

No-Label Status: A Phenomenological Study On the Lived Experience of Gen Z in Situationships

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ABSTRACT: This study explores the Psychological Well-being of Gen Z in Situationships residing in Cabuyao City, Laguna. Data were collected from a total of six (6) participants, currently engaged in situationships for six months, single, and residing in various Barangays of Cabuyao City. This study employed a phenomenological design in exploring the Psychological Well-being of participants in this non-traditional no-label relationship dynamics. There were a total of six (6) superordinate themes that emerged, such as (1) Emotional Complexity and Psychological Well-Being in Situationships; (2) Frequency and Intensity of Positive Emotions in Situationships; (3) Shared Activities and Emotional Presence in Situationships; (4) Role and Engagement in Psychological Well-Being and Fulfillment; (5) Moments of Connection and Conflict Navigation in Situationships; and (6) Self-Esteem, Fulfillment, and Achievement in Situationships. By exploring this study, valuable insights can be gained into the unique emotional and psychological dynamics of Gen Z individuals in situationships. This research highlights the complex interplay between emotional experiences and psychological well-being, offering a deeper understanding that can inform future mental health support and relationship guidance tailored to this generation.

KEYWORDS: Psychological Wellbeing, Generation Z, Situationships, Phenomenological design

I. INTRODUCTION

The rise of situationships among Gen Z individuals marks a significant impact on how they approach romantic relationships. Gen Z, also known as Generation Z, refers to individuals born approximately between the mid-to-late 1990s and the early 2010s, making them the first generation to grow up with widespread access to digital technology and social media (Parker & Igielnik, 2020). Situationships, a combining term of “situation” and “relationship,” are defined as an informal arrangement of two people involving physical and emotional connections that do not adhere to traditional labels or commitments and engage in casual arrangements (Noenickx, 2022). It is a complex connection and lacks commitment. The conventional terms of boyfriend or girlfriend would not be applicable, this type of open relationship involves going on a date, intimate relations, and honing emotional intimacy but without future planning (Author R, 2023). The prevalence of situationships has been particularly notable among Gen Z, which arise from different factors like fear of commitment, life priorities outside relationships, social influences, and prior experience of failed relationships. These nonmonogamous relationships seem to offer independence and romantic companionship but with fewer obligations (Rsmojica et al., 2024).

As situationships become more prevalent, they also raise questions about their long-term implications for relationship stability and personal growth. Unlike traditional relationships, which often follow a clear trajectory towards milestones such as cohabitation, marriage, and family planning, situationships may lack these structured progressions, potentially leading to prolonged periods of ambiguity and uncertainty. This can affect individuals' ability to make long-term plans and commitments in other areas of their lives, such as career development and financial planning. Understanding how these dynamics play out can provide insights into the broader social and economic impacts of shifting relationship patterns among Gen Z.

The psychological well-being of individuals in situationships can vary significantly. In some online forums, young people report confusion about how long the talking stage should take, and usually, it leads to stress and provokes anxiety. Young people are also confused if they are in a “situationship”. Being in this nontraditional or undefined relationship can impact psychological well-being and is one of the most prominent reasons why young people seek professional help as this could be a contributor to stress, depression, anxiety, and thoughts of self-harm (Peel, 2023). Research indicates that some individuals experience higher levels of anxiety due to the uncertainty and lack of exclusivity in these relationships, while others report greater life satisfaction due to

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perceived freedom and autonomy (Hunt et al., 2018). The varying emotional states and mental health outcomes show the complexity of situationships for Gen Z. Moreover, the presence of strong support systems is crucial for mitigating the mental health challenges associated with open relationships. Ruppel et al. (2018) highlight that emotional support from friends and family can provide stability and reduce feelings of isolation.

In this modern era, Gen Z is increasingly navigating the complexities of situationships—a no-label relationship. While this modern dating trend aligns with global shifts towards more fluid relationship dynamics, it clashes with traditional values and strong family expectations. Many young Filipinos in situationships grapple with societal stigma and the pressure to conform to conventional relationship norms. Schneider and Margraf (2021) emphasize the importance of understanding cultural norms and their influence on relationship dynamics. Cultural acceptance or rejection of open relationships can either support or hinder psychological well-being, depending on the societal context in which individuals are situated. Given that this generation is part of the modern world having easy access to social media platforms, they may be using it in various ways by getting new insights, information, and updates in almost everything specifically for the current trends among their generation. Drouin, M., Miller, D. A., & Dibble, J. L. (2016) explore how social media use, particularly Facebook, influences relationship dynamics and individual well-being, suggesting that online interactions can both support and challenge relationship satisfaction. Social media is a significant factor in how Gen Z views perspectives in various relationship dynamics.

The role of technology in facilitating and maintaining situationships cannot be understated. The pervasive use of dating apps and social media platforms has created new avenues for meeting potential partners and maintaining casual relationships. These technologies can both enhance and complicate the experiences of those in situationships by providing constant connectivity and opportunities for engagement, while also introducing challenges such as online stalking, digital infidelity, and the pressure to maintain an online presence. Examining the interplay between technology and relationship dynamics is essential for a comprehensive understanding of modern romantic engagements.

Furthermore, this study aims to explore the psychological well-being of Generation Z individuals involved in situationships within the urban context of Cabuyao City, Laguna. It addresses the underexplored dynamics of non-traditional relationship forms, such as situationships. By investigating these relationships, the study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the psychological and emotional implications for Generation Z. It fills a gap in the literature by offering insights into how these non-traditional relationship structures impact individuals' psychological well-being, emotional satisfaction, and personal development. Additionally, the study explores the psychological effects and coping mechanisms associated with situationships, highlighting this demographic's unique challenges and lived experiences. Ultimately, the research aims to enhance understanding and promote the psychological well-being of Generation Z individuals navigating these relationships.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

The research utilized a qualitative design, focusing on exploring and understanding complex phenomena and the meanings individuals or groups attribute to them. This approach captures the depth of human experiences, beliefs, and behaviors, providing insights that quantitative research may not reveal. Data collection methods typically include interviews, observations, focus groups, and document analysis, allowing for detailed, descriptive insights into participants' perspectives and contexts (Alam, 2024).

Phenomenological research, in particular, has been instrumental in investigating the universal essence of phenomena as experienced by individuals. It seeks to interpret participants' feelings, perceptions, and beliefs, aiming to gain deeper insights into lived experiences. Researchers in this approach set aside their assumptions to focus on the structure of these experiences (Delve & Limpaecher, 2022).

B. Research Locale

The research was conducted in various Barangays of Cabuyao City, Laguna. This landlocked city covers an area of 43.30 square kilometers (16.72 square miles), representing 2.25% of Laguna's total area. According to the 2020 Census, Cabuyao's population was 355,330, which accounts for 10.51% of Laguna's total population and 2.19% of the CALABARZON region's overall population (PhilAtlas, 2022).

To explore the psychological well-being of Gen Z individuals involved in situationships, a qualitative approach was employed. This focus on urban settings within Cabuyao provides localized insights into how these relationships unfold and impact this generation.

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C. Population and Sampling

The researchers gathered data for a total of six participants in line with the demographic residents of Cabuyao City Laguna who came from various Barangays. The researchers used a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling to access hard-to-reach participants of Gen Z in Situationships. According to Bisht (2024), purposive sampling or judgmental sampling involves deliberately selecting participants based on specific study objectives and the researcher's expertise. Commonly used in qualitative research to ensure that participants are well-suited to offer valuable perspectives on the phenomena being studied. The researchers used participants from purposive sampling and then used snowball sampling to have an additional participant. Snowball sampling or chain-referral sampling is a non-probability technique used to recruit participants with rare traits. In this method, existing subjects provide referrals to help identify and recruit additional participants for the study (Bhat, 2023).

Participants were recruited through Facebook and referrals focusing on Gen Z individuals currently in situationships active within six (6) months and residing in Cabuyao City. Informed consent was obtained to ensure voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity. Ethical considerations included the right to withdraw, maintaining confidentiality, and providing psychological support resources. Data collection involved scheduling and conducting interviews at convenient times for each participant.

D. Research Participants

The researchers intended participants were all part of Generation Z populations aged 18-27 years old. Tinder's 2022 Year in Swipe report indicated the top dating trend among singles from age 18 to 25 was that they were "owning the situationship as a valid relationship status (Goh, 2023). The researcher maximizes the age until 27 years old to fully cover the Gen Z age range. There were six (6) participants ages ranging from twenty (20) to twenty-seven (27) being part of Generation Z, all of them are single and reside in various Barangays of Cabuyao City, Laguna. In regards to the duration of situationships, Participants 1 and 5 are currently engaged in situationships for six months, Participants 2 and 3 are both eight months, Participant 6 is one year and a half, and Participant 4 is in situationships status for two years.

This study used a screening tool for situationship to properly assess the suitability of participants and matched with inclusion and exclusion criteria. This tool was validated by research professionals to ensure the alignment of participants to this study. The virtual interview was also coordinated for each participant.

E. Research Instrumentation

This research employed a phenomenological approach to understand their lived experiences and the impact of relational dynamics on their psychological well-being. To gather in-depth qualitative data, semi-structured interviews were conducted, covering demographic information, understanding of situationships, emotional and psychological wellbeing, engagement and connection, and overall wellbeing. For instance, participants were asked to describe their current relationship status, how long they had been in the situationship, and the impact of these relationships on their mental health.

In analyzing the qualitative data collected from semi-structured interviews exploring the lived experience of Gen Z individuals in situationships, a systematic framework analysis should be used. According to Villegas (2023), Thematic analysis is a qualitative method involving the examination of data to identify patterns and themes, with the researcher's subjective experience being central to interpretation. The process begins with familiarization, where broad themes are identified through transcription and coding. Maintaining a reflexivity journal helps document and refine the coding process. The next stage involves identifying themes from the codes and documenting the integration of codes into themes. Reviewing themes ensures they accurately reflect the data, with adjustments made as necessary. Finalizing themes involves refining and labeling them to align with research questions. The final stage is writing a report that details the analysis process and findings, ensuring they relate to the research questions. This method is versatile, allowing for a rich and intricate description of data, and is suitable for both beginners and various theoretical frameworks.

As the analysis progresses, themes begin to emerge from the coded categories, revealing recurring patterns and significant insights into the psychological experiences of Gen Z individuals in situationships. These themes are examined in-depth, considering their significance and implications for understanding the participants' experiences. This systematic approach ensures that the analysis will ultimately lead to rich and insightful findings.

F. Data Gathering

Researchers gathered the participants by posting on Facebook and referrals of existing participants. They all reside in Cabuyao City, Laguna. The researcher used a screening tool of the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the research to select the most suitable participants only. Participants who met the criteria moved forward to interview with the researchers. Once potential

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participants had expressed interest, they were provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, and assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. Written informed consent was obtained from each participant.

Following consent, semi-structured interviews were scheduled at convenient times and through video conferencing to ensure comfort and confidentiality. These interviews explored participants' understanding of situationships, their emotional and psychological well-being, moments of engagement and connection, and overall well-being. Recordings of the interviews, with participants' permission, were transcribed verbatim to capture the full depth of their responses.

Throughout the data-gathering process, strict ethical considerations were maintained. Participants were reminded of their right to withdraw at any time, and all data were anonymized using codes instead of real names. Transcriptions of interviews were thoroughly reviewed by researchers and participants to ensure accuracy and to capture important details. These qualitative data were then subjected to thematic analysis, identifying common themes and patterns to provide a rich, detailed understanding of the lived experiences and psychological well-being of Gen Z individuals in situationships.

G. Ethical Consideration

This research study prioritized ethical considerations to safeguard participant rights and well-being while ensuring research integrity. Participants received detailed explanations about the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits, and signed an informed consent form to confirm their voluntary participation and understanding of their rights, including the option to withdraw at any time without repercussions. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained, with data securely stored and accessible only to the researcher. Findings were presented in a way that prevented participant identification. The study minimized psychological distress by approaching sensitive topics with care and allowing participants to skip questions or cease participation if uncomfortable. Additionally, the study underwent review and approval by the Institutional Review Board or the University of Cabuyao Ethics Committee to ensure adherence to ethical standards and guidelines.

III. RESULTS

This chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of the data gathered in this study. The Thematic analysis aims to examine the Lived Experience of Generation Z individuals in situationships. The reflection on data acquired from the study of Gen Z experiences and the investigation of this phenomenon were key methods of inquiry.

Table 1. Superordinate Themes and Constituent Subthemes

SUPERORDINATE THEMESA1:B21	SUBTHEMES
Emotional Complexity and Psychological Well-Being in Situationships	Positive Emotions
	Ambiguity
	Support Systems and Coping
	Finding Meaning and Purpose
	Emotional Fulfillment and Support
Frequency and Intensity of Positive Emotions in Situationships	Daily Joy and Excitement
	Infrequent Positive Emotions
	Excitement and Social Interactions
Shared Activities and Emotional Presence in Situationships	Virtual Bonding and Online Interactions
	Love Languages
	Shared Activities and Personal Connections
Role and Engagement in Psychological Well-Being and Fulfillment	Essential for Emotional Connection and Satisfaction
	Balancing Engagement with Personal Priorities
	Spiritual and Personal Growth
Moments of Connection and Conflict Navigation in Situationships	Shared Vulnerability and Mutual Supports
	Acts of Care and Consideration
	Avoidance and Positive Coping
Self-Esteem, Fulfillment, and Achievement in Situationships	Building Confidence Through Trust and Support
	Personal Growth and Emotional Fulfillment
	Inclusion and Recognitions
	Emotional Drain and Loss of Self-Worth

Table 1 presents six (6) Superordinate Themes such as (1) Emotional Complexity and Psychological Well-Being in Situationships; (2) Frequency and Intensity of Positive Emotions in Situationships; (3) Shared Activities and Emotional Presence in Situationships; (4) Role and Engagement in Psychological Well-Being and Fulfillment; (5) Moments of Connection and Conflict Navigation in Situationships; and (6) Self-Esteem, Fulfillment, and Achievement in Situationships. Furthermore, the researchers identified a total of twenty-two (22) subthemes such as (1) Positive Emotions, (2) Ambiguity, (3) Support Systems and Coping, (4) Finding Meaning and Purpose, (5) Emotional Fulfillment and Support, (6) Daily Joy and Excitement, (7) Infrequent Positive Emotions, (8) Excitement and Social Interactions, (9) Virtual Bonding and Online Interactions, (10) Love Languages, (11) Shared Activities and Personal Connections, (12) Essential for Emotional Connection and Satisfaction, (13) Balancing Engagement with Personal Priorities, (14) Spiritual and Personal Growth, (15) Shared Vulnerability and Mutual Supports, (16) Acts of Care and Consideration, (17) Open Communication and Reassurance, (18) Avoidance and Positive Coping, (19) Building Confidence Through Trust and Support, (20) Personal Growth and Emotional Fulfillment, (21) Inclusion and Recognitions, and (22) Emotional Drain and Loss of Self-Worth. By exploring the Lived Experience of Gen Z in situationships, six (6) superordinate and twenty-two (22) subordinate themes emerged.

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Emotional Complexity and Psychological Well-Being in Situationships

The emotional complexity in situationships encompasses a wide range of feelings experienced by individuals involved in these relationships. These emotions can range from positive and fulfilling to ambiguous and confusing. The participants' responses reveal this spectrum, highlighting both the joy and uncertainty inherent in such arrangements.

Positive emotions are a significant aspect of psychological well-being in situationships. Participants often experience happiness and warmth from shared activities and emotional connections, despite the lack of formal commitment. Participant 1 and Participant 2's statements reflect how common interests and meaningful interactions contribute to positive emotional experiences. Similarly, Participant 4's expression of happiness from having someone to rely on underscores the importance of social support in enhancing positive emotions. These experiences align with Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, which posits that positive emotions broaden one's awareness and encourage novel, varied, and exploratory thoughts and actions.

Ambiguity in situationships can lead to mixed emotions and uncertainty about the relationship's direction. This theme reflects the complex interplay between positive emotions and fears or doubts. Participant 5's fear of trusting again due to past experiences highlights the precarious nature of these relationships. Similarly, Participant 3's mixed feelings of happiness and contentment contrasted with negative experiences on Discord illustrate the emotional rollercoaster that ambiguity in situationships can create. This aligns with the research by Hazan and Shaver (1987), which emphasizes how ambiguous relational contexts can affect attachment and emotional stability.

Coping mechanisms in situationships involve strategies individuals use to manage stress and enhance their psychological well-being. Participants' responses reveal how having a support system and finding meaning and purpose within these relationships contribute significantly to their ability to cope with life's challenges.

Support systems play a crucial role in coping mechanisms. Participant 4's response highlights the importance of having someone to confide in, which enhances his psychological well-being by providing emotional support and reducing feelings of isolation. This aligns with the findings of Cohen and Wills (1985), who emphasized that social support can buffer against the adverse effects of stress, thereby promoting better mental health. Similarly, Participant 2's experience of using conversations as a means to destress from academic pressures underscores the therapeutic role of social interactions in mitigating stress and fostering a sense of relief.

Finding meaning and purpose in relationships, even in non-traditional forms like situationships, contributes to one's overall sense of fulfillment and psychological well-being. Participant 5's pursuit of a different feeling and experience through her situationship reflects a search for meaning and novelty. Participant 6 finds joy in engaging in couple-like activities, which provides her with a sense of purpose and satisfaction. This is supported by recent studies, such as those by George and Park (2020), which emphasize that meaningful relationships and purposeful activities significantly contribute to individuals' happiness and life satisfaction. The ability to derive joy and fulfillment from these experiences, even without formal commitment, showcases the adaptive nature of these coping mechanisms.

Overall, the emotional complexity of situationships underscores the need for a deeper understanding of how these relationships impact psychological well-being. The participants' experiences highlight the dual nature of situationships, where moments of joy and connection are interspersed with periods of doubt and uncertainty. This nuanced understanding can inform future mental health support and relationship guidance tailored to the unique needs of individuals in situationships.

Frequency and Intensity of Positive Emotions in Situationships

The frequency and intensity of positive emotions in situationships reflect how often and how strongly individuals experience joy, excitement, and contentment within the situationship. Participants' responses illustrate a range from daily positive emotions to infrequent experiences of happiness, revealing varied emotional engagement in situationships.

Daily joy and excitement are vital for maintaining high levels of psychological well-being. Participants such as Participant 1, Participant 3, and Participant 4 experience frequent positive emotions, often due to regular communication and interactions with their significant others. Participant 1's statement about receiving messages throughout the day aligns with the findings of Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, and Ryan (2000), which emphasize the importance of daily social interactions in fostering positive emotions and enhancing overall life satisfaction. Similarly, Participant 4's excitement about seeing someone special each day underscores the role of anticipation and the presence of meaningful relationships in generating sustained positive emotions.

Infrequent positive emotions highlight the variability and sometimes the lack of consistency in the emotional experiences within situationships. Participant 5, Participant 2, and Participant 6's responses suggest that positive emotions are not always a daily occurrence. For instance, Participant 5 experiences joy about four times a week, while Participant 2 and Participant 6 express difficulty in maintaining contentment and excitement. This variability can impact psychological well-being, as the lack of frequent

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positive emotions might lead to lower levels of happiness and satisfaction, as discussed by Diener, Suh, Lucas, and Smith (1999). Participant 2's difficulty in distinguishing her feelings and her lack of contentment could be indicative of the emotional ambiguity often associated with situationships, which can undermine the stable presence of positive emotions essential for well-being.

Shared Activities and Emotional Presence in Situationships

Shared activities and emotional presence in situationships are critical for building and maintaining connection and intimacy. Participants' responses highlight how both virtual interactions and expressions of love languages contribute to their emotional bonds and psychological well-being.

Virtual bonding and online interactions are vital components of modern relationships, especially in situationships where physical presence might be limited. Participant 1 and Participant 2 highlight the significance of spending time together through virtual means, such as studying together or hanging out on calls, which fosters a sense of companionship and emotional support. Similarly, Participant 5's interaction through Instagram by sharing memes and reels illustrates how digital communication can maintain an emotional presence. This aligns with the findings of Valkenburg and Peter (2021), who note that online interactions can strengthen social bonds and contribute positively to emotional well-being. These virtual interactions offer a platform for consistent engagement and support, crucial for maintaining emotional connections in situationships.

Expressing love languages, such as acts of service, is a fundamental way individuals show care and build deeper emotional connections. Participant 4 and Participant 6 demonstrate how acts of service, such as preparing food and sharing meals, serve as expressions of care and affection. These acts not only enhance emotional presence but also provide a tangible means of support and appreciation. Research by Chapman and White (2019) supports the idea that understanding and utilizing love languages can significantly improve relational satisfaction and emotional intimacy. The shared enjoyment of activities like cooking further strengthens the bond, creating a sense of shared purpose and enjoyment, which is crucial for maintaining psychological well-being in situationships.

Role and Engagement in Psychological Well-Being and Fulfillment

Engagement is a key component of psychological well-being and fulfillment in relationships. Being fully present and involved in the relationship enhances emotional connections and satisfaction. Participant 1 emphasizes the importance of being in the moment and catching up to maintain the connection, aligning with Csikszentmihalyi's (2021) concept of flow, where deep engagement leads to a sense of fulfillment and connection. Participant 2 and Participant 5 highlight the importance of engagement through digital interactions and treasuring moments, respectively, which support the notion that active participation in the relationship fosters emotional satisfaction. Participant 4's emphasis on the importance of engagement for his well-being further reinforces the idea that being actively involved in the relationship contributes significantly to psychological health. These findings are supported by a study by Lambert, Fincham, and Stillman (2019), which suggests that relationship engagement is positively correlated with emotional well-being and life satisfaction.

Balancing engagement in a relationship with personal priorities is crucial for maintaining overall well-being. Engagement in the relationship must be balanced with other life domains to avoid over-commitment and ensure personal growth. Participant 5 indicates that while engagement in the relationship is highly important (80%), there still needs to be a focus on personal needs (20%). This balance is essential to prevent burnout and maintain a healthy self-concept, as discussed by Smith and Davidson (2020). Participant 6's response highlights that while engagement in the relationship is significant, it is not her primary focus, indicating the need to prioritize personal goals and responsibilities. This approach aligns with the findings of Goodman, Disabato, Kashdan, and Kauffman (2018), which emphasize the importance of balancing personal priorities with relational engagement to sustain overall life satisfaction and psychological well-being.

Spiritual and personal growth also play a significant role in the fulfillment experienced within situationships. Engagement in personal development activities, such as pursuing hobbies, spiritual practices, or self-improvement efforts, can enhance one's sense of purpose and satisfaction in life. Balancing these personal growth activities with relationship engagement ensures a well-rounded approach to well-being, fostering both individual and relational fulfillment.

Moments of Connection and Conflict Navigation in Situationships

Moments of connection in situationships are essential for the development of emotional bonds and for enhancing psychological well-being. Participants' responses reveal how shared vulnerability, mutual support, and acts of care and consideration contribute to their sense of connection and satisfaction within these informal relationships.

Shared vulnerability and mutual support are essential for creating deep emotional connections. Participant 2 and Participant 4 emphasize the importance of shared feelings and being the primary support person, respectively, which fosters a sense of special connection and mutual trust. Participant 3's experience of her partner opening up and sharing personal

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experiences underscores the role of vulnerability in strengthening emotional bonds. These interactions align with the findings of Khalifian and Barry (2020), who suggest that mutual vulnerability and support enhance relational intimacy and satisfaction. Engaging in such moments of connection can lead to increased feelings of closeness and emotional security, contributing positively to psychological well-being.

Acts of care and consideration are critical for demonstrating affection and maintaining emotional connections in relationships. These acts contribute to the sense of being valued and cared for. Participant 1's experiences of receiving messages and staying on call reflect the significance of small, considerate actions in feeling attended to and valued. Participant 6's shared activity of watching movies together with her best friend highlights the importance of spending quality time and engaging in enjoyable activities. These findings are supported by the research of Gordon and Chen (2016), which shows that acts of care and consideration significantly enhance relationship satisfaction and individual well-being. Such behaviors demonstrate attentiveness and affection, which are essential for maintaining strong emotional connections and fostering a sense of belonging.

Open communication and reassurance are crucial components of effective conflict resolution. Participant 1 and Participant 4 highlight the importance of openly discussing issues and providing reassurance, which helps to ease negative emotions and fosters a sense of mutual understanding and support. Participant 3 and Participant 5's emphasis on talking through issues, even when upset, further supports the value of clear and honest communication in maintaining relational health. Research by Mansilla (2004) indicates that open communication and reassurance are linked to higher relationship satisfaction and emotional stability. These practices contribute to building trust and emotional security, which are essential for navigating conflicts and maintaining psychological well-being in situationships.

Avoidance and positive coping mechanisms play a dual role in managing conflicts within situationships. Participant 2's experience of agreeing to disagree highlights the use of avoidance as a coping strategy, which can sometimes lead to confusion and emotional emptiness. Participant 6's response about not talking for weeks during conflicts points to the negative impact of avoidance on emotional well-being. While avoidance can temporarily mitigate conflict, it often leads to unresolved issues and emotional distress. Positive coping strategies, such as validating concerns and finding calm through discussion, are essential for mitigating the adverse effects of conflict avoidance and promoting emotional resilience.

Self-Esteem, Fulfillment, and Achievement in Situationships

The meaning derived from situationships can significantly impact the psychological well-being of individuals. Participants' responses illustrate how these relationships contribute to emotional fulfillment and support, personal growth, as well as emotional drain and loss of self-worth.

Building confidence through trust and support enhances individuals' sense of competence and self-worth. Participant 1's feeling of confidence and contentment from knowing someone cares highlights the positive impact of emotional support on self-esteem and perceived value. Similarly, Participant 4's experience of finding unique emotional support and connection in a situationship underscores the importance of these relationships for emotional stability and fulfillment. These findings are in line with the research by Lambert et al. (2019), which indicates that emotional support from close relationships significantly enhances psychological well-being and life satisfaction.

Personal growth and emotional fulfillment contribute to a sense of meaning and satisfaction within situational relationships. Participant 2's feeling of appreciation and love enhances her confidence while managing disappointments also contributes to her emotional resilience. Similarly, Participant 3's experience of feeling loved and respected highlights the emotional benefits derived from positive relationship experiences. These aspects of personal growth and emotional fulfillment align with the concept of meaning and accomplishment in one's life, contributing positively to psychological well-being.

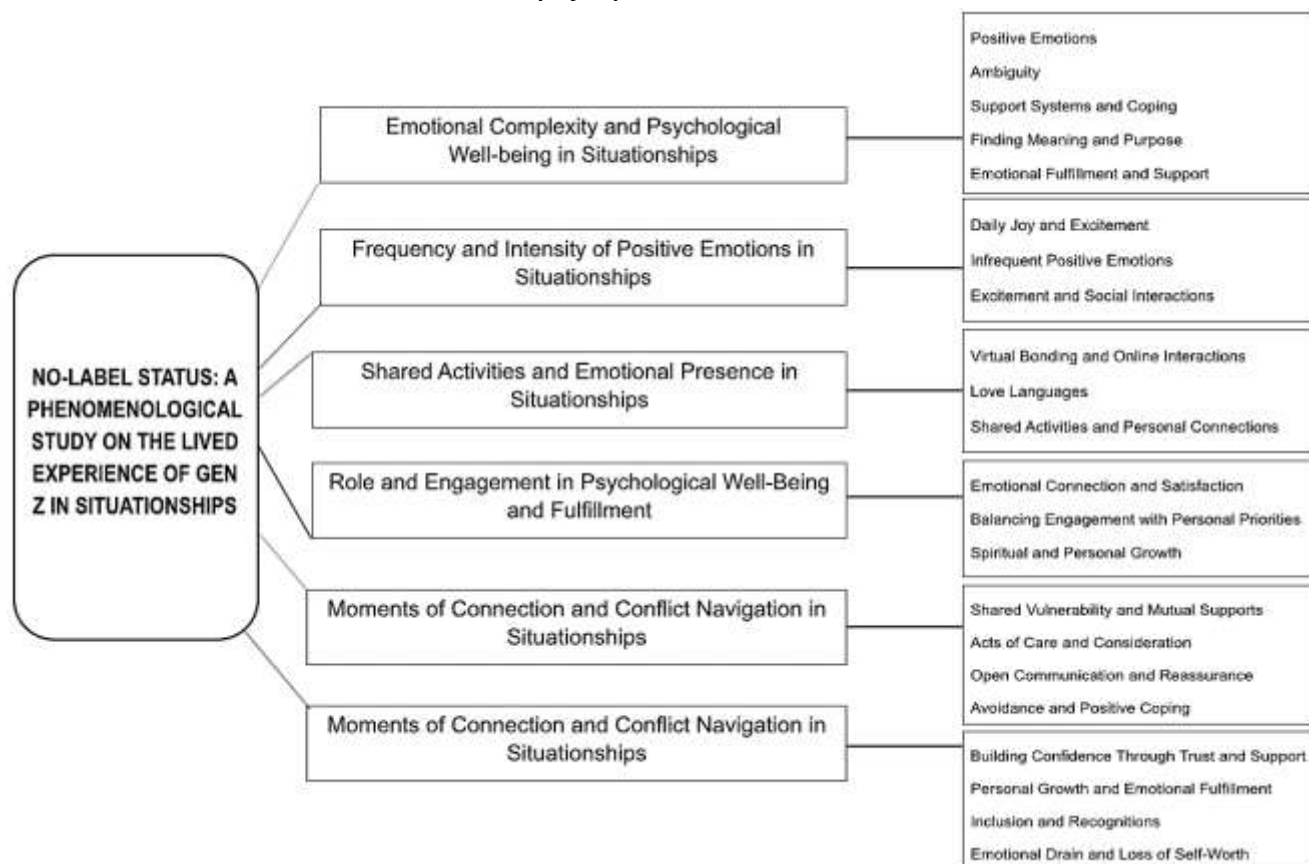
Inclusion and recognition within situational relationships contribute to a sense of belonging and social connectedness. Participant 4's experience of being introduced and included in familial settings underscores the significance of social integration in relationship satisfaction. Similarly, Participant 6's satisfaction from such experiences highlights their impact on emotional well-being and social support. Inclusion and recognition within these relationships reinforce a sense of being valued and appreciated, enhancing overall life satisfaction.

Emotional drain and loss of self-worth represent potential negative aspects of situationships. Participant 4's feeling of sadness and loss of self-worth due to prioritizing her partner indicates how situationships can sometimes lead to emotional exhaustion and a diminished sense of self. Participant 6's experience of not being able to rely on herself and focusing too much on her partner highlights the risk of dependency and reduced self-efficacy. Research emphasizes the importance of maintaining a balance between relational and personal needs to avoid emotional drain and ensure sustained psychological well-being. These findings suggest that while situationships can provide emotional support, they also carry the risk of emotional depletion and reduced self-worth if not managed carefully.

IV. DISCUSSION

On the basis of the qualitative information obtained from the semi-structured interviews with the Gen Z individuals in Situationships, the researcher's thoughts and conclusions are presented in a consolidated form in this chapter.

Thematic Map of Superordinate and Subthemes



Consolidated Findings and Reflections

In the phenomenological study on the Lived Experience of Gen Z individuals in situationships in Cabuyao City, Laguna, six superordinate themes emerged. These themes revealed the emotional complexity and variability of experiences in such relationships, highlighting both positive and negative impacts on psychological well-being.

Participants reported a range of emotions, from joy and excitement to ambiguity and fear, reflecting the dual nature of situationships. Daily positive interactions, such as shared activities and virtual bonding, contributed significantly to their well-being, aligning with theories of positive emotions and social support. However, infrequent positive emotions and emotional ambiguity often led to mixed feelings and uncertainty.

Shared activities and emotional presence, whether through virtual interactions or expressions of love languages, played a crucial role in building connections. Engagement in these relationships, balanced with personal priorities, was essential for maintaining overall well-being. Spiritual and personal growth activities also enhanced fulfillment.

Moments of connection, characterized by shared vulnerability, mutual support, and acts of care, were vital for emotional bonds. Open communication and reassurance helped navigate conflicts, while avoidance and positive coping strategies mitigated negative impacts.

Self-esteem and fulfillment were influenced by the level of trust, support, and recognition within the relationship. Positive reinforcement from partners boosted confidence and self-worth, contributing to personal growth and life satisfaction. However, emotional drain and loss of self-worth were challenges faced by some participants, highlighting the need for balanced emotional investment.

Overall, the findings offer a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of Gen Z in situationships, providing insights into the factors that enhance or hinder their psychological well-being. These insights can inform future mental health support and relationship guidance tailored to the unique needs of individuals in situationships.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the qualitative information gathered and the themes identified in the study, the following recommendations are made to address Generation Z individuals' psychological and emotional experiences in situationships. These strategies are designed to enhance their well-being, considering the challenges and coping mechanisms highlighted in the findings.

1. Address Emotional Ambiguity and Complexity

Findings: Participants expressed emotional ambiguity and stress due to the undefined nature of situationships, contributing to feelings of uncertainty and psychological discomfort.

Recommendation: Mental health professionals should design counseling interventions that focus on helping individuals navigate the emotional uncertainty of situationships. Sessions could include emotional regulation techniques and strategies for managing ambiguous relational dynamics, allowing individuals to process their emotions more effectively.

2. Enhance Social Support Networks

Findings: Participants highlighted the importance of social support systems as essential for managing the emotional challenges associated with situationships.

Recommendation: Peer support groups or online communities for individuals in non-traditional relationships, such as situationships, should be established. These platforms can provide a safe space to share experiences, seek advice, and gain emotional support, mitigating feelings of isolation and enhancing overall well-being.

3. Incorporate Situationships into Mental Health Programs

Findings: The variability in emotional experiences, ranging from joy to distress, underscores the need for targeted psychological support for those in situationships.

Recommendation: Mental health programs in schools, communities, and healthcare settings should integrate educational modules addressing non-traditional relationship dynamics like situationships. These programs should focus on coping strategies, emotional intelligence, and maintaining psychological balance in such relationships.

4. Promote Personal Growth Workshops

Findings: Participants stressed the importance of balancing relationship engagement with personal growth to maintain psychological well-being.

Recommendation: Personal development workshops that emphasize self-reflection, emotional intelligence, and personal growth should be offered. These workshops would encourage individuals in situationships to focus on their personal goals and emotional resilience, fostering a sense of individual accomplishment while navigating complex relational dynamics.

5. Provide Conflict Resolution and Communication Training

Findings: Open communication and conflict navigation were essential for emotional connection and psychological stability in situationships.

Recommendation: Relationship workshops should include training in communication skills and conflict resolution. These workshops would teach individuals how to express their emotions, navigate conflicts, and manage relational stress more effectively, improving emotional resilience and promoting healthier relationship outcomes.

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