



Issues of Unmarried Cohabitation among Higher Institution Students

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Abstract

This study examined the issues of unmarried cohabitation among higher institution students in Nigeria. Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri, Imo State was used as a case study. The study aimed at determining incidence of cohabitation, the demographic predictors of cohabitation among the students, the factors responsible for cohabitation among the students, the attitude of students towards cohabitation among the students as well as the effects of cohabitation on academic performances of the students. A structured questionnaire was administered for the purpose of data collection. A sample of five hundred (500) students was randomly selected from the six schools/faculties of the institution. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics with the aid of SPSS. The study revealed that cohabitation among student is persistently high, cohabitation is common among ND2 and HND1 students; female students were more open to talk about their cohabitation status. Reasons students cohabit include lack of finances, accommodation challenges, peer influence, sexual satisfaction and intimacy. The study concluded that there is a decline in the academic performance of students while cohabiting. Students are also aware of the dangers of cohabitation and are intentional about it.

Keywords: Issues, Unmarried, Cohabitation, Higher Institution, Students.

Introduction

Cohabitation is when two people who are romantically involved choose to live together without making the formal commitment of marriage. Cohabiting couples are typically emotionally and sexually intimate. The term “cohabitation” is not commonly used to describe people who are merely sharing a living space or who call themselves “roommates”. Cohabitation can pertain to either heterosexual or same sex couples, but it is most commonly used in reference to heterosexual couples. Cohabitation is tentative, a non-legal confidential union, it does not require a life time commitment to stay together. Even if one partner expects the relationship to be permanent, the other partner often does not. Cohabiting union breaks up at a much higher rate than marriages. While the formal dissolution of a legal marriage requires to the court’s intervention, there are not formalities for de facto spouses when they separate because their cohabitation is not recognized by civil law. Cohabitation is also called de facto relationship or common law union.

Cohabitation among students has now become very rampant in most institution of higher learning. The non-residential accommodation in many higher institutions tend to encourage this new trend of students cohabiting, unlike what was in operation in the olden times. Initially, all students were accommodated within institution’s hall had rules and regulations guiding their stay. Within a

short time, Nigerian tertiary institutions began to experience challenge of inadequate hostel accommodation, because the population of student continues to grow without corresponding growth in the number of halls of residence and other physical facilities. Therefore cohabitation became the order of the day among the students in higher institutions of learning.

Cohabitation among individuals of opposite sex is a predisposing factor to the initiation of sexual activities (Ogungbamila, 2003). Student who should be engaged in serious academic pursuit often end up performing below expectations because of all these distractions. Cohabitation among undergraduates has become a contemporary issue plaguing many higher institutions of learning. Many students tend to lose sight of why they are in school and are preoccupied with the unessential issues. It is not surprising that globalization has aided the spread of the phenomenon of cohabitation in Nigeria tertiary institutions and it has become a subject of concern for sociologists, practitioners of couple’s therapy or couple’s education, as well as parents, and other stakeholders in education ministry. This tends to cause lots of distraction for many students. The purpose why they are in school is forgotten to other responsibilities not related to learning. This tend to make

many students perform below expectations, since often times these students are never in the school/class for any serious academic work. Alo and Akinde (2010) observed that cohabitation and sexual behaviors are more common with these youths.

The culture of Chasity and purity is no longer promoted and encouraged among these youths; admission to higher institution is considered liberty and freedom to do whatever they like. Cohabitation has become rampant that some youths have become promiscuous, changing boyfriend/girlfriends regularly, and this has turned many ladies to street girls and prostitutes. AAUA Vice Chancellor, Ajibefu, (2015) asserted that cohabitation among unmarried students has been on the rise and if deliberate and pragmatic steps are not taken by all stakeholders including management of tertiary institutions, parents and religious leaders, this anomaly will continue to rise unabated and the society will ultimately suffer for it. This is serious call, hence something drastic must be done to stop this menace which is threatening the survival of our youths in higher institutions.

Statement of the Problem

Since cohabitation is against the norms and values of our society, African in general and Nigeria in particular, most students that live together do not allow their parents to know about it. This therefore exposes the students to all forms of risk and harm as they continue to cohabit. Health dimension aspect of the problem is worrisome. Cohabiting students will most likely engage in unprotected sex which could result in sexually transmitted infections and the much-dreaded HIV/AIDS disease (Ogunsola et al., 2004). The female students may indulge in the use of oral contraceptive in order to avoid unwanted pregnancy. But when pregnancy does occur, sometimes, the female student is more likely to seek abortion as a way out. This may expose the female students to quack doctors who are not licensed practitioners and this may result in septic abortion associated with hemorrhage, sepsis and acute renal failure all of which endanger life. Depression is a major consequence of cohabitation, the pains from such sexual break-ups is a factor in depression and suicide attempts among some young people. Bulanda and Lee's (2005) noted that cohabiting women exhibited significantly more depressed symptoms than married women. Bulanda and lee's talked about depression in relation to cohabiting women in general, but did not mention if the same challenge affects female students. This study therefore intends to examine various issues of unmarried cohabitation among students of Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri.

The specific objectives of the students are:

- i. To determine the incidence of cohabitation among FEDPONEK Students.

- ii. To determine the demographic predictors of cohabitation among FEDPONEK Students.
- iii. To determine the factors responsible for cohabitation among FEDPONEK Students.
- iv. To determine the attitude of students towards cohabitation among FEDPONEK Students.
- v. To determine the effect of cohabitation on academic performance of FEDPONEK Students.

Methodology

The study design was a descriptive cross-sectional study. Descriptive study involves the systematic collection and presentation of data to give a clear picture of a particular situation. Cross sectional studies aim at quantifying the distribution of certain variables in study population at a point in time. The design offers information about a population at a given point in time. It gave immediate knowledge and information on the subjects under study.

Data sources from this study were entirely obtained from the questionnaires. The data used in this study were collected from a primary source. The instrument used for data collection was the questionnaire. Five hundred (500) copies of questionnaire were administrated to a randomly slected students of the Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri.

The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as tables and charts, chi-square and frequency counts using a statistical software which is SPSS for coding and data analysis.

Results and Discussions

Results from the study are presented and analyzed as follows:

Table: 1 Socio-demographic data

SEX	Frequency	Percentage
Male	237	47.40
Female	262	52.40
AGE		
16 - 20	115	23.00
21 - 25	315	63.00
26 - 30	55	11.00
30 and above	15	3.00
MARITAL STATUS		

Single	466	93.20
Married	34	6.8
RELIGION		
Christianity	425	85.00
Islam	50	10.00
Others	25	5.00
PARENTAL EDUCATION		
Primary	65	13.00
Secondary	105	21.00
Tertiary	320	64.00
None	10	2

SOURCE: SURVEY, 2022

From the table 1 above, females and students within the age bracket of 21 – 25 years constituted greater percentage of the respondents among the sampled population. The females were more open and willing to talk about their cohabitation to the researcher than males. The age category of 21 – 25 years are mainly ND II students who are not new to the school environment. Cohabitation takes place among consenting adult students who are aware of themselves and leave in the same environment. Among the respondents are 93.2% single students of the FEDPONEK. This shows the liberty such unmarried students engage in while in school.

In as much as the ages of the respondents were not predetermined, the study managed to capture the various age groups within the student community. This was considered an important aspect since the majority of young people believe that it is a good idea to live with a person before marriage (Popenoe *et al.*, (1999).

The educational background of the cohabiting students' parents was quite high with 64% of their parents having tertiary education. This shows that these students are from parents who are well educate and were already used to freedom and liberty present in their homes before coming to school. Students whose parents were poorly educated will not have the courage to try or even afford cohabitation while in school.

Table 2: Student's Cohabitation Status

Do you Cohabit?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	150	30.00
No	297	59.40
Choose not to answer	53	10.60
Total	500	100.00

Source: Sample Survey, 2022

From the table above, it is observed that 10.60% of students chose not to respond to the question, 30% of students sampled admits that they cohabit, 59.40% of students said that they don't cohabit

Table 3: Awareness of Cohabitation among the Student

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	400	80.00
No	100	20.00
Total	500	100.00

Source: Sample survey, 2022

Table 3 above revealed a high level of percentage (80%) awareness of cohabitation among the sampled population of FEDPONEK students. This high level of awareness among students shows the enormity of the prevalence of cohabitation among the students

Table 4: Factors Responsible for Cohabitation among Students

	Frequency	Percent
To test the compatibility of their partner	50	10.00
To save money/Financial Problem	40	8.00
Lack of Accommodation	50	10.00
Lack of family support and parental love	65	13.00
To avoid divorce, once married	5	1.00
To fit it	35	7.00
Decline in the influence of religion	35	7.00
To be close and intimate to loved ones	115	23.00
Two or more of the above reasons	105	21.00
Total	500	

Source: Sample Survey, 2022

The table above summarizes the various reasons for cohabitation. Majority of the respondents (23%) highlighted to be close and intimate to loved ones as the main reason why students cohabit. 21% of the respondents outlined more than one factor. These were followed by 13% of people who highlighted lack of family support and parental love. To test the compatibility of one's partner had 10% and to fit in is 7%. To save money and decline in the influence of religion followed at 8% and 7% respectively.

Table 5: Perception of Students towards Cohabitation

	Frequency	Percent
Sinful	300	60.00
Helpful	90	18.00
Supportive	110	22.00
Total	500	

Source: Sample survey, 2022

From table 5 above, it was seen that 60% of the students perceive cohabitation as sinful. This shows that despite its high prevalence of cohabitation among some student, a great number perceive cohabitation as a sin against God. This argument supports the position of those who sees cohabitation as immoral act. It exposes students to sexual act and may lead to other dangerous sexually relate unwanted pregnancy, abortion and sexually transmitted diseases.

However, 18% of the respondents perceive it as being helpful to the students. 22% of the respondents see cohabitation as supportive in nature. The help and support here may be financial, academic, social or emotional in nature.

Table 6: Consequences of Cohabitation

<i>CONSEQUENCES OF COHABITATION</i>	Frequency	Percent
Lack of privacy	25	5.00
Poor academic performance	120	24.00
Abuse	45	9.00
Exploitation	65	13.00
Stable love affair	50	10.00
Depression	45	9.00
Unwanted pregnancies/Unsafe Abortion	75	15.00
STD/Infections	75	15.00
Total	500	

Source: Sample Survey, 2012

From the above table, 24% of respondents highlighted poor academic performance as the major consequence of cohabitation. Unwanted pregnancies/unsafe abortion and STD/infections came second with a tie at 15%.

Table 7: Factors that Discourage Cohabitation

<i>FACTORS THAT DISCOURAGE COHABITATION</i>	Frequency	Percent
Provision of hostels for female student	120	24.00
Enlighten students during orientation	155	31.00
Making accommodation affordable to students	120	24.00
Encouraging parents to regularly visit their children on campus	105	21.00

Source: Sample Survey, 2022

From the table 7 above, majority of the respondents (31%) highlighted the need to enlighten students during orientations about the dangers of cohabitation as the most reliable means to reduce cohabitation. 24% believed that provision of hostels for female students will discourage cohabitation among students. Same 24% of the respondents also believed that making accommodation affordable will discourage cohabitation among students. While 21% affirmed that encouraging parents to regularly visit their children at campus could be helpful.

Findings, Conclusion and Recommendations

Findings:

- i. The level of cohabitation amongst the students of FEDPONEK is high and needs to be controlled.
- ii. Cohabitation is common among the undergraduates in ND2 and HND1.
- iii. Students cohabit due to financial problems, accommodation challenges (Due to lack of hostel facilities) and peer influence while some cohabit due to sexual satisfaction, intimate relationship and unforeseen circumstance.
- iv. Most students see cohabitation as an action done depending on circumstance.
- v. The negative effect of cohabitation is observed to be more than the positive effect, and it affects the student's academic performance which makes them deviate from their desired goals.

Conclusion

Cohabitation among FEDPONEK students is quite common and is fueled by lack of accommodation which was referred to as poor hostel facilities. The toilet in the hostel is very bad that students can get infected easily and secondly there's no place to cook which made students spend a lot of money that is why many opted to stay in their boyfriend's place. Students perceived cohabitation as normal. Furthermore, undergraduate students indulge in cohabitation for pragmatic considerations to save money on rent and other living expenses. That is they cohabit with those whom they perceive are capable of solving their financial problems, other forms of support that make them cohabit include academic, emotional and social. It is further stated that norms regarding family formation, behavior of individuals are commonly shaped and reinforced by religious institutions. Strong religious parents can affect their child's behavior through guidance and supervision, regardless of the child's value on cohabitation, the child may decide not to cohabit in order to avoid embarrassing his/her parents, thus prevent causing them negative social sanctions or instigating family conflict. But it seems like there is a decline in religious authority and there are dramatic changes in religious structures. Religious inclination notwithstanding, contemporary

adolescents tend to do what they desire without any serious consideration for their religious beliefs. Cohabitation is seen as “Married in school but single at home”. Most of the cohabiting students refused to let their parents know about their cohabitation status while in school. Therefore, the idea of cohabiting with someone your parents never approved portrays a great danger to the students when things go wrong. Moreover, the school management and security may not be able to regulate the conduct of students living off campus where cohabitation usually takes place.

Recommendations:

The following recommendations are made to address salient issue on cohabitations among FEDPONEK students.

- i. The management of FEDPONEK should ensure that there are more hostels and hostel facilities especially for the females.
- ii. Accommodation should be affordable to students on campus so that indigent students could not be made vulnerable to all kinds of exploitation including cohabitation.
- iii. Some cohabit due to ignorance and inexperience, the desire to explore, and the sudden freedom is what prompt many of these students to misbehave. Adequate counseling and a good orientation programme will help many of these innocent students find their bearing not to misbehave and be misdirected.
- iv. Parents are also encouraged to visit their wards in school

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