Relationships and Resilience in Young adults from
Fragmented and Discordant Households

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Abstract

India witnesses a high rate of intimate partner violence [37.7% incidence in the South East Asia zone per WHO data, 2012]. Taboos about marital separation and divorce exist across socioeconomic strata, leading to a large number of Indian children growing up in discordant households who witness chronic abuse of one or both parents. Another belief that binds many discordant partners is that separation or divorce leads to poor long term mental health and personality outcomes in progenies. However, studies in Western samples have shown that there are significant negative outcomes for individuals vicariously exposed to violence in discordant households. This study aimed to assess whether resilience, a key personality attribute, differed among college-aged individuals who grew up in traditional two-parent households without conflict, discordant households or single parent households. 116 participants aged 18-24 ($M=20.3$ $SD=1.2$, 86F) were recruited at Ashoka University. Resilience scores were calculated using *The Resilience Scale*. A two-way ANOVA examining the effect of the participant's family structure and gender on resilience showed that family structure, not gender had a direct effect on resilience scores [$F(2, 116) = 3.122$ $p=0.048$] but the effect is barely significant. Post hoc (Bonferroni) testing indicated that individuals from single-parent households ($M=136$, $SD=19.01$) or discordant households ($M=134$, $SD=17.81$, $p=0.50$) tended to score higher on resilience than individuals from two-parent, non-conflicted families ($M=121.05$, $SD=20.53$, $p=0.066$). Contrary to popular belief, the results suggest that growing up in traditional two-parent households does not offer any significant advantage over single-parent households as far as resilience is concerned. These results provide initial evidence against existing social taboos and can be expanded upon for further cross-cultural validation. Further, a qualitative study explores the experiences of relationships of young adults from the three family types.

Keywords: single parents, resilience, relationships, abuse, family structures, family dynamics

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Relationships and Resilience in Young adults

From Fragmented and Discordant Households

“All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.”

- Leo Tolstoy

Children do not grow in a vacuum, divorced from their environment. A person's relationship with their family is their earliest interaction with their surroundings and directly impacts their development. As primary attachment figures, parents are crucial in providing safety, and Bowlby suggested any discordance between them may promote anxiety in the children (Cohen and Rosenbaum, 1985). They also pick up on and encode behaviours around them, and attempt to imitate and learn those behaviours. Following from this, it becomes a matter of concern when children are either exposed to domestic violence or when either parent becomes absent from their lives.

India has one of the largest populations of young people, aged 10-24 in the world (UNFPA, 2014). The reason for studying this demographic is that this population goes through a series of psychological and physical transitions, and has the propensity to develop poor psychological functioning owing to developmental stressors. These include decision making and autonomy related to career, economic and social roles, connectedness with family, the development of a sex-role identity, and intimate relationships with others (Chase-Lansdale, Cherlin & Kiernan, 1995). As they transition into adulthood and possibly assume roles of romantic/sexual partnership, marriage or parenthood, it becomes of interest to note how they behave in and experience these relationships, and to consider what they are modelled after. The answers seem to be close to home. This project aims to answer how resilience, and relationship perception and formation differ during young adulthood among three groups—

- i. Young people who grew up in fragmented households
- ii. Young people who grew up in discordant households

iii. Young people who grew up in traditional households

A fragmented household is defined as one where there is one parent with dependent children. A discordant household is a two-parent household where there is incidence of violence or abuse. This means a household where children either see, hear, are involved in or experience the aftermath of violence that occurs between their caregivers, either emotional, physical or sexual (Evans, Davies and DiLillo, 2008). These two households will herewith be referred to as alternative households. Lastly, traditional households are largely "harmonious" two-parent households with no incidence of interparental violence, where children show better well-being than their counterparts from fragmented or discordant households (Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, 1999).

The social and emotional consequences related to divorce persist through later life stages (Carrier and Utz, 2012), and we work with the view that this is bound to be same with exposure to domestic violence given the immense literature on the negative consequences of traumatic experiences. This project conceptualizes divorce and exposure to abuse as childhood adversities with the potential to be risk factors for maladaptive emotional and social wellbeing in late life. However, contrary to popular belief, well-adjusted children can develop in a wide variety of family structures (Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, 1999)! The question then is whether those who grew up in alternative family structures are equally or more resilient than their peers from traditional households. Second, how they experience and perceive their families' dynamics and their own relationships.

The motive to work on this project arose from the lack of data and research in India that studies alternative households. Secondly, the cultural differences studying this population brings could add to the field, as existing research is predominantly western. Lastly, the stigma surrounding alternative households prevents conversation, and so, intervention. This study acts

as a pilot to begin conversation by attempting to understand the children who grow up in alternative settings.

Background

India

Of the world's 2.3 billion children, 320 million belong to single-parent households (Chamie, 2016). As of 2011, 1.36 million Indians are divorced (Biswas, 2016), and 5.6 crore women are widowed (Sivakumar, 2015), but there is no indication of their family structure, and whether they have children. In India, domestic violence is alarmingly prevalent with 31% of women having reported intimate partner violence (NFHS, 2016). Data for men on this front is unavailable. In lower-middle and low-income countries such as India, 39.1 % of children have reported childhood adversities such as maladaptive family structures defined by adverse experiences including exposure to domestic violence, and interpersonal loss, such as divorce, or death of a parent (Kessler, 2010). This means that a majority of children either grow up exposed to violence, or in single-parent structures which bring with them a likelihood of concomitant adverse life challenges. There is an incongruence between the incidence and visibility of poor home environment, and clinical norms are unavailable for India.

This is unequivocally a matter of concern. While it is easy to distance oneself from the reality of domestic violence and single parenthood when viewed as a statistic, the fact remains that these are the realities of multitudes; marked by stigma, economic, social and emotional disadvantage, wavering social support, and adversity.

Alternative Family Structures

One's home environment can jeopardize developmental progress of children (Martin, 2002; McIntosh, 2002) (Holt et al, 2008) and those growing up in poor environments are especially distressed (Chase-Lansdale, Cherlin & Kiernan, 1995). Parents tend to underestimate the degree to which children are aware of discord (Edelson, 1999), which makes it less likely for them to provide appropriate interventions or psychological care if and when necessary. While there are no clinical norms in India to understand psychological wellbeing in these situations, this study recognizes that depression, anxiety, stress and substance abuse are a valid outcome response to adverse childhood experiences.

Those exposed to domestic violence report increased feelings of guilt and anxiety, damaged self-esteem, and depressive symptoms (Evans, Davies & DiLillo, 2008) (Edleson, 1990). Silvern, et al. found that children exposed to domestic violence experience clinically and statistically significant distress in their adult lives (1995). In case of discordant households, it was found that exposure to marital violence was associated with increased levels of anxiety for both males and females; but only females showed elevated levels of depression (Cohen and Rosenbaum, 1985). Furthermore, there is evidence that parental violence is associated with increasing outcome risks for substance abuse and depressive symptoms. (Fergusson & Horwood, 1998).

In those raised in single-parent households, it has been found that individuals attain similar levels of education and annual income as their primary parents, however, lower as compared to their peers from traditional households (Mueller & Cooper, 1986). Access to resources is limited by belonging to an economically disadvantaged home. Compared to their peers in nondivorced homes, adolescents in divorced families are two to three times to engage in antisocial and delinquent behaviour (Johnson et al., 1995). Luep- nitz (1979), found an increase in anxiety, depression, and withdrawal in college-age subjects who had been impacted by their parents' divorce.

Knitzer (2000), has found that adolescents are especially vulnerable to alcohol, tobacco, drugs, and other substance abuse and other high-risk behaviours if they come from alternative families, especially if the parents also abuse substances.

While it is likely that the loss of one parent or exposure to violence may make the child more withdrawn and passive, there is scope for cooperation and communication. There is a shift in roles and responsibilities as children often become equal with their parents and take on responsibilities. In short, these children 'grow up' faster than their peers.

Relationships and Gender Difference

Studies also report problems in the formation and maintenance of romantic relationships (Johnson et al., 1995). It has been suggested that adolescents exposed to domestic violence are less likely to have a secure attachment style and more likely to have an avoidant attachment style, indicating that they perhaps no longer feel trust in intimate relationships (Levendosky et al., 2002) (Holt et al., 2008). Children of single-parent households more likely to be divorced or be single parents themselves than their peers from intact households (Mueller and Cooper, 1986).

Research shows distinct gender differences in how people respond to either growing up in a single parent household or when exposed to domestic violence. Chase-Lansdale and colleagues reported that while girls recover faster than boys from the absence of a parent, they tend to be more self-critical and show lower levels of self-esteem in later life than do boys (1995). A trend that has been observed from both retrospective and longitudinal studies is that when exposed to domestic violence as children, girls tend to engage in more internalizing behaviour while boys in externalizing behaviour through adolescence (Evans, Davies & DiLillo, 2008) (Edleson, 1990). Internalizing problems are described as inner-directed and generating distress in the individual, in this case, guilt, victimization of self, etc while

externalizing problems are described as outer-directed and generating discomfort and conflict in the surrounding environment, in this instance, aggression (Forms et al, 2014).

Intergenerationality of domestic violence is a concern as children pick up cues from both parents— that violence is okay. And it potentially is cyclical, the notion it is acceptable to treat someone a certain way and to be treated a certain way. Over their childhood, both girls and boys learn attitude towards violence. Men are more likely to identify with the aggressor than with the victim, while women tend to identify with the victim who usually is the mother (Cohen and Rosenbaum, 1985). However, the good news is that the opposite could happen, where they actively work against interpreting these behaviours as acceptable. We strongly hold Tage Rai's (2015) sentiment "that it is only when violence in any relationship is seen as a violation of every relationship will it diminish."

Current Project

Growing up in alternative family structures may trigger problems in attainment in education and vocation, and in intimate relationships. Exposure to major life events could lead to higher rates of mental illness as it may disrupt transition phase that these young adults are in (Schilling et al, 2007). Given the risk, this project recognizes that there is a population is severely understudied and he hope to provide data for the construction of culturally sensitive existing theories, by exploring existing theories.

The need to study resilience emerges from the simple hope that those who witness their parents in the throes of vulnerability will better be able to work through difficulties by modelling after their parent doing so. Childhood adversity does not have negative consequences alone. By recognizing the internal and external resources of a child to bounce back, survive and thrive, we focus on resilience without diminishing the incidence of negative outcomes. By focusing on these strengths, we acknowledge and encourage these positive qualities (Greef and Ritman, 2005).

It takes a salutogenic approach by studying resilience in young adults from alternative households rather than a pathogenic approach with the hope that it could encourage resilient thinking in individuals and communities. Two studies were conducted— one qualitative, to explore how young adults experience and perceive their family dynamics and relationships, and how this impacts their own relationship. Second, a quantitative study to explore In the case of resilience outcomes, it is of interest to answer whether one is as adept, or more, at handling crisis as compared to their peers from traditional households?

Study 1: Resilience across family structures

For the present study, the inclusion criteria for all participants is to fall in the age range of 18-24, and must have completed high school . In the single parent group, participants must have grown up with a single parent prior to age 18.

In the discordant household group, participants need to have been aware of abuse between their parents, if any. Abuse has been operationalized using the list of behaviours covered in the *Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005*, and has been scaled to measure how often it occurs, and whether it negatively impacts the participant. These are interspersed with a few healthy and affectionate behaviours which have been added to the list. Lastly, a statement has been added “Stay together for the sake of children/society,” in light of the research that questions whether it is, in fact, healthier or not for a child to grow up in a discordant or single parent household.

This comes from the findings that when the possibility of divorce is associated with increased stress, children show more problems in fragmented households than in discordant households (Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, 1999). However, when divorce could lead to more harmonious outcomes, these children do better than those from discordant households

Methods

Participants

The study recruited participants between the ages of 18-24 from Ashoka University (M=20.3 SD= 1.2, 86F). A majority of the participants constituted of students from the Introduction to Psychology Module, while the rest were recruited via email.

Materials

Wagnild and Young's 25-item Resilience Scale (1993) was employed to measure resilience. Highly reliable ($\alpha = .91$) with a significance of $p \leq 0.001$, it focuses on equanimity, perseverance, meaningfulness, self-reliance and existential aloneness (Wagnild and Young, 1993). The reason for choosing this scale was not only its brevity but also that it captures resilience in response to an event as well over a period of time, making it suitable to the longevity of one's development. Its focus on openness to experience and change, perseverance in face of adversity, uniqueness and subjectivity of experience, purpose and independence make it suitable to assess resilience in developmental period of the population in question.

Procedure

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Ashoka University. Following this, a physical survey was administered to the sample, and verbal and written consent was obtained that sensitive information would be collected. The participants were briefed about confidentiality, and a trigger warning was provided for the domestic violence checklist. Demographic information was obtained (See Appendix A), including age, gender, religion, religiosity, caste, annual family income, educational qualifications of parents, members in the family, head of household, and sibling characteristics. Further, a section of the questionnaire was devoted to single-parent households, where information was collected about the reason for their parent's single-parenthood (divorce, separation, widowhood, unknown). They were asked to

indicate who their primary parent was, participants' age at which primary parents assumed single-parenthood, whether they saw their other parent, and to describe their living arrangement.

The next section assessed discord using the checklist created using the 2005 act. Participants had to indicate whether the behaviour observed had a negative impact on them, which if even one did, qualified as a discordant household. This was done with the view that children are in control of constructing their own narratives. In the end, they had to fill out The Resilience Scale. Upon finishing, participants were thanked and debriefed about the intricacies of the study. They were also offered the contact details of the researchers and the campus counselling centre.

Results

Resilience scores were analysed with a 2 (Family Structure: Single Parent vs Discordant vs Two-Parent) x 2 (Gender: Female vs Male) between-subjects ANOVA. The main effect of gender on reliance scores was not significant $F(2,110) = 1.859, p=0.161$. Nor was the main effect of family structure on resilience, $F(1, 110) = 0.038, p = 0.846$, or the interaction, $F(2,110) = 0.339, p = 0.713$ (Table 1)

Table 1. Two-way ANOVA

ANOVA - Total Score					
Cases	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Family Type	1448.98	2	724.49	1.859	0.161
Gender	14.73	1	14.73	0.038	0.846
Family Type * Gender	264.58	2	132.29	0.339	0.713
Residual	42871.68	110	389.74		

Note. Type III Sum of Squares

Figure 1. Gender and Family Type Comparisons (95% CI)

However, a one-way ANOVA (Table 2) analysing the effects of family structure on resilience scores was found to be significant $F(2,113) = 3.122, p=0.048$. A Post hoc Bonferroni test was conducted, indicating that resilience scores in individuals from single-parent households ($M=136, SD=19.01$) or discordant households ($M=134, SD=17.81, p=0.50$) were higher than in individuals from two-parent, non-conflicted families ($M=121.05, SD=20.53, p=0.066$). However, this was not significant.

Table 2. One-way ANOVA and Post Hoc Comparisons

ANOVA - Total Score					
Cases	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Family Type	2389	2	1194.4	3.122	0.048
Residual	43238	113	382.6		

Note. Type III Sum of Squares					
Post Hoc Comparisons - IV					
		Mean Difference	SE	t	p _{bonf}
Frag	Disc	0.479	7.234	0.066	1.000
	Trad	9.600	6.938	1.384	0.508
Disc	Trad	9.121	3.929	2.321	0.066

Figure 2. Family Type (95% CI)

Discussion

The results suggest that growing up in traditional two-parent households does not offer any significant advantage over single-parent households in the case of resilience. It is likely that the post hoc tests aren't significant owing to the skewed sample sizes. It could also be explained by the fact that the study did not control for child abuse, or other risk factors that occur in marginalized family situations. Although this study provides initial evidence against prevailing taboos, some crucial limitations are to be noted. That participants from fragmented households showed higher resilience could be attributed to a shift away from a conflict to a lower conflict environment.

Given the uniqueness of the socio-economic characteristics of students of Ashoka, largely belonging to an upper-middle-class or higher households, this result may not be externally applicable, as these students have access to an incomparable standard of resources. Most participants were first-year undergraduates, possibly away from home for the first time, vulnerable owing to the adjustment period, which could have impacted the accuracy of their responses.

A major limitation is that the frequency of violent behaviour was not accounted for, because we then cannot assess if the negative impact was due to prolonged exposure or due to

the shock value of a singular event. Secondly, only including those participants who reported a negative impact on violent behaviour discounts the fact that one may be habitualized or desensitized to violent behaviour.

It is a persistent assumption that that divorce is a traumatic life event with an enduring detrimental impact on the adjustment of children, and that two-parent households are necessary for successful developmental progress. However, even though divorce is a stressful life transition where risks and protective factors are constantly renegotiated, it is a chance at a more harmonious life with a better environment for growth than in a discordant household (Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, 1999). In this regard, this study is restrictive in how sample groups were categorized, for it doesn't count for discord pre-fragmentation of the parental unit.

Study 2: Experiences and perception of relationships

This study was conducted at Ashoka University, a liberal art college on the periphery of New Delhi, located in rural Haryana. Resilience theory recognizes education as a protective factor (Holt et al, 2008), meaning that these students are at an advantage, especially given the quality of education, facilities, and services on this campus. Students have access to resources that are beneficial for physical health, such as a gym, sports coaching, etc. They also have access to the university's mental health counselling service. This space is conducive to intellectual pursuits, but this is also a major source of stress. Essentially, the environment at Ashoka is conducive to growth and is both competitive and cooperative. One has to assume that students belong to a particular socio-economic and cultural class, as this is an expensive education to afford, even if one is on financial aid, reaffirming the ease of access to resources outside of campus to an extent.

The impetus to conduct a qualitative study came from the notion that children are dynamic in their effort to make sense of their experiences (Holt, Buckley and Whelan, 2008) and that they are active, not passive participants in their lives. The qualitative study aims to explore the experiences of young adults from alternative households from their perspective. It is also an attempt at understanding how they experience close relationships as problems in adjustment are visible in levels of achievement and in close personal relationships in young adults from alternative households (Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, 1999). Previous studies describe experiences tainted with confusion, sadness and fear and ambivalence towards parents (Goldblatt, 2003) (Holt, et al, 2008), and so, the interview also attempts to shift the frame to positive experiences and outcomes. The interview allowed for clarification and accommodated for the complexities and subjectivity of each participants' experience.

Methods

Participants

The participants aged 18-24, $N = 13$ ($M=21$, $SD=1$) were recruited through snowball sampling from Ashoka University based on the researchers' knowledge of people who fulfilled the criteria for either of three groups— single-parent households, discordant households, two-parent, non-discordant households. Participants were contacted individually to participate in the study.

Table 3 Characteristics of Participants

Family structure	Participants	Gender
Single Parent		
Divorced (Father as Primary Guardian)	N=2	M=2
Divorced (Mother as Primary Guardian)	N= 2	F=2
Widowed (Mother as Primary Guardian)	N=1	F=1
Discordant	N= 4	M= 2, F= 2
Two-parent	N= 4	M=2, F=2

Materials and Procedure

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Ashoka University. Following which, a semi-structured interview was conducted lasting between 20 minutes to 1.5 hours. This interview was recorded, prior to which informed consent was taken from the participants. Each interviewee was briefed regarding the purpose of the project and was verbally reassured of data confidentiality and non- disclosure of identity. They were given the

option to leave the interview whenever they felt uncomfortable or to skip questions they weren't comfortable answering. All participants were assigned an alpha-numeric code for confidentiality. All verbal and written communication with respondents was conducted in English. In the end, they were debriefed and were given information about the University's mental-health service in case they wished to seek their services.

Interview Schedule

A biographical questionnaire was constructed requesting demographic information (Appendix B), and parts of the interview schedule were derived from the Adult Attachment Interview—a semi-clinical, structured interview focusing on early attachment experiences and their effects in later life (George, Kaplan and Main, 1996).

Table 4 Rapport Building and Demographic Data

● Hi, how are you doing today? ● Where are you from? ● Where all have you lived? ● Have you moved? If so, where and why? ● What religion does your family identify with? ● Would you say you are religious? Please explain ● How has your caste identity impacted you? ● What would you say, your mood is like in general? ● Who are you as a person? Tell us more about yourself.

Participants were requested information about substance consumption and their mental health, to be able to construct a full picture of their psychological well-being.

Table 5 Mental Health and Substances

- In the last one month, have you gone through any major life event, such as loss of a loved one, major fight, illness, break-up, failure, harassment of any sort, etc.?

Please tell us more
- Have you ever seen a therapist or any other mental health professional, or a doctor for mental health concerns? Please tell us more.
- Are you on any psychiatric medication? Please elaborate.
- Do you smoke cigarettes?
 - a) What is the average number of cigarettes you smoke on a day-to-day basis?
- Do you consume alcohol?
 1. If yes, how often?
 2. On such an occasion (You are drinking alcohol),
how many drinks do you consume? (1 drink ~ 30 ml of alcohol)
 3. Do you tend to drink alone? On such an occasion (You are drinking alcohol alone),
how many drinks do you consume? (1 drink ~ 30 ml of alcohol)

They were then asked to indicate the structure of their family. In this part, participants often also spoke about their family dynamics and not structure alone.

Table 6 Family Structure

- Do you live in a joint or nuclear family?
- Who are the members of your family?
- Who is the head of your household?
- Do you have any siblings?
- What is your birth order?
- Is your parent a single parent?
 - a) Which parent is your primary guardian?
 - b) Have you ever lived with both your parents?
 - c) If yes, at what age did this change?
 - d) What was the reason your parents don't live together?
 - e) If you do, how often do you see the other parent?

f) What is your living arrangement?

g) If divorce/separation, what prompted did the divorce/separation?

Following this, the interview funneled into specific questions about the parental unit and their views on it.

Table 7 Perception of Parental Relationship

I'm going to ask you a few more questions about your parents and family life. These questions are based on when your parents were together or if they currently are.

- Can you tell me a little bit about your parent's relationship?
- Would you say they are/were happily married?
- Would you say your parents were romantic?
- Do you think your parents were equals in respect to their relationship as well as the household?
- Who do you think had more power and what makes you feel that way?
- How was this power held above the other person, if it was?
- Who is the primary breadwinner?
- Did they control all the expenditure?
- Did you, and do you feel like your basic material needs are met?
- How did the parent who was not the primary breadwinner go about spending money?
- Did your parents consult each other on all big decisions?
- Can you tell me a little more about how a big decision would be taken in your family?
- Did they have arguments?
- Can you describe their emotional states after the arguments?
- Did your parents involve you in these arguments?
- Did these arguments ever become violent?
- Was anyone besides your parents involved in these arguments?
- How did all this impact you as a child?
- Does it impact you in any way now?

Positive peer and sibling relationships act as a buffer to mediate and prevent stress, and provide provide nurture (Holt, et al, 2008). Given this, they were asked about their relationships with

their siblings. Further, a section was added regarding child abuse, so as to understand how it may have impacted one's experience of how they view their parents.

Table 8 Child Abuse and Sibling relationships

I'm going to ask you a few questions about how your parents behaved with you and your sibling.

- Did you ever feel that your parents discriminated between you and your sibling?
How so?
- Were your parents ever physically violent towards you? This includes slapping, spanking, etc.
- Were they ever physically violent towards your sibling?
- Tell us more about your relationship with your sibling.
- Can you try to describe your relationship with your family?
- Do you think there is anything about your childhood that particularly shaped your relationship with your sibling? How so?

In this section, they were asked some strength-oriented questions to break from the possible emotionally charged nature of the interview, and about their current relationship with their parents.

Table 9 Retrospective Perception

- Can you please describe a happy memory with your family? What about it makes you happy?
- Do you feel closer to either one of your parent/guardians? Tell us more.
- What about your relationship with your other parent?
- How do you feel your overall experiences with your parents have affected whom you have grown up to be??
- What is your current relationship with your parents?
- What have you carried into adulthood from your past? What sort of impact has it had on you? Do you think there is anything you have gained from having the type of childhood that you did? Is there something that you feel you have lost from having the type of childhood that you did?

They were then asked to talk about their relationships, and to explore if they thought that that exposure to their parents' relationship impacted their own in any way, and how they are in romantic relationships in general.

Table 10 Relationships

I'm now going to ask you a couple of questions about your romantic/sexual relationship and friendships

- Have you ever been in a romantic relationship? Tell us more.
- Can you tell me how many relationships you've been in, how long they have been and the time you have been single between the relationships?
- If you have, are you currently in a romantic relationship?
- Do you feel more secure in a relationship or when you are single?
- What about being _____ makes you feel that way?
- Do you feel there is any particular influence of observing your parent's relationship on your relationship?
- Tell me more about your friends' circles. Whom do you feel closest to?
- How do you feel about your relationships overall?
- Is there anything else you want us to know?

The interview ended with the participants being thanked and offered to reach out to the researchers or the campus counselling services if needed.

Thematic Analysis

Data was collected from participants belonging to single-parent, discordant and traditional households. The data from the interviews was transcribed on Microsoft Excel by the researchers, and transcribers that were hired, who were also made to fill out a confidentiality form. Initial stages included going through the recordings and reading the transcript 3-4 times, during which initial notes were made. Codes were identified and created in the next reading. After this, a table was made of all the codes from all interviews and these were colour coded based on similarity. Themes were then generated based on the frequency of the occurrence of codes, as well as the weight they held in the interview. The generation of codes and themes was an inductively aligned process, with the analysis relying on existing literature. A combination of inductive and deductive thematic analysis revealed some themes— the role of external social figures, a sense of independence, acute awareness of their families being different, and patterns in relationships as impacted by parents. While the generation of codes was inductive, it worked with the underlying assumption that participants would not report negative experiences alone. For this reason, the interview schedule was constructed to be open-ended but was also positively oriented.

Results

Independence

In accordance with existing research, children of fragmented and discordant households perceive themselves to be more mature than their peer. A participant reports

“Hmm.. in a lot of ways, I think I grew up very quickly so that has a lot of impact in the sense that I'm very comfortable around adults. I often feel older than my peers. I'm very naturally drawn to people who are older than me, both socially and romantically.”

They also display a fierce sense of independence, owing to spending a lot of time alone as children. They also report their ability to survive with limited resources. Another participant reports

“It made me grow up, not having my dad around for the first nine years when he was working elsewhere, and then for five years when he was in prison. It made me grow up much sooner than I had to. and I feel like that really helps in a lot of situations. I feel like when I'm working with people... I feel like most people lack the maturity that I expect of people that I work with and I have to compensate for it. And it's not oh I don't want to work with these people or complain about it. It takes different people different amounts of time, people look at things in different ways, and I am really glad that I had the experiences that made me grow up, that gave me that precocious maturity that I can deal with situations in that way. And it made me very taciturn also. I'm not one to fuss about food and creature comforts. I'm happy to sleep anywhere, eat anything and stuff like that. And I feel like a lot of that has to do with being left alone as a child which happened inevitably because my mom was working, and my dad was in jail, and you know, stuff like that, so I honestly don't wish it was another way.”

This independence is displayed with the decision making of a family unit, which in most participants (all fragmented households) is described as democratic— full of conversation, collaboration and agreement. Participants from fragmented households also tend to work in equal partnership with their primary parents and often assume a parental role with their younger siblings. A participant from a single-parent household reports

“With my sibling... I don't know. I think I acted like as a third or like a second, after the divorce, parent to her because my mom was busy earning, with divorce

proceedings to go and all that. And she was really small right, she was like 3. So, she was baby. So, I ended up taking a lot of care of her. So, like in terms of feeding her and making sure that she's doing okay and all of that. So, I think that like does affect our relationship sometimes. She's like you're such a mom. Which I am but like you know that kind of a thing."

Another participant reports resilience in saying

"I don't feel a sense of loss at all. I think that's thanks to my mother. She's done a good job of raising us. What have I gained? From having a turbulent childhood? I guess a sense of being independent. Just like, I don't need anything. I know I can do well on limited resources and that makes me feel good and I feel like I can manage. No matter what it is, like I'll get through kind of a thing."

External Social Figures

In India, a collectivistic culture, extended families are a common feature of family structures, meaning that members other than the parents and children exist as a unit. In our sample, the role of grandparents has played an influential role in determining family dynamics in fragmented and discordant households in two ways.

The absence of a parent changed the composition of family structure and roles. For multiple participants, their grandparents have acted parent substitutes or co-parents. Four out of five participants from single-parent households lived with a grandparent, where they played the role of a nurturer. One participant from a discordant household, whose grandmother lived with them reported her role as being co-operative and nurturing. She says

"With my grandmother it's been great. She's a breath of fresh air, I grew up with her. Knows everything I like and don't like. I grew up idolizing her, because if she can deal with everything that has happened in her life, I have no reason to complain. I mean it's hard living with somebody. She brought me up very intimately, even though my grandparents' house has a lot of rooms, I stay with her in her room... I'm one of the few people in the house who has seen her cry about it, because I used to sleep with her, I've seen her a lot of times when there is yelling that has happened, she doesn't say anything then, but quietly cries into her pillow at night

when she thinks I'm sleeping, but I'm not. So, my grandmother has been a huge part of my life."

A participant from a single-parent household says about his maternal grandparents "Yeah, so one of the houses we have is like a duplex thing, so my maternal grandparents are downstairs and me and my mother and my sister, we lived upstairs, and my father, through the ages of two and four for me... [then] it was me and my mum at my maternal grandparents' home up and through till like eighteen. Umm...I consider them like a second set of parents to me."

In one case of a discordant household, a participant drew grounding from their grandparent. However, this is anomalous for the role grandparents play in discordant households, where they often are the point of conflict, where, in two cases there is conflict between the mother and the paternal grandmother.

"Sometimes I feel like the tensions in their relationship heighten the tensions in her relationship with my grandmother, and it's a really strange dynamic. I really like my grandmother because she brought me up I never thought that my parents had time for me when I was growing up... Like my grandparents seemed like the content people of the household. Not as aggressive just like you know with their lives together. So yeah. And my grandmother's really talkative and she always has something to say. So, she's fixed in her ways and I'm not okay with the way she sometimes treats my mother. But she is my grandmother. Yeah. It's tough. Sometimes I do avoid talking to her because I feel ever so much negativity that she feels for her mother and I don't want to deal with that. But I also love my grandmother."

For another participant, this conflict in addition to intimate partner violence prompted the decision to get a divorce.

"Because she lived with her in-laws, my other grandparents, and they weren't very nice. So yeah. I mean they kind of like treated her like oh you do the cooking, do the *ghar ka kaam* and stuff like that and she wanted to work which they objected to and stuff like that."

Those from fragmented families reported not only a sense of lack of social support in familial terms but of finding home and comfort in friendships which assumed family status.

“I mean, yeah, so like I have what I call second families. You know, friends of mine where I spend a lot of time at their homes, like I consider their parents are my family, because they treat me like their own child and just like that...I mean I do kinda feel like I missed out that whole happy family kind of dynamic, but I don't think I really care.”

Families and Relationships

It is of essence to note that all participants from alternative households, in some way or the other sensed that their families were ‘unlike’ other families. A participant reports

“I mean I wish it wouldn't happen, I wish they would be happy together, I wish my family would be-- again, going to your friends' houses for birthday parties was like looking at people's lives on Instagram, like their parents behaved really well, and they were really nice to their kids, so you think that's how families are, and you can see...So I did wish my family would be more like other families. I never saw my family as a family per se. I saw me and my mom as a family and I saw our dad as just like being there.”

When asked if witnessing their parents' relationship impacted their own romantic relationships, most participants from traditional households reported having high standards for their own relationships owing to witnessing their parents'. A participant reports

“It's made me look out for an ideal... which hinders me from getting into one... I'm like there's been.. there's a reason I'm still single because every time I get propositioned from anyone I'm very, very careful about who I'm revealing my feelings to who I'm feeling for in the first place and whether or not the relationship will see through because I'm not someone who can date for a couple of months and then be like okay its chill. I get very invested, invested, emotionally dependent and if that's to happen then I need an insurance that this will go, and I don't want it to

end I think even one and a half years. It looks too little... so now I think because they've sustained it, I've seen it work out, I think I hold an ideal in my head."

However, those from discordant or fragmented households expressed that they actively try to engage in partnerships that are unlike that of their parents. These participants also showed a repulsion for conflict, which often translated into avoidance in their own relationships. It is likely that conflict is an indicator of discord and so the repulsion.

"I try to avoid conflict in relationships. Like any confrontation is like I'll avoid it as much as I can because I don't want anything to blow up into a fight. I'm very careful to avoid fights, avoid disagreements, like I'll compromise on something just to avoid a disagreement."

"I think like...I don't know. I just sometimes wonder how my life will turn out because I think for me the most radical thing to do would be to live conventionally, as opposed to the rest of my family. So, I guess I'm interested in seeing what path my life will take."

Some participants reported having maladaptive relationships owing to not having a model relationship. However, all participants from alternative households indicated directly or indirectly a strong sense of empathy, compassion and open-mindedness in their interaction with people.

"Umm.. I guess you learn to be more sympathetic or just try to understand what someone else is going through because as a child you don't really have much of a stake in what goes on in their relationship but then you try to understand how a mother or father must be feeling in a particular situation. And umm secondly I also, so initially after my mother left obviously my paternal grandmother and father were really upset about it and I wouldn't say intentionally, but obviously with the way they would talk about it, it would antagonise my mother in my eyes as well and so then I wouldn't be able to understand her side of it. But now that I'm older, I have a better relationship with my mother, I understand that she had her reasons

for xyz as well and so yeah, I guess you learn to understand that everyone has a reason for what they're doing.”

Discussion

Given the sampling type, it was easy to establish rapport with the participants, as they were acquaintances. Largely, these participants display a high degree of self-awareness and were eager to share sensitive information that the interview demanded. However, one participant from a traditional household was thrown-off by the interview, for it made them confront possibilities they hadn't thought of before. It seems that as children assume new responsibilities and obligations during adversity (Weiss, 1979), or develop an awareness of parents' problems lead them to recognize their parents as humans with weaknesses and strengths, allowing them to empathise and act with care and compassion, which this participant reported.

The most glaring limitation is that this study recruited an urban, college-educated sample. It is unlikely that this sample would be representative of the larger experiences and sentiments of the Indian young adult population. Further, being a retrospective study, one's responses could be stained by faulty memory, leading to ambiguity. It is also essential to keep in mind that major life events in the recent past, depressive symptoms or substance consumption if existent could have impacted the reporting.

Conclusion

While both studies focused on protective factors and experiences, it is also important to study the risk factors as well, especially in discordant households. While this opens up avenues for how parents and communities can positively impact their children, it also reflects on relationships and interventions that are family focused. Further, it would be interesting to explore depressive and anxiety symptoms in this population and to see what domains of measuring the former two are concurrent or not with the domains of resilience; even in the parents; to study growth and fixed mindsets in families. Above all, a nation-wide census to assess family structures would be a remarkable effort in furthering our understanding of this population. This needs to be an in-depth assessment of the outcomes, and risk and protective factors for all parties involved. This will allow us to create a framework to assess in each case, what is better for the parent and child— separation, or to continue to be in a violent situation.

It is possible that the results of this study could help understand how society can improve the quality of childcare and protection. While domestic violence remains a taboo in India, there are also perceived taboos relating to parental separation of children that tend to stigmatize such families. From a legal perspective, the paradigm is shifting away from the parent, to focus on child welfare. However, there is room to do more, especially for those children who hail from stigmatized family situations. It is incontestable that we need to foster safer environments for our children— not only within the walls of the home but also as communities that are empathetic and supportive, beginning with schools, extended families, and other social structures.

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APPENDIX A: Quantitative**Participant Name:** _____**College:** _____**Contact Number:** _____**Participant Code:** _____**Course Code (If doing for credits):** _____

We at Ashoka University are working on a research project, and we would appreciate your participation. In this survey, we will be asking you questions about your mental processes, your family structure, and family dynamics. Towards the end, there is a checklist with violent behaviours.

All your information will be kept confidential unless the researcher perceives danger to participant or others.

Your responses will be used only for this research and will not be used for legal purposes. You can withdraw participation at any point that you wish to do so.

If you are willing to participate in this research, sign below.

Thank you.

Interviewees Signature: _____

Initials: _____ **Code:** _____ **DOB:** _____ **Gender:** _____

Which year of college are you in?

1. Undergraduate
2. ASP
3. Postgraduate
4. Gap Year (Pre-UG)
5. Gap Year (Post UG)
6. Working

What religion does your family/community identify with?

1. Islam
2. Christianity
3. Hinduism
4. Buddhism
5. Non-denominational
6. Other _____

Please rate your religiosity on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is not at all and 5 is very.

Not at all

Very

1

2

3

4

5

What caste do you belong to?

Has your caste identity impacted you negatively in terms of denying you of opportunity, or discrimination and prejudiced. If yes, rate a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is not at all and 5 is very.

Not at all

Very

1

2

3

4

5

In the last one month, have you gone through any major life event, such as loss of a loved one, illness, major fight, break-up, failure, harassment of any sort, etc?

1. Yes
2. No

What is your family's structure?

1. Nuclear
2. Joint
3. Other _____

How many members are there in your family? (In digits) _____

Please indicate the members in your family (tick as many as applicable)

1. Parent(s)
2. Grandparents
3. Siblings
4. Aunts/ Uncles
5. Cousins
6. Extended relatives
7. Other _____

Who is the head of the household?

1. Grandparent
2. Parent's older sibling
3. Mother
4. Father
5. Shared responsibility between both parents
6. Other _____

**If you have a sibling, please state the number of siblings you have along with the age difference between your siblings and you. Please also state the gender of each sibling.
(Example: Sibling one: 3 years younger, female)**

Sibling one: Age difference _____ Gender _____
 Sibling two: Age difference _____ Gender _____
 Sibling three: Age difference _____ Gender _____
 Sibling four: Age difference _____ Gender _____
 Sibling five: Age difference _____ Gender _____
 Sibling six: Age difference _____ Gender _____

What is your birth order?

1. Only child
2. Oldest child
3. Youngest child
4. Twin/ Triplet
5. Other

Annual Family Income

1. < 90,000
2. 90,000- 2 lacs
3. 2-5 lacs
4. 5-10 lacs
5. >10 lacs

Education qualification of Mother

Occupation of Mother

Education qualification of Father

Occupation of Father

If you is parent a single parent please indicate their circumstance, if not please skip this page

1. Separated
2. Divorced
3. Widowed
4. Other

Which Parent is your primary guardian?

1. Mother
2. Father
3. Other _____

Have you ever lived with both parents?

1. Yes
2. No

If you answered yes, please indicate at what age this changed.

1. 0-2
2. 2-3
3. 3-5
4. 5-12
5. 12-18
6. 18 and above

If you do, how often do you see your other parent/ what is your living arrangement?

Education qualification of primary parent

Occupation of primary parent

Below is a list of behaviours. Prior to the age of 18, if you have observed a particular behaviour between them, please check it (✓). Also check whether it has had a negative emotional impact on you.

Statement	Experience	Negative Impact
Seeing bruises/ marks on your parent		
Disagreement or arguments to the extent of causing distress		
Ridiculing to the point of causing distress		
Physical affection		
Remnants of a fight such as broken glass, furniture, etc.		
Threatening physical violence		
Coercion		
Swearing which causes distress		
Restrictions that curtail humane treatment		
Subtle gestures of affection		
Punching or kicking		
Conversation and collaboration		
Overt gestures of affection (e.g.: buying gifts)		
Arguments not fights		
Lack of communication to the point it affects daily functioning		
Hitting		
Deprivation of basic resources		
Verbal bantering to the point of distress		
Isolated/isolating behaviour to the extent of causing distress		
Emotional Blackmail		
Threatening to use a weapon/object		
Humorous bantering		
Parent is visibly shaken, upset and unsound		
Shoving and Pushing		
Verbal affection		
Insulting		

Attacking using weapon or object		
Slapping		
Walking out/ disappearing without notice		
Threatening to leave, causing distress		
Claims that they together for the sake of their children/society		

Please read the following statements. To the right of each, you will find seven numbers, ranging from "1" (Strongly Disagree) on the left to "7" (Strongly Agree) on the right. Tick below the number which best indicates your feelings about that statement.

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. When I make plans, I follow through with them.							
2. I usually manage one way or another.							
3. I am able to depend on myself more than anyone else.							
4. Keeping interested in things is important to me.							
5. I can be on my own if I have to.							
6. I feel proud that I have accomplished things in life.							
7. I usually take things in stride.							
8. I am friends with myself.							
9. I feel that I can handle many things at a time.							
10. I am determined.							
11. I seldom wonder what the point of it all is.							
12. I take things one day at a time.							
13. I can get through difficult times because I've experienced difficulty before.							
14. I have self-discipline.							
15. I keep interested in things.							
16. I can usually find something to laugh about.							
17. My belief in myself gets me through hard times.							
18. In an emergency, I'm someone people can generally rely on.							
19. I can usually look at a situation in a number of ways.							
20. Sometimes I make myself do things whether I want to or not							
21. My life has meaning.							
22. I do not dwell on things that I can't do anything about.							
23. When I'm in a difficult situation, I can usually find my way out of it.							
24. I have enough energy to do what I have to do.							
25. It's okay if there are people who don't like me.							

APPENDIX B: Qualitative**Participant Name:** _____**Contact Number:** _____**Participant Code:** _____

We at Ashoka University are working on a research project, and we would appreciate your participation. In this interview, we will be asking you questions about your mental wellbeing, your family structure, and family dynamics. **This interview will be recorded. All your information will be kept confidential unless the researcher perceives danger to participant or others.** Your responses will be used only for this research and will not be shared with anyone. They will not be used for legal or any other purposes. If at any point you don't wish to answer a question or if you wish to end this interview, you can let us know and we will end the interview.

If you are willing to participate in this research, sign below. Thank you.

Interviewees Signature:**Date:****Interviewer Signature:**

Initials: _____

Code: _____

What gender do you identify with?

1. Female
2. Male
3. Other _____

Which year were you born in?

1. 2000
2. 1999
3. 1998
4. 1997
5. 1996
6. 1995

Which year of college are you in?

1. First year UG
 2. Second Year UG
 3. Third Year UG
 4. Fourth Year UG
 5. Fifth Year UG
 6. First Year Graduate
 7. Second Year Graduate
 8. Gap Year (Pre-UG)
 9. Gap Year (Post UG)
 10. Working
-