

Cohabitation among Undergraduates of the University of Benin, Edo State, Nigeria

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Abstract. There has been a steady upsurge in students' embrace of off-campus accommodation in Nigerian universities. This ordinarily ought not to be an issue but for the fact that the students have turned such off-campus accommodation into cohabitation centres. This study therefore interrogates cohabitation among undergraduates of the University of Benin, Nigeria. The study anchors its theoretical orientation on the norm activation theory. The study was conducted using the descriptive survey method where 650 undergraduates from 63 departments in the university were sampled and administered a self-designed questionnaire. The study found that inadequate provision of hostel facilities by the university management is a motivation for cohabitation by students' resident in off-campus accommodation and that most of such students end up with unwanted pregnancies and abortion. The study therefore recommends the provision of more hostel facilities by the management of the University of Benin, Nigeria as well as engaging landlords of off-campus accommodation and community leaders in a bid to have them assist in supervising and monitoring off-campus students.

Keywords: Prevalence, cohabitation, university, off-campus, hostel issues, undergraduates

1. Introduction

In the past, all undergraduates in Nigeria universities were given hostel accommodation within the school campuses (Fareo & Moses, 2018). However, with the establishment of more universities by the Federal, State and more recently, private individuals and religious bodies, the greater demand for university education and increase in the number of undergraduates being admitted without a concomitant increase in the provision of hostels or halls of residence for them due largely to paucity of funds on

the part of the establishing authorities (Onoyase, 2020 & Adeniyi, 2019). The enrolment of students as at 2019 shows that 1,200,825 were in federal owned universities, 544,933 were in state owned universities and 102,500 were in private owned universities. These figures have further gone up to 2.1m as at 2021 with Nigeria's 99 private universities accounting for only 5% of students.

Regrettably, the current economic crunch has further made most of the universities to lack the capacity to build students' halls of residence. The resultant effect of the inability of university management to provide hostel accommodation for all its students is that students have had to therefore resort to off-campus accommodation in the nearby communities but however close to the school. In these off-campus hostels, there are no formal rules of engagement like what obtains in the halls of residence in the various Nigerian universities.

With no parental control, a number of these undergraduates living in off-campus accommodation have resorted to staying with the opposite sexes. This act, as Jiya & Zhiri (2019) puts it, is nothing more than cohabitation which is one of the important shifts in family demographics of the past century (Alo, 2002). Cohabitation has been defined by Ogunsola (2014) as an act of a man and woman living together and sometimes sharing marital intimacy without being legally married. In his view, they are those who are legally or conventionally not married, reside mutually and enjoy all or some values of marital relationship. Duyilemi, Tunde & Adekola (2018) add that, the phenomenon of cohabitation among undergraduates is now referred to as 'campus marriage' or 'campus coupling'. Unfortunately, this social malaise is on the rise in various Nigerian universities and it would appear that it is unlikely to decrease in the near future except of course,

deliberate and adequate measures are put in place to stem the ugly tide. This is against the background that the phenomenon can be encapsulated as both a status and a process and also an alternative type of housing for at least one of the cohabiters.

1.1 Statement of Problem

The social phenomenon called ‘cohabitation’ in universities across Nigeria has indeed become a cause of concern this is because as Jiya & Zhiri (2019) have rightly noted the number of new students usually admitted into the universities to take the few available hostel facilities is always in geometric progression. Without mincing words, the end appears not to be insight with regards to the increasing intakes of students via-a-vis the inadequate hostel accommodation in the various universities. This hitherto unheard-of shortage of accommodation for students has inadvertently led to off-campus hostel facilities with the attendant males and female now sharing the same apartment cooking together and in almost all the cases having sexual intimacy too.

It is no exaggeration to say that cohabitation among undergraduate students in Nigerian universities have become an endemic issue which needs to be tackled head on else, parents, students and the society at large will regret their inaction. In fact, it is contrary to the cultural norms and values of the African communities to allow young adults and unmarried persons to stay together particularly if there is no family affinity whatsoever. (Ogiadimma, 2013). Scholars have put forward several predisposing factors in cohabitation which range from non-availability of hostel facilities, economic hardship, age and abandonment of chastity and cultural norms and values. (Aluko, 2011, Soboye, 2013, Adeoye, Ola & Aliu, 2012)

Regrettably, the act of cohabitation which is now the in thing amongst undergraduate students is fraught with several unforeseen consequences such as unwanted pregnancies, abortion, poor academic performance and health hazards. (Onoyase, 2020).

It is quite glaring from the preceding discussion that some studies have been conducted on cohabitation among students in Nigerian universities. In spite of these studies, the incidence & prevalence of the social malaise still persists. The question begging for answer and which is the lacuna, this research effort seeks to bridge is why in spite of the previous works, undergraduate students are still indulging in the unwholesome practice.

1.2 Research Questions

The following questions guided this study:

- Does cohabitation result in high rate of abortion among students of the University of Benin, Nigeria?
- Is inadequate provision of hostel accommodation a cause of cohabitation among students of the University of Benin, Nigeria?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The study sought to investigate cohabitation among undergraduates of the University of Benin, Nigeria. However, it specifically sought to:

- Examine whether the inadequate provision of hostel accommodation is a cause of cohabitation among undergraduates of the University of Benin, Nigeria.
- Ascertain if the high rate of abortion is a consequence of cohabitation among undergraduates of the University of Benin, Nigeria.

2. Brief Review of Related Literature

There is a plethora of studies conducted to examine the rising wave of cohabitation among off campus, undergraduate students in tertiary universities in Nigeria. There is yet to be an ad-idem among scholars on the cause or effect of the phenomenon. This is perhaps due to the differences in their background and orientation. This section examines the motivation for cohabitations and the social consequences.

2.1 Motivation for Cohabitation among Undergraduates

2.1.1 Financial needs

Several authors have argued that some students are literally forced into cohabitation due to the economic hardship which they are facing, resorting to sharing a room or moving into a room with the opposite sex usually a male is due in some cases to financial distress (Lichter, 2000) In fact, Adeniyi (2010) and Alo and Akande (2010) when they opined that many undergraduate embrace cohabitations due to economic reasons and as a way of saving on rent, food and other living expenses.

2.1.2 Inadequate Hostel /Halls of Residence

Time past when all students irrespective of level in Nigerian universities are given hostel accommodation on campus. Gradually, it slid into 100 level and final year students only. Today, some universities still find it difficult to accommodate all 100 level and final year students on campus. Little wonder that Svodziwa and Kurete (2017) believes that it is the non-availability of adequate halls of residence in public universities that make students to embrace off campus residential accommodation. Soboye (2013) puts it bluntly when he accused the management of universities of not providing hostel facilities to their students which have made them in some cases to resort to cohabitation outside the school campuses. This view had also earlier been expressed by Aluko (2011) when he lamented the steady increase in population of students without a corresponding growth in the hostel facilities which have made cohabitation very attractive to students.

2.1.3 Cultural Norms and Values

Africans in the traditional societies were noted for their values and cherished norms. In fact, these kept the societies together. Today, these values and norms appear to have been jettisoned by the “new generation”. One of the well-entrenched, cherished and valued customary practise was chastity among the girl child. The girl child was forbidden from having sexual intimacy with anyone until marriage rites have been performed and bride price duly paid. It was a thing of honour to the girl child and her family if her husband “meets her at home” (is the first person to have sexual relations with her) This regrettably is no longer the case as Adeoye, Ola and Alin (2012) have stated that the youth of this era have abandoned the revered and cherished African norms and values for the inglorious culture of premarital sexual activities. This view finds support in the work of Arisiken (2013) where he opined that cohabitation among students is totally unacceptable and alien to African society.

2.1.4 Compatibility Test

Adeniyi (2019) have argued that one of the motivation for cohabitation is to ascertain the level of compatibility of the cohabiters as well as determine whether they can “hit it off” together in marriage Ogunsola. (2004) puts it succinctly as an opportunity to carefully study each other if they really match for marriage. To Brien, Lee and Steven (2006), couples in this instant case, students learn about the quality of their relationship during cohabitation and some of them decide not to go through with their marriage.

2.1.5 Sexual intimacy

In all most all the cases, cohabiters indulge in sexual intimacy even though they are not legally or traditionally married. In fact, White heed & Popenoe (2006) insists that all young men usually show greater acceptability of cohabitation than all young women, the reason being that the males enjoy the benefits of cohabitation in terms of sexual intimacy and sharing of domestic chores than the females.

2.1.6 Independence from Control.

When students are accommodated in the halls of residence, they have no choice but to abide by the hostel/school rules and regulations. Defaulters or deviants are severely sanction by school management. At home, parents keep their eyes on the children whether they are undergraduates or not. There are rules that govern or regulate behaviour at home for the children and any child that breaks the roles is dealt with. Consequently, children particularly look forward to leaving the house for school where they could have their independence. This view has equally been shared by Ogunbamila (2013) when he said that cohabitation is an in thing among students due to the fact that many of them are having their freedom for the first time, and hence, they tend to enjoy the independence with no eyes on them to the fullest. This "fullest" unfortunately involves cohabitation.

2.2 Social Consequences of Cohabitation

It is a truism that these days, many children enter into the university at ages 15, 16, 17 years and are often naive, impressionable and curious. Their naivety and curiosity often lead them into cohabitation once they are outside their comfort zone of the watchful eyes of their parents. Most regrettably, quite a number of students ignorantly engage in cohabitation and are oblivious of the complications and implications.

2.2.1 Unwanted pregnancy and abortion

Cohabitation and pre-marital sex are becoming a life style among students in higher institution of learning in Nigeria. If the truth were to be told, it is fast becoming a kind of norm were the students not only share their rooms but also, their blankets. (Murray Swart, 2005). I dare to say that, the “under blankets” often leads to unwanted pregnancy. In a bid to getting rid of the unwanted pregnancy, many of the students resort to abortion. The lucky ones have successful termination of pregnancy while the not so lucky ones

end up having complications and in some extreme cases, untimely death.

2.2.2 Distractions

Undergraduate students are sent to school by their parents or guardians to acquire knowledge and certificates but because of their involvement in cohabitation, they often lose focus; "you can serve two masters at the same time". Rather than reading their books, the females are either going to the market to shop for the house, cooking or washing the clothes of their male partners. This as Adeniyi (2019) puts it, makes them to lose concentration and failure becomes inevitable.

2.2.3 Contacting Infection

Without doubt infection is one of the common side effects of unprotected sex. Pre-marital sex tends to be the foundation upon which cohabitation is built upon. Many undergraduate students who cohabit often contact infectious diseases such as syphilis, H.I.V and other communicable diseases. Some of these diseases when left untreated do result into infertility in later life of the cohabiters.

2.2.4 Social Vices

Due to the unfettered freedom, the cohabiters have, some of them end up developing bad behaviour, while others join bad clubs/gang while others take to drug abuse, Yahoo plus, kidnapping and in extreme cases armed robbery. They do this because they are free from the hostel's rules and regulations, and the guidance of their parents.

3. Theoretical Orientation

This study anchors its theoretical orientation on the norm activation theory as propounded by Schwartz (1977). This theory is adjudged the commonest employed model to forecast pro-environmental behaviours. Three key elements viz personal norms, ascription of responsibility and awareness of consequences play a vital role in predicting environmental behaviour. The thrust of the theory is that personal norms can directly provide sustainable desirable behaviour. The theory is well suited in the explanation and decision making in moral situations like to pro-environmental behaviour (Stern, Dietz & Kalof, 1999). The norm activation theory sees humans as people who are responsible for their actions. In fact, the actions based on these norms could lend credence to the sense of self-satisfaction and pride, whereas, those against such feelings may

develop a sense of guilt and sadness. This theory has adherents such as Abrahamse and Steg (2011), who have posited in line with Schwartz (1979) that an individual is expected to have an understanding or awareness of social implications of the behaviour manifested and consequently be responsible for the penalty.

In relation to the topic under investigation, undergraduates have personal norms which tend to influence their behavioural pattern in relation to cohabitation. Constant awareness on the implications of cohabitation among undergraduates will help them change their behaviour and its consequences can in a great way help students to take responsibilities that could lead to positive behaviour change.

4. Methods and Materials

The study was conducted using the descriptive survey method. It was adopted because Fajonyomi and Fajonyomi (2003) have stated that it serves an explanatory purpose and aids easy data collection from a group of individuals at the same time for the sole aim of describing any form of study or phenomena. The population for the study include all undergraduates of the University of Benin, Nigeria.

The sample size for the study included six hundred and fifty students (respondents) randomly selected from 13 faculties/schools housing 63 departments in the University of Benin. The study involves the random selection of male and female undergraduates from each of the 13 faculties. The instrument for data collection was a self-designed questionnaire known as 'cohabitation among University of Benin undergraduate's questionnaire' (CAUBUQ). The research instrument was designed using items from the review of related literature. The instrument was made up of twenty-seven items, with six dealing with the demographic characteristics of the respondents while the remaining 21 items dealt with the main topic under investigation. The research instrument was validated by two experts in the Faculty of Education. Suggestions made by them were incorporated into the final copy of the instrument to enhance its efficiency and usability. A reliability coefficient of 0.89 was obtained using Pearson's Moment Correlation which is considered significant. The instrument was self-administered with the assistance of two research assistants who were trained prior to the commencement of the study. The data collected for the study were organized and analysed on the basis of the research questions generated. Frequencies were counted and percentages computed for both the demographic category and the research questions.

5. Data Presentation and Analysis

This section is devoted to data presentation and discussion of findings which are done in line with the specific objectives of the study.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex		
Male	400	62
Female	250	38
Total	650	100
Age		
17-19	250	39
20-22	200	31
23-25	100	15
26 and above	100	15
Total	650	100
Religion		
Christianity	600	92
Islam	50	8
A.T.R.	-	-
Total	650	100
Educational status		
100 level	50	8
200 level	100	15
300 level	200	31
400 level	200	31
500 and 600 levels	100	15
Total	650	100
Marital status		
Single	500	77
Cohabiter	130	20
Married	20	3
Total	650	100

Source: Field survey, 2022

Table 1 indicates that there were 400 (62%) male respondents while the number of female respondents was 250 (38%). This implies that there were more male respondents than female in the study area. The table also reveals that respondents within the ages of 17-19 years were 250 (39%), those between 20-22 years were 200 (31%), while those within the ages of 23-25 years were 100 (15%) and those who were 26 years and above were 100 (15%). This indicates that majority of the respondents were between the ages of 17-19 years. On religion, 600 (92%) of the participants were Christians, 50 (8%) were Muslims while were no practitioners of African traditional religion. On educational status, 50 (8%) of the participants were in 100 level, 100 (15%) were in 200 level, while 200 (31%) were in 300 and 400 levels respectively and 100 (15%) were also respectively in 500 and 600 levels. This shows that majority of the respondents were in 300 and 400 levels. For marital status, 500 (77%) of the participants were single, 130 (20%) were cohabiters and 20 (3%) were married. This means that majority of the respondents were single.

Table 2: Percentage Score of inadequate Hostel Accommodation and Cohabitation

Question	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Is inadequate hostel accommodation the cause of cohabitation among University of Benin, students?	Yes	500	77
	No	150	23
	Undecided	-	-
	Total	650	100

Source: Field survey, 2022

Table 2 shows that 77% of the participants affirmed that inadequate hostel accommodation is the cause of cohabitation among University of Benin students, 23% was in the negative while none was undecided. This research finding supports the works of Svodziwa and Kurete (2017), Soboye (2013) and Aluko (2011) when they insist that it

is the non-availability of adequate halls of residence in public universities that lead students to embrace off campus residential accommodation.

Table 3: Percentage Score of Cohabitation and Abortion

Question	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Is abortion a social consequence of cohabitation among University of Benin students?	Yes	400	61
	No	200	31
	Undecided	50	8
	Total	650	100

Source: Field survey, 2022

Table 4 reveals that 61% of the participants affirmed that abortion is a social consequence of cohabitation among University of Benin students, 31% was in the negative while 8% was undecided. This research finding supports the work of Swart, (2005) when he observed that cohabitation often results in unwanted pregnancy, and in a bid to getting rid of the unwanted pregnancy, many of the students resort to abortion. The lucky ones have successful termination of pregnancy while the not so lucky ones end up having complications and in some extreme cases, untimely death.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The prevalence and incidence of cohabitation amongst undergraduates of the University of Benin, Nigeria as evident in this study is as a result of multifaceted factors that ought to be attended to by the management and visitors of the various public universities. The present study shows that cohabitation among the undergraduates of the University of Benin is on the increase and due mainly to the non-provision of hostel accommodation to more than half of its students. The unaccommodated students have consequently bought into the idea of cohabitation. Unfortunately, the paucity of funds by the university management and visitors to the university has made it impossible for the provision of new halls of residence to be a reality. The study also shows that most of the cohabiting students have ended up with unwanted pregnancies and abortions among other social hazards that such students have had to contend with. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- The university management as a matter of urgency, should provide more hostel facilities for the undergraduates, more particularly the females.
- The university management should solicit the assistance of multinational corporations, philanthropists vis-à-vis building of new hostels.

- The university management should collaborate with community leaders and landlords of off-campus accommodation with a view to ensuring that rules and regulations that govern students on campus are equally extended to those off-campus.
- The university management should from time to time hold programmes where the ills of cohabitation are highlighted to the students.
- The hostel accommodation provided by the university management should be made more conducive and appealing to the students.
- The university management should encourage parents to pay unscheduled visits their children in their off-campus accommodation in addition to talking with them.

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