationships; however, traditional cultural values and social norms continue to play a significant role in shaping their perceptions and personal choices.

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