

Prevalence of, disposition towards and factors associated with cohabitation among undergraduates in Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomosho, Nigeria

Adeyera, O.¹, *Omisore, A.G.¹, Balogun, O.D.², Akinwusi, M.D.², Oyekanmi, O.D.²,
Abiodun, O.M.¹, Adesina, K.A.¹

Abstract

Background: Cohabitation is increasingly common in tertiary institutions and is associated with reproductive health and other related challenges. This study is designed to determine the prevalence, pattern, disposition and reasons for premarital cohabitation among students of a tertiary institution in South West Nigeria

Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional study of 350 undergraduates selected from a university in Oyo State using a multistage sampling technique. Data was collected via a semi-structured self-administered questionnaire and analyzed using SPSS version 22.0

Results: Majority (90.0%) of the respondents were below 25 years and 70.0% were females. Twenty seven (7.7%) were currently cohabiting while 70 (20.0%) had ever cohabited. A third (32.0%) were favorably disposed towards cohabitation. More males, older respondents and those whose parents were not their source of income reported ever having cohabited.

Conclusion: Cohabiting is practiced among university students and is socially acceptable to many. Concerted efforts geared towards sensitization and awareness programs to educate students on the adverse consequences of cohabitation should be embarked upon by concerned stakeholders.

Keywords: Cohabitation, disposition, prevalence, pattern, undergraduates, Nigeria

*Corresponding author

Omisore, A.G.

ORCID ID- 0002-3393-5721

Email: akinlolu.omisore@uniosun.edu.ng

¹College of Health Science, Osun State University, Osogbo, Nigeria

²Public Health programme, College of Health Sciences, Osun State University, Osogbo, Nigeria

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Prévalence, disposition envers et facteurs associés à la cohabitation chez les étudiants de licence à l'Université de Technologie Ladoke Akintola, Ogbomoso, Nigéria

Adeyera, O.¹, *Omisore, A.G.¹, Balogun, O.D.², Akinwusi, M.D.², Oyekanmi, O.D.²,
Abiodun, O.M.¹, Adesina, K.A.¹

Résumé

Contexte général de l'étude: La cohabitation est de plus en plus courante dans les institutions tertiaires et elle est associée à la santé reproductive et à d'autres problèmes connexes. Cette étude est conçue pour déterminer la prévalence, le modèle, la disposition et les raisons de la cohabitation avant le mariage chez les étudiants d'une institution tertiaire du sud-ouest du Nigéria

Méthode de l'étude: Une étude transversale descriptive de 350 étudiants de licence sélectionnés dans une Université de l'État d'Oyo à l'aide d'une technique d'échantillonnage à plusieurs degrés. Les données ont été recueillies via un questionnaire auto-administré semi-structuré et analysées à l'aide de SPSS version 22.0

Résultat de l'étude : La majorité (90,0 %) des répondants avait moins de 25 ans et 70,0 % étaient des femmes. Vingt-sept (7,7 %) cohabitaient actuellement tandis que 70 (20,0 %) avaient déjà cohabité. Un tiers (32,0 %) étaient favorables à la cohabitation. Plus d'hommes, de répondants plus âgés et de ceux dont les parents n'étaient pas leur source de revenu ont déclaré avoir déjà cohabité.

Conclusion: La cohabitation est pratiquée parmi les étudiants universitaires et est socialement acceptable pour beaucoup. Des efforts concertés axés sur des programmes de sensibilisation et de prise de conscience pour éduquer les étudiants sur les conséquences néfastes de la cohabitation devraient être entrepris par les parties prenantes concernées.

Mots-clés : Cohabitation, prédominance, des dispositions, modèle, étudiants de premier cycle (licence), Nigéria

*Corresponding author

Omisore, A.G.

ORCID ID- 0002-3393-5721

Email: akinlolu.omisore@uniosun.edu.ng

¹College of Health Science, Osun State University, Osogbo, Nigeria

²Public Health programme, College of Health Sciences, Osun State University, Osogbo, Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

Living together of two people (a male and female) when they are not formally married is known as cohabitation. During cohabitation, marital intimacy and relationship are being assumed without the legality associated with marriage. A revolution in sexual values has seemingly eroded previously established human culture and values. What would have passed as vices or taboos hitherto have now been embraced in different parts of the world. Cohabitation represents one of such increasingly acceptable values globally. Although; this could be traced back to the Western culture, it is now being accepted in the African culture (1,2,3).

The act of cohabitation is now common among students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria (2,3). It is also regarded as 'couples' life', 'campus marriage' and 'campus coupling' (1,2). In the past students were all accommodated within the institutions' halls of residence with different hostels for male and female. However, in recent years, the increasing population of students with little or no change in the available number of halls of residence has caused students to look for accommodation outside of the school premises (4). While insufficient accommodation is the case in some schools, others do not even provide any accommodation to students (1,2,4). They are therefore at liberty to reside outside the university premises. Compared to on-campus residencies which have separate rooms/hostels for males and females, off-campus allows for mixed residence of both sexes which promotes or leads to cohabitation (1,4). Thus, insufficient/lack of institutional residence has led to an increase in the rate of cohabitation.

There are different reasons for cohabitation among students of tertiary institutions. Some students who cohabit were found to regard cohabitation as a strategy that provides an opportunity to build quality and stable marital relationships (1,2,3). It is therefore not surprising that elements of marital relationships including sexual intimacy are present in these situations (5-7). Other reasons given are accommodation issues, financial problems and testing of marriage compatibility (1,3,6). It has also been opined that moral decadence and eroding of morality among youths also fuels the high rate of cohabitation (1,3,6).

Premarital cohabitation has been reported to have health and social consequences for those who engage in it (2,7). It is associated with an increase in several risky behaviors like unprotected sex, drug use, clubbing, excessive

alcohol intake, physical fight and delinquency (1,2,3). Other sexually related consequences are sexually transmitted infections, abortions and unplanned pregnancy (2,7). Besides these consequences, it has also been found to impact negatively on the academic performances of students in tertiary institutions (5).

Given the increasing prevalence of cohabitation and its consequences on the students and the society at large, its dynamics need to be examined in different populations to control it or minimize its adverse effects. Of recent, there is increased demand for university education in Nigeria with corresponding establishment of more private and public tertiary institutions (4). Information is required for policy makers and regulatory bodies to ensure the establishment of academic environment that will guaranty healthy living and acceptable social interactions. This study, therefore, aimed to assess the prevalence, pattern, disposition and reasons for premarital cohabitation among students of a selected tertiary institution in South West Nigeria. Results from the study will provide insight into cohabitation which can guide interventions and policies formulations.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study area and site: Ogbomoso is located in Oyo State, Southwestern Nigeria. Ladoke Akintola University of Technology (LAUTECH) is a tertiary institution located in Ogbomoso, with geographical coordinate 8° 8' 0" North, 4° 16' 0" East. LAUTECH is a public university with a student population of about 30,000 spread over seven faculties. It was chosen because it is one of the institutions that do not have halls of residence/hostels for students. Therefore, students of this institution dwell outside of the university premises.

Study design: The study was a descriptive cross-sectional survey

Study population: The study was conducted among undergraduates of LAUTECH. The year one students in the school were excluded from the study, while students in year two and above were surveyed. Using Leslie Fischer's formula for sample size calculation in a population greater than 10,000 and prevalence rate of cohabitation of 23 % in a similar study (3), a minimum sample size of 273 was calculated. An estimated non-completion rate of 30.0% was factored in, making a total of 360 respondents. However a total of 350 questionnaires were completed. The respondents

were randomly selected through multi-stage sampling technique. Two faculties were selected using simple random sampling via balloting. In the two faculties, half of the departments were also selected using simple random sampling via balloting. Using proportional allocation, the number of students to be selected from each department and level was determined. Systematic random sampling was then used to select the respondents. Questionnaires were administered in the lecture halls at the end of lectures.

Data collection: A semi-structured self-administered questionnaire was used to elicit information from the respondents. The questionnaire elicited information on socio-demographic characteristics, practice and pattern of cohabitation and disposition towards cohabitation. The questionnaire was pre-tested among 35 undergraduates at Osun State University, Osogbo Campus, which also has students living off-campus. All ambiguities were corrected following the pre-test.

Data analysis: Data entry was done and analysed using IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 22 software. Descriptive analysis was done by making use of frequencies and percentages. Inferential statistics was performed using chi-square test to find association between practice of cohabitation and socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. Significance level was set at 95%.

Ethical permission: Ethical permission was obtained from Health Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of Osun State University. Permission from the Heads of the selected departments was also sought and obtained. Informed consent of the participant was obtained after explaining the purpose of the study. Confidentiality as well as privacy were also ensured.

RESULTS

A total number of 360 students were selected to participate in the study but only 350 completed the questionnaire giving a response rate of 97.2%

Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Table 1 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents: The majority, 315(90.0%) of the respondents were 24 years old and below and 234 (66.9%) were females. Most, 298 (85.1%), of the

respondents came from monogamous families and 300 (85.7%) lived with both parents (at home). The majority, 316 (90.2%) of the respondents stated that their parents were their main source of income while 207 (59.1%) stated that their average income was not enough to cater for their needs.

Disposition towards premarital cohabitation among students

Table 2 shows the disposition of the respondents towards premarital cohabitation among the respondents: A total of 198 (56.6%) of the respondents were against the act of cohabitation being banned among students. Also 112 (32.0%) of the respondents said they would recommend cohabitation to students as long as they love each other while 142 (40.6%) said students should cohabit if one does not have enough money for accommodation.

Prevalence and pattern of cohabitation among respondents

A total of 70 (20.0%) respondents have cohabited at one point in time or the other. Out of the 70, 27 (38.6%) were cohabiting as at the time of data collection. Furthermore, a total of 167 (47.7%) of all the respondents have friends who cohabit while 35 (10.0%) have relatives who cohabit.

Reasons for Cohabitation

The figure above shows the reasons for cohabitation among the 70 respondents who have ever cohabited. The commonest reason for cohabitation was found to be financial constraints (60.1%), followed by "to be closer to partner" (14.5%), and 13.1% cohabited "to improve relationship with partner" while only 6.5% cohabited for sexual gratification, and 2.9% cohabited because their partners insisted and another 2.9% because their friends were into it.

Association between socio-demographic characteristics and prevalence of cohabitation

There was a statistically significant association between the independent variables-age, gender, and source of income and the dependent variable "ever cohabiting". A higher proportion (34.3%) of respondents who were 25 years old and above cohabited compared to 18.4% of those who were 24 years and below ($p=0.026$). Also, a higher proportion of males (27.6%) reported cohabitation compared to their

female counterparts (16.2%) with $p=0.012$. In addition, a higher proportion of respondents whose parents were not their source of income (47.1%) reported cohabiting compared to those whose parents were their source of income cohabited (17.1%) ($p<0.001$).

DISCUSSION

This study examined the prevalence, pattern and disposition towards premarital cohabitation among undergraduates. Three hundred and fifty respondents participated in the study and majority of the participants were youths below the age of 24 years.

The prevalence of cohabitation in our study is 20.0%. However, the prevalence increased significantly from 18.4% among respondents who were below the age of 25 years to 34.3% among respondents who were 25 years and above. Thus, older respondents were more involved in cohabitation compared to younger people. This may not be unexpected as the older ones are presumably more matured and experienced compared to younger people who may still be subject to the control of their parents. Older adults were also more explicit and confident in talking about sexuality and relationship when compared to younger people (8). The higher reporting found among older respondents in this study could therefore be because they are usually more forthcoming and bolder to disclose engagement in relationships than younger people. Older people also exercise more freedom and independence which are enabling factors for cohabitation. Thus, a significant level of under-reporting could have occurred among the younger respondents. Though the prevalence of cohabitation in our study is similar to that reported from similar studies (2,3,6), the overall prevalence of cohabitation could be higher than as reported.

Out of the 70 students who had ever cohabited, only 27 of them were currently cohabiting at the time of the study. The durability of cohabitation has been found to be dependent on the purpose and the experience of the individual involved (7,8,9). In terms of total numbers, among the respondents who had ever cohabited in this study, 82.9% were young inexperienced individuals of less discretion and less decisive nature who are known to be ready victims of peer influence (10). Peer influence related reasons in form of 'to be closer to partner', 'to improve relationship', for sexual relationship, 'friends are doing it' and 'partner insisted' are common reasons for cohabitation in our study.

Such 'couples' learn about the quality of their relationship during cohabitation and many decide to discontinue. It has been previously reported that a large number of premarital cohabitation relationships do not lead to marriage and they break up even while still in school while some who otherwise should not have married end up marrying through cohabitation. (7,9,10)

This study found that a higher proportion of males (27.6%) compared to females (16.2%) reported ever cohabiting and the difference was statistically significant. Reports differ from studies on association of cohabitation with regard to sex or gender. Some studies have reported lack of association while others reported that there was an association (2,3,6,7). Considering that the males who reported cohabitation are doing so with their female partners, the rate of cohabitation could arguably be the same in both genders. The higher reporting found among males in this study could therefore be because males are usually more forthcoming and bolder to disclose engagement in sexual relationships than females (8,11,12).

Financial constraint was the leading reason for cohabitation among the respondents. Similar findings have been reported by other authors (1,2,3,6,). The enormous number of students and limited accommodation facilities make the available rooms/hostels expensive and out of reach of many students, hence the 'palliative measure' of resolving to either partner with or wholly lean on another individual to provide accommodation for them. Furthermore, report of cohabitation among respondents whose parents were not their source of income is significantly higher compared to those whose parents were their source of income. Lack of financial provision from parents encourages freedom from parental supervision with independence and less monitoring from parents or guardian (6,11). Such students with financial difficulties have been found to readily resort to cohabitation for economic support to save on rent, food and other living expenses (1, 11). Result from our study which revealed that 40% of the students were favorably disposed to cohabitation among students as a means to alleviate financial hardship further corroborates financial cause of cohabitation. One may wonder whether the issue actually goes beyond financial constraints, because ordinarily if it is just financial constraints, why shouldn't an individual find a partner of the same sex to partner with in paying for the needed accommodation rather than the opposite sex. This may imply that the

payment for accommodation by cohabiting partners may not necessarily be shared equally by both partners, perhaps, more often than not there is a principal financial partner to which the less financially capable partner is subject to. This may be the object of some future studies.

However, a significant proportion of the respondents in our study practiced cohabitation for relationship motives. Reasons like 'the need to be closer to partner', 'to improve relationship' and 'for sexual relationships' were reported. Other studies have identified pleasure, companionship, love and sexual gratification as leading reasons for cohabitation (1,2,3,6). In such instances, young men are known to enjoy the gains of cohabitation in terms of sexual and domestic duties especially in Nigeria and other African countries where there is cultural abhorrence to premarital sex but demonstrate a double standard blaming the female gender for sexual misdemeanors (8,11,12). Thus, cohabitation tends to be more acceptable to the male gender and are confident and bold enough to report their involvement as suggested by our study. The fact that relationship and sexual driven factors were common reasons given for cohabitation shows that many youths of today have abandoned the rich African culture that forbids a boy and a girl from having sexual relationship until they are formally married. Many commentators have opined that contemporary youths have abandoned valued African traditions for the inglorious culture of premarital sex. Cohabitation is totally against the norms and values of the African society.

CONCLUSION

Cohabitation is common among undergraduates in this study and perhaps in many tertiary institutions in the country. Even students who do not engage in cohabitation have a positive disposition towards it and it is socially acceptable among them. Cohabitation is found to be financial and relationship driven. Therefore, there should be concerted efforts towards sensitization and dissemination of information to students on the adverse consequences of cohabitation on their health and academics. Policies and interventions to lessen the financial obligation of students in the universities should also be put in place. Such interventions should include establishment of affordable and well supervised residential halls by universities and scholarships for students from government and non-governmental bodies and individuals.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgement: Nil

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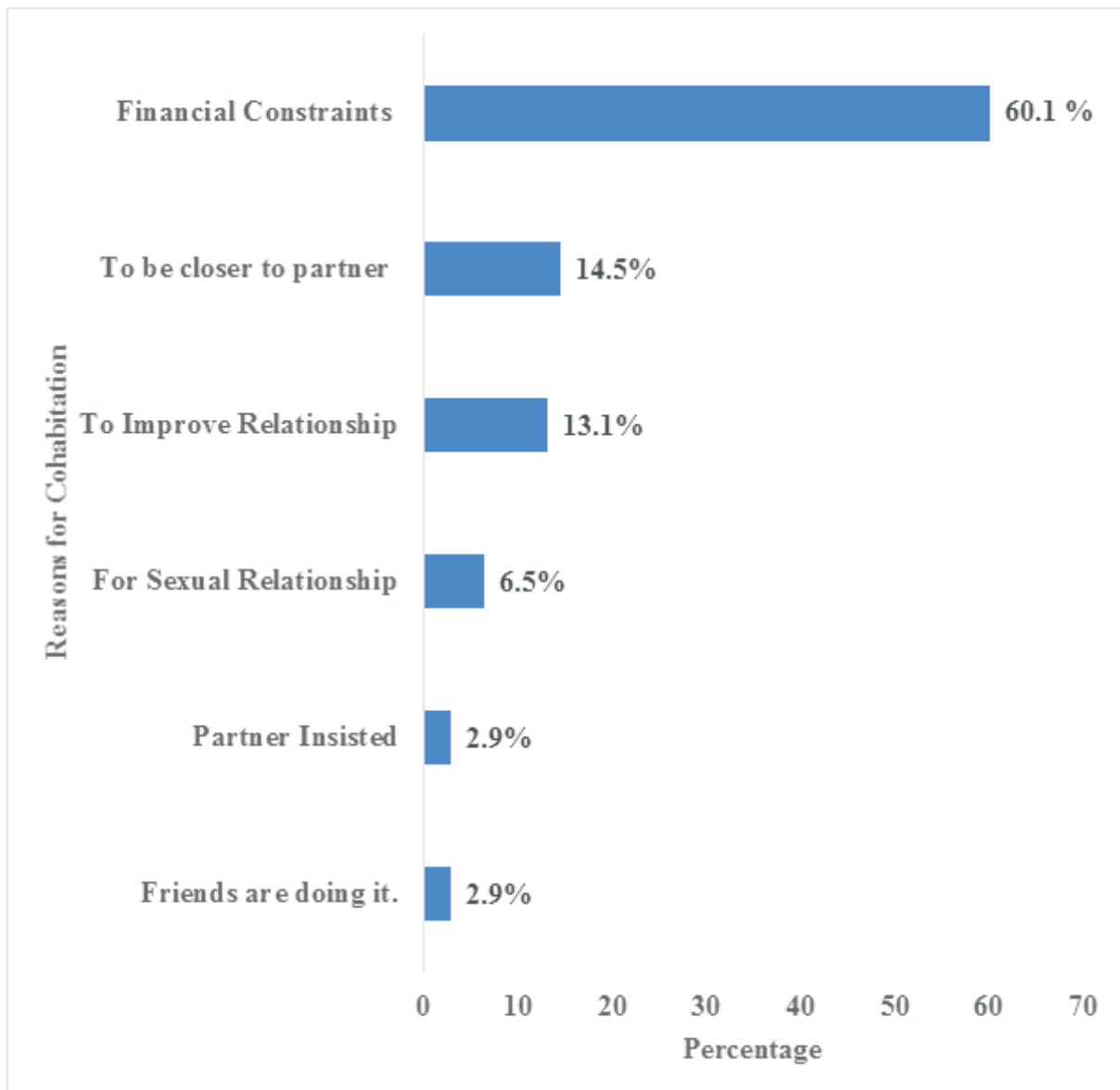


Figure 1: Reasons for Cohabitation

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

VARIABLES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Age		
24 and below	315	90.0
25 and above	35	10.0
Sex		
Male	116	33.1
Female	234	66.9
Parental marital status		
Married	332	94.9
Separated	8	2.3
Cohabiting	1	0.3
Widowed	9	2.5
Type of family		
Monogamous	298	85.1
Polygamous	52	14.9
Who do you live with? (at home)		
Mother only	32	9.1
Father only	7	2.0
Both parent	300	85.7
Other	11	3.2
Average monthly income enough to cater for need?		
Yes	143	40.9
No	207	59.1
Main source of income		
Parent	316	90.2
Guardian or other relatives	7	2.0
From business	21	6.0
Spouse	1	0.3
Dating or courtship partner	2	0.6
Others	3	0.9

Table 2: Disposition towards premarital cohabitation among students (N=350)

Variable	Cohabitation	
	Against n (%)	For n (%)
Cohabitation among students should be banned/outlawed	198(56.6)	152(43.4)
I would recommend cohabiting to a student as long as they love each other	238(68.0)	112(32.0)
Students should cohabit if one does not have enough money for accommodation	208(59.4)	142(40.6)

Table 3 : Prevalence and pattern of cohabitation among respondents (n=350)

Variable	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Ever cohabited		
Yes	70	20.0
No	280	80.0
Currently cohabiting (n=70)		
Yes	27	38.6
No	43	61.4
Length of cohabitation with current partner (n=27)		
3 months and below	8	29.6
More than 3 months	19	70.4
Length of cohabitation with last partner(n=43)		
3 months and below	28	65.1
More than three months	15	34.9
Have mates or friends who cohabit		
Yes	167	47.7
No	183	52.3
Have relatives or family member who cohabit		
Yes	35	10.0
No	237	67.7
Not sure	78	22.3

Table 4: Association between socio-demographic characteristics and prevalence of cohabitation (n=350)

VARIABLE	EVER COHABITED		p-value
	YES n (%)	NO n (%)	
Age			0.026*
24 and below	58(18.4)	257(81.6)	
25 and above	12(34.3)	23(65.7)	
Sex			0.012*
Male	32(27.6)	84(72.4)	
Female	38(16.2)	196(83.8)	
Type of family			0.822
Monogamous	59(19.8)	239(80.2)	
Polygamous	11(21.2)	41(78.8)	
Parental marital status			0.333
Currently married	68(20.5)	264(79.5)	
Not currently married	2(11.1)	16(88.9)	
Source of income			=0.001*
Parent	54(17.1)	262(82.9)	
Others	16(47.1)	18(52.9)	

*statistically significant at p<0.05