

Prevalence of Premarital Cohabitation and Premarital Sexual Behaviour Among Undergraduates in Nigeria

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Abstract

The issue of pre-marital cohabitation and pre-marital sexual behaviours among undergraduates in Nigeria has attracted a lot of attentions among scholars, researchers and policy makers. This study therefore examined the relationship between pre-marital cohabitation and pre-marital sexual behaviours among undergraduates in Nigerian Universities. Ninety two undergraduates were randomly selected from four public universities in Ogun and Lagos states. This sample was made up of forty eight males (52%) and forty four females (48%). Sixty one of selected samples had involved in cohabitation sometimes or presently cohabitating. This represented two-third of the total sample. All the selected undergraduates were unmarried with mean age of 21.6years, minimum age of 18years and maximum of 24years. There is a significant difference in the age of first sexual intercourse between cohabitating undergraduates and non-cohabitating undergraduates ($t=14.83$, $p= 0.0001$). The t-test result showed no age difference in reporting of unprotected sex among cohabiters at $t=0.46$, 59 degree of freedom and $p>0.05$. The chi-square test result showed a significant difference in reporting of condom use among cohabiters at $X^2=15.754$ and $p<0.05$. It was concluded that there was high prevalence of cohabitation among undergraduates and high incidence of risky pre-marital sexual behaviour. It was suggested that parents should ensure that they know and secure accommodation for their children in Nigerian Universities if they cannot insist on hostel facility provided by the school. Government and proprietors of universities should ensure to provide affordable hostel facility.

Keywords: Cohabitation, pre-marital sex, undergraduates

Introduction

The growing number of students seeking admission into tertiary institutions in Nigeria has placed a major challenge on the University Management especially in the area of classrooms and hostel accommodation. Most of the private universities in the country are able to manage the issue of hostel accommodation because of the sizeable number they admit, but Federal and State owned institutions are facing with either inadequate hostel accommodations or non-availability of these facilities. Many private operators now provide hostel accommodation which lack monitoring and usual regulations found in hostel accommodation managing by the University authority.

The common feature of accommodations outside the institution is cohabitation among students. Cohabitation can be defined as an act of a man and woman living together and sometimes having marital relationships without being married. Cohabitation results in two independent people, almost like roommates, who have sex, instead of a commitment to one another for the rest of their lives (Rena, 2006). Earlier studies have reported incidence of premarital cohabitation among Nigerian University undergraduates (Alo, 2008; Alo & Akinde, 2010). There are many reasons adduced for why cohabiters engage in this act.

Economic reason can be one of the justifications for cohabitation; many indigent students may be lured into living with opposite sex to have their daily needs met. Those living together are also able to split the costs of a household even when they are not indigent. Funds are combined for food, utilities, and other basics. Some cohabiting students find it difficult to live apart because of academic dependency. Ogunsola (2004) reported that cohabiters who had promised each other marriage engaged in cohabitation to try if they were compatible.

Literature Review

There is a growing rate of cohabitation among young adults. Stanley, Whitten and Markman, (2004) reported that more than half of young adults engage in a romantic relationship with someone before marriage nowadays. Many characteristics are shared by the cohabiters, Smock (2000) observed that they tend to be of slightly lower socioeconomic status, more liberal, less religious and are more supportive of egalitarian gender roles and nontraditional family roles. The University students that engaged in this change in family pattern always hold a positive attitude towards this act. They claimed to have control of the situation and maintained to have deeper understanding of their partners, enjoyed deeper love, able to disclose more, and enjoyed better sex lives (Dolgin 2011).

This study believes that social context can be used to explain cohabitation acceptability. In that cohabitation cannot exist in a vacuum. The undergraduates who are mostly young adults are bound to be influenced by their peers, partners, media and most especially family. There are evidences that youths are influenced by their peers. Steinberg and Monahan, (2008) reported low resistance to peer influence among young adults, as Rindfuss, Choe, Bumpass, and Tsuya (2004) earlier found that peer influence contributes to the growth in cohabitation.

Social learning theory has explained how individuals model their behaviour on the behaviors of others in their social environments after observing the consequences of such behaviour (Bandura 1976). Young individuals who observe his/her peers cohabiting may be encouraged to do the same.

The consequences associated with cohabitation are commonly called the cohabitation effect. For example, one of such effects is marital instability. Kline and Rankin, (2004) as well as Stanley, Whitton, & Markman, (2004) reported that couples who cohabit before marriage are at higher risk of divorcing than the couples who do not cohabit before marriage. They added that the cohabiters also tend to experience dissatisfaction in marriage than the noncohabiters.

Researcher like Kamp Dush, Cohan and Amato,(2003) reported that the experience of cohabitation may affect an individual's attitudes toward marriage and romantic relationships. However, cohabitation may be said to be closer to the institution of marriage than dating especially when a couple cohabited with an expectation of marriage. The relationship was not stigmatized and is accepted as a natural stage of the relationship (Skinner, Bahr, Crane and Call, 2002).

Statement of Problem

Many young adults, especially university students, are increasingly cohabiting, but few studies have considered how this act influences or shapes their sexual behaviour. There is paucity of studies as well on what motivates or influence cohabiters. The rapid increase in cohabitation continues unabated without adequate scholarly attention to the sources of influence that support such growing levels. This study therefore examined the prevalence of premarital cohabitation and its influence on cohabiters' sexual behaviour.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to determine the prevalence of premarital cohabitation and measure its influence on cohabiters' sexual behaviour. Other specific objectives are;

1. To determine the factors that influence cohabitation
2. To measure the age of first sexual intercourse among cohabitating undergraduates.
3. To determine the prevalence of unprotected sex among cohabitating undergraduates
4. To examine the prevalence of condom use among cohabitating undergraduates
5. There is no significant difference in reporting condom use among cohabiters

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the factors influence cohabitating among undergraduates
2. There is no significant difference in the age of first sexual intercourse between cohabitating undergraduates and non-cohabitating undergraduates

3. There is no significant age difference in reporting of unprotected sex among cohabiters

Methods

This descriptive study adopted a survey research design approach to obtain data. The questionnaire developed by the researcher was used to elicit response on whether participants have cohabitated with opposite sex before or are still cohabiting, duration of cohabitation, activities during cohabitation, sexual intercourse during cohabitation and nature of sexual intercourse etc. The psychometric properties of the questionnaire were ensured with split half reliability of 0.68, Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.74.

Results

The results obtained are presented in tables below

Table 1 Demographic data

Variation		N	%
Gender	Male	48	52
	Female	44	48
	Total	92	100
Age	18-20	44	48
	21-24	48	52
	Total	92	100
Cohabiting Status	Cohabiting	61	66
	Non-Cohabiting	31	34
	Total	92	100

The distribution revealed forty eight males (52%) and forty four females (48%). Sixty one of selected samples (66%) had involved in cohabitation sometimes or presently cohabitating while thirty one had neither cohabited before nor presently cohabiting.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in the age of first sexual intercourse between cohabitating undergraduates and non-cohabitating undergraduates

Table 2: Summary of t-test for difference in the age of first sexual intercourse

Variation	N	Mean Age	t-Ob	Sig
Cohabiting Undergraduates	61	18.62	14.83	<0.05
Non-Cohabiting Undergraduates	31	23.14		
Total	92			

The first hypothesis tested difference in the age of first sexual intercourse between cohabitating undergraduates and non-cohabitating undergraduates. The result revealed that cohabiting undergraduates had their first sexual intercourse earlier (<19years) than non cohabiting

counterparts that reported (>23years). The t-test result showed a significant difference in the age of first sexual intercourse between cohabitating undergraduates and non-cohabitating undergraduates at $t=14.83$, 90 degree of freedom and $p<0.05$.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant age difference in reporting of unprotected sex among cohabiters

Table 3: Summary of t-test for difference in reporting of unprotected sex

Variation	N	Mean	t-Ob	Sig
18-20years	37	6	0.46	>0.05
21-24years	24	7		
Total	61			

The second hypothesis tested age difference in reporting of unprotected sex among cohabiters. The result revealed that cohabiters within 18-20years of age reported engaging in unprotected sexual intercourse for average of 6 times out of 10 times while those within 21-24years reported average of 7 times out of 10 times of sexual intercourse activities. The t-test result showed no age difference in reporting of unprotected sex among cohabiters at $t=0.46$, 59 degree of freedom and $p>0.05$.

Hypothesis Three There is no significant difference in reporting of condom use among cohabiters

Table 4: Summary of Chi-Square-test for difference in reporting of condom use

Variation	N	X ²	Sig
Condom Users	15	15.754	<0.05
Non Users of Condom	46		
Total	61		

The third hypothesis tested significant difference in reporting condom use among cohabiters. The result revealed that 15cohabiters representing (25%) reported the use of condom while 46 cohabiters representing (75%) reported non-use of condom during sexual intercourse. The chi-square test result showed a significant difference in reporting of condom use among cohabiters at $X^2=15.754$ and $p<0.05$

Discussion

The finding of this study revealed high prevalence of cohabitation among undergraduates living outside the university hostels. In fact close to seven out of ten students living outside the campus cohabit. Ogunsola, (2004) had earlier reported increasing number of undergraduates cohabiting in Nigerian universities. Mokomane, (2004) cited data from Botswana Family Health Surveys (BFHS) that the proportion of women aged 15-49 years who were in cohabiting unions increased from 11 to 17% between 1988 and 1996, while proportion of cohabiting unions among all unions increased from 28 to 50% between the two time periods. The sexual behaviour of cohabiters was examined, the result revealed that cohabiting undergraduates had their first sexual intercourse

earlier (<19years) than non cohabiting counterparts that reported (>23years). The t-test result showed a significant difference in the age of first sexual intercourse between cohabitating undergraduates and non-cohabitating undergraduates. There is evidence in the literature that cohabitation is a "sexier" living arrangement than even marriage.

The growing numbers of those who cohabit and engage in premarital sex are made manifest in the area of high rate premarital pregnancy and the spread of the Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and Acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) pandemic amongst the youth in greater proportions. Invariably, cohabiters are expected to engage in sexual intercourse and if cohabiters are likely to be lower in age than non-cohabiters, their age of first sexual intercourse must be lower. Unprotected sex is a risky behaviour that is associated with premarital sex. The finding of this present study revealed that cohabiters within 18-20years of age reported engaging in unprotected sexual intercourse for average of 6 times out of 10 times while those within 21-24years reported average of 7 times out of 10 times of sexual intercourse activities. The t-test result showed no age difference in reporting of unprotected sex among cohabiters. This result collaborated finding of Ogunsola, (2004) which indicated that cohabiting students will most likely engage in unprotected sex which could result to sexually transmitted infections and the much dreaded HIV/AIDS disease.

The finding on condom use among cohabiters revealed that 15cohabiters representing (25%) reported the use of condom while 46 cohabiters representing (75%) reported non-use of condom during sexual intercourse. This result showed a significant difference in reporting of condom use among cohabiters with nonusers outnumbered the reported users. Blecher (1995) earlier reported a widespread resistance to the use of condoms in stable, long-term relationships as cohabitation because of their association with lack of trust. Maharaj and Cleland (2005) in a study conducted in Kenya, reported that 97% of people in marriage or cohabitating relationships indicated that they did not use condom the last time they had sex.

Conclusion

In Nigeria like other African countries strong norms persist that prohibit premarital sexual contact between young men and women and the topic of sexuality largely remains a taboo. Despite this fact, cohabitation and premarital sex have reached a point of crisis amongst Nigerian undergraduates. When looking closely at the dynamics of cohabitation and premarital sex among undergraduates in Nigeria, there are three elements that are worth noting, namely the youth in crisis, the factors contributing to cohabitation and premarital sex and the consequences thereof. This study has brought to the fore the prevalence of cohabitation among Nigerian undergraduates and risky sexual behaviour that are associated with it.

Recommendations

Nigeria government at all levels should wake up to their responsibilities of providing accommodation in our universities. The private universities owners should also be compelled to provide accommodation facilities for their students. In the meantime, parents should ensure that they know where their children and wards reside in the university and discourage the act of cohabitation.

Suggestion for future research

Researchers need to initiate empirical study in the area of cohabitation and associated danger so as to give researchers, counselors, therapists, and educators a clearer picture of the possible consequences of premarital cohabitation and the consequences on marital life and future relationships.

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