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# Unveiling Cohabitation: Exploring the Dynamics, Evolution, and Cultural Significance of Live-In Relationships

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## ABSTRACT

*This research explores the multifaceted landscape of live-in relationships, delving into their historical evolution, global perspectives, and nuanced intricacies within the Indian context. The study encompasses a comprehensive analysis of legislative frameworks, judicial decisions, societal attitudes, and cultural intricacies that shape the dynamics of cohabitation. Motivations behind opting for live-in relationships, legal aspects, and the psychological and societal impacts are scrutinized, offering a holistic understanding. The examination extends to challenges faced by live-in couples, highlighting societal biases and legal hurdles, while also acknowledging the positive aspects such as enhanced flexibility. Anticipated trends, potential shifts in societal norms, and considerations for policymakers form the basis of future projections. The research concludes by reflecting on the profound significance of live-in relationships in reshaping modern relationship dynamics and contributing to evolving societal norms.*

**Keywords:** *Live-in relationships, cohabitation, societal attitudes, legal aspects, cultural evolution, commitment dynamics, challenges and advantages, global perspectives, Indian context, future projections.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The commencement of this exploration lies in unravelling the intricate facets of live-in relationships—those contemporary unions where couples choose shared living without the formalities of marriage. This section embarks on a thorough examination, commencing with the definition and conceptualization of live-in relationships and progressing to an exploration of their historical roots and the cultural evolution steering the course of cohabitation trends.

### (A) Definition and Conceptualization of Live-In Relationships:

Live-in relationships, colloquially known as cohabitation, encapsulate the dynamics of couples

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cohabiting without the legal commitments of marriage. This nuanced relationship model offers individuals an opportunity to engage in a domestic partnership, assessing compatibility and mutual understanding before embracing the institution of marriage. The conceptualization of live-in relationships exhibits variation across cultures, reflecting the adaptability of modern relationship dynamics.

In contemporary terms, live-in relationships have burgeoned into a social phenomenon, challenging the traditional norms associated with marriage. This model presents an alternative path for couples seeking intimacy and shared living without the formalities of legal wedlock. The dynamics of such relationships involve shared responsibilities, joint decision-making, and emotional commitment—elements traditionally associated with marital unions.

### **(B) Historical Context and the Cultural Evolution of Cohabitation Trends:**

To comprehend the origins of live-in relationships, an exploration of the historical context and the cultural influences steering their evolution is imperative. Historically, societal norms heavily emphasized formal marriage as the cornerstone of committed relationships. However, as cultural landscapes transformed, so did attitudes towards cohabitation.

The mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, notably the 1960s and 1970s, witnessed cultural revolutions and shifts in social norms that contributed to the acceptance of alternative lifestyles, including cohabitation. The rise of feminist movements and changes in gender roles played a pivotal role in questioning traditional marriage ideals, creating space for diverse relationship models.

Cultural evolution gained momentum with globalization and the dissemination of Western ideals. The depiction of cohabitation in media, literature, and popular culture played a substantial role in normalizing the concept, rendering it a viable option for couples seeking intimacy and companionship beyond the boundaries of conventional marriage.

As societal attitudes underwent a transformation, legal frameworks also adapted to recognize and accommodate the complexities of modern relationships. The historical backdrop thus illuminates the intricate interplay between cultural shifts, societal attitudes, and legal considerations that collectively forged the emergence and acceptance of live-in relationships.

## **II. MOTIVATIONS FOR OPTING LIVE-IN RELATIONSHIPS**

The decision to engage in live-in relationships is underpinned by a myriad of motivations that

collectively contribute to the dynamics of modern partnerships. This section meticulously unpacks the intricacies of these motivations, focusing on the dynamics of compatibility testing, the evolving outlook on marriage and commitment, and the economic considerations that drive shared living expenses.

#### **(A) Dynamics of Compatibility Testing and Relationship Nuances:**

Live-in relationships are often embraced as a means of thoroughly assessing compatibility before committing to marriage. Couples opt for shared living to immerse themselves in each other's day-to-day routines, communication styles, and lifestyle choices. This arrangement provides a unique opportunity for partners to navigate challenges, resolve conflicts, and gauge their compatibility within the context of a shared domestic space.

In contrast to traditional courtship, where time spent together may be limited, live-in relationships offer a more immersive experience. This extended period of cohabitation enables a deeper understanding of each other's values and preferences, allowing couples to ascertain how well they complement each other. The goal is to pre-emptively address potential challenges that might arise post-marriage, fostering a more informed decision-making process.

#### **(B) Evolving Perspectives on Marriage and Commitment**

Shifting societal attitudes towards marriage and commitment significantly influence the choice of live-in relationships. As cultural norms evolve, the linear trajectory from courtship to marriage has become less rigid. Many individuals, influenced by changing societal attitudes, prefer to explore and solidify their commitment through cohabitation before formalizing it through marriage.

The concept of commitment, once synonymous with marital vows, has expanded to encompass the commitment manifested in daily shared living. Live-in relationships provide a space for couples to express and experience commitment without the legal and ceremonial aspects of marriage. This evolution in perspective reflects a broader cultural shift towards valuing the essence of commitment over the formality of marriage.

Couples in live-in relationships may view marriage as a subsequent step or even as unnecessary, challenging traditional norms that perceive marriage as the ultimate validation of commitment. This motivator signifies a paradigm shift in how individuals conceptualize and practice commitment within the context of modern relationships.

### **(C) Economic Considerations and Shared Living Expenses**

Practical economic factors serve as a compelling motivation for many couples opting for live-in relationships. Shared living arrangements often result in shared financial responsibilities, presenting a financially pragmatic choice. Couples can divide rent, utilities, and other living expenses, potentially saving costs compared to maintaining separate households.

In an era where financial independence is highly valued, the economic considerations of live-in relationships align with the practical aspects of modern living. Cohabitation allows couples to pool resources, share financial burdens, and collectively contribute to the costs associated with daily life.

Furthermore, the economic motivations for live-in relationships extend beyond mere cost-sharing. Couples may find that cohabitation facilitates career opportunities or enables them to pursue shared financial goals, such as saving for a home or investment. The economic dimension of live-in relationships underscores the practical choices individuals make to enhance their financial well-being and stability.

## **III. LEGAL ASPECTS: NAVIGATING THE GLOBAL LEGAL LANDSCAPE OF LIVE-IN RELATIONSHIPS**

Cohabitation, manifested in live-in relationships, exists at the confluence of personal unions and legal structures. This section embarks on a thorough exploration, providing a worldwide perspective on the legal standing of live-in relationships, scrutinizing legislative frameworks that govern cohabitation, and examining the pivotal role of judicial decisions in shaping the intricate legal terrain.

### **(A) A Global Overview of the Legal Status of Live-In Relationships**

The legal recognition of live-in relationships exhibits considerable diversity across jurisdictions, reflecting varying cultural, social, and legal norms. In certain countries, cohabitation is formally acknowledged and safeguarded by specific legal provisions, conferring upon couples certain rights and responsibilities akin to those in traditional marriages. Conversely, in other regions, the legal acknowledgment of live-in relationships may be limited or absent.

In many Western societies, jurisdictions often extend legal validity to cohabitation, affording

couples rights related to property, inheritance, and, in some cases, child custody. However, the extent of these rights is frequently contingent upon the duration of the cohabitation and whether the couple has formalized their status through legal agreements.

Conversely, certain countries lack explicit legal provisions addressing cohabitation, leaving couples in live-in relationships without the legal safeguards afforded to their married counterparts. This variance underscores the intricate nature of the global legal landscape concerning live-in relationships, emphasizing the necessity for a nuanced comprehension of regional legal frameworks.

### **(B) Legislative Frameworks Governing Cohabitation**

The legal standing of live-in relationships is intricately interwoven with legislative frameworks that either acknowledge or overlook this form of cohabitation. Legislative responses to live-in relationships span from explicit recognition and protection to implicit acknowledgment through broader family law provisions.

In countries such as Sweden and France, specific legislation recognizes cohabiting couples, offering legal mechanisms to address issues like property division and financial support in the event of separation. In contrast, other jurisdictions, while lacking dedicated laws for live-in relationships, may afford certain legal protections through general family law provisions, covering aspects such as property rights and child custody.

The existence or absence of legislative frameworks governing cohabitation holds significant implications for individuals in live-in relationships. Clear legal provisions can furnish security and a defined legal status for couples, while the absence of such frameworks may result in legal uncertainties and potential challenges in the event of disputes or separation.

### **(C) Judicial Decisions Shaping the Legal Landscape**

The influence of judicial decisions in shaping the legal terrain of live-in relationships cannot be overstated. Courts play a pivotal role in interpreting existing laws, settling disputes, and establishing legal precedents that impact the rights and responsibilities of individuals in cohabiting unions.

Landmark judicial decisions have often expanded legal recognition and protection to live-in relationships. Courts may interpret existing family law statutes to encompass cohabiting couples

or establish specific legal principles through their rulings. Conversely, judicial decisions can underscore gaps in the legal framework, prompting legislative responses to address emerging issues.

In several jurisdictions, courts grapple with defining the legal standing of cohabitation and delineating the rights of individuals in live-in relationships. The outcomes of such cases not only impact the legal status of the involved parties but also shape broader societal attitudes towards cohabitation.

#### **IV. IN-DEPTH EXAMINATION: LIVE-IN RELATIONSHIPS IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT**

A nuanced exploration of live-in relationships within the Indian context unveils a tapestry woven with cultural nuances, legal evolution, and societal dynamics. This section embarks on a comprehensive journey, delving into legislative milestones and official recognition, dissecting judicial interpretations through noteworthy legal cases, and unravelling the complex interplay of societal attitudes and cultural intricacies that shape the landscape of cohabitation in India.

##### **(A) Legislative Milestones and Official Recognition**

India, a nation characterized by its cultural diversity, has undergone a legal metamorphosis concerning live-in relationships. Legislative milestones punctuate this journey, embodying a response to the shifting sands of societal dynamics. Over the years, lawmakers in India have grappled with the imperative to formulate legal frameworks that both acknowledge and safeguard the rights of couples engaging in live-in relationships.

The enactment of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act in 2005 stands out as a transformative legislative milestone. This legislation marked a paradigm shift by extending protection to women in live-in relationships, recognizing the vulnerabilities they may face. It aimed to address issues related to domestic violence, thereby providing a legal recourse for those in such arrangements.

Moreover, subsequent legal amendments and judicial pronouncements have contributed to delineating the legal status of live-in relationships in India. While the absence of specific legislation dedicated solely to cohabitation persists, the judiciary increasingly recognizes the rights of individuals in live-in relationships under existing legal frameworks.

##### **(B) Judicial Interpretations and Noteworthy Legal Cases**

The judicial lens becomes a crucial focal point in comprehending the legal landscape of live-in relationships in India. Landmark legal cases serve as guideposts, shaping the contours of recognition and rights for couples engaging in cohabitation. A notable example is the Supreme Court's ruling in the case of *Lata Singh vs. State of U.P.* (2006), where the court affirmed the right of two consenting adults to live together irrespective of their marital status.

The judiciary's acknowledgment of the autonomy of individuals in choosing their life partners, even in unconventional arrangements, marks a progressive turn. However, legal cases in India also spotlight the challenges faced by couples in live-in relationships, ranging from societal stigma to familial opposition. The judiciary, through its interpretations, endeavours to strike a delicate balance between individual autonomy and societal norms.

### **(C) Societal Attitudes and Cultural Intricacies**

Societal attitudes toward live-in relationships in India are deeply entrenched in the fabric of cultural intricacies. Despite legal advancements, societal acceptance of cohabitation remains a complex and evolving dimension. Traditional norms cast a looming shadow over couples opting for live-in arrangements, subjecting them to societal scrutiny and familial disapproval.

Cultural intricacies manifest in the varied attitudes across different regions and communities within India. Urban centres may exhibit a more liberal outlook toward live-in relationships, influenced by global cultural currents. Conversely, rural areas may grapple with conservative norms that view cohabitation outside marriage with skepticism.

Generational disparities further contribute to the evolving landscape of societal attitudes. Younger generations, influenced by global perspectives and changing societal norms, may be more accepting of live-in relationships. On the contrary, older generations may adhere more steadfastly to traditional values, creating intergenerational tensions regarding the acceptance of cohabitation.

## **V. PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIETAL IMPACTS**

The choice of a live-in relationship in the Indian context reverberates with psychological and societal ramifications, transcending legal and cultural dimensions. A nuanced understanding of the effects on individual well-being, family dynamics, and societal acceptance provides a holistic perspective on the intricate impact of cohabitation.

### **(A) Effects on Individual Well-being and Mental Health**

The psychological impact of opting for a live-in relationship in India is intricate, shaped by societal expectations and personal experiences. Individuals may grapple with the stress of societal judgment, particularly in settings where cohabitation is met with skepticism. The psychological well-being of those in live-in relationships may be influenced by the need to navigate societal norms and familial expectations.

Conversely, for some individuals, the choice of cohabitation aligns with personal values, fostering a sense of autonomy and independence. A nuanced comprehension of the psychological impact necessitates acknowledging the diversity of individual experiences, ranging from the liberation of choice to the challenges posed by societal pressures.

### **(B) Influence on Family Dynamics and Societal Acceptance**

The decision to embrace a live-in relationship inevitably exerts influence on family dynamics and societal acceptance. In the Indian context, where familial bonds are deeply rooted, the choice of cohabitation can strain traditional family structures. Familial disapproval, especially in conservative settings, may lead to strained relationships and social isolation for those involved.

Conversely, as societal attitudes evolve, some families may gradually come to accept live-in relationships. This acceptance often hinges on generational factors and the openness of family members to embrace changing norms. The evolving societal acceptance of cohabitation contributes to reshaping family dynamics, offering a lens into the complex interplay between tradition and modernity.

## **VI. CHALLENGES AND ADVANTAGES OF LIVE-IN RELATIONSHIPS**

As live-in relationships gain prominence, a thorough exploration of the challenges and advantages becomes imperative. This section delves into the societal biases and hurdles faced by couples choosing this unconventional path, highlighting positive aspects such as enhanced flexibility, and examines the delicate balance between personal autonomy and commitment.

### **(A) Societal Biases and Hurdles Faced by Live-In Couples**

Live-in couples often encounter societal biases and hurdles that emanate from entrenched norms and perceptions. In many cultures, the conventional trajectory of courtship leading to marriage

remains deeply ingrained. Consequently, those opting for cohabitation may face judgment, criticism, and sometimes ostracization.

One of the primary challenges is the societal stigma attached to live-in relationships, particularly in conservative communities. Couples may grapple with disapproval from family members, friends, and even colleagues. This social scrutiny can lead to emotional stress and strained relationships, making it difficult for individuals to navigate the complexities of their personal choices.

Legal challenges also pose hurdles for live-in couples, especially in regions where legal recognition and protection are limited. Issues related to property rights, inheritance, and child custody can become contentious, creating additional stress for couples attempting to establish their legal standing.

### **(B) Positive Aspects, Including Enhanced Flexibility**

Amidst the challenges, live-in relationships offer a spectrum of positive aspects, and chief among them is enhanced flexibility. Unlike the traditional construct of marriage, cohabiting couples have the flexibility to define the terms of their relationship based on mutual consent. This flexibility is particularly appealing to individuals who prioritize personal autonomy and independence.

Live-in relationships allow couples to test compatibility and build a foundation for a lasting commitment without the immediate legal ties of marriage. The freedom to make joint decisions without the formal constraints of matrimony empowers individuals to explore and shape their relationship dynamics organically.

Additionally, the flexibility inherent in live-in arrangements accommodates diverse lifestyle preferences and career trajectories. Couples can adapt to changing circumstances more fluidly, fostering an environment where both partners can pursue personal and professional goals without the rigid structures often associated with marriage.

### **(C) Striking a Balance Between Personal Autonomy and Commitment**

Navigating the delicate balance between personal autonomy and commitment stands as a key aspect of live-in relationships. Unlike marriage, where the commitment is formalized through vows and legal ties, cohabitation involves an evolving commitment that grows organically.

Individuals in live-in relationships often grapple with questions of commitment and expectation. Striking a balance requires open communication, mutual understanding, and a shared vision for the future. Couples must negotiate boundaries, define their expectations, and continually reassess their commitment as the relationship evolves.

While live-in relationships offer autonomy, they also demand a nuanced approach to commitment. Couples must find equilibrium, recognizing the evolving nature of their commitment while fostering an environment of trust and mutual support.

## **VII. FUTURE PROJECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF LIVE-IN RELATIONSHIPS**

As live-in relationships continue to reshape the landscape of modern partnerships, projecting future trends and considering their implications becomes crucial. This section anticipates trends in the prevalence of live-in relationships, envisions potential shifts in societal and cultural norms, and explores considerations for policymakers and society at large.

### **(A) Anticipated Trends in the Prevalence of Live-In Relationships**

The trajectory of live-in relationships suggests a continued increase in prevalence. Changing societal norms, evolving attitudes towards commitment, and a desire for increased autonomy contribute to the growing acceptance of cohabitation.

Factors such as delayed marriage, a focus on personal and professional pursuits, and a shift towards individual fulfilment are likely to propel more individuals towards live-in relationships. The younger generation, influenced by global perspectives and a desire for experiential relationships, may further drive the trend.

Technological advancements, which facilitate connectivity and remote work, could also play a role in the increasing prevalence of long-distance live-in relationships. As geographical constraints become less defining in relationship choices, individuals may explore cohabitation with partners regardless of their physical location.

### **(B) Potential Shifts in Societal and Cultural Norms**

The rise of live-in relationships challenges traditional societal and cultural norms, prompting potential shifts in how partnerships are perceived. While conservative perspectives may continue to resist these changes, broader acceptance and normalization are expected to gain ground.

Societal attitudes towards commitment and family structures may undergo transformations. The definition of a committed relationship may extend beyond the confines of legal marriage, recognizing the validity and depth of partnerships formed through cohabitation.

Cultural representations in media and popular culture are likely to play a pivotal role in shaping perceptions. As live-in relationships become more commonplace, they may be portrayed as valid and enriching experiences in literature, films, and other forms of media, contributing to a more nuanced understanding among the wider population.

### **(C) Considerations for Policymakers and Society at Large**

Policymakers face the challenge of adapting legal frameworks to accommodate the changing landscape of partnerships. Recognizing the rights and responsibilities of individuals in live-in relationships, addressing legal ambiguities, and providing avenues for dispute resolution are essential considerations.

Society at large must engage in open dialogues to foster understanding and acceptance of diverse relationship models. Education and awareness campaigns can play a vital role in dispelling myths, reducing stigma, and promoting a more inclusive perspective on partnerships.

Furthermore, support structures such as counselling services and legal assistance should be readily available for individuals in live-in relationships. Creating a supportive environment that acknowledges the validity of cohabitation contributes to the overall well-being of couples navigating this path.

## **VIII. CONCLUSION**

As we bring our exploration of live-in relationships to a close, it is vital to revisit the key findings and reflect on the profound impact of cohabitation in shaping contemporary relationship dynamics and societal norms. This conclusion serves as the culmination of our journey through the legal intricacies, cultural landscapes, and personal dimensions of live-in relationships.

### **(A) Recapitulation of Key Findings**

Our journey commenced with an exploration of the definition and conceptualization of live-in relationships, traversing historical contexts and cultural shifts. We then scrutinized the global landscape, examining legislative frameworks, judicial decisions, and societal attitudes that

collectively weave the intricate tapestry of cohabitation.

Shifting our focus to the Indian context, we delved into legislative milestones, judicial interpretations, and the intricate interplay of societal attitudes and cultural intricacies. The psychological and societal impacts of live-in relationships offered a nuanced understanding of the diverse experiences individuals navigate within this unconventional realm.

Exploring the motivations for opting for live-in relationships, we uncovered the dynamics of compatibility testing, evolving perspectives on marriage, and economic considerations that drive this choice. The legal aspects unfolded with a global overview, legislative frameworks, and the pivotal role of judicial decisions in shaping the legal landscape.

In-depth examinations unveiled the challenges and advantages, addressing societal biases, flexibility, and the delicate equilibrium between personal autonomy and commitment. Our gaze then turned toward future projections, anticipating trends, potential shifts in societal norms, and considerations for policymakers and society at large.

### **(B) Reflection on the Significance of Live-In Relationships**

Live-in relationships emerge as a transformative force in shaping contemporary relationship dynamics and societal norms. The overarching significance lies in the redefinition of committed partnerships, breaking away from the traditional confines of marriage. Cohabitation offers a flexible and personalized approach to commitment, adapting to the changing ethos of modern living.

The fluidity and adaptability inherent in live-in relationships align with the evolving nature of contemporary relationships. Individuals, empowered by the freedom to choose their relationship structures, engage in cohabitation as a means of testing compatibility, expressing commitment, and navigating the complexities of modern life on their terms.

From a societal perspective, live-in relationships challenge entrenched norms and contribute to the ongoing transformation of cultural attitudes. While hurdles and biases persist, the increasing prevalence of cohabitation signals a departure from rigid, traditional expectations. It fosters a more inclusive narrative, recognizing diverse forms of commitment beyond the traditional bounds of marriage.

Furthermore, the legal landscape is undergoing a gradual evolution to accommodate the rights

and responsibilities of individuals in live-in relationships. Legislative advancements and judicial interpretations reflect an acknowledgment of the changing dynamics of partnerships, paving the way for a more inclusive legal framework.

The significance of live-in relationships extends beyond individual choices; it contributes to a broader conversation about autonomy, flexibility, and the evolving nature of commitment. The positive aspects, including enhanced flexibility and the opportunity for personal growth, underscore the potential of cohabitation to foster healthier, more adaptive relationship dynamics.

As we reflect on this journey, it becomes evident that live-in relationships serve as catalysts for change. They challenge traditional paradigms, empower individuals to shape their relationships authentically, and contribute to the ongoing narrative of societal transformation. In doing so, cohabitation becomes not just a personal choice but a reflection of broader shifts in how we perceive, define, and navigate the intricate terrain of modern relationships.

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