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Cohabitation in Nigeria Tertiary Institutions: A Case Study Of Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State Nigeria

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Abstract

Cohabitation in tertiary institutions in Nigeria has continued to attract scholarly attention because of the strong assumption that the phenomenon portends erosion to some of the cultural values highly esteemed in Africa. This study therefore investigates cohabitation among undergraduate students of Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Nigeria. The study was a descriptive survey research and a total of 250 undergraduates were randomly sampled from the six faculties of the university. The research instrument used for study was a 20 item questionnaire that sought information on reasons for cohabitation among the respondents. The instrument used was adjudged adequate and valid by sociologists and female specialists in women studies. Both frequency and percentage were used to analyse the data collected. Some of the major findings from the study reveal that between 25% and 50% of the university students engage in the act of cohabitation, implying that cohabitation is a menace among the university students. Also, 71.8% of the respondents agreed that cohabitation contributes to high level of moral decadence in the society, thus confirming that cohabitation have negative impact on students' moral development and invariably their health and academic development. Based on these findings, it was suggested that the menace could be curbed if parents monitor regularly their wards in school while the university authority should provide adequate hostel accommodation for students who live off campus, and of course proper counseling on marital issues should be provided for the vulnerable undergraduate youths.

Keywords: cohabitation, undergraduates, tertiary institutions, Nigeria.

Introduction

The 21st Century has witnessed an unprecedented transformation in almost all aspects of human endeavours and the human culture is not excluded. The human culture has been transformed by a revolution in sexual values. Some phenomena, especially those that border on sexuality, which hitherto are regarded as taboos or vices seem have now been enthroned as virtues to be pursued or celebrated among different nations of the world, especially in the western culture. Lots of shows and movies now celebrate sexual freedom; there is rise in pre-marital sex and co-habitation among adults and young adults alike. All these are results of sexual revolution that came with western culture.

Broadly speaking, sexual revolution (or liberation) includes increased acceptance of sex outside of traditional heterosexual monogamous relationships (primarily marriage), the normalisation of contraception and pills, public nudity, pornography, pre-marital sex, homosexuality, the alternative forms of sexuality, and the legalization of abortion (the free Encyclopedia.....or Wikipedia (cited from 'Abc-Clio' Greenwood.com retrieved 20/05/2016). From this perception, one can thus safely infer that cohabitation is directly a feature of sexual liberation.

Simply defined, co-habitation is when two people who are romantically involved choose to live together without making the formal commitment of marriage. It could also be referred to as a situation in which two people live together in a family frame work analogous to marriage without actually having gone through a ceremony of marriage (Schuellnus, 1994:1). The term is also called de facto marriage (Net Industries, 2012) and among Nigeria university undergraduates where the menace is spreading widely, it is simply referred to as 'campus marriage', 'couples' life', 'campus coupling', and 'marrying for marriage'.

As Cherlin (1992) observes, cohabitation first came to scholarly attention because of the living arrangements among college students of 1960s but then, Cherlin maintains that these persons (college students) were the imitators, not the innovators. In other words, cohabitation was first practiced by the older adults before the young adults too started the act. It has also been established that people in cohabitation relationships tend to be younger than people in marital relationships. This supports the argument that cohabitation is often an antecedent to marriage. The majority of cohabitation relationships dissolve because the couples involved get married;

Cohabitation can pertain to either heterosexual or same sex couples but it is most commonly used in reference to heterosexual couples. Also, cohabiting couples typically have some characteristics: they are emotionally and sexually intimate.

It is significant to note that it is pre-marital sex that has actually given birth to a culture of cohabitation which is now prevalent in many countries in Europe, America, Canada, and Africa, including Nigeria (Herrnson and Weldon, 2014; Mwaba and Naidoo, 2005; and Ogunsola, 2004). For instance, Mwaba and Naidoo (2005) reveal that pre-marital sex and co-habitation are common among tertiary and working youths in South Africa and the high rate of premarital pregnancy and the spread of HIV and AIDS pandemic among the youth is in greater proportions. Furthermore, research work of Risman, Hill, Rubin and Peplau (1981) show that the phenomenon has also long been in vogue among college students in the US and they reveal that a significant percentage of college students live with a dating partner at some point in their college career.

In Nigeria too, cohabitation is now a culture in most of Nigerian tertiary institutions, particularly, the state-owned universities where on-campus accommodation is almost non-existent. Pre-marital sex (a prelude to cohabitation), has become a norm amongst many youths while abstinence is no longer regarded as a virtue. Those who abstain or are chaste are regarded as unsophisticated. To avoid the stigma or name calling, many youths who are apparently vulnerable are trying sex at earlier ages than ever before. Thus, as Isiugo-Abanihe and Oyediran (2004) reveal, Nigerian youths reach sexual debut at age 16. In other words, they become sexually active at an earlier

age and most of them, especially the female youths are vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases like gonorrhoea, syphilis, and the much dreaded HIV/AIDS. This is aside the fact that the females drop out of school because of unplanned motherhood while unplanned fatherhood does not usually terminate males' schooling.

Some researchers such as Montague (1977), Newsweek (1977), and Fakeye (2000) claim that cohabitation, unconventional sexual activities especially among university undergraduates and youths generally, pose a threat to the institution of marriage and indicates lack of commitment to long-term relationships, and that it is a pointer to the erosion to African cultural values which places high premium on chastity before marriage. However, other researchers (e.g. Macklin, 1978; and Kate, 2010) claim that for most college students, cohabitation should be taken as a stage of courtship and that almost all of those who cohabit plan to marry someone eventually. Hence, the phenomenon after all, does not pose any threat to the marriage institution as is being widely circulated in research on cohabitation. This controversy and other reasons adduced for the viral effect of cohabitation partly justify the rationale for this study.

Researchers on cohabitation among undergraduates in Nigeria universities and indeed other parts of the world have adduced some reasons for the development of the phenomenon. In Nigeria, one of the major reasons is lack of residential accommodation on the campus of state universities in Nigeria. In the past decades, many universities (particularly private and state-owned) sprung up in Nigeria. The economic meltdown plaguing the nation as a whole has no doubt affected the education industry. Hence, it has become a herculean task for both the federal and state governments to provide sufficient fund to build enough halls of residence for her teeming population of students that were offered admission. In other words, as enrolment has surged, on-campus housing construction has not matched increased enrolment. Undoubtedly, the need for shelter is one of the greatest needs of humanity and Abraham Maslow depicts this in his pyramid of human needs. As Olotuah (2010) aptly submits, housing has profound influence on the health, efficiency, social behaviour, productivity, satisfaction and general welfare of the community. There is no doubt that students' housing affects their success in college,

As a way out of the aforementioned challenge, the Federal Government of Nigeria has adopted a liberal policy on the provision of hostel accommodation for students of tertiary institutions. Some private hostel developers are allowed to build hostels outside the university campus. Bello and Ogunsanwo (2013) observe that this liberal policy, though a blessing, has some negative effects on the students who seek off campus type of accommodation. Most off-campus decent accommodation are often less affordable than the on-campus housing. Therefore, the usual practice is that both male and female rent a space and cohabit. This confirms the opinion of Elise (2004) that cohabitants live together in order to save money, because of the convenience of living with one another, or a need to find housing. This assertion is also in agreement with Goodwin; Mosher, and Chandra (2010) that extremely high costs of housing and tight budgets of today's economy also account for cohabitation. The resultant effect of all these is that most of these youths who have reached their sexual debut and are more or less on their own without any parental guidance and necessary sex education,

have unabated freedom to engage in sexual activities and other unwholesome acts with reckless abandon.

In a literature on intimate relationships conducted by Prager (2000), it was revealed that both men and women are motivated to live together for love or at least due to affection and attraction. Also, Arisukwu (2013) reveals from her study that students who cohabit do so because of love. Their belief is that cohabiting with their so-called campus lovers would strengthen their relationship and prevent other students from taking advantage of separate accommodation to snatch their partners from them. Thus, one can infer that these reasons represent relationship-driven motives. There is no doubt that this will have negative effect on the students' academic performance. The study of Sabia and Rees (2009) reveal that there is relationship between students' sexual relationship and their academic performance. They believe that teenagers who abstain from sex are more likely to graduate from high school and attend college (university) than their sexually active peers. Their argument is anchored on the premise that when greater energy and interest were invested in sexual activity, the drive for academic performance or long term academic goals will likely diminish in importance. Furthermore, since teenage sexual relationships are inherently short-term and unstable, when the intimate relationship collapses, emotional turmoil and depression usually set in. Also, undergraduate students indulge in cohabitation for pragmatic considerations to save money on rent and other living expenses (Manning and Smock, 2005; Lindsay 2000; Sassler 2004, and Arisukwu (2013). 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.

Some researchers opine that cohabiters cohabit in order to study each other to test compatibility with their partners, while they still have the option of ending the relationship when things turn sour. For instance, Elise (2004) reveals that in the US, cohabitation is often seen as a natural step in the dating process. More than two-thirds of married couples in the US were said to have lived together before getting married.

Among college students, Risman, Hill, Rubin and Peplau (1981) maintain that cohabitation is a stage of courtship. Thus, cohabitation is viewed as a prelude to marriage or as an important antecedent to marriage. As revealed by Bumpass and Lu, (2000), almost 60 percent of all marriages formed had begun as nonmarital unions. However, a survey by a University of Chicago sociologist Linda Waite found that 16 percent of cohabiting women reported that arguments with their partners became physical, while only 5 percent of married women had similar experiences. Most cohabiting couples have a faithful relationship, but Waite's surveys also demonstrated that 20 percent of cohabiting women reported having secondary sex partners, compared to only 4 percent of married women. In the same vein researchers maintain that that cohabiting couples are twice more likely to experience infidelity within the relationship than married couples. Indeed it is a common scenario among student's cohabiters, especially the females, to experience violence from their fellow male cohabiters, some of whom are drug addicts and/or cultists.

The emergence of cohabitation could also be traced to the effect of globalisation. According to Fakeye (2000) the exposure through globalisation to foreign cultures and other sexual orientations has led to the emergence of new cultures, languages,

dressings, values and liberalization of the sexual ethics or beliefs amongst Nigerians. Today, many taboos, old traditions and customs relating to sexuality are wavering and the new sexual awareness is attracting wider acceptance on a daily basis. It is common to see most of our youths watching all day long (rather than engage in extensive reading that will better their academic lot) pornography films. They visit such sites at will and put into practice what they have watched or read in romance fiction. All these and more features of globalisation partly directly or indirectly converge to make young adults engage in premarital sex and cohabit when they are outside the four walls of their parents home or have freedom to experiment.

Statement of the Problem

Generally, the culture of cohabitation, which cannot be totally divorced from premarital sex, remains on an upward swing among adults and youths, including university undergraduates students in many nations of the world. It is not surprising that globalisation has aided the spread of the phenomenon of cohabitation in Nigerian tertiary institutions and it has become a subject of concern for sociologists, practitioners of couples therapy or couples education, as well as parents, and other stakeholders in education industry. In agreement with Mashau (2011) the phenomenon is worrisome because it is a pointer that youths are in crisis. As pointed out by Mashau, the crisis manifests in various ways, one of which is the normalisation (among youths) of sex before marriage, their vulnerability to all types of STDs, prevalence of teenage pregnancy, increase in suicide acts (because of failure to cope with pressures related to love, sex, courtship and marriage), prevalence of rape and all forms of abuse, and ultimately, untimely death occasioned by HIV/AIDS infections (STIs). Where some supposedly 'wise or smart' youths are spared from all of these malaises (which is seldom so), cohabitation diminishes students' drive for academic performance (their main goal of being in school).

In sum, it is assumed that cohabitation portends danger for the marriage institution and ultimately, the sanctity of the human culture is gradually being eroded. This aside the fact that sexual behaviour arising from premarital sex and ultimately the culture of cohabitation has implications for protection of sexual health which research shows has proved difficult over the years. In the light of this unwholesome development, this study therefore, investigates the factors responsible for cohabitation among Nigerian undergraduates, the dangers inherent in the act, and measures of clamping down the menace in the ivory tower. The study is limited in scope to Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria. It is a state-owned university and the institution is still battling with acute accommodation problems for her teeming population of students, and this problem ultimately accounts for one of the major reasons for cohabitation among the students.

Research Questions

1. What percentage of tertiary institutions students engage in cohabitation?
2. What are the causes of cohabitation among tertiary institution students?
3. What are the consequences of cohabitation among the students?
4. What are the possible ways of reducing the prevalence of cohabitation in the university?

Methodology

The study was a descriptive survey research. The undergraduate students of Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State constituted the population for the study. A total of 250 students were randomly sampled from the six faculties of the university: Agriculture, Arts, Education, Law, Science, and Social and Management Sciences. The research instrument used was divided into two sections. Section A consisted of demographic data of the respondents while section B was made up of 20 item questionnaire that sought information on reasons for cohabitation among undergraduate students. Respondents were to answer yes or no to each of the questions asked. The instrument used were reviewed and adjudged adequate and valid by sociologists and female specialists in women studies. The total number of questionnaire retrieved from the respondents was 220. Both descriptive and inferential statistics like chi-square, frequency counts, and percentage were used to analyse the data collected. The study provided answers to the four research questions raised for the study.

Results

The data gathered for the research purpose was collated and analyzed using various statistical techniques as applicable. The research questions were answered using frequency and percentage. The results are as presented in the following tables.

Research Question 1: What percentage of tertiary institution students engage in cohabitation?

Table 2: Frequency Distribution on Percentage of Students engaging in Cohabitation

Item	Response		
		F	%
In your opinion, what percentage of university students engage in this act?	Less than 25%	69	31.4
	25% - 50%	105	47.7
	51% - 75%	35	15.9
	Above 75%	11	5.0
	Total	220	100.0

The table shows that 31.4% of the respondents said that the percentage of University students that engage in the act of cohabitation was less than 25%. Ascribing the population to be between 25% and 50% was 47.7% of the respondents and 15.9% said they were between 51% and 75%, while 5% of the respondents said they were above 75%. Based on the majority, it was summed that between 25% and 50% of the University students engage in the act of cohabitation. This finding implies that cohabitation is a menace among the university students.

Research Question 2: What are the causes of cohabitation among students?

Table 3: Frequency Distribution on Perceived Causes of Cohabitation among Students

Questions Items	Response	Percentage
	What reasons make you engage in the act of cohabitation?	Companionship
	Social Influence	30.0
	Lack of accommodation	10.0
	Love	10.0
	Pleasure Sake (Lust)	30.0
	Total	100.0
What reasons do you think other students who engage in cohabitation give for doing so?	Companionship	4.3
	Compatibility	2.2
	Depression	2.2
	Financial Dependence	15.2
	Financial dependence and Sex	2.2
	Ignorance	4.3
	Inferiority Complex	2.2
	Intimacy	6.5
	Lack of parental guidance	4.3
	Loneliness	2.2
	Love	
	Marriage Prospect	2.2
	Peer Influence	
	Peer Influence and Lack of moral up bringing	2.2
	Pleasure Sake (Lust)	23.9
	Security Reasons	2.2
	Total	100.0

The table shows that 30% of the respondents engage in cohabitation for social influence and pleasure seeking, 20% of the respondents indicated companionship, while 10% ascribed it to lack of accommodation, and love for the other party. The opinions regarding reasons why other students engage in the act shows that most of the students do it for pleasure sake with 23.9% of the respondents attesting to it. A total of 15.2% said they cohabit because of financial dependence – to defray cost maintenance in the rented space. 6.5% adduce intimacy with the cohabiting partner, and 4.3% give lack of parental guidance as reason. Some other felt reasons were indicated by 2.2% of the respondents each and these are; for compatibility reasons, depression issues, financial dependence and sexual pleasure, inferiority complex among others, loneliness, marriage prospect, peer influence and lack of moral upbringing, and lastly, due to security reasons.

Research Question 3: What are the consequences of cohabitation among students?

Table 6: Frequency Distribution on Consequences of Cohabitation among Students

Items	Response		
		F	%
Does cohabitation have any impact on student's academic performance?	No	28	12.7
	Yes	192	87.3
	Total	220	100.0
Is this impact negative or positive	Negative	173	78.6
	Positive	19	8.6
	Not applicable	28	12.7
	Total	220	100.0
It helps youths to prepare adequately ahead of marriage	Strongly Agree	5	2.3
	Agree	21	9.5
	Neutral	28	12.7
	Disagree	54	24.5
	Strongly Disagree	112	50.9
	Total	220	100.0
It often leads to marriage	Strongly Agree	9	4.1
	Agree	17	7.7
	Neutral	41	18.6
	Disagree	89	40.5
	Strongly Disagree	64	29.1
	Total	220	100.0
It usually reduces academic performance	Strongly Agree	62	28.2
	Agree	84	38.2
	Neutral	51	23.2
	Disagree	14	6.4
	Strongly Disagree	9	4.1
	Total	220	100.0
It increases the risk of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)	Strongly Agree	92	41.8
	Agree	68	30.9
	Neutral	33	15.0
	Disagree	19	8.6
	Strongly Disagree	8	3.6
	Total	220	100.0
It increases the risk of unwanted pregnancies among girls	Strongly Agree	120	54.5
	Agree	58	26.4
	Neutral	13	5.9
	Disagree	17	7.7
	Strongly Disagree	12	5.5
	Total	220	100.0
Cohabitation contributes to the level of moral decadence in the community	Strongly Agree	82	37.3
	Agree	76	34.5
	Neutral	27	12.3
	Disagree	17	7.7
	Strongly Disagree	18	8.2
	Total	220	100.0

The result shows that 87.3%, which represents the majority confirmed that cohabitation has impact on students' academic performance. From that population that agreed, majority of them also (which is 78.6% of the sampled participants) affirmed that cohabitation had negative impact on the students. Just 8.6% of the respondents said it has positive impact. On the various forms of negative implications, it was indicated by majority that cohabitation do does not help youths to prepare adequately ahead of marriage. This was such that 75.4% disagreed that cohabitation helps youths to prepare adequately ahead of marriage. 12.7% were neutral to the statement while 11.8% agreed. Majority of the respondents (69.6%) negated the statement that cohabitation often leads to marriage. 11.8% agreed while 18.6% were indifferent. Majority of the respondents (66.4%) of the respondents agreed that cohabitation eventually reduces students' academic performance. Also most of the respondents (80.9%) agreed that it increases the risk of unwanted pregnancies among girls. Lastly, 71.8% of the respondents agreed that cohabitation contributes to the level of moral decadence in the community. These therefore highlighted and confirmed that cohabitation affect students negatively in both academic and health wise.

Research Question 4: What are the possible ways of reducing the prevalence of cohabitation in the community?

Table 8: Percentage Distribution on statement regarding possible ways of reducing the prevalence of cohabitation

Suggested ways to reduce the prevalence of cohabitation in the community	Percent
Both moral education & provision of hostel accommodation	9.15
Counseling on marriage	3.27
Job opportunities	0.65
Moral education against cohabitation	63.40
Parent should often check on their wards in school	10.46
Proper parental up bringing	1.31
Provision of adequate hostel accommodation for students inside the school	9.80
Teaching them God's words and prayers for the youth	1.96
Total	100.0

From the above table, it was indicated that majority of the respondents (63.4%) suggested moral education as a means of combating cohabitation among students. Following this was the opinion by 10.5% of the respondents saying that parents should often check on their wards in school as a mode of checkmating their behaviours and attitudes. Other suggested ways are; Provision of adequate hostel accommodation for students inside the school (9.8%), Both moral education & provision of hostel accommodation (9.2%), proper counseling on marital issues (3.3%), Teaching them god's words and prayers for the youth (2%), Proper parental up bringing (1.3%), and provision of job opportunities to students who are willing to work and study (0.7%).

Conclusion

Campus cohabitation among university undergraduates is a common phenomenon. This basically because of misplaced priority among those who cohabits, lack of self esteem, covetousness, lack of on-campus accommodation, peer group influence and so on. The study shows that cohabitation can lead to cases of abortion, low self-esteem, poor academic performance, and many other vices. Thus, the act is condemnable and must be discouraged.

Concerted efforts must be made to reduce the prevalence of cohabitation among students of AAUA. School administration, parents, and students alike must collectively unite to fight cohabitation in all its ramifications. Provision of more on-campus accommodation is imperative and there must be regular sensitization programmes for the students. Also, students should build a positive self esteem about themselves and place their academic interest above any other interest and generally shun cohabitation in all its ramifications.

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