

## Convergent Influence of Living Arrangements on Happiness, Anxiety, And Stress Post-Pandemic

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### ABSTRACT

The supremacy of kinship ties is deeply beholden in Eastern culture. The traditional Indian culture is representative of many kinds of family structures and dynamics based on living arrangements. Indian families typically symbolize a collectivistic approach characterizing mutual dependence and hierarchy. This research study is an attempt to compare and understand the differences in living arrangements in terms of happiness, anxiety, and stress in the post-pandemic era. The global impact of covid-19 pandemic is evident by the transition in the family structure and dynamics. In this research study, the differences in the living arrangements are understood between the two types of living arrangements, namely the traditional joint family and modern nuclear family setup. For this, a sample of 411 young and middle-aged people has been considered, and were administered questionnaires to evaluate their happiness, anxiety, and stress levels. The findings of this research study reveal that the joint family setup is significantly different from the nuclear family setup as the former is associated with increased happiness and lower levels of anxiety and stress as compared to the latter. Furthermore, differences in gender and marital status are also obtained. It can also be concluded that happiness, anxiety, and stress are significantly correlated.

**Keywords:** living arrangement, joint family, nuclear family, Covid-19 pandemic, Happiness, Anxiety, Stress

### INTRODUCTION

There is a significant gap in the cultural domain of residence between Eastern and Western cultures. Intergenerational co-residence aptly explains the concept of living arrangements in India and is deeply rooted and justified in the ancient concepts of *Dharma*. The ancient roots of Indian culture widely accept and preach the benefits of a joint family. *Samyukta kutumb* is the concept of a joint family, and *Avibhakta kutumb* is the concept of an undivided family. This explains how parents are to be respected for their age and wisdom and in return, shower care for their children (T. Samanta, F. Chen, R. Vanneman, 2015).

There has been an evident shift in the modes of living from joint family to nuclear family due to globalization which has led to massive urbanization and young population migrating to Western countries. This has led to changes in the preferences towards the mode of living, preferring a distance from intergenerational co-residence. There are various factors associated with a preference of the working generation for nuclear families, deflecting from the ancient concepts established by *dharma* (T. Samanta, F. Chen, R. Vanneman, 2015).

This deflection in the mode of living has been a challenge, especially during the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic had an adverse global impact on all age groups. It resulted in restrictions, fear, and uncertainty, leading to increased anxiety, panic, and distress among people. The pandemic has disrupted people's mental well-being to a great extent. The current research study aims to highlight the pervasive effects of the pandemic, by exploring the effect of living arrangements on people's mental well-being.

#### 1. Living Arrangement

In India, the concept of kinship ties is supreme. These ties determine the living arrangements in which they inhabit. These kinship associations become the center of their lives and their residence is highly dependent on these

relationships. Two types of living arrangements can be found in India: the nuclear family and the joint family. The organization of the members of a family determines the type of living arrangement they have.

Family is not only the unit of society but also one of the most important institutions within a society. The family members have a reciprocal relationship with each other regarding their roles and responsibilities.

The 'nuclear family' is the smallest unit of the family, comprising a mother, father, and unmarried children who share a common residence. Whereas the 'joint family' refers to the organization of the family members which involves the parents of the mother or father adding to the nuclear family setup, residing together in a household.

The outbreak of coronavirus has impacted the world adversely. It has led to extreme loss of human life across the globe. The Covid-19 pandemic has unexpectedly brought many families together and separated the others. Several factors are associated with this transition in the living arrangement such as the closure of schools and universities, a shift from field jobs, desk jobs, or office jobs to remote working, loss of employment due to massive layoffs, curfews, need to support and provide care to the elderly and their loved or inability to live alone about the need and support required in times difficult (G.K. Tiwari, et al.,2020).

These transitions in the living arrangement setup have influenced people's health and well-being in their ways. Few studies implicate a positive response to staying together with their children, while others implicate a negative response, exhibiting symptoms such as depression and poor quality of life. It can be observed that these changes in living arrangements are bound to be stressful regardless of the intention behind them (B.B. Sethi. 1989).

Wheaton and Montazer (2013) suggest that stressors could be life events, a particular state, or a problem that could be persistent and continuous in nature. If coping mechanisms for dealing with these stressors are insufficient or not up to the mark, this stress can become distress. Therefore, we can establish that the parents or children may be distressed due to this change in the living arrangement during the pandemic and have resulting challenges to face in the family (P. Tewari, S.K. Suryawanshi, 2015).

The current study aims to study the effect of these two living arrangements, namely the nuclear family and joint family, on the level of happiness, anxiety, and stress among people residing in India post adversity (pandemic) times across the nation.

### *1.1 Living Arrangements in India*

It is considered that the family is the most important fundamental institution of Indian society. It is the link of continuity from early ages to the present. Both joint families and nuclear families can be seen as a continuum, which means that these are related to each other developmentally. This can be explained further. Since each family goes through a transition in terms of its size, roles, responsibilities, composition, the status of the members of the family, societal norms, and sanctions, thus it can be well stated that both types of families undergo a developmental cycle. Post-pandemic, it can be understood that one of the factors for this transition could also be environmental (S.DeB, et al., 2016).

Environmental factors of transition of living arrangements include the adversities due to which there is a change in the size and composition of family structure. This transition is associated with emotional reactions, such as anxiety and distress, and low levels of happiness (P. Tewari, S.K. Suryawanshi, 2015).

## **2. Happiness**

Taking care of basic needs, such as food, water, oxygen, and shelter is primary to human survival. Alongside these basic needs, huge importance can be placed on emotional needs. It is essential to focus on emotional needs as it impacts the development of personality and affects resilience. Avoidance of emotional needs often leads to persistent inappropriate behavior (P. Tewari, S.K. Suryawanshi, 2015).

Research indicates that joint families facilitate better emotional security, where the members of the family feel free to express emotions, thereby becoming emotionally sensitive toward others' feelings (G.K. Tiwari, et al.,

2020). Emotional expression helps with establishing self-worth as one feels safe sharing their emotional vulnerabilities. The expression of emotions enables a person's optimal functioning.

Family plays a vital role in a person's emotional development as they provide unconditional emotional support.

Research conducted in this area identifies that there is a clear difference in terms of emotional need fulfillment in joint and nuclear families. A joint family proves to be a better environment in terms of emotional need fulfillment than the nuclear family since there are not only parents but other elderly members of the family like grandparents, cousins, etc. who are available to express emotions too. This helps in better personality development. There is a sense of being nurtured and taken care of. In the case of a nuclear family, there are only a few members to fulfill their emotional requirements. If the individual is unable to express their emotional needs, it might lead to stress, aggression, prolonged sadness, social withdrawal, compulsive behavior, and lead to psychosomatic illnesses (P. Tewari, S.K. Suryawanshi, 2015).

### **3. Anxiety**

Every individual has experienced situations that make them feel tense, dreaded, and generally feel discomfort, accompanied by overthinking, sweating restlessness, and rapid heartbeat. The covid-19 pandemic has brought along several reasons that have aggravated anxiety and stress levels among people. These reasons include quarantine, persistent social media use, social isolation, shortage of essential supplies such as hospital beds, oxygen cylinders, and medicines, a shift toward remote working, career prospects, and many more (M. Spinelli, F. Lionetti, M. Pastore, M. Fasolo, 2020).

The challenges posed by the pandemic have created havoc among people around the globe. It has challenged their effectiveness to face adversities due to novelty and lack of research in this area. A critical factor that also contributes to creating a perspective toward handling such situations is living arrangements. The size and composition of the members of the family determine the perspective that people form about the challenges posed by the unpredictable situation. The uncertainty and lack of knowledge about the pandemic resulted in the elevation of the levels of anxiety among people and contributed to a panic situation that made it harder to cater to the challenges posed by the covid-19 pandemic.

There are individual differences in terms of people's perspectives toward the adversities they face in life.

This research paper focuses on one such adversity, the Covid-19 pandemic. The psychological responses after the experience of adversity are unique to every individual that determines their response patterns, coping mechanisms, stress, anxiety, and resilience. Parallely, the living arrangements that the people belong to alter these mentioned factors significantly. In this research paper, we explore this dimension in detail to highlight the subsequent effects of the style of living on people's levels of anxiety, since it may be useful in creating interventions to help people deal with such situations more resiliently.

### **4. Stress**

Human beings are subjected to a constant influence of harm, challenges, and threat. Coping with these challenges is an indivisible aspect of mental and emotional regulation. The process of coping with these strenuous situations often results in physiological and psychological wearying (F. Afridi, A. Dhillon, S. Roy, 2021). The psychological constituent of this emotional and mental tension is known as stress.

Stress is an automatic response to one's inability to cope with the demands of the environment. Persistent stress can drastically affect one's health and well-being. This research paper identifies the aftermath of one such situation that has been stressful that people from every corner of the world have experienced, the Covid-19 pandemic. Covid-19 has been an International Public Health Emergency that has created global havoc. Agencies like Center for Disease Control and Prevention and World Health Organization have highlighted the importance of mental health in times tough (A. Kumar and K.R. Nayar, 2020). It can be clearly observed that there are many factors in this situation that have elevated the levels of stress among people, such as fear, discomfort, isolation, uncertainty, addictions, work-life balance, and many more.

Even though the source of the existence of these factors is adversity, there is an important aspect that affects the impact of the stressor on the individuals, living arrangements. The living setup refers to the composition of family members that live together. The different setups of living arrangements have an impact on people's responses to these stressors. This paper attempts to understand the impact of living arrangements on people's stress levels post-pandemic.

Acceptance and management of Covid-19 have been challenging for people in every stratum, every family, and every locality. Although the novelty of Covid has faded away, the after-effects of the pandemic still prevail such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, substance abuse, and general anxiety disorder, which ultimately results in high comorbidity with psychiatric conditions.

This research study aims to establish an understanding of the convergent influence of living arrangements. The living arrangement accounts for the setup in which the individual lives. This setup could be a compact, modern, and most common way of living in today's scenario, i.e., a nuclear family or an extended, traditional, and now dwindling, joint family.

The covid-19 pandemic is an adversity that has had a drastic effect on the population across the globe. It has caused major transitions in the living setups of people, alterations in lifestyle patterns, modification in eating preferences, changes in the sleep cycle, adopting new health-promoting behaviors, and discarding old unhealthy behaviors. It has contributed to the 360-degree transformation in the perspectives of people about different aspects of life, both physiologically and psychologically. This research study is an attempt to understand the psychological aspect of this transformation in the post-pandemic era in terms of their living arrangement.

## **5. Method**

The present research study is an attempt to amalgamate the dimensions of social and health constructs. The social dimension represents the family structure based on the living arrangements and the health dimension highlights the elements of psychological well-being, such as happiness, anxiety, and stress.

For this, a sample of 411 subjects was considered. The data for the survey was collected online. The subjects were informed about their voluntary participation in the research study, and they had the freedom to withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. It was ensured that the subjects were educated about the purpose and the scope of the research project prior to recording their responses. The participants were enthusiastic about sharing their experiences with the Covid-19 pandemic and keen to know the outcome of the research project. However, the subjective responses have not been embedded in this research study. They have been assured that the results will be shared with them post-analysis of their recorded data.

### **6.1 Aim**

The aim of the study is to examine the convergent influence of living arrangements on happiness, anxiety, and stress post-pandemic.

### **6.2 Objectives**

The current research is an attempt to understand the individual effects of these living arrangements on the levels of happiness, anxiety, and stress among people in general.

#### *5.1 Objective 1*

Firstly, we examine the happiness levels based on establishing a comparison between the two types of living arrangements (nuclear and joint family setups), gender (male and female), and finally marital status (married and unmarried).

#### *5.2 Objective 2*

Next, we examine anxiety levels by comparing the two types of family arrangements (nuclear and joint living setups), gender (male and female), and finally marital status (married and unmarried).

### 5.3 Objective 3

Finally, we examine stress levels by comparing the two types of living arrangements (nuclear and joint family setups), gender (male and female), and finally marital status (married and unmarried).

### 5.4. Objective 4

To determine the correlation between happiness, anxiety, and stress.

### 6.3 Hypothesis

H1. There will be a significant difference in the happiness levels among the living arrangements (nuclear and joint); gender (male and female); and marital status (married and unmarried).

H2. There will be a significant difference in anxiety levels among the living arrangements (nuclear and joint); gender (male and female); and marital status (married and unmarried).

H3. There will be a significant difference in the stress levels among the living arrangements (nuclear and joint); gender (male and female); and marital status (married and unmarried).

H4. There will be a significant relationship between happiness, anxiety, and stress.

### 6.4 Variables

1. Living Arrangement
2. Happiness
3. Anxiety
4. Stress

### 6.5 Research Design

This research study is a quantitative correlation study to understand and compare the variances in the happiness, anxiety, and stress levels between the living arrangements, namely nuclear and joint families; gender (male and female); and marital status (married and unmarried).

### 6.6 Sample

For this research project, a sample of 411 young adults was considered belonging from young and middle adulthood.

#### 6.6.1 Inclusion Criteria

1. Literate married and unmarried people have a fluent understanding of English.
2. People from the age bracket of 25-50 years of age.
3. People belonging to the middle or upper class
4. People willing to participate in the research project.
5. People living in nuclear or joint families.

#### 6.6.2 Exclusion Criteria

1. Illiterate people with no understanding of the English language.
2. People not falling in the age bracket of 25-50 years of age.
3. People belonging to the lower class.
4. People who are not willing to participate in the research study.

5. People living away from the family, divorced, widowed, and single parenting.
6. Any gender other than male and female.

#### *6.6.3 Sampling Technique*

In the present study, a convenience sampling technique was utilized.

#### *6.6.4 Sample Distribution*

The sample includes young adults from various backgrounds, who are working and non-working, married and unmarried, comprising of males and females. A total of 411 young and middle adults were considered for this research study falling in the age bracket of 25 to 50 years. Out of the total sample, 186 were females and 225 were males.

#### *6.6.5 Location of the Sample*

The northern area of the Indian Subcontinent.

#### *6.6.6 Socio-economic Status*

Middle Class and Upper Class

#### *6.7 Tools*

This research study utilizes 3 scales, namely the Subjective Happiness Scale to measure happiness levels, General Anxiety Scale to measure anxiety levels, and the Perceived Stress Scale to measure stress levels.

##### *Subjective Happiness Scale*

The Subjective Happiness Scale was created by S. Lyubomirsky and H.S. Lepper in the year 1999 as a measure of happiness (Subjective well-being). This scale finds its application in the conduct of a global and subjective assessment of understanding whether a person is happy or unhappy. The scale has a 7-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 to 7. There are 4 items on the scale and the average of the responses to these four items determines the happiness levels. Higher scores on SHS are indicative of greater levels of happiness. The Cronbach's alpha is 0.86 and determines a good internal consistency of the items. The test-retest reliability was 0.72 indicating that the test is reliable. The scale also holds good validity.

##### *General Anxiety Scale (GAD-7)*

The General Anxiety Scale is an easy-to-use questionnaire that finds its application in screening the severity of anxiety levels among individuals. The scale was developed by R.L. Spitzer, J.B. William, and colleagues in the year 2006. The scale comprises 7 items that are responded to on a 4-point Likert Scale. The scale holds good reliability and validity (criterion, factorial, and procedural). This suggests that GAD-7 is an adequate scale that can be utilized to determine anxiety levels.

##### *Perceived Stress Scale*

The Perceived Stress Scale has been designed to evaluate individual stress levels. The tool was developed in the year 1983 by Sheldon Cohen. It comprises 10 statements that are responded to on a 5-point Likert scale. The scale is both valid and reliable and holds good internal consistency. Hence, the scale is appropriate to be utilized for the current research study.

#### *6.8 Procedure of Data Collection*

The aim of the research study was to understand the influence of different living arrangements on the happiness, anxiety, and stress levels of the people residing in the northern region of the Indian subcontinent after the inimical effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. For this research, two types of living arrangements based on the number of people residing together have been considered, namely nuclear and joint families. The data has been collected

through online forms to increase accessibility and keep the comfort of the participants a priority. A total sample of 411 was collected in the age range of 25-50 years. Out of the total data collected, 186 were females and 225 were males. After the collection of data, the scores were statistically analyzed using SPSSv27. The student t-test was used to compare and understand the variances among the living arrangements in terms of happiness, anxiety, and stress post-pandemic. Gender differences and differences with respect to marital status were also within the scope of this research. The statistical analysis was successfully conducted, and the results obtained were tabulated and interpretation was made.

## 6. Results

The present research study aimed to compare and understand the impact of different living arrangements on the happiness, anxiety, and stress levels of people after the encounter of the Covid-19 pandemic. For this, a total sample of 411 young and middle-aged people was considered who were falling in the age bracket of 25 and 50 years. The data was obtained through online Google forms that helped prioritize the comfort of the participants. Statistical analysis was done through SPSSv27 to obtain the results that are tabulated as given.

Table 1 highlights the comparative analysis of the two types of living arrangements that were included in this research study, namely nuclear and joint family setups. The table clearly shows that Joint families are associated with higher levels of happiness and lower levels of anxiety and stress compared to nuclear families.

Table 2 represents the comparison in the happiness, anxiety, and stress levels between married and unmarried people. The table highlights that married people are subjected to greater levels of happiness and lower levels of anxiety and stress when compared with unmarried people.

Table 3 exhibits the differences in happiness, anxiety, and stress levels between men and women. The table represents that men are happier and less anxious and stressed as compared with women.

Table 4 illustrates the relationship between the three variables across the total sample that was considered for the study. It can be clearly inferred that the three variables, happiness, anxiety, and stress are significantly correlated with each other. Happiness is negatively correlated with anxiety and stress significantly. It is also found that there is a significantly positive correlation between anxiety and stress.

**Table 1. Comparison of living arrangements (nuclear and joint) in happiness, anxiety, and stress.**

	Living Arrangement	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error Mean
Happiness	Nuclear	302	19.72	3.777	.217
	Joint	109	20.01	3.653	.350
Anxiety	Nuclear	302	5.07	4.689	.270
	Joint	109	4.71	4.675	.448
Stress	Nuclear	302	17.25	6.443	.371
	Joint	109	15.95	6.036	.578

**Table 2. Comparison of marital status (married and unmarried) in Happiness, Anxiety, and Stress.**

	Marital Status	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Happiness	Married	225	20.69	3.506	.234
	Unmarried	186	18.70	3.738	.274
Anxiety	Married	225	4.24	4.651	.310
	Unmarried	186	5.85	4.578	.336
Stress	Married	225	15.04	5.820	.388
	Unmarried	186	19.17	6.253	.459

**Table 3. Comparison of Gender in Happiness, Anxiety, and Stress**

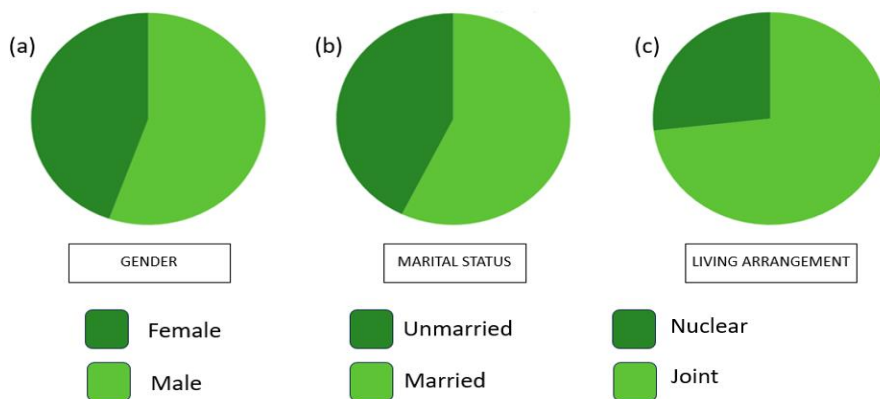
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
<b>Happiness</b>	Male	225	20.04	3.587	.239
	Female	186	19.49	3.910	.287
<b>Anxiety</b>	Male	225	4.42	4.667	.311
	Female	186	5.64	4.625	.339
<b>Stress</b>	Male	225	16.07	6.280	.419
	Female	186	17.92	6.318	.463

**Table 4. Correlation between happiness, anxiety, and stress**

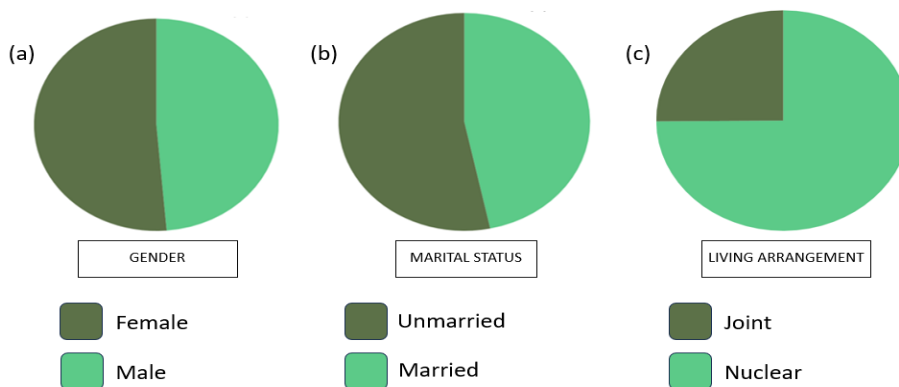
	Happiness	Anxiety	Stress
Happiness	1		
Anxiety	-.475**	1	
Stress	-.550**	.737**	1

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The following are mentioned the figurative representation of the results obtained.

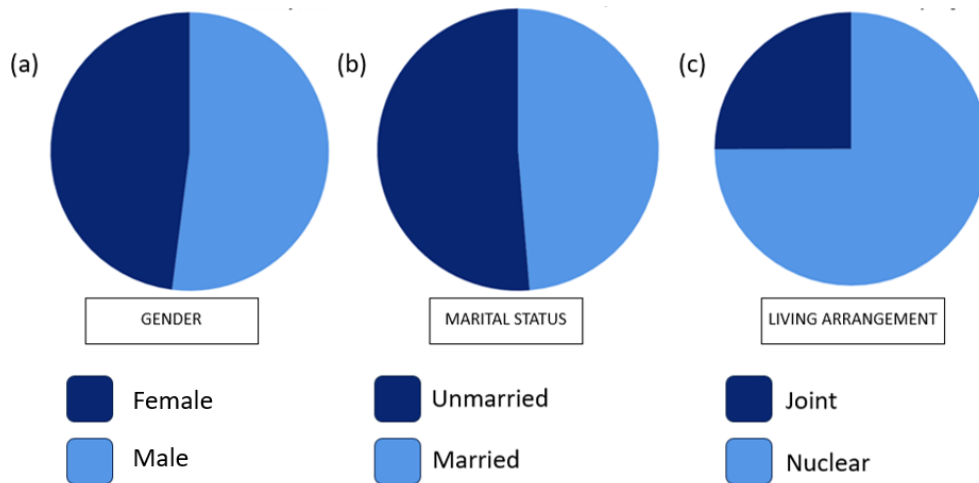


**Figure 1. Pie Chart Sum of Happiness by (a) Gender, (b) Marital status, and (c) Living arrangement.**



**Figure 2. Pie Chart Sum of Anxiety by (a) Gender, (b) Marital status, and (c) Living arrangement.**





**Figure 3. Pie Chart Sum of Stress by (a) Gender, (b) Marital status, and (c) Living arrangement.**

Figure 1 represents the pie chart sum of happiness by gender, marital status, and living arrangement, clearly depicting higher levels of happiness among males (as compared with females); married people (as compared with unmarried people); and joint family (as compared with nuclear family).

Figure 2 is the pie chart sum of anxiety by gender, marital status, and living arrangement, representing higher levels of anxiety among females (as compared with men); unmarried people (as compared with married people); and nuclear families (as compared with joint families).

Figure 3 is representative of the pie chart sum of stress by gender, marital status, and living arrangement, highlighting higher stress levels among females (as compared with males); unmarried people (as compared with married people); and nuclear families (as compared with joint families).

## 7. Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this research study is to understand the convergent influence of living arrangements on happiness, anxiety, and stress levels. In Eastern culture, the notion of kinship ties plays a significant role in providing support through the stages of life (A. Jadhav, K.M. Sathyanarayana, S. Kumar, K.S. James, 2013). The concept of living arrangements signifies the family setup based on the residency of the members of the family. In the present study, two types of family arrangements have been considered, namely nuclear family and joint family. Co-residency is not a new concept in the Indian culture. It is the most accepted and ideal form of living setup. Many studies have been conducted to understand the patterns of living arrangements and their impact on general health, quality of life, and living standards. One of the studies conducted by S. Srivastava and colleagues in the year 2021 suggests that older adults who resided away from their children were generally dissatisfied, and had poor general health, and subjective well-being. The present study is indicative of the differences in the psychological health of young and middle-aged people residing in different living setups. The psychological construct of health can be understood in terms of the variations in the levels of happiness, anxiety, and stress among the family setups considered in this research study.

The global outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic has seen many families unified. This was because of the closures of schools and universities, the shift from office jobs to remote working, massive layoffs due to shut down of manpower in many organizations and industries, and the inability of older adults to access resources such as food, medicines, and items of the daily requirement, and many more. The change in the dynamics of the family was also in terms of moving out of the household to protect their families from the risk of contamination with the covid virus (M. Evandrou, J. Flakingham, M. Quin, A. Vlachantoni, 2021).

Catering to the challenges that were posed by the pandemic has also been different between the family living arrangements. The central goal of this research is to provide an understanding of these differences vividly and contribute to stating the association between household structure and psychological health post-pandemic.

The results of the study show that joint family setups are associated with better subjective well-being (happiness), and decreased levels of anxiety and stress in comparison with the nuclear family setups. This creates an understanding that the co-residency of family members of multiple generations ensures better resilience and coping mechanisms to deal with challenges.

There are gender differences that claim that men are comparatively happier and less anxious and stressed. Differences were also observed in marital status, indicating that married people tend to be happier and less anxious and stressed as compared to unmarried people.

It is also found that there is a significant negative relationship between happiness and anxiety, and happiness and stress. This suggests that lower levels of happiness is indicative of higher levels of anxiety and stress. Parallely, there exists a positive significant relationship between anxiety and stress. This means that higher anxiety levels result in higher stress levels.

This study's findings exhibit important implications regarding the policies in the context of Covid-19 or handling any such adversities. There is a possibility that lower levels of happiness, and increased levels of anxiety and stress may be because of isolation during the pandemic in the nuclear family setup (M. Evandrou, et al., 2021). Joint families prove to be better at dealing with challenges and adversities in times tough. Hence, the scope of this study is found in determining stress management strategies and identifying better-coping mechanisms in a constructive manner to better deal with the challenges that are posed in life.

## **8. Limitations and Future Implications**

As much as the scope of this research study is wide in terms of its application, there are certain limitations to this study. First, the research study lacks detailed information about the tenure of the stay of participants in their respective family arrangements. The information about the motives behind any temporary change in the living arrangement is also unclear. It is assumed in this research that the interpretation of the survey questions attests to changes due to the covid-19 pandemic. But there is an increased possibility that there is a change in the living arrangement because of increased stress levels. A longitudinal cross-sectional study that contains detailed information over a long period of time could help address this issue.

Finally, the sample of this study is only representative of the Delhi-National Capital Region and lacks information about the other regions of the country.

This research study has several strengths, including its large sample size, its longitudinal account of participants' demographic information, and its inclusion of several measures that are indicative of psychological health. Alongside, this study highlights the importance of policymaking to deal with adversities such as covid-19 pandemic, with a focus on equipping people with better reach of resources, and safe connectivity. This study finds its scope in understanding and analyzing the variables to establish important strategies and measures to deal with adversities which will thereafter help to build resilient coping techniques during tough circumstances.

It also suggests the importance of telehealth services in dealing with the anxiety and stress pertaining to uncertain challenging situations, such as the pandemic. Another implication of this study can be to determine better strategies for stress management, improving resilience, and effective coping strategies at the family level that can be utilized by family therapists and thereby help improve the family environment that is supportive and stress-free.

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