

CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF COHABITATION AS PERCEIVED BY FOR COUNSELLING

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Abstract

Cohabitation is prevalent among tertiary institution students in Nigeria and it has become a great source of concern among scholars, school authorities, guidance counsellors and individuals in the society. The study, therefore, investigated the causes and consequences of cohabitation as perceived by students of Oke-Ogun Polytechnic in Oyo state. Researchers developed instrument tagged “Causes and Consequences of Cohabitation as Perceived by Students of Oke-Ogun Polytechnic Questionnaire” (CCCPSQ)” was used to collect the data. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to select OND II and HND II students across the three faculties. The findings of the study revealed that lack of accommodation, financial constraints and inadequate education on reproductive health were perceived as the major causes of cohabitation by the respondents, while sexually transmitted diseases, unsafe abortion and emotional breakdown were perceived as the major consequences of cohabitation by the respondents. It was recommended based on the findings of the study that school management should make accommodation available to students on campus and this will go a long way towards reducing cases of cohabitation among students. School counsellors should provide adequate information to students on the implications of cohabitation with regards to their sexual reproductive health.

Keywords: Causes, Consequences, Cohabitation, Students, Oke-Ogun Polytechnic

Introduction

The increase in population of students and the inability of the government to adequately provide the needed social infrastructures and funding of higher education in Nigeria has led to a greater challenge among students in schools. Government policy on students’ hostel accommodation and the inability of the institutions in expanding and building new hostels has forced many students to look outward for accommodation. This constraint of hostel accommodation within the school 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 authorisation portends danger to the sanctification of the institution of marriage and family.

Cohabitation among tertiary institution students is becoming a normal way of life as it's not uncommon to see adults stay together even if they are not married. The rate, as observed, at which students cohabit in Oke-Ogun Polytechnic these days call for concerns as one would be left with no choice but to be wondering what has become of the society. Students of the polytechnic and other tertiary institutions alike in Nigeria see cohabitation as nothing bad as the majority of them are noticed to be happily involved in this act. In a study conducted by Nnubia, Umennuihe, Okechukwu, Nnodim and Makata (2021), majority (54%) of the students were partly or fully cohabiting with friend of the opposite sex. Cohabitation has become rampant that students have become promiscuous, it has led to unwanted pregnancies which have affected their completion of education (Duyilemi, Tunde-Awe & Adekola, 2018).

Cohabitation is defined as two adults of the opposite sex living together in an intimate, nonmarital relationship. Green (2022) maintained that cohabitation is a stage of courtship. Thus, cohabitation is viewed as a prelude to marriage or as an important antecedent to marriage. Unachukwu and Iloakasia (2018) referred to cohabitation as a practice in which a man and a woman dwell together in the same place as husband and wife before the actual marriage. According to Duyilemi, Tunde-Awe and Adekola (2018), cohabitation among students is often referred to as campus marriage or campus coupling, in which some student couples are well known among their peers as non-marital sexual partners. Jamison and Ganong (2011) identified two forms of cohabitation among students; part-time cohabitation or stay over relationship, and full-time cohabitation. Stay over partners live apart but spend nights together with their partners while full-time cohabiters maintain one residential unit.

Peer pressure is one of the major causes of cohabitation among students in tertiary institutions of learning. The majority of students who become involved in cohabitation do so because of peer pressure. They look at their peers and give in to temptation, because 'everyone does it'. They do it in order to fit into peer sub-culture or avoid being laughed at and to receive affirmation/approval from their peers. Jiya and Alhassan (2019) stated that peer pressure, inadequate hostel accommodation, financial challenges faced by students (most especially female students), lack of supervision by parents were the causes or influencing factors of cohabitation among tertiary institution students. Others are freedom from parental supervision, loss of religious inclination, abandonment of valued African culture, sexual gratification, financial distress, to study each other for marriage, shortage of on-campus accommodation, and higher tuition fees were factors responsible for cohabitation among students (Fareo & Moses, 2018; Onoyase, 2020). Imo (2017) showed that the most perceived factor was the sense of freedom of having left home for more independent living, followed by financial problems which could make students to co-depend on each other for financial survival.

Ojo (2019) and Iyekolo (2021) observed that many of the cohabiting students do not eventually get married, leaving some of the students, heart-broken and emotionally destabilised for the rest of their lives. All these could endanger a student's life, especially students, and possibly truncate the educational pursuit and life career of the individual. The high cost of college fees has, in some cases, forced students to cohabit. According to Iyekolo (2021), many younger cohabiters

enter into joint living arrangements as a result of financial need which may result in unstable partnerships. Different causes of cohabitation have been observed among students on campuses which include inadequacy of school hostel accommodation, insecurity in school, peer influence or pressure, inability to manage or control sexual urges or desire for sexual satisfaction. Other causes may include the fear of losing out on a partner or loved one, greed, extravagance or desire to live large while on campus, fear, among others.

Green (2022) stated that the number of young adults engaging in premarital sexual behaviour has increased to 60 percent in the last 10 years. According to Jamison and Ganong (2011), living together and having sexual relationship without being married is a trend that has virtually eroded the level of morality among youth, particularly students of higher institutions. Adeniyi (2019) conducted a study on the effects of cohabitation on the academic performance of students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria, the study revealed that cohabitation breeds abortion, sexually transmitted diseases, and some even tend to indulge in social vices like stealing, lying and cybercrimes to raise finances to keep their affairs going.

Cohabiting students are most likely engage in unprotected sex which could result to sexually transmitted infections and the much dreaded HIV/AIDS disease. Also, the majority of cohabitants often withdraw or dismissed from school, while some involve in death, depression and suicidal attempts, others spend longer time than necessary as a result of carryovers (Adeniyi, 2019). In addition, at times, the females are more often than not abused and molested by their partners or "would-be husbands" when they quarrel or have a fight, leading to grave psychological trauma that could affect their health, social life and education while some of the students who cohabit find it difficult to graduate and make lower grades because they do not have enough time to read.

Poor academic grades as observed among students in Nigerian institutions are part of the major consequences of cohabitation. Sometimes, students especially females who engage in romantic campus relationships may lose touch with reality or whatever that is happening in their immediate environment (Okoroji, 2016). They are likely to yearn to see their partners while lecture is ongoing and sometimes lose interest in attending lectures because of crave to be with their partners or to attend parties and picnics with their lovers. Abosi (2016) lamented that most times these parties are organised during school hours, even when they are organised in the night, it prevents students from studying their books, doing home assignments and preparing for quiz and examinations. The consequence at the end of the day is poor academic grades. Umerah (2022) regretted that some students have delayed their graduation many times because of poor grades in their examinations and accumulated carryovers as a result of cohabitation.

Essentially, a number of studies have been carried out on the nature of cohabitation in Nigeria. For instance, Adejumo, Okojide, Adejumo and Bateren (2017) examined the prevalence of premarital cohabitation and premarital sexual behaviour among undergraduates in Nigeria; Obikeze, Obi and Mmegbuanaeze (2019) worked on premarital cohabitation as predictor of academic engagement among undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State, Nigeria; Kalu, Ejiogu, Chukwukadibia and Nleonu (2021) investigated social-economic and health effects of cohabitation among off-campus students in Federal Polytechnic Nekede Owerri, Imo State. However, to the best knowledge of the researchers, none of the previous studies have

dwell on causes and consequences of cohabitation as perceived by students of Oke-Ogun Polytechnic in Oyo State. Therefore, it was the focus of this study to investigate the causes and consequences of cohabitation as perceived by students of Oke-Ogun Polytechnic in Oyo State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the causes and consequences of cohabitation as perceived by students of Oke-Ogun Polytechnic in Oyo State, Nigeria. Therefore, the research responds to the following questions:

1. What are the causes of cohabitation as perceived by students of Oke-Ogun Polytechnic in Oyo State, Nigeria?
2. What are the consequences of cohabitation as perceived by students of Oke-Ogun Polytechnic in Oyo State, Nigeria?

Methodology

Descriptive survey method was adopted for this study because the researchers are interested in examining the causes and consequences of cohabitation as perceived by students of Oke-Ogun Polytechnic in Oyo State. The target population for the study were students of Oke-Ogun Polytechnic. The study involved two stages; namely, purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was used to select National Diploma (ND) II (2) and Higher National Diploma (HND) II (2) students because many of them have a better understanding of the problem in school. Also, simple random sampling technique was used to select 200 respondents across the three faculties (School of Financial Management, School of Business and School of Communication).

Validity was done by five lecturers in the Department of Mass Communication, Polytechnic Ibadan. The reliability was done and the instrument was administered twice on a group of students in the Department of Animal Health and Production Technology, Oyo State College of Agriculture and Technology, Igbo-Ora within an interval of four weeks. The correlation of the two sets of scores, using Pearson Product Moment Correlation was considered and the reliability coefficient was 0.71. Therefore, the instrument for data collection was designed by the researchers adopting it from the literature review. The instrument was tagged: "Causes and Consequences of Cohabitation as Perceived by Students of Oke-Ogun Polytechnic Questionnaire (CCCPSQ)". The instrument has three parts i.e. sections A, B and C. Section A dealt with personal information of the respondents, section B sought for causes of cohabitation as perceived by students, and section C focused on consequences of cohabitation as perceived by students.

The instrument was made up of 30 items, 15 of them were on causes of cohabitation and the remaining 15 were on the consequences of cohabitation as perceived by students. The subjects were to show whether they agreed or disagreed with the 30 items by ticking (√) strongly agreed (SA) = 4, agreed (A) = 3, disagreed (D) = 2 and Strongly Disagreed (SD) = 1. The researchers used 2.50 as benchmark to find out whether respondents agreed or disagreed with the items on the questionnaire.

Results

This is about the data that was gathered. It displays the study's findings along with a relevant interpretation. In Oke-Ogun Polytechnic, a total of 200 students were selected for the study. The study identified the causes and consequences of cohabitation as perceived by students of Oke-Ogun Polytechnic in Oyo State, Nigeria.

Table 1: Mean and Rank Order of Causes of Cohabitation as Perceived by Students of Oke-Ogun Polytechnic in Oyo State, Nigeria

N	Items	Mean	Rank
7	Lack of accommodation in school	3.89	1 st
1	Financial constraints	3.87	2 nd
4	Inadequate education on reproductive health	3.77	3 rd
2	Poor parental supervision	3.74	4 th
11	Influence of peer group	3.72	5 th
9	Fear or insecurity in the school	3.72	5 th
15	Decline in moral and religious values	3.72	5 th
5	Problems with roommates	3.70	8 th
10	Fear of losing a loved one	3.68	9 th
3	Desire for sexual satisfaction	3.64	10 th
12	Testing compatibility for marriage	3.62	11 th
6	Ignorance	2.59	12 th
14	Dependency syndrome	2.57	13 th
13	High tuition fees	2.53	14 th
8	Exposure to pornographic films	2.50	15 th

Table 1 shows the mean and rank order of causes of cohabitation as perceived by students of Oke-Ogun polytechnic in Oyo state. The table shows that all the items were perceived as the causes of cohabitation by students of Oke-Ogun Polytechnic, because all the items were ranked above the mid-mean score of 2.50. Therefore, items with mean values of 3.89, 3.87 and 3.77 respectively preceded others and were ranked 1st, 2nd, and 3rd. The items indicated lack of accommodation in school, financial constraints and inadequate education on reproductive health. In addition, items 14, 13 and 8 with mean values of 2.57, 2.53 and 2.50 were the least ranked items, that is, 13th, 14th and 15th. They indicated dependency syndrome, high tuition fees and exposure to pornographic films.

Table 2: Mean and Rank Order of Consequences of Cohabitation as Perceived by Students of Oke-Ogun Polytechnic in Oyo State, Nigeria

N	Items	Mean	Rank
15	Sexually transmitted diseases	3.88	1 st
11	Unsafe abortion	3.86	2 nd
4	Emotional breakdown	3.75	3 rd
3	Low self-esteem	3.74	4 th
6	Alcoholic consumption	3.72	5 th
8	Unwanted pregnancy	3.72	5 th
13	School dropout	3.72	5 th
5	Psychological trauma	3.71	8 th
1	Suicidal thoughts	3.66	9 th
9	Lack of concentration in class	3.64	10 th
14	Relationship breakdown	3.62	11 th
7	Gender based violence	2.59	12 th
12	Poor academic performance	2.57	13 th
10	Premarital sex	2.53	14 th
2	Social stigmatization	2.50	15 th

Table 2 shows the mean and rank order of consequences of cohabitation as perceived by students of Oke-Ogun Polytechnic in Oyo State. The table shows that all the items were perceived as the consequences of cohabitation by students of Oke-Ogun Polytechnic, because all the items were ranked above the mid-mean score of 2.50. Therefore, items with mean values of 3.88, 3.86 and 3.75 respectively preceded others and were ranked 1st, 2nd, and 3rd. The items indicated sexually transmitted diseases, unsafe abortion and emotional breakdown. In addition, items 12, 10 and 2 with mean values of 2.57, 2.53 and 2.50 were the least ranked items, that is, 13th, 14th and 15th. They indicated poor academic performance, premarital sex and social stigmatization.

Discussion

In line with question one, the study indicated that there are numerous causes of cohabitation as perceived by the respondents which include lack of accommodation, financial constraints and inadequate education on reproductive health. The increase in the number of students and the inability of the school authorities to provide adequate hostel accommodation, has led to

cohabitation among students. This finding agreed with the studies of Jiya and Alhassan (2019) and Onoyase (2020) which identified financial issues, inadequate on-campus accommodation, the decline in religious values or loss of religious inclination, abandonment of valued African culture, sexual gratification, desire to study each other for marriage, and higher tuition fee as factors responsible for cohabitation among tertiary institution students in Oyo State.

In line with question two, the study revealed numerous consequences of cohabitation as perceived by students of Oke-Ogun Polytechnic, Oyo State. These consequences of cohabitation include sexually transmitted diseases, unsafe abortion and emotional breakdown. This finding agreed with Adeniyi (2019), who noted that high rate of abortion and emotional breakdown in tertiary institutions can be attributed to cohabitation. According to Adeniyi, some of the cohabiting students often get pregnant and because they are not prepared for parenting, some of them take to abortion which exposes the female partners to the risk of death or damaged uterus. This finding supports Adeoye, Ola and Aliu (2012), who pointed out that some of the consequences are unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, gender based violence and other sexually transmitted diseases. Cohabitation also leads to risky sexual behaviour and one of the outcomes is spread of sexually transmitted infections; in support of this, Offor, Adirika and Anadi (2017) agreed that unplanned pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, infertility and unsafe abortion were some of the problems associated with cohabitation among students. The finding also showed that respondents agreed that cohabitation could lead to emotional breakdown due to incidences of cheating and break-ups, and drug abuse.

Implications for Counselling

From the findings of this study, the major cause of cohabitation as perceived by students of Oke-Ogun polytechnic is lack of accommodation. It has been observed that there is no enough accommodation facilities for students on campus. The lack of accommodation has predispose students to search for alternative means of the accommodation with the options of cohabitation often available. The school authority should provide more hostel accommodation for the students especially the female students. The hostel accommodation provided by the school should be conducive and affordable for all students. The school authority should monitor students living off campus to curb their excessive behaviour especially regarding cohabitation. The school authority could collaborate with the community leaders to curb the incidence of cohabitation among students. Students should be able to visit counsellors when facing challenges of cohabitation.

The respondents agreed that dependency syndrome is another cause of cohabitation hence, school counsellors need to enlighten students on cohabitation and its implications in school. Parents or guardians must not only send their children and wards to school, they must visit them to know how and what they are doing in school. Some students cohabit without the knowledge of their parents because they are sure that their parents would never come to visit them in school. 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 counselling and a good orientation programme will help many of these innocent students find their bearing not to misbehave and be misdirected. Also, the results indicate a need for promoting sex education and provision of reproductive health services among students. The need to strengthen students' guidance and counselling services at the Oke-Ogun Polytechnic cannot be overemphasised.

From the findings of the study, the issue of cohabitation leads to poor performance of some students while some drop out of school completely. A student that becomes pregnant may not be able to complete her education, if the parents are not supportive. Some may contract sexually transmitted diseases or infections. Thus all hands must be on deck, the parents, school authorities, religious bodies especially, the school counsellors must be able to speak against these new trends of cohabiting among students. Counsellors should liaise with medical personnel in health centres of their various schools to organize lectures on the health hazards of cohabitation (such as contracting sexually transmitted diseases, abortion and damage to female uterus) and effect of cohabitation on students' academics. For instance, prolonged years of study, drop-out and graduating with lower grades.

Conclusion

Cohabitation is quite common and caused mainly by accommodation problem in school, financial constraints and inadequate education on reproductive health. The resultant effects of this problem were sexually transmitted diseases, unsafe abortion and emotional breakdown, and there is need for adequate guidance and counselling in addressing or reducing the problems of cohabitation as perceived by students in school.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that;

- School management should make accommodation available to students on campus and this will go a long way towards reducing cases of cohabitation among students.
- Government should improve the standard of living in the country so that parents will be able to provide for their children especially the students while in school.
- School counsellors should educate and provide adequate information to students on the implications of cohabitation with regards to their sexual reproductive health.
- Unwanted pregnancy by cohabiters should not be aborted because abortion could lead to damage of female uterus and sometimes to death.
- School authorities should include issue of cohabitation in students' handbook; what constitutes cohabitation, its consequences on students and punitive measures to be meted out to students who indulge in it.

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