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LIVE-IN RELATIONSHIPS: AN ETHICO-LEGAL STUDY IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

“The law may or may not recognize relationships, but society is often the final judge of morality.” Live-in relationships have emerged as an alternative to traditional marriage, especially among young, urban, and progressive individuals. However, in India, these relationships face both legal ambiguities and social criticism due to deep-rooted cultural and religious beliefs. This research explores the ethical and legal dimensions of live-in relationships, analyzing judicial interpretations, statutory provisions, and the challenges of legal recognition. While courts have acknowledged the rights of individuals in such relationships, India lacks a comprehensive legal framework, leaving many aspects in a legal gray area.

The study also examines societal attitudes, revealing how religious, cultural, and generational factors influence perceptions of live-in relationships. Women and children in these arrangements often face legal and social vulnerabilities, further complicating their acceptance. A comparative analysis of the legal systems in the USA, UK, and Australia demonstrates how structured legal provisions can offer better protection.

To assess the awareness and perception of live-in relationships among Indian youth, a survey was conducted among Pondicherry University students. The findings highlight the cautious acceptance of live-in relationships, emphasizing the need for legal reforms, social awareness, and balanced policymaking that respects both individual rights and cultural values.

Keywords: Live-in Relationship, Personal Liberty, Judicial Precedents, Social Morality, Legal Recognition

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION:

“A live-in relationship between two consenting adults is not an offence under the law. Even if it is perceived as immoral by society, the law does not prohibit it.”¹

- Justice K.G. Balakrishnan

Law plays a crucial role in driving social change. Society consists of individuals, and both law and society work to guide individual behaviour. Since marriage is a cornerstone of society, its stability is essential for protecting the community's interests. In India, matters concerning marriage are governed by personal laws, with each religion having its own regulations regarding marriage and family issues. As we witness shifts in societal living patterns, the law must adapt accordingly while considering both social values and constitutional principles.

In the last few decades, relationships and family structures have changed dramatically worldwide. Many couples are choosing different sorts of relationships, such as cohabiting as opposed to the once-accepted-only one of traditional marriage. Research shows a worldwide drop in marriage rates but an increase in live-in relationships, which indicates a shift in societal norms. Live-in-relationships have been on the rise in countries including Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, in part propelled by financial independence, career goals and changing social attitudes toward marriage. This trend of cohabitation is outstanding among younger generations who frequently value financial stability and personal compatibility above formal marriage vows. But caught between changing social norms and deeply entrenched cultural values, live-in relationships remain a controversial subject in India, notwithstanding its fast modernization and urbanization. Then the question arises: Should the Indian legal system adapt to this social change, or should traditional norms continue to govern the relationship's legality and ethics? Therefore, this research aims to explore this conflict through an ethico-legal study of the subject.

India, however, is still developing and has not developed yet. It is a country with rich traditional values and customs generally adhered to by its people. Marriage (wedlock) as an institution in this society is considered to be a very sacrament in nature. It is believed to be a union of two souls formed in paradise and practised on earth. The status of marriage has always remained

¹ Honourable Justice K.G. Balakrishnan in *S. Khusboo v. Kanniammal & Anr* AIR (2010)5 SCC 600

high because it holds a place of extreme significance both for the individual and the state, and is looked at with respect and dignity and considered to foster social stability.

India is a nation that is gradually embracing Western notions and lifestyles, one of which is the idea of living together in a relationship. In legal parlance relationship of a man with a woman is legitimate if it is based on proper marriage and illegitimate if not. The conceptualized version of the relationship is shaken by the younger generations who are rapidly adopting Western attitudes and behaviours and one such example is Live-in relationships.

A live-in relationship is an arrangement where two consenting adults live together for an extended period or permanently but without a legal marriage. It portrays a couple living like a married pair in society, though there is no marriage in legal marriage. The term “live-in relationship” can be defined alongside several other similar terms, such as cohabitation, living together, de facto relationships, or marriage-like partnerships. The fundamental concept behind a live-in relationship is that the couple involved seeks to evaluate their compatibility with each other before committing to a more serious relationship.²

1.2 RESEARCH GAP:

Previous research on live-in relationships has largely focused on their legal standing, particularly through judicial decisions in India. But still there is a big knowledge gap on the ethical conflicts related to these relationships as well as the attitudes of young people who are more often cohabiting. Although earlier research has considered the legality of live-in relationships, few studies have investigated the interaction of ethics, cultural norms, and youth views on this matter. This analysis seeks to offer new knowledge on the current views of live-in partnerships in India based on empirical research from a questionnaire given to Pondicherry University students. The aim is to close the divide between theoretical legal discussion and actual social dynamics by studying legal precedents, ethical issues and international comparisons.

1.3 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM:

India is a country with diversity and different religions; each with their customs, traditions, values and beliefs. One common thing is the paramountcy of marriage. Every religion considers

² Mohit Chhibber & Aditya Singh, *Live-in Relationships: An Ethical and Moral Dilemma*, 1 Int'l J. Applied Res. 74 (2015).

marriage as the most crucial need for maintaining social standing, having children and receiving social security. A marriage calls for numerous responsibilities towards both partners and their respective families. This pattern has been followed in India for ages. But in due course of time, today's generation started perceiving marriage as a forceful societal clench and inclined towards the Western style of living with partners known as a Live-in-Relationship. However, this easy escape is not as beautiful as it sounds because in India, it highlights important ethical and legal concerns, as this order of relation exists in a legal grey area with no legislation governing non-marital cohabitation. Apart from mainstream society, a large part of Indian society views and regards non-marital relations as nothing but the exchange of sexual services in consideration of security. In reality, live-in relationships have no obvious legal recognition apart from the *Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005*³ which also deals vaguely with the same.

Article 21 of the Constitution of India states that, "No person shall be deprived of his life and personal liberty except according to procedure established by law."⁴ The Supreme Court has ruled that live-in relationships fall under Article 21 in the case of *S. Khushboo v. Kanniammal* (2010)⁵ and *Pushpa Devi v. State of Punjab* (2021)⁶ and pointed out that living together with two major persons is a part of the right to life. However, no law specifies the rights of parties in live-in relationships and the status of children born to such couples. The protection provided by courts is applied on a case-by-case basis. The lack of legal certainty affects both partners, as men in a live-in relationship do not have a well-defined legal role or obligations, and women struggle to claim legal rights in case of separation. Men suffer with parental rights also because the custody of the child in most cases is in favour of the mother. The male partners face false allegations or exploitation or abuse from live-in partners, leading to legal susceptibility with strong protection under existing laws. Therefore, gender-neutral legal protection is necessary. The question of giving legal protections to live-in partners in itself creates a chain reaction of problems. The main disputes are the legal ones. Acknowledgement of the social idea of living together and the security that needs to be provided. The ethical concerns are primarily rooted in societal norms rather than legal inadequacies. However, in *Payal Sharma v/s Superintendent, Nari Niketan* (2001),⁷ Allahabad High Court-Justice M Katju said, "In our opinion, a man and

³ The protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005. No. 43, Acts of parliament, 2005 (India)

⁴ INDIAN CONSTN.art 21

⁵ S.Khusboo v. Kanniammal & Anr AIR(2010)5 SCC 600

⁶ Pushpa Devi and Anr v. State of Punjab and Haryana (2021) CRWP-6314-2021

⁷ Payal Sharma alias Kamla Sharma v. superintendent, Nari Niketan, Agra and Others AIR (2001) ALL 254

a woman, even without getting married, can live together if they wish. This may be regarded as immoral by society, but it is not illegal. There is a difference between law and morality.”⁸ The researcher, therefore, apart from citing the status of legality in India, compares it with other systems and addresses a few issues with live-in relationships. Based on the comparison and the survey, it concludes that an explicit legal framework dealing with relationships is needed, though Article 21⁹ is available to all citizens.

1.4 SCOPE AND OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:

This research aims to evaluate the current status of live-in relationships in India and to explore the influence or impacts of the judicial pronouncements regarding non-marital cohabitation in Indian society. To analyze the ethical concerns that target the women and children of such relationships due to patriarchal thoughts, and also how it affects men who are left without clear obligations and rights. Through a comprehensive analysis, it seeks to identify the issues and suggest legal reforms for better and gender-neutral laws that will protect in such cases.

The objective of the study is based on the research questions to have a comprehensive and explicit answer to the issues:

- To evaluate the status of live-in relationships in India concerning both ethical and legal perspectives.
- To examine the role of Article 21 and responses of the judiciary to live-in relationships.
- To assess legal recognition of live-in relationships in other jurisdictions to identify best practices that could be incorporated into Indian law.
- To understand the level of awareness in the society and its attitude towards live-in relationship through a survey.
- To propose gender-neutral legal reforms on live-in relationships which will provide balanced rights and obligations to both partners.

1.5 RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS:

“Despite progressive judicial pronouncements, the absence of an explicit legal framework governing live-in relationships in India perpetuates societal stigmatization and legal insecurity, disproportionately affecting women and children, while also leaving male partners without clear obligations or rights.”

⁸ Ibid 8

⁹ Id 5

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

In accordance with the problems mentioned above, this research aims to respond to the following questions-

1. What is a live-in-relationship and how is it perceived within Indian society?
2. What are the ethical concerns that arise in live-in relationships?
3. How have the Indian courts interpreted non-marital cohabitation over time?
4. How is the idea of a live-in relationship perceived in various countries, particularly in the USA, UK, and Australia?
5. What are the perceptions of young minds about live-in relationships?

1.7 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY:

This study is subject to certain limitations.

- **Firstly**, the absence of a specific legislative framework governing live-in relationships in India poses a challenge in conducting legal analysis because interpretations rely on judicial decisions rather than codified law.
- **Secondly**, ethical considerations and societal values surrounding live-in relationships are deeply rooted in religious and cultural beliefs, which may vary significantly among communities, making it difficult to generalize conclusions.
- **Thirdly**, the empirical research is limited to the Pondicherry University campus, which may not be a representation of broader social attitudes across India.
- **Lastly**, although the judiciary has made significant progress in defending the rights of those involved in these kinds of relationships, especially women and children, many issues remain unanswered due to the absence of a thorough legal framework.

1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

It is well known that research on every different issue looks for the right approach, yet there is always an interdependence of several tools applied in research design to evaluate the hypothesis for the study. In this context, the present research adopts a mixed-method approach by using doctrinal (legal) research and empirical research to offer a thorough ethico-legal study of live-in relationships in India. The research is both descriptive and analytical. It relies on both primary and secondary data sources for a well-rounded analysis.

Primary data is collected for an empirical study among the students of Pondicherry University using Google form. In order to understand the perceptions and opinions of individuals

regarding live-in relationships, a Google survey was conducted. The survey was designed to collect empirical data from respondents, focusing on societal acceptance, ethical considerations, legal awareness, and personal experiences related to live-in relationships. The sample included 165 students of Pondicherry University from different departments and schools who were the respondents. The selection of respondents was made using snowball sampling. The Google form created is circulated among the university students from diverse backgrounds, ensuring a broad representation of views. The responses collected were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively to identify trends and key perspectives on the subject. For this SnowBall sampling method is used.

Secondary data used in this research is for the part of the doctrinal study. This includes legislations, legal documents, judgments, articles, journals, publications, online materials, websites, and media reports.

Legal Texts and Statutes:

- Constitution of India - Provisions related to fundamental rights, personal liberty, and equality that may impact the legal recognition of live-in relationships.
- Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 - Discussing the implications of marriage laws on cohabiting couples.
- Domestic Violence Act, 2005 - Addressing the protection available to women in live-in relationships.
- Relevant Supreme Court and High Court Judgments - Providing judicial interpretations and legal precedents regarding cohabitation, rights of partners, and inheritance issues.

Judicial Precedents:

- Landmark cases such as *Khusboo v. Kanniammal (2010)*, *S.P.S. Balasubramanyam v. Suruttayan (1992)*, and others have been analyzed to understand the evolving judicial stance on live-in relationships.

Books and Academic Literature:

- Research papers, books, and law review articles have been used to trace the historical, cultural, and legal evolution of live-in relationships in India and internationally.

Government Reports and Surveys:

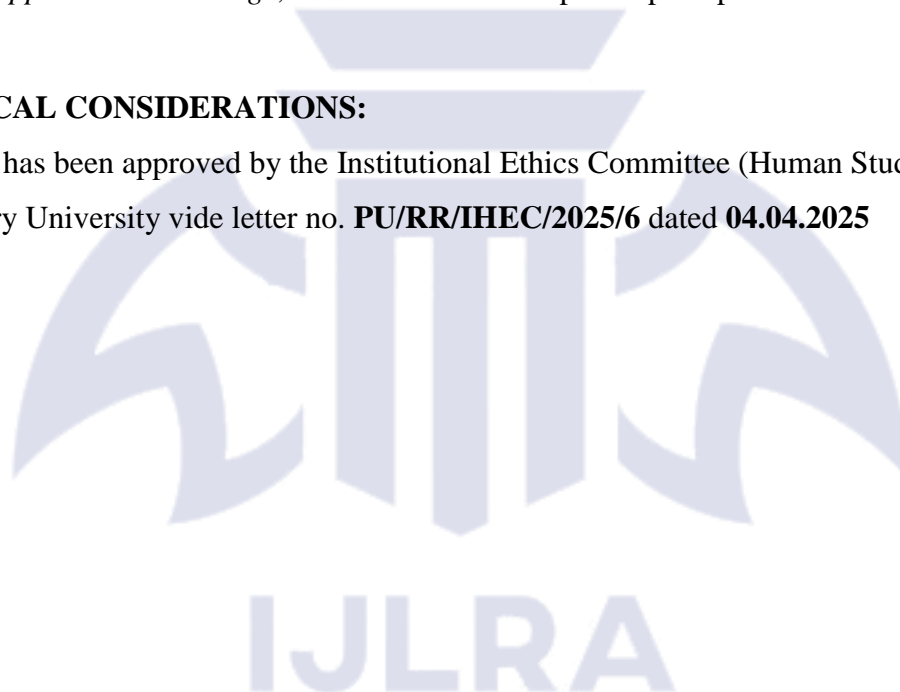
- Reports by the Law Commission of India and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on marriage, cohabitation, and legal rights have been referenced.
- YouGov India Survey (2023) and Centre for Social Research (CSR) Study (2021) have been used to support sociological perspectives.

Media Reports and Digital Sources:

- Articles from newspapers, legal blogs, and online journals discussing the social and ethical discourse surrounding live-in relationships.
- Analysis of Bollywood films, web series, and pop culture references, such as *Luka Chuppi* and *Little Things*, that have influenced public perception.

1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS:

This study has been approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee (Human Studies), Pondicherry University vide letter no. **PU/RR/IHEC/2025/6** dated **04.04.2025**



CHAPTER II: ETHICAL DILEMMAS ON LIVE-IN RELATIONSHIPS

2.1 INTRODUCTION:

“With changing social norms of legitimacy in every society, including ours, what was illegitimate in the past may be legitimate today.”¹⁰

-Justice A.K Ganguly

The notion of legitimacy in an evolving society is highly volatile. Over time live-in relationships have become a revolutionary change that infiltrated the general consciousness of Indian society. The concept of live-in relationships has undergone a significant transformation in India, reflecting shifting social attitudes, generational divides, and evolving legal interpretations. While courts have progressively upheld an individual's right to cohabit without marriage, societal acceptance still remains uneven. The traditional Indian ethos, deeply rooted in family honour, religious morality, and marital commitment, continues to view live-in relationships as an unconventional and ethically debatable choice.¹¹ Unlike past generations where marriage was the only socially acceptable institution for cohabitation, modern Indian youth increasingly view live-in relationships as a practical approach to companionship, emotional compatibility, and relationship testing before marriage.

When a nation bases its legal system both on respect for individual freedom and social values, the nation is said to be socialist. These laws are created in line with popular philosophy and for the benefit of the society. However moral values and ethical principles vary from person to person. The moral and ethical angle to the concept of a live-in relationship is a subjective one, especially in a country like India. On one hand, a section of society is of the view that it will dilute the sacred institution of marriage as it encourages pre-marital sexual relationships, in fact, they consider it to be a sin. On the other hand, the liberal minds of society consider it a progressive and forward-looking concept that allows the younger generation to check their compatibility with their partners before entering permanent commitment through valid legal marriage.¹² A non-conclusive and ongoing argument regarding the idea of live-in relationships, their moral and ethical standing, and whether or not they should be legalised in India was started even before Indian society was affected by western civilization and began practising them.

¹⁰ *Revanasiddappa & Anr v. Mallikarjun & Ors*, (2011) 11 SCC 1.

¹¹ Romi Kumari, *Live-In Relationship: Ethically Right or Legally Right*, 3 INT'L J.L. MGMT. & HUMAN. 1836 (2020).

¹² *International Journal of Current Microbiology and Applied Sciences*, 7 INT'L J. CURR. MICROBIOL. & APPLIED SCI. (2018), available at <http://www.ijcmas.com>.

Live-in relationships exist at the intersection of personal autonomy and societal morality, raising ethical concerns about whether individuals should have the freedom to choose their partners without social interference. While legal rulings uphold the right to cohabit, social traditions, religious beliefs, and cultural expectations continue to resist the idea of cohabitation outside marriage. The debate is centered around whether personal choices should be governed by collective morality or protected as fundamental rights. One of the major sources of resistance to live-in relationships is family honor and generational conflict. Traditional Indian society views marriage as the foundation of social order, and families fear that cohabitation challenges this institution by promoting casual relationships over lifelong commitments. In many cases, individuals choosing live-in relationships face family pressure, threats of disinheritance, or social exclusion, particularly in rural and conservative communities. Parents often oppose such relationships out of concern for societal reputation, caste considerations, and fear of moral condemnation. Honor-based resistance is more pronounced for women, as a daughter's marital status is still tied to family prestige, making live-in relationships an ethical dilemma for those caught between personal choice and familial duty.¹³

Recently, a YouGov India survey was conducted in April- June 2023 to assess public opinion in major metro cities like Delhi, Mumbai, and Chennai that revealed that 68% of urban Indian youth believe that live-in relationships should be legally protected, even though 47% feel that cohabitation still carries a social stigma, particularly in rural areas.¹⁴ Similarly, a study conducted by the Centre for Social Research in January-June 2021 found that 65% of Indian college students feel that Bollywood's changing portrayal of live-in relationships has contributed to their growing acceptance. 38% of the people over 40 years still viewed live-in relationships as socially unacceptable¹⁵. This is the new normal that we witness today and this is also proof that live-in bonds are no longer an urban-egalitarian experiment.¹⁶

Despite legal acceptance, live-in relationships remain ethically debated as they challenge deep-rooted cultural and religious values. Ethical dilemmas arise when individual freedom and evolving social norms come into conflict with traditional Indian morality especially when it is associated with the concept of marriage and to trace it is a difficult thing because the birth of a

¹³ *International Journal of Current Microbiology and Applied Sciences*, 7 int'l j. curr. microbiol. & applied sci. (2018), available at <http://www.ijcmas.com>.

¹⁴ YouGov India Survey Report, (2023).

¹⁵ Centre for Social Research (CSR) Report on Youth Attitudes, (2021).

¹⁶ Ibid 91

man is the birth of marriage- a practise that seems as old as the human race itself.

This chapter therefore examines the confusion and conflict in relation to social ethics and legal leniency by including ethical issues of both the partners and the children involved in such a relationship. It analyses how they challenge established norms, redefine gender roles and raise concerns about commitment, accountability, and familial expectations.¹⁷

2.2 CONFLICT BETWEEN MORALITY AND LAW:

The law and ethics or philosophy are two opposing concepts in the world, where one often limits or sometimes invalidates the existence of the other, and in very limited instances, they coexist peacefully. Live-in relationship, whether lawful or unlawful, is highly subjective, particularly in India, where traditions are valued greatly, and breaching them is considered contrary to the ethical and moral standards of society, especially in issues related to marriage and family. Traditionally, Indian culture has regarded marriage as the foundation of social order, viewing it as both a personal commitment and a social duty. Live-in relationships, which pose a challenge to the conventional institution of marriage, are frequently regarded as morally wrong, despite the fact that they are not illegal.¹⁸ This moral condemnation results in discrimination against couples who opt for cohabitation instead of marriage, exposing them to social exclusion, familial pressure, and even the threat of violence. Even with legal acknowledgment, landlords commonly decline to lease properties to live-in couples, employers impose ethical judgments, and families apply emotional and financial pressure to dissuade such relationships. The disparity between law and morality is thus apparent in the difference between legal entitlements and societal limitations.¹⁹

The judiciary has played a crucial role in upholding individual autonomy while trying to strike a balance between law and prevailing social norms but one of the biggest challenges in resolving the conflict between law and morality is the lack of codified laws specifically governing live-in relationships.²⁰ This overlap of legal rights and moral control creates a paradox- while individuals are legally free to live as they choose, they often cannot exercise this freedom without fear of social consequences. While courts have extended certain

¹⁷ Id 90

¹⁸ <https://lawfullegal.in/live-in-relationships-legal-moral-and-ethical-issues> accessed on 21 March 2025

¹⁹ Mohit Chhibber & Aditya Singh, *Live-in Relationships: An Ethical and a Moral Dilemma*, 1(8) INT'L J. APPLIED RES. 74 (2015), available at www.allresearchjournal.com.

²⁰ <https://blog.iplayers.in/all-about-law-and-morality/> accessed on 21 March 2025

protections to live-in partners, particularly under the Domestic Violence Act, 2005, there is no clear legal framework defining the rights and obligations of partners in cohabitation. This legal ambiguity allows social morality to interfere with individual rights, leading to moral policing by law enforcement agencies, denial of services, and inconsistent judicial interpretations. Without a structured legal approach, moral beliefs continue to influence the implementation of laws, making it difficult for individuals in live-in relationships to claim their rights without facing social and institutional barriers.²¹

Despite progressive judicial rulings, moral policing of live-in relationships continues in various forms. In conservative areas, police officers often harass live-in couples, wrongly interpreting their relationship as immoral or illegal, even though courts have ruled otherwise. Families use emotional and financial coercion to pressure individuals into marriage, seeing it as a “corrective measure” for cohabitation. In some cases, local communities resort to honour-based violence, forcing couples to separate or marry against their will. The gendered impact of moral and legal conflicts is another critical concern. Women in live-in relationships face greater societal stigma than men, as they are often perceived as violating cultural expectations of chastity and family honour. Even when courts have ruled in favour of women’s rights in live-in relationships, society continues to blame women for choosing a non-traditional relationship structure. In *Indra Sarma v. V.K.V. Sarma* (2013), the Supreme Court acknowledged that women in live-in relationships are often left vulnerable in case of abandonment, but it also set conditions on when a relationship qualifies for legal protection, leaving room for subjective interpretation. This shows how legal decisions still struggle to break free from moral influences, as they often reflect societal concerns about marriage, commitment, and traditional gender roles.²²

The conflict between morality and law in live-in relationships reflects India's ongoing struggle between modernity and tradition. As legal precedents gradually shift toward individual freedom, moral resistance continues to exert influence over people's lives. The absence of a comprehensive legal framework allows societal morality to interfere with legal rights, creating a paradox where what is legally permitted remains socially unacceptable. Until legal reforms address the practical concerns of live-in couples, morality will continue to act as an unwritten force shaping the real-world application of laws on cohabitation.²³

²¹ Bhumika Sharma “*Live in Relationship- The Indian Perspective*” India Law Journal (2007)

²² *Indra Sarma v. V.K.V. Sarma*, (2013) 15 SCC 755.

²³ Legal Conundrum of *Live-in Relationship in India: A Judicial Approach*, 9(26) L. & WORLD 47 (2023), available at <https://doi.org/10.36475/9.2.4>.

2.2.1 *Marriage v. Live-In Debate*

Marriage in India is governed by personal laws, which provide clear legal rights and responsibilities to both partners. The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, Muslim Personal Law, and Special Marriage Act, 1954, among others, define the rights related to inheritance, maintenance, succession, and spousal duties. Married couples are entitled to alimony, property rights, and social security benefits, which ensure legal and financial protection.

Live-in relationships, on the other hand, do not have a codified legal status. The judiciary has intervened to grant limited legal recognition, primarily under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 (PWDVA).²⁴ However, courts have also ruled that not all live-in relationships qualify for legal protection, creating uncertainty for individuals in cohabitation. For instance, in *Indra Sarma v. V.K.V. Sarma* (2013),²⁵ the Supreme Court differentiated between casual live-in relationships and those “like marriage”, stating that only the latter may be eligible for legal protection.

The lack of legal clarity often results in discriminatory treatment of live-in partners, particularly when it comes to inheritance, property disputes, and maintenance claims. Courts have attempted to bridge this gap by recognizing long-term live-in relationships as equivalent to marriage, but the inconsistency in judicial interpretation remains a major concern.

2.2.2 *Stability v. Freedom*

From an ethical standpoint, traditionalists argue that live-in relationships weaken the sanctity of marriage, undermining family values and social stability. Many view marriage as an essential institution that provides moral, emotional, and financial security, particularly for women and children. Critics fear that if live-in relationships become more common, they could lead to a decline in marriage rates, increasing instances of abandonment and single parenthood. On the other hand, supporters of live-in relationships argue that personal relationships should be based on free will rather than societal expectations.²⁶ Cohabitation allows individuals to explore compatibility, make independent choices, and prioritize personal happiness over social conventions. Many young urban Indians see live-in relationships as a practical alternative to marriage, as they allow partners to focus on career goals, personal growth, and emotional well-

²⁴ *The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005*, No. 43, Acts of Parliament, 2005 (India)

²⁵ *Indra Sarma v. V.K.V. Sarma*, (2013) 15 SCC 755

²⁶ Legal Conundrum of *Live-in Relationship in India: A Judicial Approach*, 9(26) L. & WORLD 47 (2023), available at <https://doi.org/10.36475/9.2.4>.

being without the legal and financial complications of marriage.²⁷

2.3 GENDER BASED ETHICAL DILEMMA:

Women in cohabiting relationships frequently encounter a blend of legal uncertainty and social judgment, confronting distinctive ethical dilemmas that arise from cultural expectations, gender discrimination, and the lack of a strong legal system. Although the legal system has made efforts to safeguard women's rights in these partnerships, societal morals still regard such situations as abnormal, putting women in a precarious situation. The ethical issues related to men in live-in relationships are not as frequently addressed,²⁸ yet they are of equal importance. While women face societal stigma and legal disadvantages, men often grapple with legal ambiguities, concerns about false allegations, and the absence of parental rights.

2.3.1 Ethical Status of Women in Live-in Relationship

Ethics is inherently subjective and varies across different societies, communities, regions, and cultures. There is no universal formula to define ethical standards, as they are shaped by personal virtues, societal norms, religious beliefs, and legal frameworks. Ethical standards are essentially a set of expected behaviors that align with societal values and collective morality. In relationships, ethics are further influenced by religious traditions, social customs, and legal principles, all of which establish the rights and obligations of individuals within a community. In many societies, including India, ethical standards in relationships are closely linked to religious doctrines and legal regulations. The law often reflects the long-standing moral beliefs of a society, thereby reinforcing societal expectations regarding marriage, inheritance, and family responsibilities. While these norms are meant to maintain social order and moral propriety, they often create ethical dilemmas when individuals deviate from traditional practices, such as entering into live-in relationships instead of formal marriages.²⁹

A significant aspect of this ethical debate is the gendered impact of social norms. It is widely believed that both men and women share equal responsibility in upholding ethical values, yet in practice, women bear a disproportionate burden of societal judgment. In the context of live-

²⁷ Dr. Anil Kumar Dubey, "Live in Relationship in India: The Socio- legal prospective and Judicial Approach", Indian Bar Review, Vol. 45(3), 2019

²⁸ <https://lawaddiction.com/law-morality-and-live-in-relationships-jurisprudential-analysis/> accessed on 22 March 2025

²⁹ *International Journal of Current Microbiology and Applied Sciences*, 7 INT'L J. CURR. MICROBIOL. & APPLIED SCI. (2018), available at <http://www.ijcmas.com>.

in relationships, women are more vulnerable to moral scrutiny, legal insecurity, and social exclusion. Society often views women in non-marital relationships as violating cultural expectations, which can lead to stigma, familial rejection, and economic disadvantage. While Indian courts have recognized the rights of women in live-in relationships, the absence of codified laws leaves many aspects open to interpretation. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 (PWDVA) extends protection to women in "relationships in the nature of marriage," but proving such a status is often burdensome. Women in short-term or casual live-in relationships do not always receive legal protection, leaving them vulnerable to abandonment, financial insecurity, and domestic violence. In *Indra Sarma v. V.K.V. Sarma* (2013),³⁰ the Supreme Court ruled that not all live-in relationships qualify for legal protection, leading to uncertainty for women who are not in long-term cohabitation arrangements. The burden of proving economic dependence, social acceptance, and cohabitation stability falls entirely on the woman, making it difficult for many to claim maintenance or protection under the law.

The ethical paradox for women in live-in relationships arises from society's reluctance to grant them equal recognition. While legal systems are evolving to accommodate changing social realities, the absence of uniform legal protections for live-in partners continues to place women at a greater risk of exploitation and instability. This ethical conflict highlights the ongoing tension between individual freedoms and traditional moral values, raising critical questions about the necessity for legal reforms and shifting societal attitudes to ensure gender equality in all forms of relationships.³¹

2.3.2 *Ethical Status of Men in Live-in Relationship*

▪ **Fear of legal consequences and false accusations**

One of the biggest concerns men face in live-in relationships is the possibility of legal repercussions in case of disputes. While marriage has clearly defined rights and responsibilities, live-in relationships lack clear legal guidelines, leading to uncertainties about financial obligations, domestic violence claims, and accusations of abandonment. In some cases, men have raised concerns about the misuse of legal provisions, particularly those under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 (PWDVA). If a relationship ends

³⁰ *Indra Sarma v. V.K.V. Sarma*, (2013) 15 SCC 755

³¹ Geetika Sachdeva, *Revisiting the Laws Relating to Live-in Relationship in India*, 2(1) IND. J.L. & LEGAL RES. (2020).

on bad terms, a male partner can be accused of exploitation, domestic abuse, or financial abandonment, even if the relationship was consensual.³² Unlike marriage, where divorce laws provide a structured process for separation, live-in partners face subjective legal interpretations, making men vulnerable to legal challenges.

A major ethical dilemma arises from the legal ambiguity surrounding false promises of marriage. The Supreme Court, in multiple cases, has ruled that if a man falsely promises marriage to enter into a live-in relationship, it can be considered as a form of sexual exploitation. This interpretation, however, creates a gray area, as proving "false intent" is often subjective and complex. In some cases, live-in relationships that fail due to mutual incompatibility lead to legal battles over whether the man ever intended to marry.³³

▪ **Economic obligation and maintenance issues**

Unlike in marriage, where alimony and property division laws clearly outline financial responsibilities, men in live-in relationships face legal uncertainties regarding financial obligations. In *Abhijit Bhikaseh Auti v. State of Maharashtra* (2009), the Bombay High Court ruled that a woman in a live-in relationship is entitled to maintenance under the Domestic Violence Act. However, this does not create a uniform rule for financial obligations, and courts often decide cases based on subjective interpretations of cohabitation duration, dependency, and intent.

Men in live-in relationships also face dilemmas regarding shared property and financial investments. Unlike married couples, live-in partners do not automatically have rights over shared assets, leading to disputes over property ownership, division of financial resources, and debt responsibilities after separation. In the absence of clear legal provisions, men often struggle to protect their financial interests, particularly in cases where property is registered in one partner's name.³⁴

▪ **Parental rights and custody battles**

Another major ethical issue affecting men in live-in relationships is the lack of clarity over

³² <https://lawfullegal.in/live-in-relationships-legal-moral-and-ethical-issues/> accessed on 22 March 2025.

³³ *International Journal of Current Microbiology and Applied Sciences*, 7 INT'L J. CURR. MICROBIOL. & APPLIED SCI. (2018), available at <http://www.ijcmas.com>.

³⁴ Bipin Bihari Mishra & Sujit Kumar Mishra, *Moral and Social Issues Related to Live-in Relationships*, 2(4) INT'L J. EDUC. MOD. MGMT. APPLIED SCI. & SOC. SCI. 42 (2020).

parental rights. While courts have ruled that children born out of live-in relationships are legitimate, custody laws generally favour mothers, leaving fathers with limited legal standing.³⁵

2.4 ETHICAL STATUS OF CHILDREN IN LIVE-IN RELATIONSHIP

In the context of live-in relationships, the ethical and legal challenges faced by children born out of such unions are even more critical than those faced by the parents. While women in live-in relationships encounter social stigma and legal uncertainties, it is the children who are most vulnerable, despite being innocent in the entire scenario. The challenges they face are not only legal-such as inheritance rights and legitimacy under different personal laws-but also social, as they often endure discrimination and moral judgment from society.

Since Indian law does not formally recognize live-in relationships as equivalent to marriage, the children born from such relationships frequently struggle to establish their legitimacy. While courts have made attempts to protect their rights, there is no uniform legal framework ensuring that these children are treated equally in all circumstances. This raises a fundamental ethical dilemma:

“Is it morally acceptable for a couple in a live-in relationship to bring a child into the world when the legal system does not provide absolute certainty regarding the child’s rights?”

The resolution of this ethical concern is closely tied to how the legal system treats children born out of live-in relationships. While some court rulings have granted such children similar rights to those born within marriage, there is no guarantee that every case will be decided in their favour. Over time, judicial precedents have set various conditions to determine whether a live-in relationship can be considered akin to marriage, thereby impacting the child’s legitimacy and legal rights.³⁶ If a particular relationship does not meet the legal criteria for recognition, the child may face deprivation of inheritance rights and legal recognition, creating serious ethical concerns about their future security.³⁷

A significant legal development aimed at addressing this issue was seen in *Revanasidappa v. Mallikarjun and Others*, where the Supreme Court took a compassionate approach,

³⁵ Geetika Sachdeva, *Revisiting the Laws Relating to Live-in Relationship in India*, 2(1) IND. J.L. & LEGAL RES. (2020).

³⁶ Id109

³⁷ *International Journal of Current Microbiology and Applied Sciences*, 7 INT’L J. CURR. MICROBIOL. & APPLIED SCI. (2018), available at <http://www.ijcmas.com>.

emphasizing the need to protect the rights of children born out of such relationships. Under Hindu law, Section 16 of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, which was amended in 1978, grants legitimacy to children from void or voidable marriages, ensuring that they have inheritance rights in their parents' self-acquired property. However, in *Jinia Keotin v. Kumar Sitaram Manjhi*,³⁸ the Supreme Court clarified that such children do not have rights in ancestral property, only in their parents' self-acquired assets. Furthermore,³⁹ Section 20 of the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act, 1956, places a legal obligation on a Hindu parent to provide financial support to their illegitimate child.⁴⁰

However, Muslim law does not provide strong legal protection to children born from live-in relationships. According to Section 342 of Mulla's Principles of Mohammedan Law, a child only gains limited rights if the father acknowledges paternity. Otherwise, under both Shia and Sunni traditions, such a child has no claim to inheritance. The Sunni school of thought only provides for basic care until the child reaches the age of seven. Similarly, Christian law in India provides no specific protection to children born out of live-in relationships. The Indian Succession Act, 1925,⁴¹ which governs inheritance rights for Christians, does not contain provisions ensuring equal treatment for such children. In the absence of clear legal protections, children born from live-in relationships under Christian law may be considered "filius nullius" a child of no one, making them legally vulnerable.

Despite India's dynamic social and cultural evolution, societal attitudes remain largely unfavourable toward children born from live-in relationships. They often face prejudice, social rejection, and exclusion, regardless of their legal status. Even when courts recognize their rights, families and communities may refuse to accept them, depriving them of emotional security and familial support. The most pressing ethical issue is that while the decision to enter a live-in relationship is made by consenting adults, the consequences directly impact an innocent child who has no say in the matter.⁴² Given these legal and social realities, the ethical validity of having children in a live-in relationship remains a debatable issue. Since the law does not always guarantee full protection, it may be considered ethically problematic for a couple to bring a child into the world without ensuring that their rights are safeguarded. This

³⁸ *Jinia Keotin v. Kumar Sitaram Manjhi*, (2003) 1 SCC 730.

³⁹ Section 20, The Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act, 1956, No. 78, Acts of Parliament, 1956 (India).

⁴⁰ *Ibid* 112

⁴¹ *The Indian Succession Act, 1925*, No. 39, Acts of Parliament, 1925 (India).

⁴² <https://juriscentre.com/2024/06/10/legitimacy-and-rights-of-children-born-out-of-live-in-relationships/>

dilemma highlights the urgent need for legal reforms that would grant equal protection to all children, regardless of their parents' marital status, thereby bridging the gap between law and ethical responsibility.

2.5 IMPACT OF MEDIA AND POP CULTURE

The impact of media and popular culture on live-in partnerships in India has been significant, playing an essential role in normalizing cohabitation, especially among urban youth. Throughout the years, Bollywood movies, television series, OTT platforms, and digital content have contributed to shaping public opinion concerning non-marital relationships. Although traditional Indian society regards marriage as the sole acceptable form of companionship, the contemporary depiction of live-in relationships in the media contests these norms, mirroring the evolving values, aspirations, and attitudes of the younger generation.⁴³

2.5.1 Role of Bollywood in shaping public opinion

Bollywood, as one of the strongest cultural influences in India, has been crucial in shaping public conversations about live-in relationships. In the past, live-in relationships were considered too controversial for mainstream cinema, and the few films that depicted them often treated them as rebellious or scandalous choices.⁴⁴ Bollywood largely upheld the traditional institution of marriage, and premarital cohabitation was rarely portrayed positively.

- *Salaam Namaste* (2005)⁴⁵ was one of the first mainstream Bollywood films to openly depict a live-in relationship. Starring Saif Ali Khan and Preity Zinta, the film explored the challenges of cohabitation, including societal judgment, relationship conflicts, and unplanned pregnancy. However, to conform to traditional values, the story ultimately ended in marriage, reinforcing the idea that live-in relationships are only acceptable as a precursor to wedlock.

In recent years, Bollywood has progressed toward a more open and neutral portrayal of live-in relationships, reflecting changing social attitudes.⁴⁶

- *Shuddh Desi Romance* (2013)⁴⁷ took a bold step by challenging the institution of marriage. The film's protagonists, played by Sushant Singh Rajput and Parineeti

⁴³ Sanskar Krishnan & Ishita Srivastava, *Social and Cultural Implications of Live-In Relationships in India*, 6(3) INT'L J. MULTIDISC. RES. (2024), available at www.ijfmr.com.

⁴⁴ <https://www.indianyouth.net/social-medias-impact-on-love-and-relationships/> accessed on 22 March 2025.

⁴⁵ *Salaam Namaste*, (Dir. Siddharth Anand, Yash Raj Films, 2005).

⁴⁶ <https://www.indiatoday.in/india-today-podcasts/story/live-in-relationships-in-india-conversations-with-couples-defying-cultural-norms-the-right-swipe-ep-21-2340143-2023-02-27> accessed on 22 March 2025.

⁴⁷ *Shuddh Desi Romance*, (Dir. Maneesh Sharma, Yash Raj Films, 2013).

Chopra, reject marriage pressures and choose to live together, emphasising the idea that relationships should be based on emotional compatibility rather than societal approval.

- *Luka Chuppi* (2019)⁴⁸ humorously highlighted the challenges of live-in relationships in conservative Indian towns. Starring Kartik Aaryan and Kriti Sanon, the film depicted a couple secretly living together in a small town, showcasing the social obstacles and family pressures that arise when cohabitation is discovered.

2.5.2 Influence of OTT Platforms and Web Series

With the rise of digital streaming platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Hotstar, OTT content has further normalized live-in relationships, offering realistic, relatable, and often progressive portrayals.

- *Little Things* (Netflix, 2016–2022)⁴⁹ became a cultural phenomenon by presenting a subtle and realistic depiction of a live-in couple navigating love, career struggles, and personal growth. Starring Dhruv Sehgal and Mithila Palkar, the series resonated with millennials and Gen Z, as it did not treat cohabitation as a temporary phase but rather as a natural evolution of modern relationships.
- *Four More Shots Please!* (Amazon Prime, 2019–2022)⁵⁰ featured strong female characters exploring personal choices, including live-in relationships, further promoting individual autonomy over societal expectations.
- *Permanent Roommates* (TVF, 2014–2016)⁵¹ was one of the first Indian web series to explore live-in relationships without moral judgment. The series depicted a couple's decision to cohabit before deciding on marriage, addressing issues like commitment, independence, and family pressure.

⁴⁸ *Luka Chuppi*, (Dir. Laxman Utekar, Maddock Films, 2019).

⁴⁹ *Little Things*, Netflix (2016–2022).

⁵⁰ *Four More Shots Please!*, Amazon Prime (2019–2022).

⁵¹ *Permanent Roommates*, The Viral Fever (2014–2016).

**CHAPTER III: ASSESSMENT OF AWARENESS OF LIVE-IN
RELATIONSHIPS: A SURVEY STUDY IN THE PONDICHERRY
UNIVERSITY CAMPUS**

3.1 INTRODUCTION:

In India, the idea of cohabitation has gained a lot of attention, especially in light of changing legal and social standards. India, a developing country with long-standing customs, has seen a dramatic change in how people see marriage, relationships, and cohabitation. Social acceptance is still a problem, even though the legal system has adopted a progressive attitude in several court rulings. This chapter uses an empirical study based on a structured survey to evaluate Pondicherry University students' awareness, perception, and acceptability of live-in relationships. The purpose of the study is to investigate how young adults, who are society's future, feel about live-in relationships, their potential legal ramifications, and the moral dilemmas that go along with them. Understanding their viewpoints is vital in assessing the extent to which cultural norms are altering and how the younger generation perceives cohabitation outside the institution of marriage.

Over the past few decades, India has witnessed significant changes in social structures, influenced by globalization, urbanization, and shifting cultural values. The concept of live-in relationships, two consenting adults cohabiting without marriage, has gained prominence, particularly among urban and educated youth. This shift has been largely attributed to factors such as financial independence, career aspirations, delayed marriages, and changing perceptions of companionship. University students, being at the intersection of tradition and modernity, form an ideal demographic to assess evolving attitudes toward live-in relationships. Their perspectives offer valuable insights into how India's younger generation perceives personal liberty, societal norms, and the legal implications of cohabitation.

This study is significant in multiple ways. First, it provides an empirical assessment of the awareness and attitudes toward live-in relationships among university students in India, specifically on the Pondicherry University campus. Given that universities are often hubs of progressive thought and open dialogue, they serve as an appropriate setting to gauge contemporary opinions on cohabitation. Second, the findings of this study contribute to the broader discourse on social acceptance and legal recognition of live-in relationships. While various judicial pronouncements have affirmed the rights of individuals in such relationships,

societal perspectives still largely adhere to traditional norms. By assessing the viewpoints of young adults, this study helps bridge the gap between legal development and social acceptance. Lastly, the study aids in understanding the gendered implications of live-in relationships. Women and children in live-in arrangements often face greater legal and social vulnerability compared to their male counterparts. The survey provides insights into whether young adults recognize these disparities and whether they believe existing legal protections are adequate.

The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative elements. A structured questionnaire was distributed among students of Pondicherry University through Google Forms. The questionnaire contained 15 questions covering various aspects of live-in relationships, including awareness, perception, ethical concerns, and legal understanding. The responses were collected from approximately 165 students, ensuring a diverse representation of viewpoints.

The questions in the survey were designed to explore:

- Awareness of the legal status of live-in relationships in India.
- Personal opinions on live-in relationships and their societal acceptance.
- Gender perspectives on cohabitation outside marriage.
- Ethical concerns associated with live-in relationships.
- Perceived necessity of legal reforms.

One of the major aspects that this study examines is how societal perception influences young adults' views on live-in relationships. The survey seeks to determine whether university students, as representatives of progressive thought, align with traditional values or embrace contemporary perspectives on cohabitation. By assessing students' knowledge of these legal aspects, the study sheds light on whether there is a need for increased legal awareness and policy interventions to protect individuals in live-in relationships.

3.2 REPRESENTATION OF DATA:

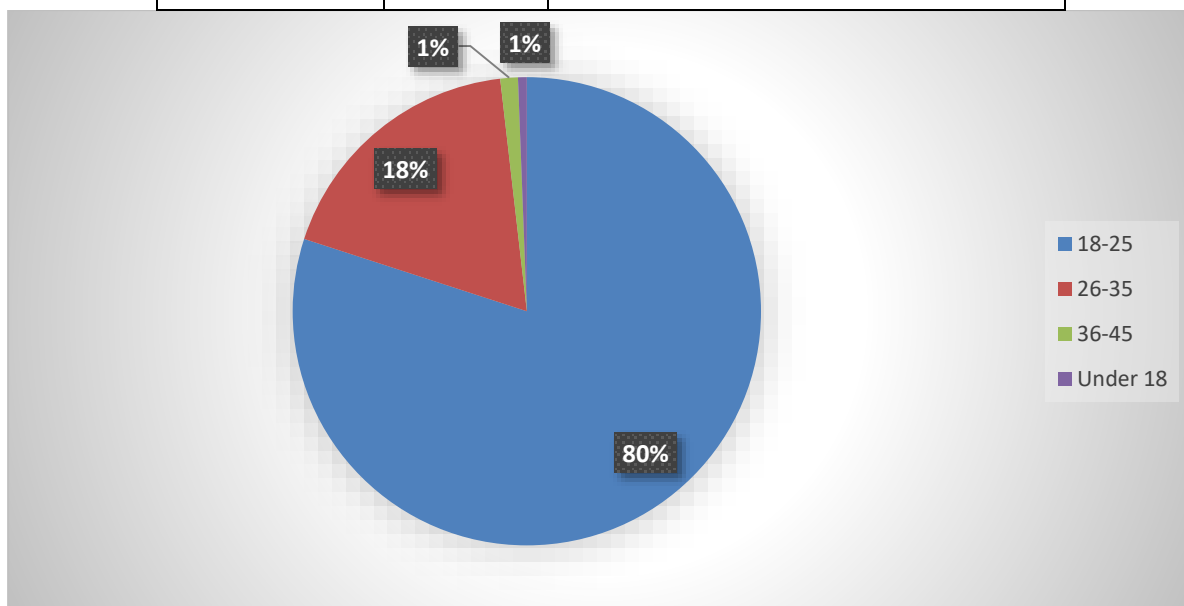
In order to represent the data collected in graphical form, tables and pie charts have been used. Percentage of all the responses has been taken into account. Descriptive analysis is used to convert the information into qualitative facts. The analysis is divided into two segments-

- A. Tabular representation expressing data in figures and percentages.
- B. Graphical representation of data using pie charts.

The information is as follows:

Question 1: Age Group of Respondents

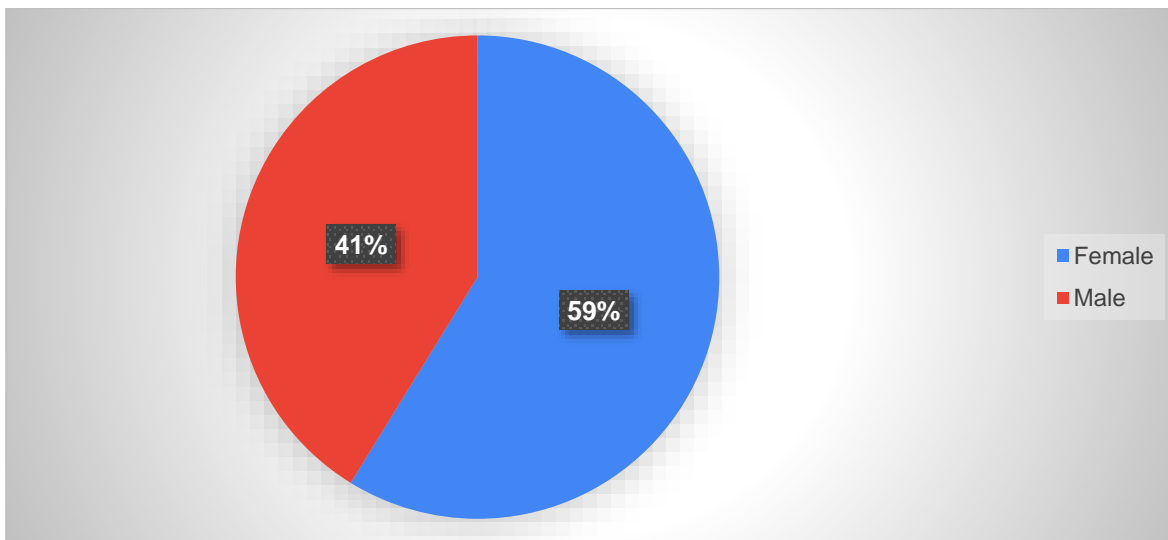
Age	Responses	Percentage
18-25	132	80.0%
26-35	30	18.2%
36-45	2	1.2%
Under 18	1	0.6%
Total	165	100.0%



The demographic profile of the majority of students (80.0%) falls within the 18-25 years age group, indicating that young adults primarily participated in the survey. This is expected in a university setting, where most students belong to this age bracket. The 26-35 years age group accounts for 18.2%, suggesting that a small number of postgraduate students or research scholars participated. Only 1.2% of respondents belong to the 36-45 years age group, possibly indicating a few faculty members or mature students. A negligible 0.6% of respondents are under 18, which could include early admissions or young undergraduate students.

Question 2: Gender of Respondents:

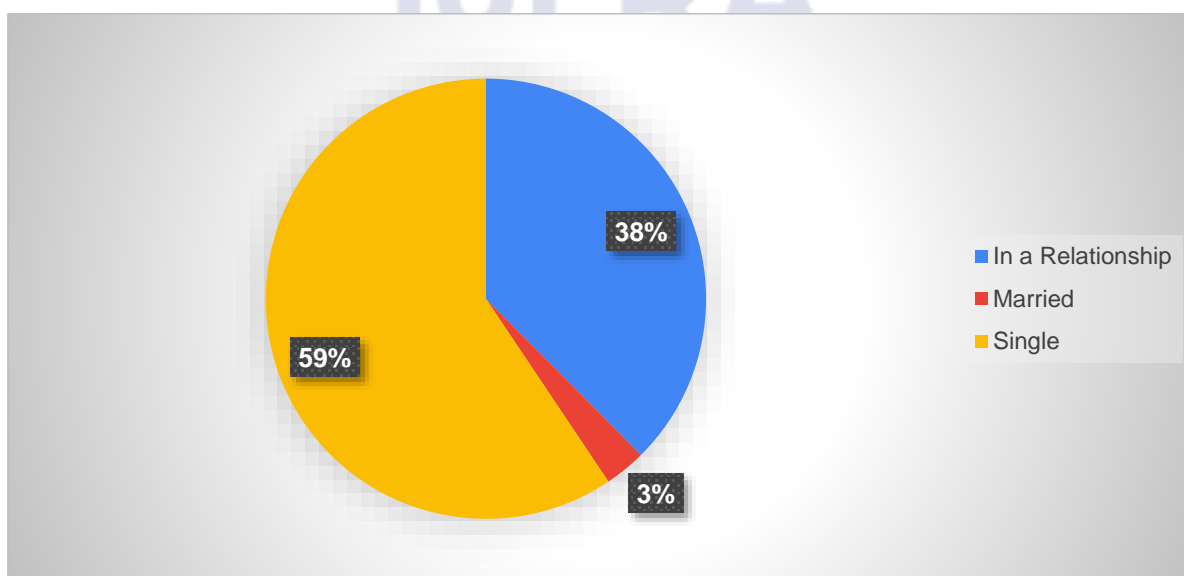
Gender	Count of Gender	Percentage
Female	97	58.79%
Male	68	41.21%
Total	165	100.00%



The gender profile of the respondents indicates a mixed perspective of participants identifying as male (41%) and female (59%). There are no respondents identifying as other category. This distribution ensures a balanced representation of views on live-in relationships, highlighting how perceptions may differ across gender identities.

Question 3: Marital Status of Respondents:

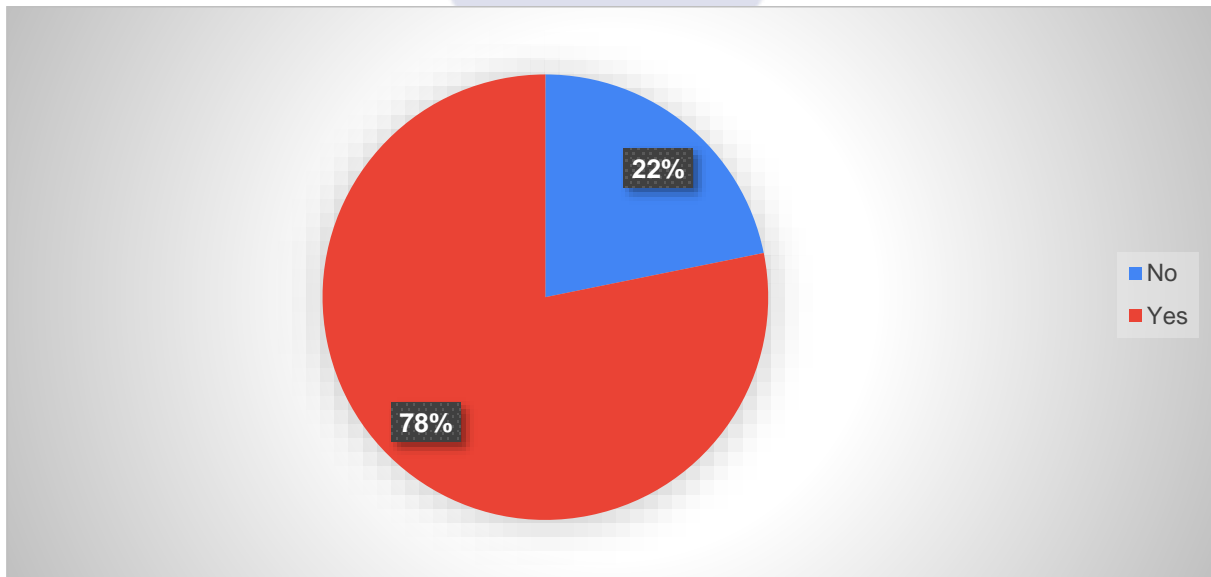
Marital Status	Count of Marital Status	Percentage
In a Relationship	62	37.58%
Married	5	3.03%
Single	98	59.39%
Total	165	100.00%



The survey results reveal that most respondents are Single, making up a significant portion of the sample. This is expected, given that the survey was conducted among university students, who are in their early adulthood and yet to enter marital life. A smaller portion of respondents reported being In a Relationship, indicating individuals who are committed but not legally married. Additionally, a minority of respondents are Married, reflecting the presence of postgraduate students, research scholars, or faculty members within the survey sample.

Question 4: Awareness of the legal status of live-in relationships in India

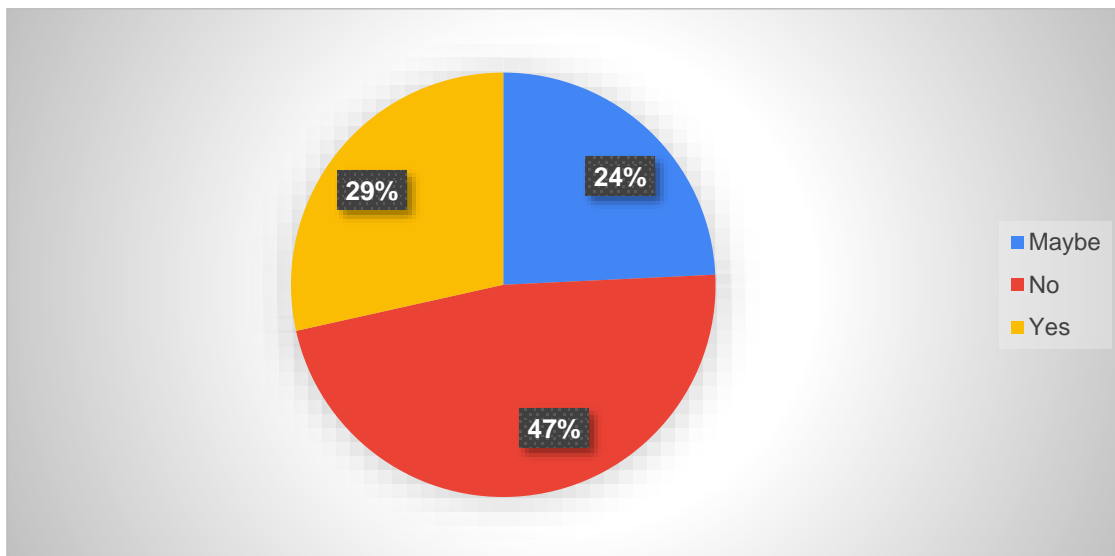
Responses on Legal Awareness	Count	percentage
No	36	21.82%
Yes	129	78.18%
total	165	100.00%



The data on legal awareness of live-in relationships shows that a significant majority of respondents (129 participants, approximately 78.2%) are aware of the legal status of live-in relationships in India. However, 36 participants (21.8%) responded “No”, suggesting that a notable portion of students lacks awareness regarding the legal standing of such relationships.

Question 5: Should a live-in relationship have the same legal rights as marriage?

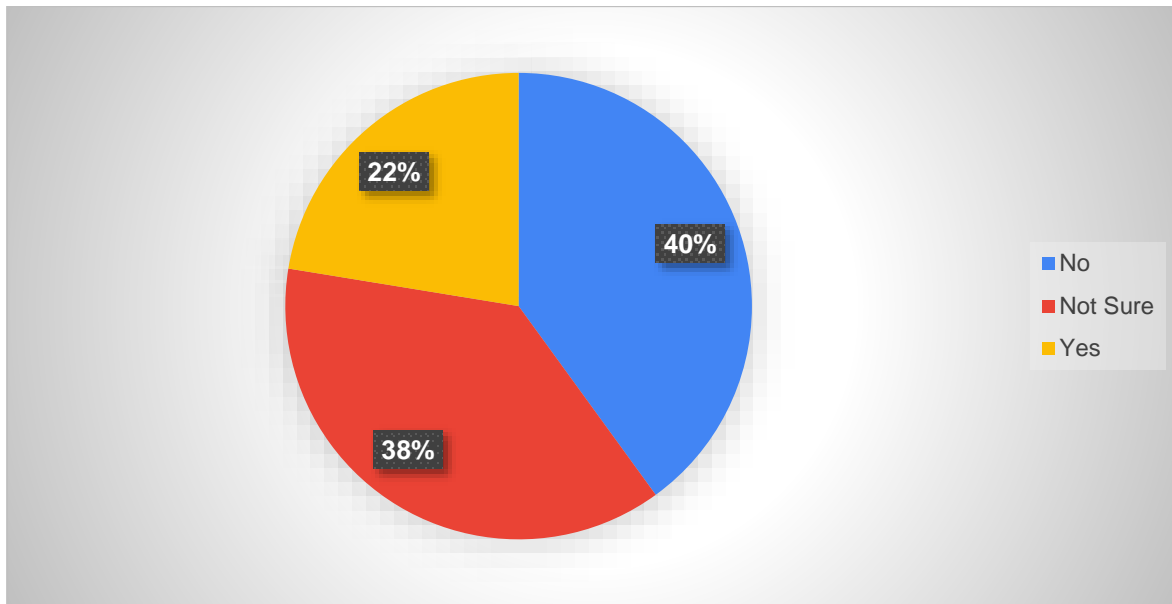
Do you think live-in relationships should have the same legal rights as marriage?	Count	Percentage
Maybe	40	24.24%
No	78	47.27%
Yes	47	28.48%
Total	165	100.00%



The survey results reveal that 77 respondents (47.0%) believe that live-in relationships should not have the same legal rights as marriage. This suggests that a significant portion of participants view marriage as a distinct institution that should maintain separate legal recognition. However, 46 respondents (28.1%) support equal legal rights for live-in relationships, indicating a growing acceptance of alternative relationship structures. Additionally, 40 respondents (24.4%) selected “Maybe”, reflecting uncertainty or a belief that some but not all legal rights should be extended to live-in partners.

Question 6: Adequacy of legal protection for partners in a live-in relationship

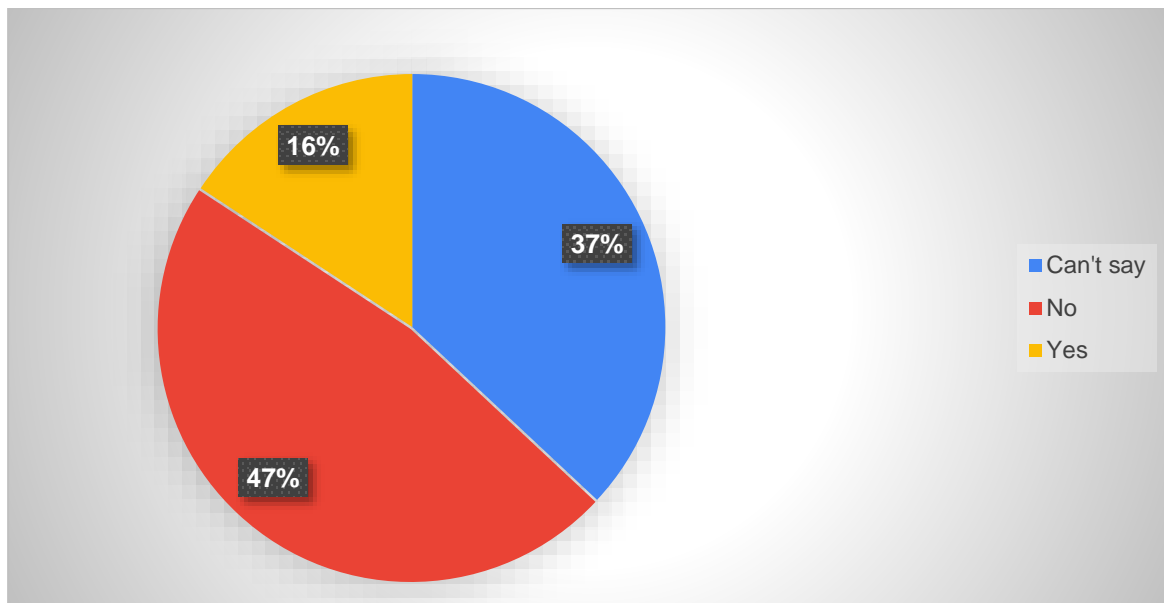
Is the legal protection provided to partners in a live-in relationship in India adequate?	Count	Percentage
No	66	40.00%
Not Sure	62	37.58%
Yes	37	22.42%
Total	165	100.00%



The survey results indicate that 66 respondents (40.2%) believe that the legal protection provided to partners in live-in relationships is inadequate. This suggests concerns regarding the lack of a comprehensive legal framework to address issues such as property rights, maintenance, and custody of children. A significant 62 respondents (37.8%) selected “Not Sure”, indicating uncertainty about the extent of legal protection available for live-in partners. This may reflect a general lack of awareness regarding existing laws and judicial pronouncements on the subject. Meanwhile, 37 respondents (22.0%) believe that legal protection is adequate, suggesting that they feel the current laws, including judicial interpretations under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, provide sufficient safeguards.

Question 7: Do live-in relationships align with Indian cultural values?

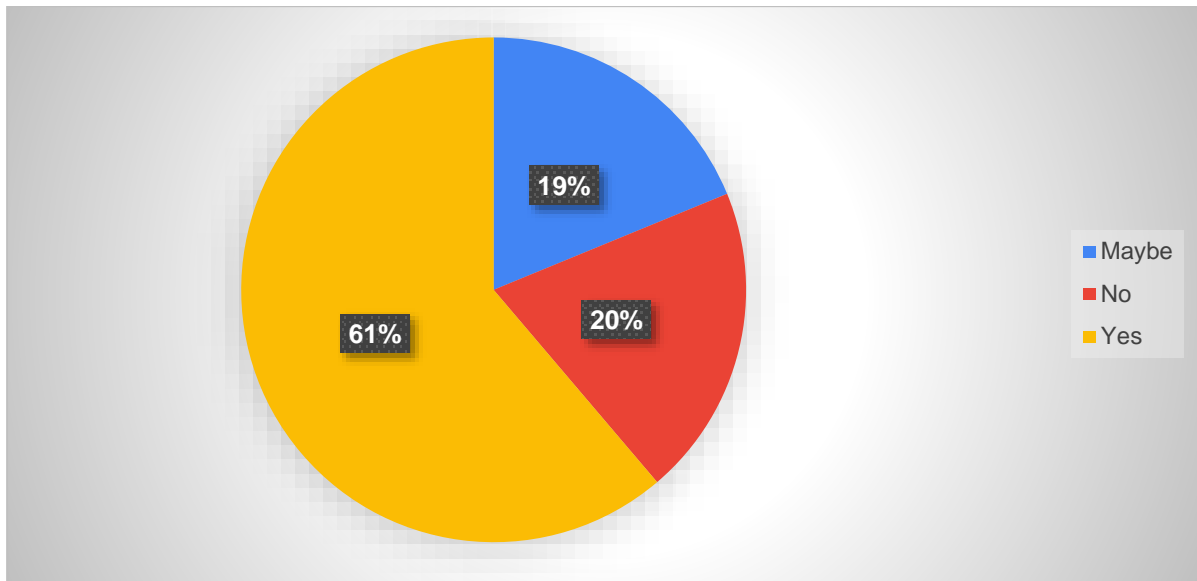
Do you think live-in relationships align with Indian cultural values?	Count	Percentage
Can't say	61	36.97%
No	78	47.27%
Yes	26	15.76%
Total	165	100.00%



Out of 165 respondents, 78 respondents (47.6%) believe that live-in relationships do not align with Indian cultural values. This reflects the traditional perspective that marriage is the socially accepted norm, and cohabitation outside of marriage is often viewed as culturally inappropriate. A notable 61 respondents (37.2%) selected “Can’t say”, indicating that they are uncertain or believe that cultural acceptance varies based on societal changes and individual perspectives. Meanwhile, 26 respondents (15.8%) believe that live-in relationships do align with Indian cultural values, suggesting a shift toward modern thinking where personal choice and autonomy in relationships are being recognized.

Question 8: Would you support a friend or family member in a live-in relationship?

Would you support a friend or family member in a live-in relationship?	Count	Percentage
Maybe	31	18.79%
No	33	20.00%
Yes	101	61.21%
Total	165	100.00%

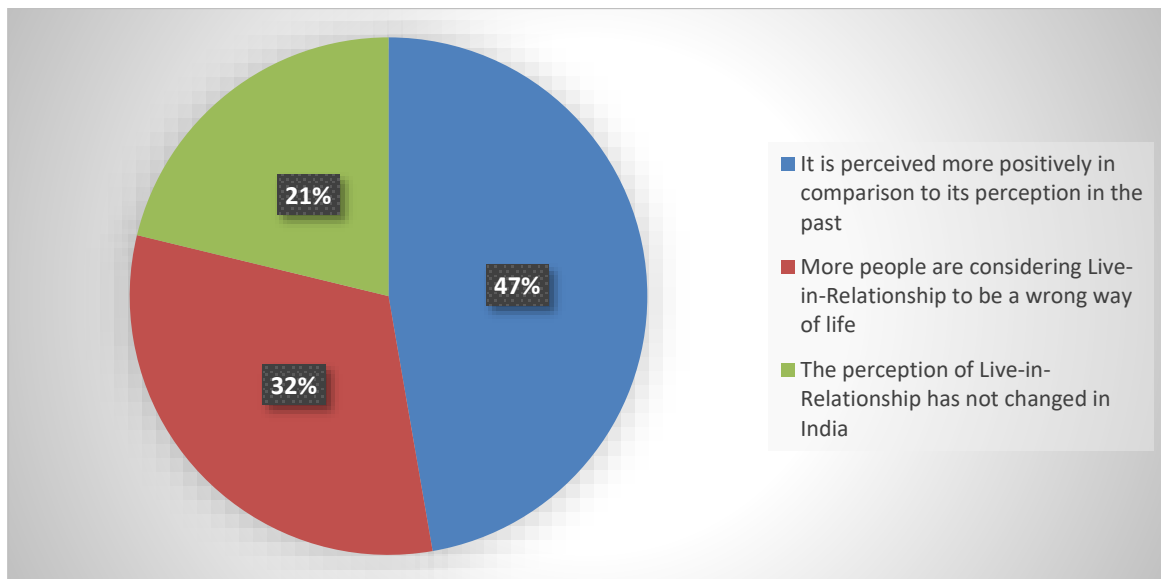


The survey results indicate that 101 respondents (61.2%) would support a friend or family member in a live-in relationship. This suggests a growing acceptance of non-traditional relationships among young adults, with many prioritizing personal choice and autonomy over societal norms. However, 33 respondents (20.0%) answered “No”, indicating that a segment of participants still holds reservations about live-in relationships, possibly due to cultural, religious, or moral beliefs.

Meanwhile, 31 respondents (18.8%) selected “Maybe”, suggesting uncertainty or conditional support based on factors such as societal acceptance, legal protection, and the nature of the relationship.

Question 9: Is the societal perception of live-in relationships changing in India?

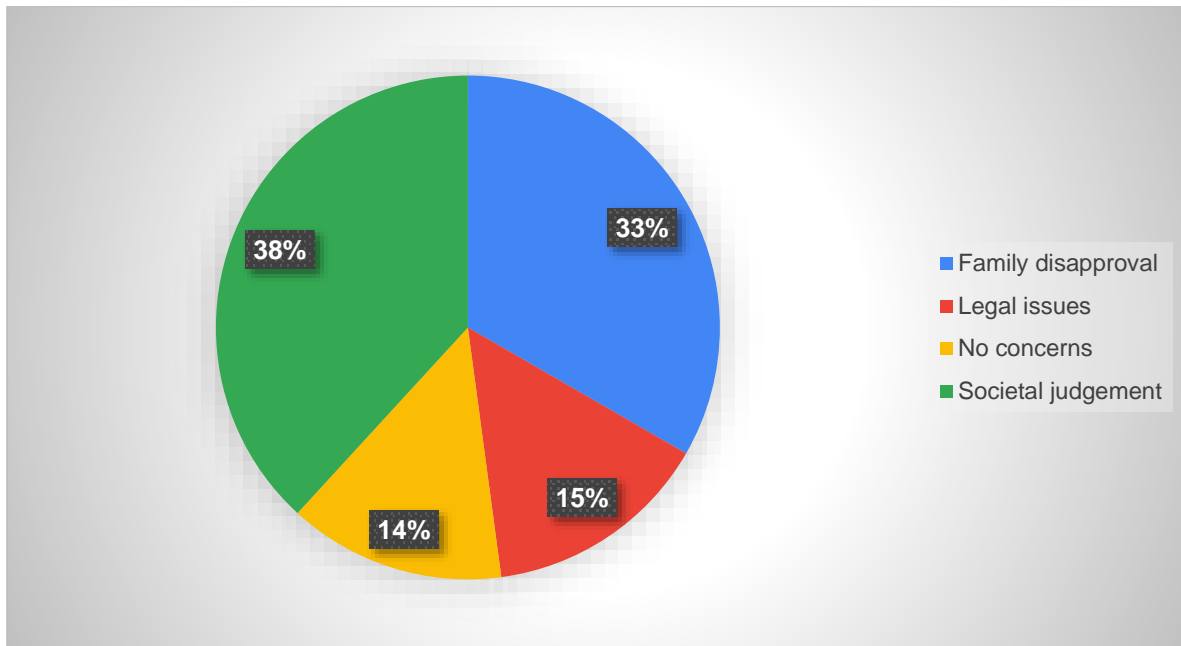
Do you think the societal perception of live-in relationships is changing in India?	Count	Percentage
It is perceived more positively in comparison to its perception in the past	78	47.27%
More people are considering a live-in relationship to be the wrong way of life	52	31.52%
The perception of a live-in relationship has not changed in India	35	21.21%
Total	165	100.00%



The data shows that a shift in societal attitudes toward live-in relationships in India. A significant portion of respondents believe that perceptions are changing positively, with more people becoming open to the idea of cohabitation before marriage. However, a considerable number of respondents feel that traditional views still dominate, and societal acceptance remains limited, especially in rural areas and conservative families. Some participants expressed that while younger generations are more accepting, older generations and certain cultural or religious groups continue to oppose live-in relationships. A segment of respondents remained uncertain, indicating that societal perception is evolving but remains inconsistent across different demographics.

Question 10: Primary concern regarding live-in relationships

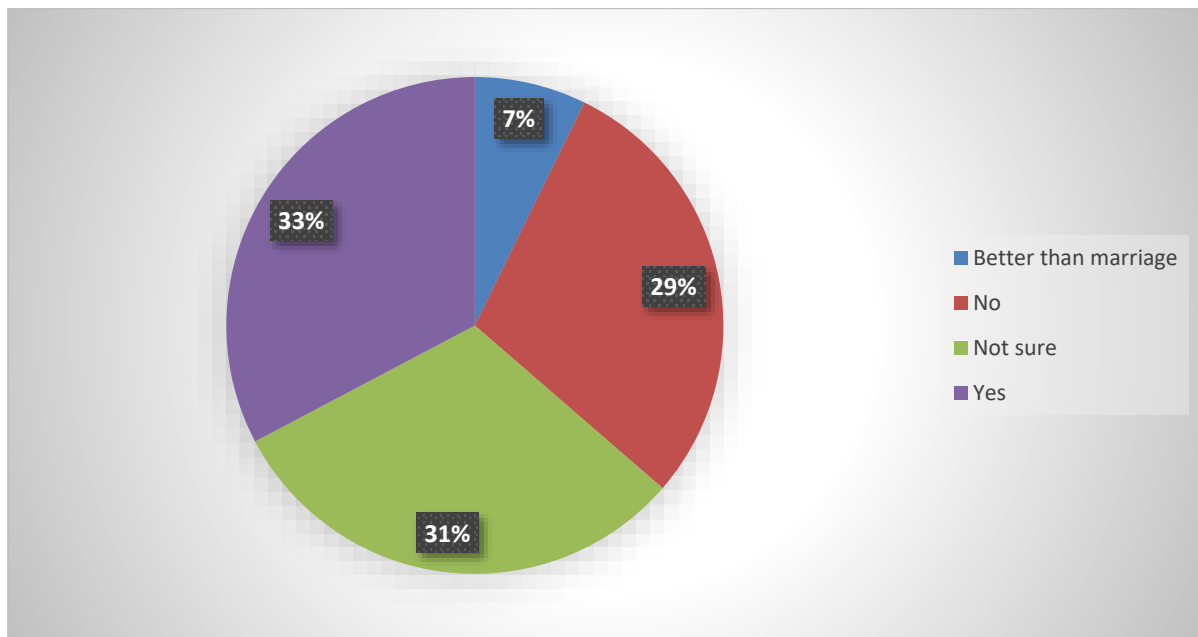
Concern	Count	Percentage
Family disapproval	55	33.33%
Legal issues	24	14.55%
No concerns	23	13.94%
Societal judgement	63	38.18%
Total	165	100.00%



The most significant concern among respondents is societal judgment (63 responses), followed closely by family disapproval (55 responses). Legal issues, such as lack of protection for partners, account for (23 responses), while 23 people expressed no concerns about live-in relationships. This indicates that societal and familial pressures remain major obstacles in accepting live-in relationships in India.

Question 11: Do you believe live-in relationships can provide the same emotional and psychological stability as marriage?

Do you believe live-in relationships can provide the same emotional and psychological stability as marriage?	Count of Responses	Percentage
Better than marriage	12	7.27%
No	48	29.09%
Not sure	51	30.91%
Yes	54	32.73%
Total	165	100.00%



The responses show a diverse perspective on the emotional and psychological stability of live-in relationships. A significant portion of respondents (54 respondents) agree that live-in relationships can offer similar stability, arguing that emotional security is based on mutual understanding and commitment rather than legal marriage. They believe that as long as partners are compatible and communicate effectively, live-in relationships can be just as stable as marriage. While 51 are uncertain, believing that stability depends on the individuals involved rather than the nature of the relationship itself. They acknowledge that while some live-in relationships may be stable, others may lack the support system that marriage often ensures. 48 respondents disagree, expressing concerns that live-in relationships lack the long-term commitment and societal recognition that marriage provides. They argue that the absence of legal obligations can lead to insecurity, making it easier for partners to leave without accountability. Interestingly, 12 respondents believe live-in relationships offer better stability than marriage, indicating a shift in perception.

3.3 RESPONSES (OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS)

- No idea
- It's a personal choice from my point of view if a couple wants to stay in a live in relationship they can like after a certain age people have their own right what to do and what not to do so if they want they can...
- It doesn't require any legal protection as long as it is between consenting adults.

- Legal protections for live-in relationships in India should include recognition of cohabitation agreements, ensuring financial and property rights, and granting maintenance in case of separation. Inheritance and parental rights for partners and children must be strengthened to prevent legal disputes. Extending spousal benefits like health insurance and pensions can provide financial security. Awareness campaigns and legal reforms are essential to remove ambiguities and reduce societal stigma, ensuring equal protection for live-in partners under the law.
- Mainly to protect the intimation of the partners physically as because it may undergo a different situation unconsciously.
- Rights like in a married relationship
- Live-in partners in India should have legal protections for property rights, financial support, inheritance, domestic violence protection, child custody, social security benefits, and safeguards against abandonment A cohabitation agreement law could provide clarity on rights and responsibilities.
- system for optional registration of live-in relationships could help in establishing rights similar to those of married couples.
- Life time imprisonment for live in relationship✳
- At the time of breakup no false cases could filed by any of them so registration is required.
- I think it's not necessary to implement legal protection for live-in- partners in India.
- Protection against violence between the couples
- Mainly their personal safety and security
- It should be treated as domestic relationship
- Child custody
- Legal protection for live in partner in India should include right to property division, financial support domestic violence etc
- Live-in partners in India need legal protections for financial security, inheritance rights, domestic violence protection, and child custody. Strengthening laws will provide stability and safeguard partners from legal and social vulnerabilities.
- I'm unaware of legal protections regarding live-in relationships but I'm sharing my point of view if the law that doesn't exist. My perception is that if the partners have thought of giving birth to a baby, then the child rights should be reserved and the child should lead a normal life like the child with parents and single parent. Societal perception over

such child shouldn't be judgemental. Every life has a right to exist and the partners should equally take care of the child until he/she attain the major age limit.

- I think the law should clearly define what constitutes a "live-in relationship" to reduce any ambiguity and recognize such couples should be unions similar to married couples, to avail similar rights. Also the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, and other similar acts, should be extended to live-in couples as well, as domestic violence is not exclusive to only married couples. On top of that, guidelines and laws related to parenthood and custody should also be clearly mentioned.
- Protection for both male and female partners, ensuring gender neutrality in maintenance claim.
- Scraping of legalization of live in relationship
- Right to live in peace.
- Legal documentation can be provided to them like in case of child custody or guardianship.
- Live-in partners in India need legal recognition, maintenance rights, domestic violence protection, and social security benefits like healthcare and insurance. A registration system could help establish rights and prevent disputes.
- Domestic violence, emotional manipulation, Domestic violence, child protection, legal status of children.
- I cannot think of any at this moment.
- Privacy is one Among the major concerns
- It should be legalize and promoted
- Not know bro I am single
- Are they sure about themselves
- Partners should have legal rights over jointly acquired property, similar to married couples. A legal framework for resolving property disputes in case of separation.
- Domestic violence protection
- The provision reconcile as provided under CPC
- The law could be like Couple should register themselves as domestic partner legally so that no crime happen
- Allow live-in partners to jointly own property, including real estate and financial assets
- In my opinion people opt for living relationship rather than legally getting married is mainly for the purpose avoiding the legal formalities in the event of separation. So bringing them within a legal frame work will hinder the very idea of living relationship.

It is obvious that there are legal challenges and personal rights violations happening in the live in relationship. But as far as India legal frame concerned domestic violence act provide protection to the couple who are in live-in relationship.

- But the lacuna regarding the adoption rights of people who are in live in remain unaddressed.
- I believe that legal protection in case of domestic violence can also include live in relationships the way it already does. But anything more turns it into a marriage taking away the essence of the concept.
- They need specific protection under criminal laws and marriage acts in India
- Live-in partners in India should have legal recognition with rights similar to married couples, including property division, inheritance, and maintenance in case of separation. Protection against domestic violence, child custody rights, and access to medical and social security benefits should also be ensured. A clear legal framework would provide stability and safeguard their interests.
- Legal remedies against financial exploitation, emotional abuse, and coercion in live-in relationships, ensuring equal protection; Live-in partners cannot claim benefits such as pension, medical insurance, or government schemes available to married couples, this should be looked into.
- Property rights and inheritance, child custody etc
- Recognition and legal status
- A formal legal framework defining live-in relationships can prevent ambiguity in rights and obligations.
- Registration of live-in relationships could be an option to establish legitimacy and facilitate access to rights.
- Should be free from societal judgements. Many people will criticise and slut shame girls mostly for being in an living relationships.
- I may not be able say the right thing.
- Some limited protection should be provided to the partners and all rights should be given to the child born out of them.
- Social Security and protection from physical, emotional, and economic abuse
- 1) Granting Legal Recognition to Live-in Relationships.
- 2) Equal Property & Inheritance Rights
- 3) Maintenance Rights for Both Partners
- 4) Protection Against Domestic Violence for Both Genders

- In India, it is very common that the live in partners are not able to find a suitable flat because the society sees them as inappropriate. So there can be specific anti-discrimination laws in order to prevent landlords or housing societies from denying accommodation to live-in couples.
- They should have a legal notice of permission and also safety with priority to regular checking.
- A written contract/ MOU between the partners which include their mutual understandings, should make compulsory. And any deviation from that can be sued.
- No protection needed
- Live-in partners in India should be granted legal protections, including the right to maintenance, especially under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act. Children born in such relationships should have inheritance rights, and partners should have clarity regarding property rights. Legal recognition of the relationship, similar to marriage, would provide access to social security benefits, health insurance, and tax advantages. Live-in partners should be protected from abandonment and domestic violence, with the right to fair settlements in case of separation. Clear inheritance and succession laws should also be implemented, ensuring equitable rights for all parties involved.
- Not sure about this.
- Live-in partners in India should be extended legal protections such as inheritance rights, protection against domestic violence, financial support in case of separation, and recognition under family laws for property and child custody matters.
- Since LGBTQ+ community still does not have marriage rights, people from this community especially have a live-in relationship. they don't have a choice. If providing them marriage rights is going to take time, it would be better to help them out in other ways by building a strong system to protect their safety when they are in a live-in relationship. Further, having health insurance jointly is in question as well. So providing ways legally to avail these basic services would be helpful to improve the well-being of those in live-in relationships.
- Rights to Safety and Protection, Recognition of Relationship, Children's Rights, Freedom to End the Relationship Without Fear, Emotional and Financial Support, Fairness in Property and Assets
- Laws should prevent abandonment or exploitation, especially for women who may be left without financial support.

- Although current laws do not grant automatic inheritance rights to live-in partners or to child born out of Live-in relationship, courts have recognized property rights based on contributions made during the relationship. (Like as under Section 125 CrPC & DV Act). Legislation could formalize these rights, ensuring equitable distribution of assets
- Cohabiting couples may execute a formal agreement to marry, complying with applicable laws and regulations governing cohabitation.
- If such a term is introduced in India then it must get proper protection
- Property and financial rights
- Protections against harrasment from the rest of the society, and the right to seek housing anywhere in major cities and towns, without facing any sort of disapproval because of the stigma associated with live-in relationships. (This is necessary mainly because live-in relationships are considered immoral, and marriage is considered as the only socially sanctioned and acceptable relationship between lovers)
- It should have similar rights as a marriage as both parties are willingly living together. and by a similar contract like marriage certificate it should also have some kind of legal documents
- Legal provisions for division of assets if the relationship ends.
- To protect the birth of child regarding with relationship
- Anything same as a marriage. Speaking of, the protections coming from family, the social values should be same. The rights should be same as married couples. Also, the acceptance from the family and society.
- Strict laws should be frame regarding fakeful promise for marriage.
- No need to any protection for living in relationship
- Especially for female partner who are often subjected to violence (physically emotionally sexually), the legal protection in India regarding this issue needs to be address.
- Maintenance rights
- Property rights
- Children right
- No automatic legal status
- No harassment from the society should be accepted
- Protection from consensual rape
- Legally they should be well protected from outside as married couples are.

3.4 OBSERVATION OF RESEARCHER BASED ON RESPONSES:

The open-ended responses collected from the survey provide critical insights into the prevailing attitudes, concerns, and legal expectations regarding live-in relationships among university students. This section synthesizes those responses and offers an analytical perspective to bridge empirical data with theoretical discussions on ethics and law. The observations are categorized into key themes that emerged from the responses.

3.4.1 LEGAL PROTECTION: A DIVIDED OPINION

One of the most prominent themes in the responses was the need for legal protection for live-in partners. While some respondents argued that legal safeguards should be extended to live-in relationships, others expressed the belief that these relationships should remain outside legal regulation to maintain their informal nature. Many respondents emphasized the need for legal frameworks similar to marriage, particularly regarding property rights, inheritance, financial security, and domestic violence protection. Others proposed a system for optional registration of live-in relationships, allowing couples to secure rights without being bound by marital obligations.

Some participants strongly opposed any legal protection, arguing that live-in relationships are inherently different from marriage and should not be placed under the same legal framework. There were concerns about false allegations in cases of separation, highlighting the potential for misuse of legal provisions if live-in relationships were given rights similar to marriage. These findings indicate that while legal recognition is desired by many, the absence of a consensus reflects the broader legal ambiguity in India.

3.4.2 SOCIETAL JUDGMENT AND FAMILY DISAPPROVAL

The second major theme revolved around societal and familial opposition to live-in relationships. This aligns with the survey results, where a significant portion of respondents cited societal judgment and family disapproval as their primary concerns. Respondents highlighted that despite legal recognition in judicial pronouncements, social acceptance remains limited, especially in rural and conservative areas.

Some individuals expressed that women in live-in relationships face greater scrutiny and moral policing, reinforcing gendered double standards in societal perceptions. Several respondents advocated for awareness campaigns to reduce stigma and educate society on the evolving nature of relationships. This demonstrates that while legal discussions on live-in relationships are progressing, deep-rooted cultural biases and moral judgments continue to act as deterrents

to social acceptance.

3.4.3 EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL STABILITY

Participants were divided in their opinions regarding the emotional and psychological stability of live-in relationships compared to marriage. Some respondents believed that live-in relationships provide emotional security equal to or better than marriage, emphasizing the importance of mutual understanding and compatibility. Others felt that live-in relationships lack long-term commitment and stability, leading to emotional insecurity.

Several responses suggested that the success of a relationship depends on the individuals involved, rather than the institutional framework. This reflects a broader debate in relationship psychology, where emotional security is often linked to social recognition and legal safeguards. It also indicates the influence of cultural conditioning on perceptions of stability in relationships.

3.4.4 CHILD CUSTODY AND INHERITANCE RIGHTS

Another critical concern raised was the rights of children born from live-in relationships. Many respondents expressed the need for stronger legal provisions for child custody and inheritance, ensuring that children born out of live-in relationships are not placed at a legal or social disadvantage.

Some are of the view that current judicial interpretations provide adequate protection, particularly under laws like the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005. Others pointed out that despite legal recognition, children may still face societal discrimination and identity issues, suggesting the need for broader social reforms.

This finding highlights that legal ambiguity extends beyond live-in partners to the next generation, raising questions about legitimacy, identity, and financial security.

3.4.5 GENDERED IMPLICATIONS AND NEED FOR NEUTRAL LAWS

The responses also brought out gender-based concerns in live-in relationships. Several respondents emphasized the need for gender-neutral laws, ensuring that both men and women are equally protected. Some male participants voiced concerns about false allegations in cases of separation, calling for legal frameworks that do not disproportionately favor one gender.

Female respondents raised issues of domestic violence and financial insecurity, advocating for stronger protections. This indicates a complex gender dynamic, where both men and women experience vulnerabilities but from different perspectives.

3.4.6 SUGGESTIONS FROM PARTICIPANTS

Respondents also proposed various recommendations, including:

- Legal documentation for live-in relationships to ensure clarity on rights and responsibilities.
- Joint ownership laws for property and financial assets, allowing live-in partners similar rights as married couples.
- Provisions for social security, healthcare, and insurance benefits to offer financial stability.
- Anti-discrimination laws to prevent bias against live-in couples in housing, employment, and public services.
- Stronger legal measures against abandonment, ensuring financial security for vulnerable partners.
- Mandatory cohabitation agreements, defining financial and custodial responsibilities.

These suggestions highlight the necessity of a structured legal framework to protect individuals in live-in relationships while maintaining the voluntary nature of these partnerships.

The qualitative responses from the survey provide an in-depth look at the practical, social, and legal challenges of live-in relationships in India. While legal protections are widely discussed, there is no single opinion on whether live-in relationships should be equated with marriage. Societal stigma and familial disapproval remain significant barriers to acceptance, indicating that law alone cannot resolve the challenges faced by live-in couples.

From a research perspective, these findings suggest the need for multi-dimensional reforms:

- Legal reforms to define live-in relationships, ensuring protection without diluting their informal nature.
- Judicial clarity on ambiguous aspects like maintenance, child custody, and property rights.
- Social awareness campaigns to challenge moral stigmatization and educate the public.
- Gender-neutral legal protections, ensuring fairness to all individuals in live-in relationships.

The empirical analysis validates the hypothesis that despite progressive judicial pronouncements, the absence of a structured legal framework continues to cause societal stigmatization and legal insecurity. Addressing these gaps through a combination of legal, policy, and social measures is essential for fostering an equitable approach toward live-in relationships in India.

CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION, FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

4.1 FINDINGS:

The survey carried out among students at Pondicherry University aimed to evaluate their awareness, acceptance, and concerns regarding live-in relationships. The feedback provided critical insights into the awareness, perception and changing viewpoints of the younger generation, assisting in connecting theoretical debates with real-world attitudes.

Awareness of the legal status of a live-in relationship

- A significant proportion of respondents displayed awareness of the legal status of live-in relationships in India. However, there was noticeable confusion regarding the exact legal provisions governing such relationships.
- Many participants incorrectly assumed that live-in relationships are either fully recognized as equivalent to marriage or completely unregulated by law, highlighting the need for clearer public legal awareness.

Social Acceptance and Familial Support

- While a large number of students expressed a liberal attitude towards live-in relationships, they also acknowledged that family and societal acceptance remain a major challenge.
- Several responses indicated that parents and elders still perceive live-in relationships as morally unacceptable, reinforcing the idea that social conditioning plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions.
- Many respondents pointed out that while their generation is more accepting, intergenerational conflict regarding cohabitation remains prevalent.

Ethical and Moral Dilemmas

- A significant portion of participants expressed ethical concerns about live-in relationships, with morality often being tied to religious and cultural beliefs.
- Some respondents associated live-in relationships with a lack of commitment and instability, while others saw them as a pragmatic approach to understanding compatibility before marriage.
- The divide in moral standpoints was evident, with some considering live-in relationships as progressive and others viewing them as a threat to traditional marriage norms.

Gendered Perspectives and Concerns

- The survey revealed that women participants were more concerned about the lack of legal protection and social stigma attached to live-in relationships.

- Female respondents feared social ostracization and legal insecurity in cases of relationship breakdowns, whereas male respondents were more focused on personal choice and autonomy.
- Many women highlighted concerns about financial dependence and the lack of legal safeguards in cases of separation, indicating the pressing need for legal reforms.

Perceived Stability compared to Marriage

- The responses were divided on whether live-in relationships offer the same stability as marriage. While some believed cohabitation provided a strong foundation for relationships, others felt that the absence of legal binding made live-in relationships unstable.
- A section of respondents viewed live-in relationships as a way to test compatibility before marriage, whereas another group saw them as an excuse to avoid long-term commitment.

Concerns over Children and Future Security

- Many respondents expressed concerns over the legal status of children born out of live-in relationships, with uncertainty regarding inheritance rights and social acceptance.
- The data suggested that while urban youth are more open to live-in relationships, they are also apprehensive about the lack of structured legal provisions for children in such arrangements.

Need for Legal Recognition

- A strong consensus emerged on the necessity of a more comprehensive legal framework to govern live-in relationships.
- Participants emphasized the importance of laws that protect the rights of women and children, similar to those seen in other countries.
- Many respondents believed that proper legal recognition would reduce societal stigma and provide security to individuals in such relationships.

These findings underscore the intricate interaction of awareness, legal ambiguity, and societal resistance. While younger generations display a greater willingness toward live-in relationships, entrenched cultural norms still affect their perception and acceptance.

4.2 CONCLUSION:

“Chains do not hold a marriage together. it is threads, hundreds of tiny threads, which sew people together through the years”- Simone Signoret

Every individual has an inherent desire for the institution of marriage. The institution of

marriage has evolved and is present in almost every civilized country, which supports this fact. This yearning for marriage arises from the individual's need for stability and reassurance in life. Only marriage can provide such stability and predictability. Thus, if a new form of man-woman relationship is developed, it is unavoidable that it will adopt the form and qualities of marriage. Similar situations occur with cohabitation, which initially appeared to lack many characteristics of marriage but has gradually incorporated nearly all of them. Widow remarriage, divorce, and cohabitation are all discouraged in our society. Indian culture has consistently adhered to traditional norms and remains rigid and unaccepting of novel concepts. However, there has also been a significant inclination within this same society to liberate itself from the constricting constraints of this so-called "dharma." The lively 1960s, a period filled with happiness and merriment, marked the beginning of the challenging journey of live-in partnerships within Indian culture. Individuals sought a fresh concept of commitment as marriage seemed to evolve into nothing short of a burden due to the inclination to challenge all norms. Live-in relationships were shaped by a generation wary of commitment and were inspired by our western counterparts. Even after sixty years, this concept remains built on very unstable ground. This topic not only raises significant concerns among the middle class in Indian society but also troubles the upper classes. How is this concept perceived by the general public? Is it feasible in our society?

Although it may not resonate with many individuals, the Supreme Court of India, utilizing a three-judge bench, delivered a significant ruling declaring that live-in relationships are now legal in India. In accordance with the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, live-in relationships are presently characterized by the Supreme Court as "relationships in the nature of marriage." For couples who feel they aren't prepared for marriage or who don't hold the institution of marriage in high regard, this ruling has proven to be a boon. India has a historical background of being a conservative nation with conservative inhabitants. Ironically, marriage and relationships have seldom been contemplated deeply in the land of the Kamasutra. The notion of marriage may represent various meanings to different individuals. Yet, regardless of your personal beliefs, matrimony holds sacred significance in India. It signifies the union of two souls and their families, not just the formal joining of two individuals. The couple receives the blessings of their elders, and they proceed to live joyful lives. Relationships that lack the marriage component are looked down upon. However, in contemporary times, attitudes towards marriage have transformed. A decade ago, divorce rates were almost non-existent. Individuals have unearthed new, more practical methods of navigating their lives. One of these outcomes is cohabitation, or the notion of a live-in relationship. Some people perceive marriage

as a challenge, akin to scaling a mountain without being aware of what lies at the summit.

A solution for such people is the idea of live-in partnerships. There are no obligations, no pressure, and no marriage. In India today, live-in relationships are fairly common. The law does not dictate how we should live; rather, ethics and social customs define what it means to live under the welfare model. The Court itself acknowledges that something that is not illegal but is yet unethical may be. In a 2006 ruling, the court stated that two consenting adults having intercourse is not illegal under the law, “even though it may be viewed as immoral.” Of course, such preventative measures could potentially result in issues that could be avoided. However, taming the courageous and the bold may require more than just raising the hammer. These young people need to be made aware of the potential emotional and societal pressures that such a relationship may bring, as well as the potential for legal difficulties with matters like property division, violence, abandonment due to the death of a partner, handling of custody cases, and other concerns involving children born from such relationships

The research study on the examination of live-in relationships in India uncovers a complicated blend of legal acknowledgment, ethical issues, and social views. Although the Indian judiciary has made progressive advances to recognize the validity of such relationships, a clear and thorough legal structure is still lacking. The absence of distinct statutory provisions generates uncertainty, making individuals—particularly women and children—exposed in different situations. Despite Supreme Court rulings striving to offer clarification, social stigmatization persists in affecting the acceptance of live-in relationships in India. One significant finding is that the Indian legal system, even with progressive rulings, has not entirely accepted live-in relationships as a legitimate type of partnership. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, represents a crucial advancement in securing rights for women in these relationships, yet its application is still uneven. Courts have offered some assistance to women pursuing maintenance and protection from violence, however, the lack of codified laws continues to constrain their legal position. Judicial rulings, although developing, are still specific to individual cases, making it challenging to create a consistent precedent.

From an ethical perspective, as mentioned in Chapter 4, live-in relationships pose considerable dilemmas. Conventional Indian moral values frequently clash with changing social realities, generating a conflict between personal freedom and societal norms. Many contend that the lack of an official legal structure for live-in relationships leads to moral policing and bias,

particularly against women who opt for these partnerships. This ethical discussion is further heightened when topics like children born from live-in relationships, inheritance rights, and the social acceptance of these unions are brought up. Tackling these ethical issues necessitates a sophisticated approach that reconciles individual rights with social values, ensuring that legal reforms mirror modern realities instead of antiquated moral standards.

A comparative analysis with the legal systems of the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia emphasizes the differences in the legal acknowledgment and protection of live-in relationships. In the UK, cohabiting partners receive specific rights, especially concerning property and financial agreements, but they do not possess the same legal status as married individuals. The US exhibits a varied approach, with some states offering significant protections for cohabiting partners, including domestic partnership statutes, whereas others provide minimal legal acknowledgment. Conversely, Australia has implemented a progressive framework where de facto relationships are legally acknowledged, and partners are granted rights akin to those of married individuals, including financial assistance and property distribution.

Furthermore, the empirical findings presented in Chapter 6 highlight the absence of legal acknowledgment for live-in relationships in India. The research emphasizes the changing viewpoints of young adults, particularly through the survey carried out at Pondicherry University. It was clear that although students show an understanding of live-in relationships, their views are still influenced by cultural and moral factors. The findings suggest a generational change in attitudes, but resistance continues due to deep-rooted traditional values. The study also pointed out that many couples were unaware of their limited legal rights, which further complicates their ability to pursue legal remedies. These empirical observations strengthen the necessity for legislative clarity and public awareness concerning the legal aspects of live-in relationships.

India's judiciary-led acknowledgment of live-in relationships has led to inconsistent outcomes, leaving people without a reliable legal framework. By learning from the established legal systems of the UK, the US, and Australia, India could gain from creating legislation that explicitly outlines the rights and responsibilities of partners in live-in relationships. Establishing a legal framework that provides financial security, protections against domestic violence, and inheritance rights would help prevent exploitation and guarantee access to justice.

Given the growing frequency of live-in relationships in India, a strong legal framework is essential to safeguard the rights of those involved. The law needs to adapt to mirror evolving societal dynamics, ensuring that those in live-in relationships can access legal remedies and social security. Enhancing legal provisions, raising awareness, and educating law enforcement agencies can assist in closing the gap between legal acknowledgment and actual application. Until legislative actions are enacted, individuals in live-in relationships will keep encountering legal and social uncertainties that obstruct their right to a safe and dignified life.

4.3 SUGGESTIONS:

To address the legal uncertainties and societal issues related to live-in relationships in India, a comprehensive strategy is required. The subsequent suggestions intend to offer enhanced legal clarity, guarantee protection for at-risk partners, and establish an atmosphere where individuals in these relationships can assert their rights free from social discrimination.

A primary suggestion is the establishment of an all-encompassing legal framework regulating live-in relationships. The lack of specific laws has caused judicial decisions to be made on a case-by-case basis, which frequently results in varying outcomes. A clearly outlined legal system should acknowledge live-in relationships as a valid type of partnership, offering explicit guidelines regarding rights related to maintenance, property inheritance, and financial security in instances of separation.

▪ CODIFICATION OF RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

One of the essential legal changes needed is the official acknowledgment of live-in relationships via a written statute. The legislation ought to clarify the characteristics and extent of such relationships, distinguishing between temporary cohabitation and enduring partnerships. It must create explicit eligibility standards for legal safeguards, akin to the protections provided to married couples under family law. In addition, measures should be implemented to guarantee that partners-particularly women-can access maintenance rights in the event of separation, avoiding financial hardship.

Registration of Live-in Relationships:

Introducing an optional registration system for cohabiting partnerships would offer legal clarity and ease the resolution of rights in controversies linked to support, inheritance, and domestic abuse. Although making registration compulsory might appear as limiting, presenting it as a

choice would motivate couples to pursue formal acknowledgment without enforcing excessive regulatory demands. An organized process for registration could assist courts and law enforcement authorities in confirming the length and validity of the relationship when dealing with legal disputes.

- **EXTENSION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROTECTION**

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, needs to be revised to clearly incorporate live-in relationships across the board without the necessity of judicial interpretation. At present, the application of PWDVA protections relies on a court's determination that the relationship is 'in the nature of marriage.' This stipulation should be eliminated to guarantee that all women experiencing domestic violence in live-in relationships receive clear legal protection. Additionally, training programs ought to be organized for law enforcement personnel to enhance understanding and effective execution of these provisions.

Financial and Property Rights:

To tackle financial instability, particularly for women, legislation ought to guarantee that individuals in extended cohabiting partnerships possess the ability to seek financial assistance akin to alimony regulations in marital laws. Additionally, courts must be granted the authority to fairly distribute property that has been jointly obtained in situations of separation. Creating frameworks for property entitlements, inheritance, and financial support would aid in averting economic abuse and offer protection to partners who might otherwise find themselves without options.

- **PROTECTION AGAINST SOCIAL DISCRIMINATION**

Legal reforms by themselves are inadequate unless the societal stigma related to live-in relationships is also confronted. Awareness campaigns aimed at the public need to be carried out to dispute negative stereotypes and encourage acceptance of different relationship forms. Programs aimed at sensitizing law enforcement, the judiciary, and employers ought to be established to guarantee that people in live-in relationships experience no discrimination in employment, housing, or access to public services.

- **LEARNING FROM INTERNATIONAL BEST PRACTICES**

India can benefit from adopting elements of international legal frameworks that recognize cohabitation rights. Germany's structured approach provides legal certainty by granting

cohabiting partners rights related to taxation, inheritance, and social security. India should consider adapting similar provisions within its legal system while tailoring them to the country's socio-cultural context. A comparative analysis of successful models can help in designing a legal framework that balances individual rights with the country's evolving social dynamics.

- **JUDICIAL GUIDELINES FOR UNIFORMITY**

Until particular laws are established, the judiciary ought to create uniform guidelines to guarantee consistency in ruling on cases concerning live-in relationships. Supreme Court directives may assist lower courts in applying standardized principles related to maintenance, domestic violence, and property rights, thus minimizing arbitrary decisions and legal ambiguity.

