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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE CHANGING PARADIGM OF COHABITATION: INTERPLAY BETWEEN SOCIAL NORMS, EMOTIONAL INTERDEPENDENCE AND SUBJECTIVE WELL BEING

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Abstract

Objectives: The present study attempts to understand how the social norms concerning the idea of cohabitation and different patterns of emotional interdependence affect an individual's subjective well-being in cohabiting relationships.

Method: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 6 participants (three males and three females) aged 21-48 (n=6) in a cohabiting relationship for more than eight months and residing in Indian metropolitan cities. A semi-structured interview schedule with twenty-six questions was designed and validated by three experts.

Results: A review of audio recordings, transcripts, and process notes revealed thirteen sub-themes listed under six global themes that emerged from the qualitative analysis: Emotional Covariation; Interpersonal Emotion Dynamic; Society's Standpoint; Social Support; Individual Perspective, and Well Being.

Conclusion: Examining emotional interdependence, social norms, and subjective well-being, we drew attention to several vital factors of interpersonal emotion dynamics and individual versus relational well-being. Participants' views about cohabitation were recorded. A low social acceptance of cohabitation led to significant distress and feelings of anxiety, fear, and uncertainty. The role of social support in higher levels of affective well-being is also analyzed.

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Introduction:-

Breaking the barriers of marriage as the only socially acceptable institution, the concept of cohabiting relationships has been increasingly emerging in India. Cohabiting relationships can be defined as an arrangement where people in a romantic or sexually intimate relationship for a long-term or permanent basis live with their partner in a consensual union but are not legally married and registered.

In India, live-in relationships have been taboo since the beginning, as customs, ideas, and beliefs do not accept them. However, it is common to find people in metro cities living in a cohabiting relationship. It has been observed in various studies that people in modern society prefer cohabitation before marriage to test their compatibility. On the contrary, maintaining cohabiting relationships in smaller cities in India would land the couple in trouble as the concept of marriage is deeply embedded as a religious sacrament in people's mindsets.

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As a result, since cohabitation is against the norm of our society, most people that live together, especially young adults, do not let their parents know about it. Therefore, this exposes the cohabitators to risk and harm as they continue to live together. Recent literature has emphasized that when young people make partnership choices that clash with social attitudes and norms, their relations with their parents may deteriorate (Rosina & Fraboni, 2004; Di Giulio & Rosina, 2006).

Argyle, Martin, and Crossland (1989) defined subjective well-being as a frequency and positive affect, or joy and a high level of satisfaction over a period of time, as well as the absence of negative affect. The quality of one's romantic relationship is an essential variable in terms of subjective well-being. From a conceptual point of view, the discrepancy between social expectations and the life choices of young adults might adversely affect a person's health and well-being.

Couples in romantic relationships and cohabitation tend to be happier when they provide social support to each other in their relationship, have less conflict, and when their commitment is vital. In other words, when the quality of their relationship is positive, their subjective well-being is also positive (Demir, 2010; Prager, 1995).

Emotional interdependence can be defined as a situation where one person's feelings are related to another person's. This is often seen as a critical characteristic of close relationships. It is seen as one of the defining markers of intimate relationships, with partners constantly influencing each other's emotions, cognition, and behavior (Kelley et al., 1983; Berscheid et al., 2001).

The transition to cohabitation is a major developmental milestone for romantic couples yet is linked to myriad adverse outcomes. One's cultural surroundings can affect how a cohabiting couple is perceived by society and affect their relationship. Since partners continuously influence each other's emotions, cognition, and behavior, emotional interdependence can affect subjective well-being in cohabiting relationships.

Research conducted in the field of non-marital, heterosexual cohabitation reflects an increase in cohabitation and the availability of new data. "Half of all couples entering their first marriage today live together – or cohabit before marriage, and there are at least ten times as many couples living together today than there were just thirty years ago" (Bumpass & Lu, 2000). With the availability of birth control and the increased likelihood of non-marital sex, the concept of cohabiting among never-married adults is fundamentally changing. It is becoming a part of our society, but it has yet to be accepted by most of the older population (Stanley et al., 2011). "The increase in cohabitation has occurred alongside other major demographic shifts, including rising levels of divorce, delay in marriage, and childbearing" (John & Coast, 2009).

The social norms shaped by ideational goals, historical specificities, and socialization processes cannot be considered a random error term and must be structured in social sciences and demographic research (Lesthaeghe & Surkyn, 1988). The effect of social norms and cultural dynamics on behavioral change is cohort-related. Cohorts have their value orientation defined through socialization and preserve it during their lives until they pass it on. People who are still conditioned to the mindset of previous generations resent the very concept of a live-in relationship as they believe that it is the destroyer of our culture and social values and hence, the concept of a live-in relationship, which is averse to religious significance, faces resentment from the commoners living in India.

Romantic relationships are important markers for both the completion of identity exploration of emerging adults (Arnet, 2000) and for them to feel better subjectively (Berscheid & Regan, 2005). However, Soons, Liefbroer, and Kalmijn (2009) found the well-being level of cohabiting young adults (aged 18 to 26 years at the start of their study) to be lower than that of married young adults but higher than that of young adults not in a union. Using data from the National Survey of Families and Households in the United States, Brown (2000) found that cohabiters aged 19 and over reported significantly higher levels of depression than married individuals, even after controlling for several demographic factors. Using the same data, Marcussen (2005) found that even after controlling for socioeconomic resources, cohabiting individuals still reported higher levels of depression than married individuals. This, in turn, may affect one's well-being.

Recent studies have emphasized that in countries where the level of social acceptance of cohabitation is low, and the value placed on marriage is high, choosing to cohabit may lead couples toward distress (Di Giulio & Rosina, 2007;

Schröder, 2008). Nevertheless, the youngest generations are increasingly choosing to cohabit when forming partnerships (Mynarska & Bernardi, 2007; Matysiak, 2009).

Emotional interdependence—defined as partners' emotions being linked to each other over time—is often considered a key characteristic of healthy romantic relationships. Emotions emerge in interactions between people and can become intertwined over time, giving rise to complex interpersonal emotion dynamics (Butler & Randall, 2013; Kappas, 2013). These interpersonal emotion dynamics can be observed in several phenomena, one of the most prominent being that one person's feelings may influence another person's feelings across time (Butler, 2011). Emotional interdependence has primarily been investigated in a very confined manner by looking at connections between the same emotions of both partners. Second, there is a methodological consideration that existing research on emotion interdependence and its relation with well-being often did not take into account (Sels et al., 2016).

In close relationships, there can be two ways in which emotional interdependence can be interpreted. In one way, it can be seen as a healthy feature of romantic relationships, emphasizing the necessity of "being on the same wavelength" (Larson & Almeida, 1999). On the other hand, there seems to be abundant evidence for the existence of emotional interdependence in adult romantic relationships, especially for negative emotions.

When couples show substantial interdependence, "the specific interdependence patterns vary tremendously, with associations between every emotion pair and in every direction. Unidirectional interdependence, in which only one partner influences the other partner across time, is the predominant pattern, and only a few couples show bidirectional interdependence. Although it is recognized that emotional interdependence can be unidirectional" (Larson & Almeida, 1999; Ferrer & Nesselrode, 2003; Gottman, 2013), bidirectional interdependence and reciprocity are often considered to be the norm (Gottman, 2013).

The present study attempts to understand how the social norms around the idea of cohabitation and different patterns of emotional interdependence affect an individual's subjective well-being.

Despite abundant data on the adverse effects of cohabitation on subsequent marriage, young adults continue to engage in premarital cohabitation. In the Indian social context, most studies on cohabitation are descriptive, dealing with prevalence rates or contrasts between married and unmarried couples, and do not attempt to place cohabitation in a theoretical or historical context. The meaning and consequences and lack of consistency in the evidence on the association between cohabitation and mental health reflect a gap in the literature, which this study attempts to address. It will extend the literature by studying how social norms and patterns of emotional interdependence affect one's subjective well-being in cohabiting relationships by adopting a narrative research design.

The study's findings will help devise culture-specific intervention strategies in the domains of individual counseling, relational counseling, couple's counseling, and family therapy. It will also help design a mental health toolkit for young people residing in cohabitation with psychoeducation, positive actions, and coping strategies. Thus the objective of the study is to understand the nature of the psychological experiences of individuals residing in cohabitation and to understand how social norms around cohabitation and different patterns of emotional interdependence affect an individual's subjective well-being in cohabiting relationships.

Method:-

The research data of this qualitative study was collected from 6 participants (m=3; f=3) of urban families who were in a cohabiting relationship for more than eight months residing in Indian metropolitan cities. A semi-structured interview schedule with twenty-six questions was designed and validated by three experts. The study follows a narrative research design, and the individual narratives were prioritized, focused on, and respected (Bruce, Beuthin, Shields, Molzahn, & Schick-Makaroff, 2016). The method of snowball sampling was used in this study, and the recruitment of new participants was interrupted when data saturation was reached (Saunders B., Sim J., Kingstone T., et al., 2018).

Ethical approval was taken from the Institutional Review Board as a measure of approval for data collection. The interviews were conducted via telephone in English and were audio recorded with the participant's consent and all measures taken to ensure confidentiality. The interviews were 50 minutes to 70 minutes. The audio was then transcribed and prepared for thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke's model (2006).

This technique involved reading and rereading the transcriptions. The thematic analysis was done following six steps including familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up. The transcribed data was read several times for sorting, and codes were identified and categorized into suitable themes. A non-hierarchical level was used to categorize the codes into themes. Respondent validation and peer validation were used to validate the analyzed data.

Results:-

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis to obtain the following results. Demographic proforma was taken from the participants, and the participants' demographic details are represented in Table 1.

Table 1:- Demographic Details of the Participants.

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
Sex	Male	Female	Female	Female	Male	Male
Age	21	22	25	22	27	22
Occupation	IT Sector	Student	Research Assistant	IT Sector	Dancer	Freelancer
Partner's Occupation	Student	IT Sector	Lawyer	IT Sector	IT Sector	Student
Period of Cohabitation	1Y 6M	1Y 7M	11M	10M	9M	1Y 1M
Residence	Bangalore	Bangalore	Bangalore	Mumbai	Bangalore	Hyderabad

A review of audio recordings, transcripts, and process notes revealed six global themes which had emerged from the qualitative analysis, which have been represented below in Figure 1:

Figure 1:- Thematic Representation Of The Global Themes

Theme 1 Emotional Covariation

This theme describes the extent to which two partners' emotions fluctuate across time through emotional similarity, coregulation, or synchrony. It explicitly captures the time-dependent, temporal component of emotional change (Sels et al., 2016). The participants agreed that they exert influences on each other's emotional cycles and rates of change.

The sub-themes that emerged from this theme:

Emotional Susceptibility

It captures the extent to which change in a person's emotion is readily affected and predicted by a change in the emotion of their partner at the previous time point (Larson & Almeida, 1999) through emotion transfer, transmission, or crossover.

"...I think my emotions also affect him and his actions. (P4)"

"...so, more or less, when she is sad, I feel the same. (P2)"

Relationship Characteristics

The referents of this factor capture the communication pattern between the couples, perceived support provided by the partners to each other, and the kind of environment built around the couple, which affects the rate of emotional covariation. The partners who curated a safe space, healthy and effective communication with each other, and an environment of support reported lesser emotional covariation than others.

"...since both of us...are not that connected with our family...things just you know...they got easier after this as now I do have someone...haina...like one person who I can just share whatever I am going through. (P6)"

Theme 2 Interpersonal Emotion Dynamic

This theme describes the patterns of dependency between partners' emotions and the magnitude of empathetic concern. It also tries to capture the extent to which any emotional experience in one partner is linked to any emotional experience in the other. Participants reported linkages between their emotions of varied ranges.

"...I'm very independent. But at the same time, I'm very, very dependent on my partner...because in my relationship, I think, emotionally, I'm very dependent on my partner... Happiness, any sadness, any emotion that I get, uh it's shared with my partner. And uh it's the same with her. (P1)"

The sub-themes devised from this are:

Characteristics of Dependence

This sub-theme captures the reasons given by participants for dependence, such as level of comfort, being together in partner's experiences, partner being the primary source of comfort, ability to be vulnerable, and a sense of constant support. Two participants described this experience as overwhelming. It also includes other forms of dependence, such as financial dependence, transportation, and household chores.

"...and I think that sharing of emotions...uh...sharing of emotions, benefits that dependency for that person. And without being dependent on someone else, how can you keep some relationship going?... If you're choosing to be dependent, it means you're choosing to be vulnerable with a person. (P1)"

Moderating Factors of Emotional Interdependence

This factor captures the time spent together, relationship longevity, commitment, and closeness between couples. It captures the cognitive, conative, and affective components. A long-term orientation for the relationship shows higher interdependence, the intention to persist in the relationship showed an increase in emotional interdependence, and the psychological attachment to the relationship was also a factor in patterns of emotional interdependence. The partners whose activities, goals, and interests were mainly linked also showed more emotional interdependence.

"...umm time wise I don't know...it depends like I said some days 2 hours some days 10 hours. We just hang out, talk, watch shows, just chill together...Maybe have a drink or two on the weekend..umm go out. We do go out often to dinners and workshops, watch shows and all. (P5)"

Theme 3 Society's Standpoint

This captures the experiences of the participants' interactions with their surroundings and notes other people's reactions and interactions. It captures the positive and the negative responses that the participants received. All the participants reported feelings of hesitation, uncertainty, and fear while moving in with their significant others due to societal norms.

This theme led to three sub-themes:

Immediate Surroundings and Neighborhood

The referents of this factor reflect the reactions and interactions with the people residing in the immediate neighborhood, including neighbors, shopkeepers in the area, and other handypersons. Four participants reported problems in finding a house because of being an unmarried couple, and one reported contractual issues with the owner. The participants reported the neighbors to be inquisitive. Two participants reported that the neighbors were accepting and friendly.

"...I can hear the judgment in voices of people my age too but that's something I've learnt how to deal with. (P6)"

Family Awareness

This factor includes the awareness level and involvement of immediate family members in the process of cohabitation. Most participants did not reveal their cohabitation status to their families due to their parents' ideologies, family values, and strict nature of the parents. Participants who revealed their relationship status to their families faced judgment from extended family members. All the participants reported feelings of guilt about lying to their parents, and several reported decreased communication at home.

"...I do feel a little guilty about lying to my parents...umm I really feel bad about it because my partner's mother knows that we live together... so yeah that guilt is quite there. (P3)"

"...I currently have a certain image with my family, which did not make much sense because my family is very, very religious...So according to my family, um, I'm more or less like a playboy (P1)"

Social and Legal Implications

This factor reflects the reactions and the reception of cohabitation by the extended society in which the couple resides. The participants revealed feeling unsafe, experiences of social judgment, negative social responses, and society's resistance towards change. None of the participants reported any legal troubles.

"...so we were at a local-ish bar and a group of guys they... were pretty sloshed, sitting next to us overheard somehow that we live together... and three of them...came on to me when she was in the washroom and said some pretty cheap and vulgar things about us, mostly about her...(P2)"

Theme 4 Individual Perspective

This factor compiles the general views of participants about cohabitation and marriage. All the viewpoints support cohabitation and describe it as a consensual form of love, a necessary precursor to marriage, and a way to know their partner better. They believed marriage is contractual and couples should first be willing to live together without a contract. No participant experienced any feeling of guilt toward society.

"...I absolutely don't believe that living without marriage should be considered as going against Indian culture. It's...uh just, just about being sure of what you want. (P2)"

Theme 5 Well Being

This theme reflects the participants' experience and evaluates their lives and specific domains. It captures experienced well-being (Kahneman & Deaton, 2010) and judgments of overall life satisfaction of specific aspects of life, such as relationships, community, health, and occupation, as well as overall evaluations.

Sub-themes that emerged were:

Positive and Negative Affect

The referents of this factor reflect feelings of well-being. As in the case of positive affect, it represents an overall perception of life as functioning smoothly and joyfully. Several participants reported their happiness with their current lifestyle, feelings of contentment, and motivation from their partner to improve and for a healthy lifestyle.

"...spending time with him, with my family, and with my friends. I've got a really good circle. umm...Even though I did not plan on working at this place for so long...I am happy...So I've been really happy with what I've done personally in recent life. (P5)"

The negative affect represents a generally depressed outlook on life. This factor represents overall constructs only to the extent that the overall perception of life is concerned. The participants reported experiencing feelings of insignificance and difficulty in adjusting to the new living arrangement.

Expectation- Achievement Congruence

This factor refers to feelings of well-being generated by achieving success and the standard of living per one's expectations, or what may be called satisfaction. Four participants reported contentment with their profession and standard of living. They mentioned experiences of personal growth and satisfaction with social status. Two participants who reported incongruent expectations and achievement described experiences of self-reflection and motivation to work towards their goal. Positive and negative aspects have emerged as independent and not correlated. This factor also considers the work-life balance in participants, and the majority showed an imbalance in this aspect.

"...For specifically me...work...umm work comes at a very different timing. So that's really...balancing it with life makes it more difficult.(P3)"

"...I still haven't found a way to manage my social life with my work life.(P4)"

Biological Functioning and Physical Health

This factor measures happiness and worries over health and physical fitness. It is a one-dimensional factor, as both happiness and worry are highly correlated. Most of the participants experienced complaints of back pain, irregular sleep patterns, irregular meals, lack of exercise, and unhealthy eating. There were specific complaints of Polycystic ovary syndrome, Dust Allergy, Minor Surgery, and Asthma by the participants.

Theme 6 Social Support

This theme describes social support experienced by the participants as the support accessible through social ties to other individuals, groups, and the larger community (Lin N et al., 1979).

Two sub-themes were devised from this:

Social Support and Contracts

It measures the security and density of social networks in the social environment beyond family, including friends, colleagues, and neighbors. The referents of this factor also reflect a deficiency in social contracts. The participants who reported well-maintained interpersonal relationships and stable and robust social support showed a positive attitude toward their perceived well-being. Participants who reported low social support, a lack of immediate social support, and their partner as the primary source of support showed a negative attitude toward their perceived well-being.

“...I don't have any colleagues as such, I have clients and it's a strict professional type of a relationship...and umm Friends from school and college...I have but we...like rarely talk...it is a good relationship but now since we're all in different places, everyone is busy with their own life...(P4)”

Family Support

This factor reflects positive feelings derived from the perception of the family as supportive, cohesive, and emotionally attached. It also reflects the negative feelings of lack of joint decision-making and disharmony. Participants' responses varied from having supportive parents and close relations with family to distant relationships with uninvolved parents, lack of communication with parents, and strict parents.

“...I have a single mother, she's been supportive, at least on my end...Knowing about our move in...uh living in a relationship. (P1)”

“...first of all, they are too strict, they wouldn't approve. And I don't talk to them also that often...so it's no big of a deal for me that they don't know it...They didn't even try to ask...you know so...it's better this way. (P3)”

Table 2:- Verbatim Table.

Theme	Sub-theme	Verbatim
Emotional Covariation	Emotional Susceptibility Relationship Characteristics	“...I think my emotions also affect him and his actions. (P4)” “...so, more or less, when she is sad, I feel the same. (P2)” “...since both of us...are not that connected with our family...things just you know...they got easier after this as now I do have someone...haina...like one person who I can just share whatever I am going through. (P6)”
Interpersonal Emotion Dynamic	Characteristics of Dependence Moderating Factors of Emotional Interdependence	“...I'm very independent. But at the same time, I'm very, very dependent on my partner...because in my relationship, I think, emotionally, I'm very dependent on my partner... Happiness, any sadness, any emotion that I get, uh it's shared with my partner. And uh it's the same with her. (P1)” “...and I think that sharing of emotions...uh...sharing of emotions, benefits that dependency for that person. And without being dependent on someone else, how can you keep some relationship going?... If you're choosing to be dependent, it means you're choosing to be vulnerable with a person. (P1)” “...umm time wise I don't know...it depends like I said some days 2 hours some days 10 hours. We just hang out, talk, watch shows, just chill together...Maybe have a drink or two on the weekend..umm go out. We do go out often to dinners and workshops, watch shows and all. (P5)”
Society's Standpoint	Family Awareness Immediate	“...I can hear the judgment in voices of people my age too but that's something I've learnt how to deal with. (P6)” “...I do feel a little guilty about lying to my parents...umm I really feel bad about it because my partner's mother knows that we live together... so yeah that guilt is quite there. (P3)”

	surroundings and neighborhood	<p>“...I currently have a certain image with my family, which did not make much sense because my family is very, very religious...So according to my family, um, I'm more or less like a playboy (P1)”</p> <p>“...so we were at a local-ish bar and a group of guys they... were pretty sloshed, sitting next to us overheard somehow that we live together... and three of them...came on to me when she was in the washroom and said some pretty cheap and vulgar things about us, mostly about her...(P2)”</p>
Individual Perspective	Social and Legal Implications	<p>“...I absolutely don't believe that living without marriage should be considered as going against Indian culture. It's...uh just, just about being sure of what you want. (P2)”</p>
Well-Being	Biological Functioning and Physical Health	<p>“...spending time with him, with my family, and with my friends. I've got a really good circle. umm...Even though I did not plan on working at this place for so long...I am happy...So I've been really happy with what I've done personally in recent life. (P5)”</p>
	Positive and Negative Affect	<p>“...For specifically me...work...umm work comes at a very different timing. So that's really...balancing it with life makes it more difficult.(P3)”</p>
	Expectation-Achievement Congruence	<p>“...I still haven't found a way to manage my social life with my work life. (P4)”</p>
Social Support	Social Support and Contracts	<p>“...I don't have any colleagues as such, I have clients and it's a strict professional type of a relationship...and umm Friends from school and college...I have but we...like rarely talk...it is a good relationship but now since we're all in different places, everyone is busy with their own life...(P4)”</p>
	Family Support	<p>“...I have a single mother, she's been supportive, at least on my end...Knowing about our move in...uh living in a relationship. (P1)”</p> <p>“...first of all, they are too strict, they wouldn't approve. And I don't talk to them also that often...so it's no big of a deal for me that they don't know it...They didn't even try to ask...you know so...it's better this way. (P3)”</p>

Discussion:-

With this study, we aimed to contribute to understanding the emotional interdependence between couples in a cohabiting relationship and social norms around cohabitation and its relation with subjective well-being. The majority of the participants in the study did not produce substantial evidence of emotional interdependence (n=4). Indeed the participants reflected strong evidence of emotional covariation. Specifically, the participants demonstrated positive concurrent linear and non-linear covariation in their negative emotions, positive emotions, and emotional extremity. "Attachment researchers theorize that adult partners "coregulate," referring to a process in which partners regulate each other's affect and physiological arousal, resulting in interwoven oscillating emotional patterns" (Field, 1985; Sbarra & Hazan, 2009; Butler & Randall, 2013).

As reported in a previously conducted study by Laura Sels et al. in 2016, it was found that when participants showed evidence of substantial interdependence, the specific interdependence patterns varied tremendously with associations between every emotion pair and in every direction. There were lesser instances of unidirectional interdependence (n=2). Although it is recognized that emotional interdependence can be unidirectional (Gottman, 2013), bidirectional interdependence and reciprocity were observed at a higher rate.

In spite of this observed heterogeneity, the strength of emotional interdependence related to several aspects of individual well-being, including overall life satisfaction, relational well-being, perceived social support, and empathic concern. Individuals that were part of bidirectionally interdependent couples reported higher life satisfaction and less concern for support. As reported in previous studies, by modulating each other's emotions, partners would help maintain each other's emotional stability, which is critical for psychological well-being (Kuppens et al., 2007).

Additionally, analyses of the "degree to which an individual's emotions drove (sender effects) or followed (receiver effects) the partner's emotions" (Bandura, 1997; Kuijjer & De Ridder, 2003) over time revealed that sender effects were positively associated with life satisfaction and negatively with empathic concern. It was consistent with the previous findings that driving one's partner's emotions would increase individuals' sense of self-efficacy and feeling supported by their partner, which are known to enhance well-being (Maisel & Gable, 2009).

Further, emotional interdependence seemed largely unaffected by potential moderators, such as the amount of time that partners spent together was positively related to the extent to which positive emotions were dependent on each other but not to the extent of covariation in negative emotions or emotional extremity. It was observed that relationship longevity was not associated with the degree of observed emotional interdependence.

This study shows a lack of observed emotional interdependence, which could have been due to specific characteristics of the study, such as the small sample size, limited questions, and no real-time observation of the couple's routine. However, it is noteworthy that a study conducted by Laura et al. (2020) revealed surprisingly similar results while using face-to-face daily life measurements of emotional interdependence.

As observed in the study conducted by Perelli-Harris et al. (2012), the participants' views about cohabitation were also recorded in the study, and it was seen that the participants accepted the idea of marriage but instead postponed it until later in the life course. Cohabitation is seen as a medium that allows couples to ensure they are compatible. "Although this conceptualization of cohabitation could be considered similar to the concepts of "prelude to marriage" or "trial marriage," the emphasis on the temporary or impermanent nature of the relationship suggests that early in the relationship, cohabitation is only a minor step beyond dating." (Brienna Perelli-Harris et al., 2019).

While young individuals support the idea of cohabitation, the norms of Indian society about cohabitation are entirely different. All the participants experienced low levels of social acceptance at different rates. It was also observed that the participants who faced more societal problems reported higher distress and feelings of anxiety, fear, and uncertainty. These findings are consistent with recent studies that have emphasized that in countries where the level of social acceptance of cohabitation is low and the value placed on marriage is high, choosing to cohabit may lead couples toward distress (Di Giulio & Rosina, 2007; Schröder, 2008).

We also noted that India is a country where the level of social acceptance of cohabitation is low. As a result, participants (n=5) did not inform their parents about their living status, and few also reported feelings of guilt (n=5) and a deterioration in their relationship with their parents (n=3). These findings are supported by previous literature as it has emphasized that when young people make partnership choices that clash with social attitudes and norms, a deterioration in their relations with their parents may occur (Rosina & Fraboni, 2004; Di Giulio & Rosina, 2007; Schröder, 2008). Hence, distress that occurs due to interactions with society is relational to the emotional well-being of the individuals in a cohabiting relationship.

Social support can be described as the perception of being cared for by others and having a reliable network to turn to when needed, in everyday situations or specific moments of crisis (Taylor, 2011). This research observed social support provided to participants from three sources: family, friends, and significant others (Zimet et al., 1988). All the participants (n=6) reported higher social support from their partners. The participants who obtained more social support from their friends and family showed higher levels of affective well-being. This finding could be justified by previous studies that found that people with close social relationships tend to report higher levels of well-being and flourishing (Myers, 2015; Diener et al., 2018).

Conclusion:-

Examining emotional interdependence, social norms, and subjective well-being, we drew attention to several essential constituents of interpersonal emotion dynamics, including heterogeneity in emotional interdependence, the

prevalence of emotional covariation, the potential differential relation between interdependence and individual versus relational well-being, and differences in sender versus receiver effects. It also revealed that cohabitation was seen as a medium that allows couples to make sure they are compatible. Low social acceptance of cohabitation led to significant distress and feelings of anxiety, fear, and uncertainty. Participants who obtained greater social support from their significant others, friends, and family showed higher levels of affective well-being.

Limitations and Future Studies

The results of this study must be considered in light of several limitations. The first one is that the research is the non-inclusion of sociodemographic and mental health variables such as stress, depression, and coping strategies, which could have influenced the interdependence of emotions between partners. The study's sample size needed to be bigger, limiting its findings. Real-time observation of the couple's routine can also be considered as one of the limitations, as only limited evidence was collected with the help of semi-structured interviews.

Further, we assessed emotions in the light of the participant's daily life, and no distinction could be made between emotions whose precipitating sources were within the relationship versus emotions whose origins lay outside the relationship. Since cohabitation is an emerging phenomenon in India and is not widely accepted by society, the data was collected from participants aged 21 to 27. In light of this study, the effect of different patterns of emotional interdependence on an individual's subjective well-being cannot be understood from an age-normative life-stage perspective.

Further research on cohabitation can be multi-method with larger sample sizes. It should include viewpoints of young, middle-aged, and older adults and cohabitating LGBTQIA couples, which the present study did not cover. Expanding theoretical and application-oriented knowledge generation on family systems and marriage with a greater focus on alternate union formations should be the focus of future research endeavors. Conventional research themes on union formation will give way to novel research that reflects the altered scenario of marriage and cohabitation.

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