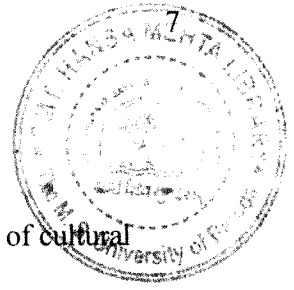


ABSTRACT



The purpose of this phenomenographical study was to examine the role of cultural memes and contextual factors in shaping romantic relationships in Baroda, a mid-sized urban city in Gujarat, India. It also aimed to understand the relationship processes and experiences of romantically involved individuals and the subsequent developmental outcomes, in two phases. A mixed method was applied using in-depth, open-ended (a) questionnaires in phase 1, and (b) interview guidelines with (c) 5 point Likert type rating scale in phase 2. Participants included 110 respondents, 80 college going emerging adults in the age range of 18-25 years and 30 middle adults, with equal number of men and women. The latter were included to know the societal and parental perspectives on the phenomenon, as parents play a significant role in matters related to marriage partner selection in the Indian context. Qualitative data revealed that individuals across age and gender viewed romantic relationships as having potentially positive developmental impact on individuals engaged in them. The nature of impact depends on several factors including cultural ideas about love, relationships and commitment. Girls were reported to be more susceptible than boys to both positive and negative relationship impacts, they being more vulnerable biologically, emotional psychologically and oppressed socially. Quantitative data showed stronger positive correlation for boys between several domains related to relationship quality and happiness as compared to girls. Discussion examined potential threats to realizing positive developmental outcomes in the contemporary Indian society from ethological and Indian socio-cultural perspectives on romantic relationships. The broader implication of the findings is the re-examination of current social ideologies in light of the ancient Indian antiquity to evolve social structures that can promote positive developmental outcomes.