

# Development and Validation of Situationship Scale: Preliminary Phase

<sup>1</sup> Shreya Pushkar, <sup>2</sup> Dr. Pankaj Singh,

*1Post Graduation Clinical Psychology, Student.*

*Affiliation: Amity Institute Of Psychology and Allied Sciences, Amity University*

*Doctorate, Assistant Professor III*

*Affiliation: Amity Institute Of Psychology and Allied Sciences, Amity University*

## **Abstract**

### **Aim: Development and Validation of the Situationship Scale: Preliminary Phase**

Situationships, or relationships that lack a clear definition or label, have become increasingly prevalent among young adults. These relationships are often characterized by ambiguity, uncertainty, and a lack of commitment. To better understand the impact of this type of relationship, a research study was conducted to develop and validate a Situationship Scale during the Preliminary Phase. The primary objective of this study was to conduct qualitative research to define what a Situationship is, identify its effects, and its contributing factors. The target population for this study was young adults aged 18 to 25 who have been or are currently in a Situationship. A sample of 30 individuals was taken using purposeful and snowball sampling. The study revealed five themes that emerged from the analysis of the data: ambiguity in relationships, emotional distress, cognitive distress, sexual needs, and individual preferences. The theme of ambiguity in relationships was the most prevalent, indicating that a lack of clear definition or label for the relationship can cause confusion and uncertainty. The theme of emotional distress was also prominent, with participants reporting feelings of anxiety, frustration, and sadness related to their Situationship.

The theme of cognitive distress was related to the mental strain caused by the ambiguity and uncertainty of the relationship. Participants reported difficulty focusing on other areas of their lives due to the constant questioning and analysis of their Situationship. The theme of sexual needs highlighted the importance of physical intimacy in relationships, even those that lack a clear definition. Finally, the theme of individual preferences emphasized the importance of personal values and beliefs in the dynamics of a Situationship. Overall, the study showed the impact of a Situationship on one's personal and professional life. The lack of clarity and commitment in these relationships can cause emotional, cognitive, and sexual distress, which can affect one's overall well-being. The findings of this study can be used to develop interventions and support systems for young adults who are in or have been in a Situationship. Further research is needed to validate the Situationship Scale and to explore the long-term effects of these types of relationships.

## **Introduction**

Scholars and researchers in fields as diverse as psychology, sociology, and communication studies have long been captivated by the complexities of human connections. Contextual elements, such as the particular conditions in which an interaction takes place, have a significant role in shaping the nature of these partnerships over time. Tools that capture the multifaceted, context-dependent character of interpersonal relationships are needed, despite the fact that most research has concentrated on measuring and understanding more stable relationship variables like attachment types or personality traits. Studying relationships that do not conform to the traditional categories of friendship, romantic partnership, or familial bonds can often be a complex and

challenging task. To address this issue, our research has taken the initiative of developing and validating a new scale for "situationships". The first stage of this process involved conducting qualitative research to define the concept of a situationship, identify the various factors that define it, and extract emerging themes. This information has been instrumental in the development of a new instrument called the "Situationship Scale", which will be created in the final phase of our research.

The word "situationship" was created in the first decade of the 21st century to characterize unconventional forms of social interaction. Their fluidity, lack of rigid limits, and general lack of clarity identify them. According to literature, a "situationship" is a type of relationship where one person is preoccupied and dismissive, leading to a pattern of pursuit and withdrawal (Becker-Phelps, 2014, p.140). This type of relationship is characterized by a partner who shows interest but doesn't seem to care about their partner's feelings or thoughts. They may dismiss their partner's desire for closeness as being too needy (Becker-Phelps, 2014, p.140). A situationship is an informal dating relationship without a formal commitment or label between the two people involved, but nonetheless behaves similarly to more serious, committed partnerships in terms of dating activities. According to this description, people in a situationship go on dates as they would in a committed relationship, but they do not commit to each other and they do not have a name for their relationship (Gibson, 2020). The absence of commitment, clarity, or the aim of a long-term relationship characterizes many "situationships," which may include romantic or platonic features or even cohabitation. A situationship is a relationship of convenience with undefined parameters and no expectations for long-term commitment (Miller, 2019). A situationship is a romantic or sexual relationship that lacks clear boundaries and expectations. It is characterized by ambiguity and uncertainty, with both parties unsure of where they stand with each other. Situationships are often seen as a transitional stage between casual dating and a committed relationship, but they can also exist as a long-term arrangement. Researchers have defined situationships in varying ways, but all agree that they involve a lack of clarity and commitment. Situationships as relationships that prioritize autonomy and quick gratification without guilt (Edusi, 2014). Some have described situationships as "friends with benefits" with an emotional dimension, while others have emphasized the importance of communication and boundary-setting in navigating these types of relationships. Overall, situationships can be challenging to navigate and can lead to confusion and hurt feelings if expectations are not clearly communicated and respected. Such relationships are prevalent and important in today's culture since they may be found in a variety of settings, from casual dating to non-exclusive partnerships. The Situationship Scale aims to contribute to this developing body of knowledge by providing a valid and reliable tool for evaluating the nature and strength of such relationships.

The dramatic shifts in social norms and interpersonal practices have inspired researchers to learn more about situationships. New and varied relationship patterns have emerged as a result of changes in values and lifestyles made possible by technological developments and shifting societal conventions. This has led to a shift away from the ideal of a monogamous, lifelong commitment and toward a more fluid view of human interactions. These shifts force people into the unexplored seas of situationships, where emotional closeness and physical connection may coexist with future uncertainty. The lack of valid and thorough assessment instruments that can capture the multidimensional character of situationships has hampered research into the area. Improving our grasp of the intricate, ever-changing nature of interpersonal interactions in modern society requires the creation and validation of tools like the Situationship Scale. This research aims to help academics, therapists, and people better navigate the complexities of situationships by offering a reliable and accurate assessment instrument, with the ultimate goal of promoting healthier and more rewarding interactions in the contemporary world. According to Hsieh (2021, para. 1), a "situationship" is a term used to describe the uncertain period between a platonic relationship and a committed one. Unlike traditional relationships or friends with benefits, there are no clear agreements or discussions about expectations or labels for this type of relationship. Here are some ways that a situationship differs from casual dating, an open relationship, and a friend with benefits.

### **1. Friends with Benefits (FWB):**

Friends with benefits are individuals who engage in sexual activity without any expectation of romantic commitment. This type of relationship is primarily focused on the physical aspect, with a foundation of

friendship. Unlike situationships, friends with benefits have a clear understanding of their arrangement, which emphasizes the sexual component.

## **2. Casual Dating:**

Casual dating is a type of dating where individuals spend time together without the expectation of a serious commitment. Emotional involvement can vary depending on the individuals involved, with some seeking companionship and others seeking fun and casual connections. Sexual activity may or may not be involved, and the relationship typically lacks the exclusivity seen in committed relationships.

## **3. Open Relationships:**

In open relationships, partners agree that they can have romantic or sexual relationships with other people while maintaining their central primary relationship. Clear boundaries and rules are established regarding outside involvement, and communication and trust are of utmost importance to maintain transparency and ensure that all parties are comfortable.

## **4. Traditional Romantic Relationships:**

A romantic relationship is built on mutual commitment, emotional intimacy, and exclusivity. It often involves long-term planning, such as living together or getting married. Partners in a relationship prioritise each other's well-being and invest in building a future together. These elements are what make a relationship special and fulfilling. It's a beautiful thing to have someone you can rely on, someone who shares your life with you, and someone who is there for you through thick and thin. A relationship is not just about the good times, but also about overcoming challenges together and growing together as a couple. Ultimately, a strong relationship is built on trust, communication, and a deep understanding of each other.

### **Concept of Relationships and Their Importance in Human Lives**

Before delving into the historical and contemporary dynamics of relationships, it is essential to establish a foundational understanding of the concept of relationships and their fundamental significance to human existence.

#### **Defining Relationships**

A relationship, in its essence, is a link or bond between two or more people. These connections come in a myriad of forms, encompassing family bonds, friendships, romantic attachments, professional affiliations, and more. Each type of relationship serves a unique purpose, fulfilling various emotional, psychological, and social needs.

#### **The Importance of Relationships**

Relationships are a cornerstone of human life, playing a pivotal role in shaping our experiences and overall well-being. They provide us with emotional support during challenging times, enhance our sense of belonging and identity, and offer a platform for the expression of love, affection, and intimacy. The quality of our relationships is often a primary determinant of our happiness and life satisfaction.

#### **Historical Changes in Societal Norms and Values Related to Relationships**

Human relationships have been deeply influenced by societal norms and values throughout history. These norms are not static but, rather, have evolved and adapted in response to cultural, economic, and technological changes. To understand the modern landscape of relationships, we must first examine the historical forces that have shaped our understanding of them.

#### **Traditional Relationship Norms**

Throughout much of human history, traditional relationship norms have prevailed. These norms were often characterized by prescribed gender roles, monogamy, and a strong emphasis on family units. In many societies, arranged marriages were common, with the family's interests often taking precedence over individual desires.

## **Changing Social Norms**

The 20th and 21st centuries have witnessed significant shifts in societal norms and values surrounding relationships. These changes have been driven by factors such as feminism, the sexual revolution, and the recognition of LGBTQ+ rights. As a result, gender roles have become more flexible, and individuals now have greater agency in choosing their partners and relationship structures.

## **The Rise of Non-Traditional Relationship Structures and the Emergence of Situationships**

The changing landscape of relationships has given rise to non-traditional and unconventional structures that challenge the conventional notions of partnership. One of the most intriguing phenomena to emerge in this context is the concept of "situationships."

## **The Concept of Situationships**

Situationships, a term coined in the early 21st century, describe those interpersonal connections that do not fit neatly into established categories like friendship, romantic partnership, or family ties. They are characterized by their ambiguity, fluidity, and lack of clearly defined boundaries. In situationships, emotional intimacy and physical involvement may coexist with uncertainty about the future.

## **Factors Driving the Emergence of Situationships**

The rise of situationships can be attributed to various factors, including changing dating and mating practices, the influence of technology, and evolving social norms. As societal expectations around relationships become more flexible, individuals often find themselves navigating the uncharted waters of situationships, leading to intriguing questions about their nature, dynamics, and impact on individuals and society. In this investigation, we set sail to learn how partnerships and non-traditional relationship arrangements have changed throughout time. We will delve into the complexities of situationships and explore the impact of changing societal norms and values on the way we connect with others in the modern world. Ultimately, this journey will illuminate the intricate interplay between relationships, culture, and historical context, shedding light on the profound importance of human connections in our lives.

## **Problem Statement**

The modern era has witnessed a shift in societal norms and values, leading to the rise of non-traditional relationship structures, particularly situationships, which are characterized by ambiguity and fluidity. Despite their prevalence, there is a significant gap in the existing research and a lack of dedicated measurement tools for assessing situationships. This research intends to fill the gap by defining situationships, identifying factors that contribute to situationships, and deriving themes from them in the preliminary phase. In the final phase, we aim to develop and validate the Situationship Scale, which will provide a comprehensive means to understand and measure the dynamics of these complex connections.

## **Objective of the study**

The objective of this study is to define situationships, identify the factors that contribute to them, and derive themes from these factors in the preliminary phase. In the final phase, we will develop and validate the Situationship Scale, which will be a reliable and comprehensive tool to assess the quality, dynamics, and unique characteristics of situationships. This will help address the existing gap in our understanding of relationships.

## **Scope of the study**

The objective of this study is to primarily focus on the definition of situationships, while identifying factors and themes through a qualitative study. In the final phase, the development and validation of the Situationship Scale will be aimed at, with the objective of providing a reliable tool for assessing the nuanced nature of situationships, that is a growing phenomenon in modern relationships. The research encompasses a wide range of scenarios, including non-exclusive partnerships, casual dating, and ambiguous connections. It seeks to establish the psychometric properties, validity, and reliability of the scale, offering a comprehensive instrument

for researchers, clinicians, and individuals to better comprehend and navigate the intricacies of these unconventional relationship structures.

### **Review Of Literature**

Gutterman, 2023 investigated “Let’s Talk About Sex Talk” to explore the role of gossip in helping women navigate hookup culture. Hookup culture, characterized by casual sexual encounters with low commitment, comes with physical and emotional risks for women such as gender-based violence and emotional damage. Gossip between women can provide them with valuable information about potential partners, as well as learn about social norms and expectations within hookup culture. Using literature review, interviews, and participant observation, this study examines the ways in which gossip, through both online and offline formats, is used by women to bond, establish protective social networks, and evaluate sexual partners. The findings suggest that gossip can be a valuable tool for women to understand and combat the complex and often negative aspects of hookup culture, and that the content and context of gossip can reveal important insights into the disciplines of gender, sexuality, and social hierarchies. This research contributes to our understanding of how the interpersonal behavior and discourse of women allow them to protect themselves and others from systematic societal dangers in the context of sexual expression.

Choudhry V et al., 2022 did a research on Understanding sexual relationship complications is crucial to understanding Ugandan university students' dangerous sexual behavior. Nine grounded theory-based focus groups with 31 male and 33 female students in 2014 examined sexual interactions in their lives. ‘Relationships at campus are situationships’ was the main category, referring to sexual encounters among Ugandan university students. The research found that sexual relations follow a script that changes to handle different conditions. These relationships' sexual scripts were shaped by local socio-cultural norms and youth global ambitions. Student discussions about transactional sexual relationships typically included these sexual scripts. Transactional sexual relationships were motivated by ‘fulfilling aspirations’ and ‘being coerced into exchanging sex’ to overcome socio-economic disadvantages. The idea of a university as a sexualized setting where one may explore relationships, drink, and postpone marriage and family helped sexual interactions. Cultural sexual scripts at Ugandan universities were influenced by globalization and consumerism but remained anchored in traditional gender norms. Both young men and women, in a variety of settings, may be at risk for sexually unhealthy implicit ideas about sexual interactions.

Monterrosa, 2021 analyzed the romantic history and present-day relationships of Black women from the working class who had been affected by the criminal justice system. Thirty-one working-class Black women (aged 18-65) in Southern California who had been affected by the criminal-legal system were interviewed using intersectional research approaches. Six distinct relationship statuses emerged from the data when examined via a Black feminist criminological lens. Women experienced varying degrees of emotional and psychological stress depending on their relationship status since it fell short of their expectations.

Gibson.J.Tierica, 2020 did researches of casual relationships continue to focus mostly on white people, especially white women? Research on social dating continues to focus on white people and their involvement and experiences in casual dating relationships, despite the fact that the majority of women in the United States are now women of color, primarily black women. One definition of a situationship is a dating relationship that lacks a firm commitment but is more than just casual hookups. To better understand the ways in which black women's dating experiences are shaped by their race and gender, semi-structured interviews were performed with black women. As this research shows, black women often use situationships as a stepping stone to more serious relationships in an effort to obtain the "girlfriend" label. Although situationships seem to deviate from the norm of monogamous partnerships, they might make Black women feel as if they are making progress toward long-term relationships. Furthermore, I discovered that situationships tend to be repressive to Black women's sexual autonomy and helpful to males, eventually affecting how they regard themselves and the culture of dating within the black community via demonstrating behaviors of accentuated femininity and hegemonic masculinity.

## **Methodology**

### **AIM**

The aim of this research is to conceptualize the notion of 'situationships', determine the key factors that influence them, and extract themes from these factors during the initial phase. Subsequently, we intend to create and authenticate the Situationship Scale, which will serve as a dependable and comprehensive instrument to evaluate the quality, dynamics, and distinct features of situationships. This will bridge the existing void in our comprehension of relationships.

### **Objectives**

The primary objective of this exploratory research is to define the concept of 'situationship' and its impacts through an in-depth qualitative study. The ultimate aim of this research is to develop a reliable and valid scale that can effectively measure the different factors of situationship. The proposed scale will be based on a comprehensive review of the existing literature on situationship and will take into account the various factors that can influence its components, such as age, gender, culture, and personal preferences.

To this end, we will test the proposed scale using a diverse sample of participants from different demographic backgrounds and refine it based on the results of the testing. The final scale will be a valuable tool for measuring and comparing the impact of situationship across various populations. It will provide researchers with a reliable and valid instrument to assess the different aspects of situationship, thereby facilitating future research in this area.

In conclusion, this research aims to provide a better understanding of situationship and its impacts through a rigorous and systematic study. The proposed scale will be an essential contribution to the field, enabling researchers to examine the complexities of situationship and its various components.

### **Approach**

The researchers in this study opted to use a qualitative strategy. Empirical work is performed by the acquisition of data that may either confirm, disprove, or challenge hypotheses, shedding light on various findings in the process (May, 1997). In qualitative research, the researcher gathers information about a topic of interest via a process called induction and uses that information to develop hypotheses, models, and theories. Rather than using a quantitative method, which is more structured, large-scale, and numerically based, a qualitative method was chosen because of its greater capacity to gain depth and meaning based on an individual's experiences with unemployment along with their beliefs and feelings.

### **Interview**

This research was conducted using semi-structured interviews. They gave respondents greater room for explanation, which meant researchers could probe in more directions and learn more nuanced responses. Individuals are given more leeway in answering questions in semi-structured interviews than in standardized interview, but the format still allows for reasonable comparison when compared to the focused interview (May, 1997). Kumar (2005) argues that the interview is the best method for investigating delicate topics since the interviewer may prime the participant for sensitive questions and provide in-depth explanations of difficult ones. Interviews are a great way to get detailed information about a topic, but they can also be time-consuming and costly. varied interviews might provide vastly varied quality replies because of subtle differences in the dynamics between the interviewer and the interviewee (Kumar, 2005). Furthermore, the interviewer's experience, abilities, and dedication all have a role in the quality of the resulting data (Kumar, 2005). There is also the possibility of researcher bias. Furthermore, it can be challenging to gather reliable data on the research subject if only a small number of participants are involved, in contrast to the quantitative approach, which typically includes more people and thus, in some cases, can provide more comprehensive and reliable data results.

### **Sample Selection**

The researcher used a purposeful sampling strategy to find study participants. In qualitative research, purposeful sampling is used to pick information-rich instances in order to make the most of available resources (Patton, 2002). This method of sampling entails choosing respondents with extensive first-hand knowledge of the study phenomena (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Snowball sampling was the method of deliberate sampling used by the study's author. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), a snowball sample is one in which the researcher starts with data from a small number of participants they are able to find and then allows those participants to recruit others who may be willing to participate and meet the criteria for the study, and so on. When the intended recipients are hard to locate or otherwise want to remain anonymous, this method is used. Phenomenographic approach suggests recruiting between 15 and 30 people for high-quality qualitative research. Thirty people were interviewed and provided data for the study after the researcher recruited them.

### **Exclusion Criteria**

- Individuals above the age of 25 years
- Individuals below the age of 18 years

### **Inclusion Criteria**

- The age group referred to is young adults between the ages of 18 and 25.
- Individuals who are or have been in a situationship

### **Data Collection**

August of 2023 was the month of data collecting. We used Google Meet for all of our meetings and interviews, and transcribed every word of every interview. There were thirty people there. All of the interviewees were notified of the upcoming phone interview by phone call. All interviewees opted to hold their sessions on Google Meet, where they could relax and feel safe enough to share their thoughts and opinions openly. Even though the questions in a semi-structured interview are normally arranged in a schedule-like fashion, the order in which they are asked might change. There should be room for the interviewer to dig further and ask more in-depth questions in response to what are seen to be noteworthy responses (Bryman, 2004), all while enabling the researcher and participant to get to know each other and feel comfortable opening up to one another. The researcher was given a detailed interview plan to follow to ensure the interview went well. All respondents were asked the same broad range of questions on their situationist experiences and their lives. The questions were mostly free-form, with just a few of closed ones asking for specifics like age, duration of relationship, and so on. The interview will consist mostly of open-ended questions such as "How do you feel situationship has affected you personally?" More information may be gleaned from respondents to open-ended inquiries like these (Sarantakos, 1988). these is particularly true when dealing with sensitive topics. The researcher made an effort to ensure that all interviewees understood and could relate to the terminology used (Bryman, 2001).

### **Research Method Used**

#### **Thematic Analysis**

The researcher used Thematic content analysis. The researcher did line-by-line coding. Thematic Analysis is a research methodology used in qualitative research to identify and analyze themes in textual data. This approach involves thoroughly examining each line of text and coding it based on its content, eventually grouping these codes into larger themes. To conduct thematic content analysis by line-by-line coding, researchers typically start by creating a set of initial codes based on the research question or topic. They then read each line of the text and assign the appropriate code, creating a coding scheme. Once all of the data has been coded, the researcher can analyze the data by organizing the codes into themes and sub-themes. This methodology can be particularly useful in analyzing complex and nuanced textual data, such as interviews or survey responses. Thematic content

analysis by line-by-line coding allows researchers to identify patterns and themes in the data that may not be immediately apparent, leading to a deeper understanding of the research topic.

### **Phenomenological Interpretative Approach**

The phenomenological interpreted approach is a qualitative research methodology that aims to understand the lived experiences of individuals. This approach involves a deep exploration of the subjective experiences of individuals and the meanings they attach to those experiences. It is often used in disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and philosophy to investigate a variety of phenomena. The phenomenological approach is based on the philosophy of phenomenology, which emphasizes the study of consciousness and the experience of reality. This approach involves a suspension of preconceived notions and assumptions, allowing researchers to explore the phenomenon without imposing their own biases. To conduct a phenomenological study, researchers typically use methods such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, and participant observation. The data collected is then analyzed using a process called phenomenological reduction, which involves identifying and extracting the essential themes and structures of the experiences under investigation.

### **Procedure**

To conduct the qualitative research, A specific procedure was followed to ensure the accuracy and validity of the research findings. First, the researcher started by defining the research question which guided the entire process. This helped the researcher to focus on a specific topic and avoid getting sidetracked. After defining the research question researcher chose a research design that was appropriate for the research question. In this case, the researcher chose a qualitative design which allowed the researcher to gather in-depth data and insights. Next, the researcher selected a sample of participants who met the criteria for the research question. The researcher ensured that the sample was diverse and representative of the targeted population. The researchers then employed techniques including in-depth interviews, focus groups, and participant observation to compile their findings. The researcher specifically asked participants open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses. Once the researcher had collected the data, the researcher analyzed it using qualitative analysis techniques such as coding, categorizing, and theming. This helped the researcher to identify patterns and themes in the data.

### **Analysis Of Results**

The researcher transcribed the audio recordings verbatim and checked them against the recordings for any discrepancies. Open coding was used to label codes based on participants' language, staying close to the data. After thematic analysis and coding for all 30 transcripts, patterns and themes emerged. The researcher identified five global themes, including ambiguity in relationships, Emotional Distress, Cognitive Distress, intimacy needs and individual preferences. The study also looked into how being in a situationship affects both one's personal and professional life.

When questioned about "situationships" as a dating trend, the interviewee described it as a relationship where individuals refrain from committing to each other officially. This type of bond often lacks commitment, causes mental and emotional stress, creates confusion, and lacks direction and clear future goals. For example, one female interviewee aged 25 years old stated:

***"I would define situationship as more or less the shittiest form of relationship I think we can even call it a relationshit because bro there is no one pathway they don't even know what they are doing or how much it's affecting the other person's emotional or mentally because of what they are doing they just don't give a damn about others feelings."***

The interviewees also noted that individuals frequently choose this type of relationship for casual fun, sexual needs, or self-exploration, without offering any hope for a long-term commitment to their partner. For example a male respondent of 25 years of age said:

***"A beautiful bond with no boundaries or limitations and no restrictions. I did it for casual fun but I am not the only one who did this. There are many other people who do this for exploring their sexual needs and just***

*to hang out with the other person or just for casual fun. Without worrying about the attachment or any kind of misunderstanding which we just clear out before that there will be no commitment.”*

Respondents also mentioned that there is not a particular timeline for this kind of bond and the level of emotional and mental stress it causes can lead to a significant disturbance in an individual's personal life. For example a 25-year-old interviewee shared how being in a situationship has impacted her personal life:

*“I'm frustrated by the lack of communication and clarity I don't know where to go and what to do my family is forcing me to get married but I don't want to plus the person is also not giving me any confirmation I feel like I am stuck and it's really emotionally exhausting sometimes its feels like I would get an anxiety attack just thinking all this”*

Being in a situationship can be frustrating and have a significant impact on a person's professional life. Several interviewees reported that situationships caused them to worry excessively, leading to a lack of concentration at work and decreased productivity. Respondents also mentioned that their time management suffered due to staying up all night to talk to their partner, disrupting their sleeping schedule and causing fatigue in the mornings due to insufficient rest. A female interviewee of 22 age mentioned about her professional life disturbances due to situationship:

*“It affected my professional life as I used to be very anxious and self conscious and wasted quite a lot of time confused angered and saddened by the situationship but did not have the guts to cut it off my creativity and productivity was hampered by it”*

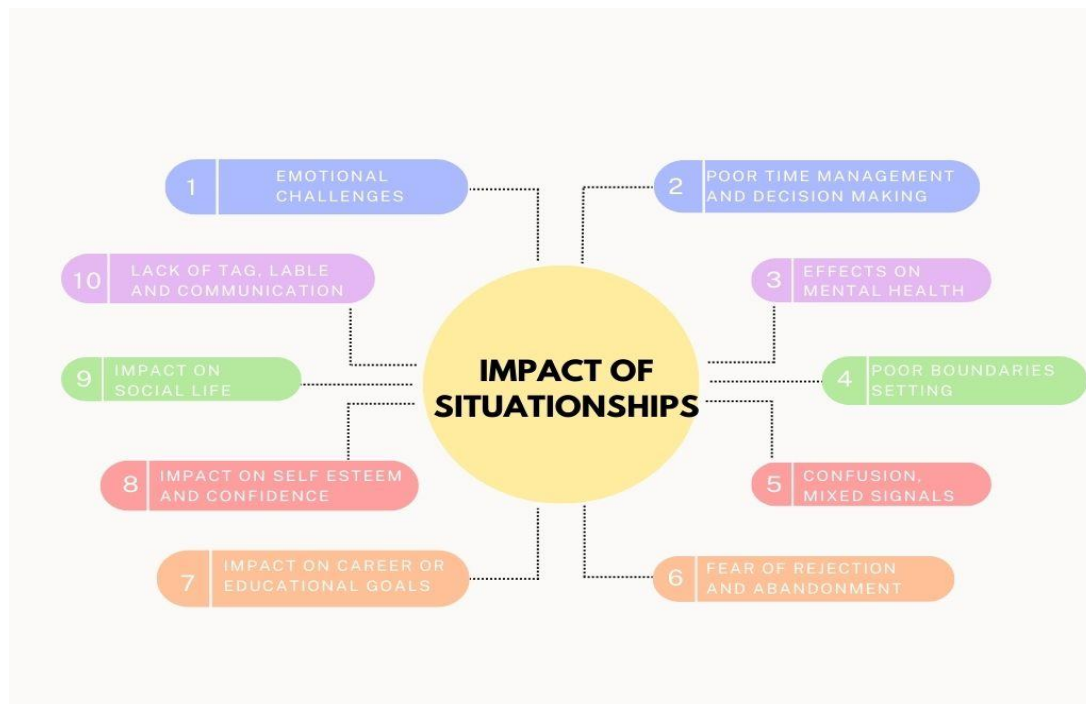
In conclusion, situationships can be detrimental to an individual's emotional, mental, personal, and professional life. The lack of commitment and communication can lead to confusion, stress, and anxiety. While some individuals may enter into this type of relationship for casual fun or self-exploration, it is important to consider the potential consequences before engaging in such a bond.

In the study, the researcher identified five global themes that emphasize the influence of situationships on relationships. The findings underline the significance of transparent communication and commitment to the success of any relationship. Additionally, the researcher observed the interdependence of these themes and their impact on both personal and professional aspects of life.

## Discussion

The aim of this qualitative study was first, to explore the situationship its definition, and its impact on emotional health, impact on psychological health, impact on cognitive health, impact on personal life and impact on professional life. Second was the Development and validation of Situationship Scale. A situationship is a term used to describe a relationship that lacks clear boundaries and commitment. It can involve two people who are romantically involved but not in an official relationship, or it can refer to a friendship that has blurred lines of intimacy. The effects of a situationship can be both positive and negative. On the one hand, it can allow for a level of freedom and flexibility that a traditional relationship may not provide. It can also be a way to explore one's feelings and desires without the pressure of commitment. However, situationships can also lead to confusion, frustration, and even emotional pain. Without clear boundaries or expectations, one person may feel used or taken advantage of, while the other may feel guilty or unsure of how to proceed. It can also lead to a lack of trust and communication, as both parties may be hesitant to confront their true feelings or intentions. Psychologically, situationships can be taxing on one's mental and emotional health. The uncertainty and ambiguity of the relationship can lead to feelings of anxiety, stress, and even depression. It can also lead to a sense of self-doubt and insecurity, as one may question their worth or desirability. In terms of personal and professional effects, situationships can impact one's overall well-being and productivity. The emotional toll of the relationship can spill over into other aspects of one's life, affecting their ability to focus or perform at their best. It can also lead to a sense of isolation or disconnection from others, as the individual may feel unable to share their experiences or feelings with others. The impacts of a situationship are illustrated in Figure 1 through a flow chart. These impacts include emotional consequences, communication challenges, difficulties with time management, effects on mental health, impacts on social life, issues with setting boundaries, fear of rejection or

abandonment, inability to plan for the future, potential for jealousy and insecurity, lack of support and stability, confusion and mixed signals, difficulty in defining the relationship, negative impact on self-esteem and confidence, among others.



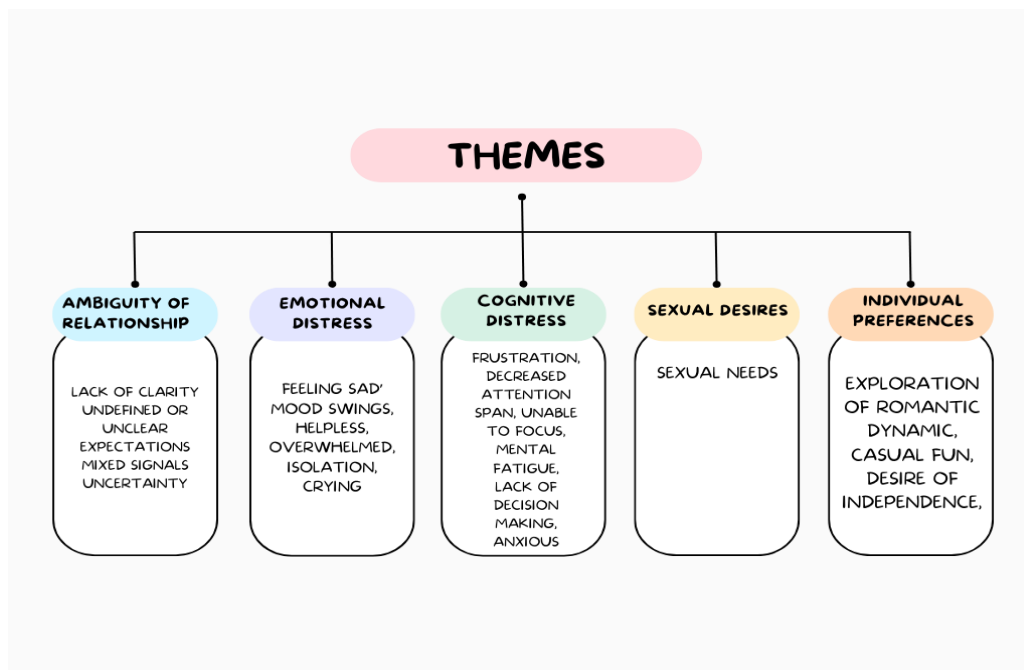
**Fig:1, Impact of situationships**

The development and validation of the Situationship Scale is an important contribution to the field of psychology, as it provides a tool to capture the multifaceted, context-dependent character of interpersonal relationships. While most research has concentrated on measuring and understanding more stable relationship variables like attachment types or personality traits, the Situationship Scale fills a gap in the literature by focusing on relationships that do not fit neatly into the categories of friendship, romantic partnership, or familial bonds. The concept of "situationships" is relatively new, having been coined in the first decade of the 21st century to characterize unconventional forms of social interaction. These relationships are characterized by their fluidity, lack of rigid limits, and general lack of clarity. They may include romantic or platonic features or even cohabitation, but they are defined by the absence of commitment, clarity, or the aim of a long-term relationship. The Situationship Scale can provide a means of measuring and understanding the complexities of these relationships. Its development and validation will involve a rigorous process of item generation, pilot testing, and factor analysis to ensure its reliability and validity. The Situationship Scale has important implications for both research and clinical practice. From a research perspective, it provides a means of studying relationships that are often overlooked in the literature, as well as a tool for exploring the factors that contribute to their formation and maintenance. From a clinical perspective, it can help therapists assess the nature of their clients' relationships and tailor their interventions accordingly. For example, a therapist working with a client who is in a situationship may need to focus on communication skills and boundary-setting, whereas a therapist working with a client in a more traditional romantic relationship may need to focus on attachment issues or conflict resolution.

The researcher conducted interviews with a total of 30 individuals between the ages of 18 and 25, consisting of 22 females and 8 males. Prior to the interview, the researcher obtained consent from all participants. The interviews were recorded and transcribed in full for thematic analysis. Following transcription, we conducted a thorough thematic analysis using line-by-line coding to extract basic themes, organizing themes, and global

themes. Additionally, the researcher utilized a phenomenological interpretation approach to gain a deeper understanding of the subjective experiences of individuals and the meanings they attach to those experiences.

Figure 2 demonstrates themes including ambiguity in relationships, emotional and cognitive distress, intimacy needs, and individual preferences. It was also observed that situationships have an impact on both personal and professional aspects of life.



**Fig: 2, Thematic Framework of Situationship**

The first theme was the ambiguity of relationship which refers to a situation where the nature and status of a particular relationship are not definitively established, leading to confusion and uncertainty for those involved. This lack of clarity can cause stress and anxiety, and it is important to address and clarify the terms of the relationship to ensure everyone feels informed and secure. A situationship can be likened to a scenario where two people are dating but have not yet defined their relationship. They may be spending time together, going on dates, and even being intimate, but neither party has explicitly stated what they are to each other. This lack of clarity can lead to confusion and misunderstandings, causing unnecessary stress and anxiety. For example one interviewee stated:-

***“I and my partner were in kind of bond where he was talking to other girls too which was affecting me and when i confronted it with him he said we are not bound to each other we can talk to anyone we want but when i started talking to someone else he started getting angry and would stop talking to me because he was very possessive about me but also he was not ready to commit officially to me. I always had this fear that one day he will leave me when he will find someone new maybe he was just with me because I was giving him emotional support which he was not getting it from others.”***

This issue highlights a significant problem in modern dating and interpersonal dynamics, with far-reaching impacts on the individuals involved. The problem at the core of situationships is the lack of definitive establishment of the nature and status of a particular relationship. When two people engage in what seems like a romantic connection but fail to explicitly define their relationship, it creates a breeding ground for confusion and uncertainty. The impact of this ambiguity is multifaceted and profound. First and foremost, individuals caught in situationships often experience heightened stress and anxiety. The absence of clarity about their partner's intentions and commitment can lead to constant worrying and second-guessing. The story shared by one interviewee vividly illustrates this point, with the person feeling torn between their partner's mixed signals,

emotional possessiveness, and reluctance to commit officially. This emotional turmoil can have detrimental effects on mental and emotional well-being. Furthermore, the impact of situationships extends beyond the emotional realm. They can hinder personal growth and future planning. Without a clear understanding of where a relationship is heading, individuals may find it challenging to make important life decisions, such as career choices, relocation, or family planning. This uncertainty can lead to missed opportunities and stagnation.

The second theme extracted was emotional distress is a term used to describe a state of mental or emotional strain or pain, often caused by difficult or traumatic life events. It can manifest in a variety of symptoms, including anxiety, depression, anger, fear, and sadness. After analysing the interviews researcher found that people have a significant impact on their overall well-being and quality of life because of emotional distress. Situationships can often lead to emotional distress if one or both partners are unclear on the nature of the relationship. Uncertainty and ambiguity can cause anxiety and fear, leading to emotional strain.

***“Because there was a lot of mess created by us that it started fucking with my emotions. I used to cry a lot for that one shitty person who didn’t gave a fuck about my feelings I even went to a psychologist because it was going a lot in my head and I couldn’t control it so I had to take the help”***

the research has highlighted a pressing issue in the realm of interpersonal relationships: emotional distress. Emotional distress is characterized by a state of mental or emotional strain and is often triggered by challenging or traumatic life events. This study, based on interviews and personal accounts, sheds light on the profound impact of emotional distress on individuals' overall well-being and quality of life. One prominent theme that emerged from the analysis is the role of ambiguous relationships, often referred to as "situationships," in causing emotional distress. When individuals find themselves in relationships where the nature of the connection is unclear or uncertain, it can lead to heightened anxiety, fear, and emotional strain. The narrative shared by one interviewee vividly illustrates the profound emotional toll such situations can take. The impact of emotional distress, as exemplified in this account, goes beyond mere emotional discomfort. It can disrupt daily life, lead to mental health challenges such as anxiety and depression, and necessitate professional intervention, such as therapy or counseling. Emotional distress is not only a personal struggle but also a societal concern, as it affects individuals' abilities to lead fulfilling lives and contribute to their communities.

The third theme was cognitive distress. The term "cognitive distress" refers to a state of mental or emotional discomfort caused by a disruption in one's usual patterns of thought, perception, or behavior. This can occur as a result of various life events, including trauma, illness, or significant changes in personal or professional circumstances. Some common symptoms of cognitive distress may include difficulty concentrating, feelings of anxiety or depression, and a general sense of unease or dissatisfaction with one's current situation. It is important to seek support from trusted individuals or professionals if you are experiencing cognitive distress, as it can significantly impact your overall well-being and quality of life. Cognitive distress can be experienced in various life events, including situationships. A situationship is a romantic relationship that lacks clear boundaries and commitment. It can cause cognitive distress if one's usual patterns of thought, perception, or behaviour are disrupted. Symptoms may include difficulty concentrating, feelings of anxiety or depression, and a general sense of unease or dissatisfaction with the current relationship. For example of one interviewee:-

***“ because of all this confusion I was not able to concentrate on my studies I became emotionally weak and was used to lost all day in daydreaming except for focusing on my work and giving hundred per cent to my work sometimes I feel like crying or sometimes it just felt so numb. And sometimes I used to think about him a lot my chest feels so heavy and my hands used to shiver sometimes”***

the third theme explored in this discussion is cognitive distress, which is characterized by a state of mental or emotional discomfort arising from disruptions in one's usual patterns of thought, perception, or behavior. Cognitive distress can be triggered by various life events, including trauma, illness, or significant personal and professional changes. The impact of cognitive distress on an individual's well-being and quality of life can be substantial. In the context of romantic relationships, such as situationships, cognitive distress can manifest in various ways. When someone finds themselves in a situationship, a relationship lacking clear boundaries and commitment, it can disrupt their usual thought processes and emotional state. This disruption can lead to

symptoms like difficulty concentrating, heightened feelings of anxiety or depression, and a pervasive sense of unease or dissatisfaction with the current relationship. The above example from an interviewee vividly illustrates the detrimental impact of cognitive distress within a situationship. The interviewee describes experiencing significant challenges in focusing on their studies, emotional weakness, daydreaming, and even physical manifestations of distress such as chest heaviness and trembling hands. This firsthand account underscores the profound impact cognitive distress can have on an individual's mental and emotional well-being.

The fourth theme, Intimacy refers to the emotional and physical closeness individuals require to feel connected and fulfilled in their relationships. This can include activities such as cuddling, holding hands, sharing personal thoughts and feelings, and engaging in sexual intimacy. Different people have different levels of intimacy needs, and it is important to communicate and respect each other's boundaries in order to maintain a healthy and fulfilling relationship.

***“Physical intimacy plays a major role in most situationships a good chunk of people are in a situationship because they crave physical intimacy without having to deal with the emotional maturity and competence an established relationship requires and when we discuss about the preferences, boundaries about physical intimacy it sets a clear tone for the relationship and avoids conflict and I am saying it from my personal experience”***

The issue of intimacy, specifically physical intimacy, holds a significant place in many situationships. It's evident that a considerable number of individuals find themselves in situationships primarily to fulfill their physical intimacy needs, often avoiding the emotional maturity and commitment that a formal relationship demands. The impact of this dynamic is multifaceted. Firstly, the problem lies in the blurred boundaries and lack of clear communication regarding physical intimacy within situationships. This can lead to misunderstandings, unmet expectations, and ultimately conflict between individuals involved. Without open and honest discussions about preferences and boundaries, it becomes challenging to maintain a healthy and fulfilling situationship. Furthermore, the impact extends beyond the individuals directly involved. Situationships that primarily revolve around physical intimacy may inadvertently perpetuate a cycle of emotional avoidance and hinder personal growth in relationships. This pattern can ultimately impede the development of more meaningful and lasting connections.

Fifth theme, when it comes to situationships, individual preferences play a crucial role in determining the success or failure of the relationship. Each person involved has their own needs, desires, and boundaries that must be respected and communicated effectively. While there may not be a formal commitment in a situationship, it is still important for both parties to be aware of and acknowledge each other's preferences. As confronted by one of the participants that she is just in the situationship because she don't want anything serious.

***“We are together but we refuse to confront our feelings seriously because we chose this just for casual fun and self-exploration. I don't know about my partner's reason but I chose to be in this, I already had so many bad past experiences so this time I don't want to rush things and would like to take it slow”***

One of the core issues in situationships is the potential disconnect between intentions and expectations. In the example above, one participant clearly expresses a desire for a casual, non-committal arrangement, driven by a need for fun and self-exploration, while also highlighting a fear of repeating past negative experiences. The impact of such a misalignment in preferences can be significant. It can lead to emotional turmoil, misunderstandings, and even hurt feelings, as one person's desire for a low-pressure, exploratory relationship clashes with the other's more serious intentions. The problem in this situation is the lack of clear and honest communication between the individuals involved. Without a frank discussion about their intentions and expectations, they may find themselves in a situation where one person feels used or led on while the other feels pressured or misunderstood. This disconnect can have lasting emotional and psychological impacts, potentially eroding trust and causing emotional distress.

The impact of a situationship on personal life can be significant. Without clear boundaries or communication, uncertainty and stress can arise as individuals try to navigate their feelings and expectations. This lack of clarity

can make it difficult to make future plans or commitments, leaving individuals unsure about the relationship's direction. For example:-

***“yes my personal life have been affected very much there is no freedom only possessiveness and fights and emotional drama or manipulation etc sometimes I think why the hell I am with this person and its feel like I'm in a state of limbo, and it's affecting my overall happiness”***

For instance, one respondent shared a personal account of the detrimental effects of a situationship on their life. They mentioned feelings of being trapped, with no freedom, and the relationship being marred by possessiveness, frequent conflicts, emotional drama, and manipulation. The respondent expressed moments of questioning the purpose of remaining in such a state of ambiguity, which ultimately had a negative impact on their overall happiness. In summary, situationships have the potential to disrupt personal lives by fostering an atmosphere of ambiguity and emotional turmoil, leading to stress, dissatisfaction, and uncertainty about the future of the relationship.

Impact of situationship on the professional life of an individual. Maintaining a healthy professional life is crucial to achieving success and personal fulfilment. The impact of situationships, whether positive or negative, can greatly affect one's career and overall job satisfaction. One of our participants shared her view on this:-

***“umm yes it has affected my work life a lot because of so much stress and emotional exhaustion i could not focus on one work completely because in the back of my head it was running like a tape and my attention span also decreased which resulted in poor work performance and I had very low motivation to do any thing.”***

The impact of situationships, whether they bring positivity or negativity, can significantly influence one's career trajectory and overall job satisfaction. The participant's experience, as shared, underscores the severity of the problem. Situationships can lead to high levels of stress and emotional exhaustion, which, in turn, disrupt one's ability to concentrate and perform well at work. This lack of focus can result in poor job performance and a diminished motivation to excel in one's professional endeavors. Ultimately, the negative impact of situationships on an individual's work life is a poignant reminder of the importance of maintaining healthy boundaries and emotional well-being in the pursuit of career success and personal contentment.

In summary, this qualitative study delved into the concept of situationships, their definition, and their multifaceted impact on individuals' lives. Situationships, characterized by their lack of clear boundaries and commitment, have both positive and negative effects on emotional health, psychological health, cognitive health, personal life, and professional life. Therefore I quote the definition of situationship as an informal bond characterized by relationship ambiguity, often fueled by sexual desires. Situationships have the potential to affect our emotional and psychological health. The problem at the heart of situationships is the ambiguity of the relationship. The absence of clear definitions and expectations leads to confusion and uncertainty, causing heightened stress and anxiety. Individuals may find themselves torn between mixed signals and emotional turmoil, hindering their ability to make important life decisions. Emotional distress is a significant consequence of situationships, manifesting in anxiety, depression, and emotional strain. It disrupts daily life and necessitates professional intervention, impacting not only the individuals involved but also their communities. Cognitive distress is another aspect, that leads to disrupted thought patterns and emotional discomfort. Difficulty concentrating, anxiety, and unease are common symptoms, further highlighting the detrimental effects of situationships. Intimacy needs vary among individuals, and a lack of clear communication about physical intimacy can lead to misunderstandings and conflict within situationships. This dynamic may perpetuate emotional avoidance and hinder personal growth in relationships. Individual preferences play a crucial role in determining the success or failure of situationships. Misalignment in intentions and expectations can lead to emotional turmoil and hurt feelings, underlining the importance of open and honest communication. Situationships can also have a significant impact on personal and professional life. The ambiguity and emotional turmoil can disrupt personal lives, causing stress, dissatisfaction, and uncertainty about the future. In the professional realm, situationships can lead to high levels of stress, emotional exhaustion, reduced focus, and poor job performance. In summary, the concept of situationships represents a contemporary

challenge in the realm of interpersonal relationships. This study highlights the need for clear communication, emotional well-being, and the establishment of boundaries to mitigate the negative impacts and promote healthier, more fulfilling connections.

The interconnectedness of themes in this qualitative study reveals the complex web of effects that situationships can have on individuals' lives. These themes, including ambiguity of the relationship, emotional distress, cognitive distress, intimacy needs, and individual preferences, are all intertwined and can collectively shape the impact of situationships on emotional, cognitive, personal, and professional aspects of life. The ambiguity of the relationship theme serves as the foundation for many of the other themes. The lack of clear boundaries and commitment in situationships leads to emotional distress, as individuals grapple with uncertainty about their partner's intentions. This emotional distress, in turn, can result in cognitive distress, disrupting thought processes and affecting mental well-being. Additionally, the theme of intimacy needs highlights how situationships often involve physical closeness without emotional commitment, which can exacerbate emotional distress and further complicate the relationship. Individual preferences also play a critical role in the dynamics of situationships. When preferences are not aligned, it can lead to misunderstandings, emotional turmoil, and conflict, contributing to emotional and cognitive distress. Moreover, these mismatches in preferences can affect both personal and professional life, as individuals may struggle to balance their relationship with their career and personal well-being. The impact on personal life is closely linked to the themes of ambiguity, emotional distress, and cognitive distress. The lack of clarity in situationships can make it difficult for individuals to make future plans or commitments, causing uncertainty about their personal life's direction. Emotional and cognitive distress can further compound this uncertainty, affecting overall happiness and life satisfaction. The theme of the impact on professional life demonstrates how situationships can have tangible consequences in the workplace. Stress, emotional exhaustion, and reduced concentration resulting from situationships can hinder job performance and motivation, affecting one's career trajectory and job satisfaction. These interconnected themes highlight the intricate relationship between situationships and emotional, cognitive, personal, and professional well-being. The lack of clarity in these relationships can lead to emotional and cognitive distress, impacting personal and professional life in profound ways. Understanding these themes is essential for individuals to navigate situationships effectively and make informed decisions about their relationships and overall life goals.

The first phase involved conducting a qualitative research study to explore the definition of situationships, the factors that contribute to them, and the themes that emerge from them. This qualitative phase was necessary because there has been limited research on situationships, and we wanted to ensure that we had a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon before developing the scale.

In this qualitative phase, we conducted in-depth interviews with individuals who had experienced situationships and analyzed the data using a thematic analysis approach. The results of this analysis provided us with a definition of a situationship, the factors that contribute to it, and the themes that emerge from it. This information will be used to inform the development of the Situationship Scale. The qualitative phase was critical in ensuring that the Situationship Scale should be developed based on a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Without this phase, we would not be able to develop a scale that accurately captures the complexities of situationships. The qualitative phase will also ensure that the scale is developed based on the experiences and perspectives of individuals who have experienced situationships, which is essential for a tool that is designed to assess these types of relationships.

### **Limitations**

One of the limitations of the research is that it relies heavily on self-reported data, which may be subject to social desirability bias and may not accurately reflect the true nature of the relationships being studied. Furthermore, the study only focuses on one type of unconventional relationship, and it may not capture the complexity of other forms of non-traditional partnerships. Finally, the study is limited to the information provided by the participants and does not take into account contextual factors that may influence the nature and strength of situationships, such as cultural norms or individual differences in attachment styles.

### Recommendation for future research

Based on the results of the qualitative research and the extraction of major themes, it is recommended that future researchers conduct further investigations into the relationship between situationship and other relevant variables.

### Conclusion

The lack of clarity and commitment in situationships can lead to confusion and hurt feelings, making it crucial to understand their full complexity. The Situationship Scale will be a good tool for researchers and practitioners to better understand the intricacies of modern relationships. It will capture the nuanced, context-dependent nature of situationships, providing valuable insights into their dynamics and helping people navigate them more effectively. Our research has been divided into two phases. In the Preliminary Phase, we performed qualitative analysis to define the concept of situationship, identify its impact, and explore potential themes. Additionally, we created a preliminary questionnaire for situationships based on our qualitative research. In the Final Phase, we will develop and validate the Situationship Scale with larger and more diverse samples to ensure its reliability and validity. Ultimately, the Situationship Scale has the potential to advance our understanding of modern relationships and promote healthier and more fulfilling interactions in today's complex world. The ever-changing nature of interpersonal interactions in modern society requires the development of new tools, and the Situationship Scale will be an important contribution to this field of research. It is our hope that this instrument will help academics, therapists, and people better navigate the complexities of situationships and lead to a deeper understanding of human connections.

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