

Cohabitation among University of Ibadan Undergraduate Students

Ogadimma Chukwubueze, Arisukwu

Department Of Sociology, Faculty of the Social Sciences, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.
Collinsabu2000@yahoo.com +234 8033485441

Abstract

The increase in the number of undergraduate students and the inability of the School authorities to provide adequate hostel accommodation, has led to cohabitation among undergraduate students in some Nigerian public universities. The study adopted rational choice theory as a theoretical framework to explain cohabitation among undergraduate students of University of Ibadan. Full time undergraduate students in the University of Ibadan constituted the study population. The study utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis on three hundred respondents. Cohabitation among the undergraduates of university of Ibadan students is quite common and was caused mainly by lack of accommodation, problems with roommates, lack of privacy and the need to be close and intimate with ones lover.

Key word: undergraduate students, accommodation problems, cohabitation

1. Introduction

The increase in cohabitation is one of the most significant shifts in family demographics of the past century (Alo, 2008). Cohabitation has become common, among undergraduate students in Nigerian higher institutions. Yet, cohabitation prior to marriage has been consistently associated with poorer marital communication quality, lower marital satisfaction and higher levels of domestic violence Clarkberg, M, Ross, M. Stolzenberg and Linda J. W. 1995). Cohabitation was obscure and even taboo throughout the nineteenth century and until the 1970s. Nonmarital unions have become common because the meaning of the family has been altered by individualistic social values that have progressively matured since the late 1940s (Ogunsola, 2004). Sociologists treat cohabitation as a distinct occurrence not just because it has displaced marriage, but also because it represents a structural change in family relationships.

Although in the past cohabitation before marriage was not viewed as the right thing to do, it is now sometimes seen as a “necessity.” Some people do it out of preparation for marriage, while others do it out of convenience.

2. Statement of the problem

The increase in population of undergraduate students and the inability of the government to adequately provide the needed social infrastructures and funding of higher education in Nigeria has led to risky coping mechanisms among the students. Government policy on students' hostel accommodation i.e encouraging private developers may have its good side but it has been observed that, the inability of the institutions in expanding and building new hostels has forced several students to look outward for accommodation. This constraint of hostel accommodation within the universities has led to a deviant form of cohabitation known as “campus marriage” among students. A situation where students of opposite sex are forced to live together and share things in common without any traditional or legal authorization portends danger to the sanctification of the institution of marriage and family.

It is against the norms and values of our society to allow young and unmarried couple to live together especially where they do not have any family affinity. 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. Students who live together with their partners lack both family and the university's protection and support. So they are vulnerable and susceptible to attack and abuse by both outsiders and even their partners. Often times the society frowns at unmarried adults cohabiting within the society without paying adequate attention to the consequences of undergraduate students living together in the same society. Most institutions make laws to control indecent dressing among students without paying attention to cohabitation among them.

Cohabitation has inevitably come to stay with all its supposed positive and negative consequences. Although similar to marriage, cohabitation has some distinct function from marriage. The participants in a cohabitation setting are not immune from the various problems that besiege it. Problems such as sacrificing of the primary aim of being in school, unwanted pregnancy, the use of oral contraceptive by female students and the danger inherent in such practices, sharing of domestic chores among others. Financial involvement can also bring the unit into serious conflict. The multi-dimensional consequences facing cohabiters are quite numerous. One of the consequences is unprotected sex and its attendant effects such as unwanted pregnancies and other sexually transmitted diseases. These diseases can also affect the financial positions of the cohabiters therefore affecting other aspects like education. There are other educational consequences associated with cohabitation. Economic problems have been identified as one of the challenges currently plaguing cohabiting relationships among students. This has manifested in the form of greed on the part of the partners and a strong unwillingness to be committed financially. Health dimension aspect of the problem is worrisome. Cohabiting students will most likely engage in unprotected sex which could result sexually transmitted infections and the much dreaded HIV/AIDS disease (Ogunsola,2004). This practice of cohabiting has serious health issue to the female students that may indulge in the use of oral contraceptive in order to avoid unwanted pregnancy that may lead to truncated educational aspirations. But when pregnancy does occur, sometimes, the female student is more like to seek abortion as a way out. This practice of seeking for abortion may lead to another problem of exposing the female students to quack doctors who are not licensed practitioners and this may result in a whole of health complications with serious negative spillover effects in the long run (Ofoegbu, 2002). However, some students may frown at abortion and or not even have the money to execute it. This may lead to giving birth to unwanted babies that were not planned for and all the consequences that come with it including a threatened academic pursuit. The study broadly aimed at investigating the consequences of cohabitation among University of Ibadan undergraduate Students. The specific objectives for the study are:

1. To examine the factors responsible for cohabitation among students;
2. to investigate the opinion held by cohabiting students;
3. to explore the perceived challenges facing cohabiting students;
4. to describe the ways in which domestic chores are organized among cohabiting students,
5. To examine the effect of cohabitation on student's academic performance.

3. Justification for the study

This study contributed in the filling of some gap in the literature on cohabitation among undergraduate students in Nigeria. It is also justified on the ground that it provided a base for the understanding of the various consequences from cohabitation and how the situation can be managed. The many consequences of cohabitation among the students were made known to aid government policies on students' accommodation in Nigeria. Understanding the complex series of interactions that go on in cohabitation relationships and the various health related problem that may result thereof was another justification for this study.

The study attempted to explore cohabitation among university students in order to bring to the fore the various reasons given by the students for their involvement. The wide dearth of knowledge as a result of little work done on this phenomenon were also bridged and members of the public were aware of the consequences that are inherent in such practice and therefore be rational enough to decide against it. When the findings of the study is made known, it may also help to demystify some of the negative dangers in cohabitation and aid the university community as well as policy makers to understand the phenomenon and for adequate measures to be taken to bring the issue under control.

4. Theory and Methods

The study adopted rational choice theory as a theoretical framework to explain cohabitation among undergraduate students of University of Ibadan. Full time undergraduate students in the University of Ibadan constituted the study population. Diploma, post graduates and distance learning students were excluded from the study. The sample population was drawn from this study population. The student population was stratified into campus and off campus residence for the purpose of collecting data from the cohabiting adults. Also, the perception of non-cohabiting students will also be relevant for the study in order to probe the phenomenon deeper and try to discover the meanings that cohabitation hold for non-cohabiters.

A sample of three hundred (300) respondents took part in the study by completing the questionnaire. The questionnaire was complemented with 8 In-depth interviews (IDI) which was conducted on students that have cohabited before and those currently involved in it.

5. Results

Results from the study are presented and analyzed as follows:

Table: 1 Socio-demographic data

SEX	Frequency	Percentage
Male	120	40.0
Female	180	60.0
AGE		
16-20	127	42.3
21-25	145	48.3
26 and above	28	9.3
MARITAL STATUS		
Single	280	93.3
Married	20	6.7
ETHNICITY		
Yoruba	184	61.3
Igbo	83	27.7
Hausa	6	2.0
Others	27	9.0
RELIGION		
Christianity	252	84.0
Islam	42	14.0
Others	6	2.0
PARENTAL EDUCATION		
Primary	9	3.0
Secondary	33	11.0
Tertiary	249	83.0
None	9	3.0
TOTAL	300	100

Source: field work 2012

From the table 1 above, females and students within the age bracket of 21-25 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 was mainly students who were no longer fresh to the University environment. Cohabitation takes place among consenting adult students who are aware of themselves and leave in the same environment.

Among the respondents are 93.3% single students of the University of Ibadan. This shows the liberty such unmarried students engage in while in school. The value of the institution of marriage has reduced the incidence of cohabitation among students who were already married. Among adult workers in the cities it is possible to observe cohabitation among married people due to high cost of accommodations and unaccompanied transfer of one of the married spouse away from home.

The table above equally revealed that 61.3% of the respondents were from the Yoruba ethnic origin. This shows that despite the fact that The University of Ibadan is located in Yoruba land, some of the students from this ethnic group were found to have the highest percentage of cohabiting students among the respondents. It could equally suggest that most students from other ethnic groups left their lovers or friends behind while coming to school in Ibadan. So proximity of cohabiting partner becomes a strong factor in understanding cohabitation among University of Ibadan students.

The educational background of the cohabiting students' parents was quite high with 83% of their parents having tertiary education. This shows that these students 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. They will prefer to squat with friends or relatives in Ibadan.

Table.2 Awareness of cohabitation among University of Ibadan Students

	Frequency	percentage
Yes	239	79.7
No	61	20.3
Total	300	100

Source: field work 2012

The table 2 above revealed a high level of percentage (79.7%) awareness of cohabitation among the sampled population of undergraduate students of University of Ibadan. This high level of awareness among students shows the enormity of the problem of accommodation among students in the campus of university of Ibadan. It therefore, shows that cohabitation is perceived by the students as a normal means of dealing with the problem of cohabitation.

Table.3 cohabiting students among the sampled population

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	69	23.0
No	231	77.0
Total	300	100

Source. Field work 2012

From table 3 above it was observed that 23% of the student population among the respondents actually cohabit while 77% do not cohabit. This shows that the number of students who do not cohabit were more than those that cohabit. However, 23% who cohabit is actually high when considered the negative implications of students cohabiting without the knowledge of their parents or guardians.

Table.4 Factors responsible for cohabitation among students

Factors	Frequency	percentage
Accommodation difficulties	20	6.7
Financial problems	16	5.3
Lack of accommodation	16	5.3
Love	28	9.4

Source: field work 2012

The table above shows some of the factors responsible for cohabitation among the undergraduate students of university of Ibadan. From the table, 9.4% of the students who cohabit do so because of love. Students arrange to cohabit with their lovers in the same place while in school. This could be to strengthen their relationship and prevent others from taking advantage of separate accommodation to snatch their partners from them.

Also, 6.7% of the respondents cohabit due to accommodation difficulties. Most students do not enjoy their privacy while living in the midst of other students in the same room in the hostel. So to avoid problems and disputes, they prefer to cohabit off campus to protect their love life and shield it from public view. So to avoid undue interference by others into their affairs and to avoid constant provocations from others, students choose to stay on their own outside the school with their partners together.

Poverty is also a factor as attested to by 5.3% of the respondents. To this category of students, cohabiting helps them to reduce the cost of living in the school. They enjoy the financial support of their partner when they live together. It was found that Love (9.4%) constituted the greatest reason for cohabitation among undergraduate students of University of Ibadan.

This position was supported by a female respondent who has been cohabiting for over two years;

I honestly prefer to live with my boy friend than any stranger

Though we often quarrel, but I love my boy friend and can face

Whatever challenges that may arise together with him.

Female IDI, Agbawo, 2012

This means that love is usually at the centre of cohabitation among undergraduate students in University of Ibadan.

Opinions held by cohabiting students

The IDI revealed that the cohabiting students see nothing wrong with it and some do not even care what their friends thinks of them. This position was supported by a female student who is twenty years of age and has been cohabiting for a year;

Most of my friends don't know and it's really not their business

If you think you can cohabit then you can. It is not wrong.

Female IDI, Bodija, 2012

Another male student aged 29 who has been cohabiting for two years said;

I feel indifferent how my friends feel about it

My girl helps me a lot. I don't use to attend lectures

Regularly before, but she literally drags me to school these days

She complaints of some of my guys too and helps me not to get into

Trouble any more. The only thing is that if my parents find out they will be angry

Male IDI, Ibadan, 2012

This shows that cohabiting students see themselves as normal students only that they prefer to live together with their partners. To them it is their perception of themselves that counts, they do not care what their friends may think or say about them. Though some of the cohabiting students claim that their parents know, others were too afraid to let their parents hear about it.

Table 5. Perception of other students towards cohabitation

Perception	Frequency	percentage
Sinful	156	57.4
Helpful	45	16.5
Supportive	71	26.1
Total	300	100

Source: field work, 2012

From table 5 above, it was seen that 57.4% of the students perceive cohabitation as sinful. This shows that despite its high level of awareness and practice among some student, a greater percentage of the students who do not cohabit perceive cohabitation as a sin against God. This argument supports the position of those who see cohabitation as immoral act. It exposes students to sexual act and may lead to other dangerous sexually related risks such as unwanted pregnancy, abortion and sexually transmitted diseases.

However, 45% of the respondents perceive it as being helpful to the students. Those who may likely benefit from financial and other forms of support from their partners see it as supportive. This shows that poverty and lack could predispose students to cohabit with those that have the capacity to solve or help them out of their problems. To 26.1% of the respondents, cohabitation is supportive in nature. Here the nature of the support could include financial, academic, emotional and social. So cohabitation performs these support services to the students who indulge in it.

Table 6. The consequences of cohabitation among University of Ibadan students

	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of privacy	97	32.3
Poor academic result	64	21.3
Abuse	51	17.0
Exploitation	30	10.0
Stable love affair	38	12.7
Total	280	93.3

Source; field work 2012

The above table shows some of the various consequences of cohabitation among the students of University of Ibadan. From the table, 32.3% of the respondents said cohabitation leads to lack of privacy. This means that once you cohabit most of your secrets become exposed to your partner. You find it difficult to have your own private conversations in phones, or even receive some visitors without your partner knowing about everything about you.

This situation was supported by one female IDI respondent who said;

Though I enjoy the company of my boy friend

But I have issues with timing and differences in schedules

Choice of friends and use of each other's properties

Another male IDI respondent said;

I honestly find it really hard to cope with some of her friends

When you want to relax or sleep that's when they will visit and

Make a lot of noise. If I try to warn her about them, she gets angry.

Male IDI Ibadan, 2012

Though some students claim to live off campus in order to have their privacy, however the privacy is further denied them when they cohabit. As a student one needs some level of quiet and private time alone to concentrate in the rigours of academic demands in school.

The effect of cohabitation on academic performance of the students as shown in the table is negative. The table shows that 21.3% of the respondents were of the view that cohabitation leads to poor academic performance. This position was buttressed by one male IDI respondent who said;

We often quarrel in the house and if we don't
Settle the disagreement on time, it affects me
Emotionally and I find it difficult to concentrate while reading.
It can affect your results in school if you don't manage the crisis well.

Male IDI Ibadan, 2012

Cohabiting therefore exposes the students to the challenges of managing home and tolerance among adult couples in the society even when they were ill prepared for such responsibility.

Cohabitation exposes students for abuse as attested to by 17% of the respondents. Sexual abuse is common among cohabiting partners. This is because they own no commitment and responsibility to each other. Most times it is the girl that often fall victim of abuse in a cohabiting relationship. Most times they are physically abused and even raped by their cohabiting partner. This could be violent where the male partner is a drug addict.

Cohabitation also leads to exploitation by one of the partners. Table 6, above shows that cohabitation can lead to exploitation as said by 10% of the respondents. Cohabitation as a form of relationship is open to a lot of exploitation by one partner. The observation and results from IDI among cohabiting students reveals that exploitation can be in form of finance, time and even academic most times. The male students sometimes complain that they have to be compelled to assist their girl friend with their academic work. Some even said that they had to beg on their behalf so that she can pass her courses.

From the above table it was only 12.7% of the respondents that claimed that cohabitation leads to a stable love affair. This shows that cohabitation actually teaches the students about tolerance and living with their loved ones. By staying together they tend to understand each other better and their proximity has a positive impact on their love affair. Cohabitation prevents multiple sex partners among some students and therefore aids a stable love affair among them.

Table7. Cross tabulation of students who cohabit against gender.

Sex	Do you cohabit? <u>yes</u>	Do you cohabit? <u>No</u>	total
<u>Male</u>	<u>27.6</u> <u>24.2%</u>	<u>92.4</u> <u>75.8%</u>	<u>120</u> <u>100%</u>
<u>Female</u>	<u>41.4</u> <u>22.2%</u>	<u>138.6</u> <u>77.8%</u>	<u>180.0</u> <u>100.0%</u>
<u>Total</u>	<u>69.0</u> <u>23.0%</u>	<u>231.0</u> <u>77.0%</u>	<u>300.0</u> <u>100%</u>

Chi-square=154; df=1; p=.695

The result in table 7 above indicates that there is no statistically significant relationship between gender and student cohabitation status among the respondents. This means that there is no significant connection between students that cohabit and their gender. Both male and female all cohabit among the students.

Effects of cohabitation on students' academic performance

Most of the cohabiting student interviewed agreed that cohabitation has effects on their academic performance. One of the female IDI respondents said;

I can tell you that since I started living together
I now attend lectures regularly and study together
With my boy friend. He even assists me in my assignments.

This shows that cohabiting facilitates studying together and sharing in the challenges of study. Where the cohabiting students are in the same department it enables them to support and complement each other during study. Cohabiting reduces the financial challenges some students undergo especially during examinations by sharing the financial needs and demands during the session. However, some cohabiting students claimed that cohabitation has affected their academic performances negatively. One male IDI respondent said;

I enjoy my girl friend's companion
But when we quarrel it affects me badly
I cannot even open my books talkless of
Understanding anything. When her demands
Becomes too much I am emotionally down and
Cannot perform well in my studies.

Male IDI, Ibadan 2012

The quotation above shows that domestic conflict and financial challenges can affect the study plans and patterns of the cohabiting students and result in poor academic performances in examination. This is because, students have no legal or cultural commitment to each other as seen among married couples. Cohabitation is a deviant habitation pattern frowned at by both culture and religion. Students lack the experience and training to cope with challenges of living together as man and wife. These challenges if not solved in time could degenerate to violence and abuse by one of the cohabiting partners.

Management of the home chores

The cohabiting students all claimed that they do the house chores together at home. They contribute money for feeding and other things. They share and use their properties together. This position was supported by one of the respondent who said;

We contribute our money and time to run the home
I can wash plate and clean the house while my girl friend is cooking.
Sometimes I even do the cooking too.

Another respondent said that;

Everybody runs his or her life individually
You make your money and spend it the way
You wish. If I buy things for my girl it's just out
Of love not because we cohabit

This shows that some of the cohabiting students live their individual life while others combine to run the home. It is the nature of the relationship that exists among them that will affect how they run the home. However, one cannot rule out the effect of gender in the roles the students perform. Conflict equally results where they have some habits and lifestyles such as smoking, drinking out with friends and following fashion trends and life style. These life styles and habits if not properly managed could be a source of quarrel among the students.

6. Conclusion and recommendation

Cohabitation among the undergraduates of university of Ibadan students is quite common and caused mainly by lack of accommodation, problems with roommates, lack of privacy and the need to be close and intimate with ones lover. The students perceive cohabitation as normal and none of the business of their friends in school. The high awareness of cohabitation among the students generally suggests the acceptance of this living style among the students.

However the students were not counseled to handle the socio-economic and psychological consequences of cohabitation. 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 portends a great danger to the students when things go wrong. Moreover, the school security may not be able to regulate the conducts of students living off campus where cohabitation usually takes place.

Though, the rational theorists believe that cohabiting students have made a sound judgment by considering the benefits of cohabitation before going into it, such calculations may be based on immediate gains against future life and relationships. So cohabitation could expose the students to abuses and other socially risky attitudes and conducts that may jeopardize their future happiness and fulfillment.

The root cause of cohabitation among undergraduate students of University of Ibadan is lack of accommodation. It has been observed that the university has more male hostels than female hostels in the campus. This makes it difficult for the school to adequately cater for the accommodation needs of numerous female students in the university. This lack of accommodation for female students predisposes them to search for alternative means of accommodation with the options of cohabitation often available.

Cohabitation could influence the life and attitude of the students positively or negatively depending the real experiences of the students. It exposes students to pre-marital sex and other consequences such as unwanted

pregnancies, abortion complications and sexually transmitted diseases. The trauma the students encounter at this stage could affect future relationships and perception of opposite sex.

On the other hand, where the cohabiters have good experiences it fosters tolerance, and encourages them to know each other better for a permanent future relationship through marriage. It helps the partners to see and experience their partners where they are dating for they actually are and make informed decision about their continued stay in the relationship. Another important issue here is the age at which the students engage in cohabitation. It was observed that some of the students were in their late teens early 20s and were not ready for marriage. They just see cohabitation as fun and opportunity to explore their new found independence and liberty in the university.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to reduce the negative consequences of cohabitation among the undergraduate students of university of Ibadan.

1. The University authority should provide more hostels for female students.
2. The living conditions of the hostels provided must be examined to make them more conducive for students to habit.
3. Accommodation should be made affordable to students on campus so that indigent students could not be made vulnerable for all kinds of exploitation including cohabitation.
4. The University authority must find a way of regulating and monitoring the conducts of the students who live off campus with the help of the community leaders within the neighborhoods where students live.
5. Students should be adequately enlightened during orientations about the dangers of cohabitation.
6. Parents should be encouraged to visit their children and find where and whom they live with while in school.
7. Students should be encouraged to meet social councilors whenever they are in danger or being abused by their cohabiters quick to save their live and enhance their academic performances.

7. References

- Alo, O. A and Akinde, I. S. (2010). Premarital sexual activities in an urban society of Southwest Nigeria
- Alo, O.A. (2008). Socioeconomic determinants of unintended pregnancies among Yoruba Women of Southwest Nigeria. International Journal of Sustainable Development. Vol.1 (4), 145-154.
- Clarkberg, M, Ross, M. Stolzenberg and Linda J. W. (1995). *Attitudes, Values, and Entrance into Cohabitional versus Marital Unions. Social Forces*. 74: 609-634.
- Kramer, Elise (2004). "Cohabitation: Just a Phase?" *Psychology Today* 37: 28.
- Nwogugu, E. I. (2001). *Family Law in Nigeria, (Revised Edition)*. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria) Plc.
- Ofoegbu, C. I., (2002). *Human Development, Family Behaviour, Parenting, Marriage and nCounselling Skills*. Enugu: Snaap Press Ltd.
- Ogunsola, M.O. (2004). Premarital behaviour and length of courtship as determinant of marital stability among couples in Oyo State, Nigeria. Unpublished M.Ed. project, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.

This academic article was published by The International Institute for Science, Technology and Education (IISTE). The IISTE is a pioneer in the Open Access Publishing service based in the U.S. and Europe. The aim of the institute is Accelerating Global Knowledge Sharing.

More information about the publisher can be found in the IISTE's homepage:
<http://www.iiste.org>

CALL FOR PAPERS

The IISTE is currently hosting more than 30 peer-reviewed academic journals and collaborating with academic institutions around the world. There's no deadline for submission. **Prospective authors of IISTE journals can find the submission instruction on the following page:** <http://www.iiste.org/Journals/>

The IISTE editorial team promises to the review and publish all the qualified submissions in a **fast** manner. All the journals articles are available online to the readers all over the world without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. Printed version of the journals is also available upon request of readers and authors.

IISTE Knowledge Sharing Partners

EBSCO, Index Copernicus, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, JournalTOCS, PKP Open Archives Harvester, Bielefeld Academic Search Engine, Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek EZB, Open J-Gate, OCLC WorldCat, Universe Digital Library , NewJour, Google Scholar

