

Attitude of Higher Institution Students towards the Use of Family Planning Methods and Cohabitation in Ondo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated higher institution students' attitudes toward family planning methods and cohabitation in Ondo State, Nigeria. This study used a descriptive survey research design and a sample of 560 higher institution students selected through a multi-stage sampling procedure from the seven higher institutions in Ondo State, Nigeria. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire with two sub-scales titled 'Students' attitudes towards contraceptive use inventory' and 'Attitudes towards cohabitation questionnaire' The data collected were analyzed using frequency count, percentage and correlation analysis. The study results showed a high prevalence of cohabitation among higher institution students in Ondo State with 408 (72.86%) of the 560 respondents engaging in cohabitation. Also, significant relationships existed between attitudes towards the use of family planning methods and cohabitation among higher institution students ($r= 0.479$, $P< 0.05$). Based on the findings, it was concluded that a highly prevalent level of cohabitation exists among students of higher institutions and a positive relationship existed between the use of family planning methods and cohabitation among the students. Therefore, it was recommended that the government and management team of each of the higher institutions should provide, within the campus, enough affordable accommodation and rules guiding visitation to opposite-sex hostels.

Keywords: Higher Institution Students, Family Planning Methods, Cohabitation

INTRODUCTION

The issue of formal education appears to be of significant interest to almost all parents in Nigeria. Parents aspire that their children be educated and acquire university certificates that could qualify the children to be admitted into skilled or professional careers in life. Secondary school education is designed to prepare these children for the competitive world of work and also to have the opportunity to pursue higher institution programmes. Higher institutions appear to admit qualified children by certification and age. Any child with a minimum qualification of five credit passes and within the age range of 16-20 years seemed qualified to be admitted into a higher institution programme. At this age range of 16-20 years, it spells out that this group of admissible children are within the age of adolescents who by characteristics, appear to always believe they are mature enough to do whatever an adult person can do. It appears they are prone to crisis if left unguided because boys and girls at this stage mostly seem to witness tremendous physical bodily change (Owuamanam & Owuamanam, 2004). Higher institution academic studies appear may allow undergraduates to enjoy some freedom or social activities because students are free to do whatever they want.

According to Ojewola and Akinduyo (2017), cohabitation among undergraduates across Nigerian tertiary institutions was unrestrained and based on uncertainties of the future. At an alarming rate is the diversification of engaging in cohabitation (Li et al., 2022); with many records of breakups in cohabitation, preventing successful marital relationships (Lamidi et al., 2019; Guzzo, 2014). It is observed that most of the higher institutions in Nigeria appear to lack enough affordable and convenient accommodation for all students within their campuses. This

probably has accounted for the students' attitudes towards cohabitation in and out of the environment of higher institutions in Ondo State, Nigeria. Two living projects: such as cohabitation and cohousing were living arrangements that explain cohabitation (Binachi & Costa, 2024); that paved the way for unofficial husband-and-wife living and uncensored premarital sexual intercourse. Cohabitation, a term that should be more appropriately used to describe the relationship or living together between married couples has gone deeply to revolve more around the unmarried students of higher institutions and it is now increasing. The reasons for the increase in cohabitation, according to Knox & Schacht (2008), include educational commitments; increased societal and parental tolerance; improved birth control technology, urge for a stable illegal sexual relationship; and greater disregard and disrespect for convention and possibly culture and tradition. Baxter (2005) argued that cohabiters are likely to be high school dropouts or higher institution students who have less concern for tradition and religion, but Houseknecht & Lewis (2005) asserted that adolescents who are not close to their parents are more likely to cohabit.

The increase in cohabitation among university undergraduates in Nigeria has been a source of worry to all stakeholders (Lawal & Okereke, 2021), with appalling consequences for the undergraduates, families, and society at large. These include but are not limited to unplanned pregnancies, abortions, high mortality rate, and contracting and spreading of sexually transmitted infections, In the past, an intimate relationship was premised on spirituality and emotions, but has shifted to sexual and physical relationships in the present era of undergraduates (Jalil et al., 2024). According to Rogers (2016), undergraduates perceived adulthood or their university programmes as a period to prepare for future family roles, this made them accept cohabitation as the best way of life. Fareo and Moses (2018); and Knox and Schacht (2008) have adduced possible causes of students' involvement in cohabitation to include financial capability, low academic ability, security and mutual attraction. If the submission of Fareo & Moses (2018) and Knox and Schacht (2008) is considered critically, some students likely view their financial capability over the students who have poor finances but need help to lure the poorly financed students and attract them into cohabitation on agreement of give and take. Similarly, students who are very brilliant academically but financially poor may be lured into cohabitation with students who are academically weak, and lazy but financially buoyant. This may not completely be true because it appears that some parents who are in poverty seem to encourage their children to engage in cohabitation. Song and Lai (2022) found that females experiment with different intimate relationships in other to get the best mate for marriage, while males do the same to prove their economic strength and sexual potency.

Certain attitudes such as full concentration on academic work are expected from higher institution students but with the openness to affordable and befitting accommodation, some students seem to have an extended attitude towards cohabitation. Cohabitation in higher institutions is a form of living together by both young unmarried male and female students practicing a couple's life. It is a situation where a young adolescent boy and girl are living together underneath a roof sharing food, drinks, money, and a bed and giving and receiving love including having sex together as if they are married. The cohabitation attitude among students is not aimed at ending up in legal marriage; therefore, those who are involved are not ready for producing and rearing children (Gross, 2010).

Individuals who got into cohabitation and are not willing to be involved in unplanned pregnancies and/or sexually transmitted infections appear to employ strategies involving satisfying their sexual urges or intimacies without resulting in pregnancy or contracting diseases. In Nigeria, before the era of modern family planning, couples have been spacing the birth period between their children using traditional methods. Ukwuani-Kwaja et al. (2023) posited that twenty medicinal plants were being used to control birth in Kebbi State, Nigeria with *Momordica*

charantia herbal plant as the most used traditional contraceptive method. However, modern methods appear to have overtaken these traditional child spacing methods. These modern methods known as family planning methods are available for all who are interested in their use in satisfying their sexual pleasure to avoid unwanted pregnancy, abortion and sexually transmitted diseases (Owuamanam 2004).

Globally, the prevalence of unplanned pregnancies ending in abortion and unwanted babies among higher institution students appears to be increasing astronomically despite the possibility of awareness and knowledge of the use of family planning methods. In sub-Saharan Africa alone, fourteen (14) million unintended pregnancies were reported yearly (Ameyaw, 2019); predisposing undergraduates to numerous health risks. The knowledge of these higher institution students about family planning may contribute immensely to the high level of behavioural disposition of the students towards cohabitation, yet the incidence of unwanted pregnancy; high-level abortion, prostitution, unwanted sexually transmitted diseases, disregard and lack of respect for the culture and ethnic norm for sexual relationship appear to continue at increase among these higher institution students.

Studies on cohabitation among students in higher institutions in Nigeria have been carried out, for instance, Aremu et al. (2019) investigated cohabitation and academic achievement among students of tertiary institutions in Niger State, Nigeria. The study used a descriptive survey design with 710 respondents drawn from a population of 7,701 final-year students of three tertiary institutions. Data analysis results revealed that the level of cohabitation among the students is high. Gaining social influence and protection from their spouse influence the academic performance of the cohabiting students. In the same manner, Duyilemi et al. (2018) examined cohabitation using students of Adekunle Ajasin University, Ondo State, as a case study of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The result of the study revealed from the responses of the 250 sampled students that 140 (63.6%) indicated that the percentage of university students that engaged in cohabitation ranged between 25% - 75%. Lijun (2012) found out, from the study of attitudes towards cohabitation among the generation after the eighties in urban areas of China that males tend to be more positive in attitudes towards cohabitation than their female counterparts.

Studies have been carried out to investigate the influence of family planning on human behaviour, for instance, Wang et al. (2015) studied the association between contraceptive use behaviour and unintended pregnancy in unmarried female university students in China. Forty-nine universities with a sample of 35,383 unmarried female students were used for the study. The findings revealed that 82.9% of the sexually active students who had sexual intercourse frequently chose to use male condoms while 83.9% of the students without the intention of pregnancy chose to abort the pregnancy. A study by Laidi (2016) on contraceptive use among Nigeria undergraduates from a federal university revealed that students use many contraceptives including traditional and modern contraceptive methods; 48.0% of the male students indicated that they always protect themselves during sexual intercourse while 42.2% of the male do not protect themselves at all, 63% of the 46 female respondents indicated that they do not always ensure they are protected.

Mangalore et al (2011) examined the role of relationship characteristics in young adult contraceptive use, using a sample of 4014 respondents for daily relationships of youths. The findings from the regression analysis of data collected showed that cohabitation was associated with the use of any methods ($\beta = 0.7$); the reduced risk of condoms was alone or dual methods ($\beta = 0.6$) while the risk of using the hormonal method or condoms only increased with relationship duration. Anyawie and Manning (2019) examined cohabitation among American women. The study made a comparison between cohabiting and the usage pattern of family planning devices among married women and also between cohabiting women across race and ethnicity. The

findings showed that there is a significant relationship between cohabiting women and the use of family planning methods and also cohabiting women are more likely to use family planning methods than married women.

The academically weak and lazy students are likely to explore the opportunity of the financial weakness of the brilliant students to agree in terms of cohabiting with such brilliant students in the form of feeding and providing satisfaction for the needs of the brilliant students in the course of cohabiting while the brilliant students also reciprocate by carrying out the request of the academically weak and lazy but financially strong students whose request and interest could extent to sharing a bed with the brilliant students and helping in preparing academic assignments. It is probably a result of this lack of befitting accommodation issue as well as finance that led to some students arranging for affordable and befitting accommodation outside the institutions' campus hostels (Aluko, 2011). This self-arranged accommodation has given opportunity to some of the students to engage in other things outside their academic work, for instance, cohabitation.

Cohabitation is an uncustomary form of relationship (Obeng-Hinneh & Kpoor, 2022); unapproved intimate sexual relationships perpetrated and almost becoming a norm currently among higher institution students has brought disregard and disrespect to the norms and values of the marriage institution. While the rate of unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, abortion, prostitutes-like appearance, harlotry practice, sexual harassment, rape, murder, disrespect and disregard for laws, traditions and cultures regarding legitimate sexual intercourse are at increase among higher institution students. Good virtues such as integrity and intactness are associated with virginity (Hughes, 2023); with the majority of male students (76.7 %) found to appreciate female students maintaining their virginity, while only 11.1 % of female students cherished male virginity (Eşsizoğlu et al., 2011) and female gender are culturally blamed for virginity loss (Matswetu & Bhana, 2018). The valued tradition of keeping virginity till marriage and the maintenance of value, religion, norms and chastity are all broken down. The illegal acceptance of cohabitation among undergraduates is bothersome (Emeng, 2021); with inappropriate use of family planning methods among undergraduates has led to unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections and uncontrolled abortions (Idoko et al., 2018). These illegal attitudes towards cohabitation and improper family planning methods usage by undergraduates, who are adolescents must not be allowed to thrive further. This study considered the life risk engaged in by these students and the factors of family planning methods that possibly induce attitudes towards the practice of cohabitation among higher institution students, as well as the effects cohabitation behaviour may produce on the students and the society in general, hence, this study seeks to investigate the relationship of family planning methods and the concomitant effects on cohabitation among higher institution students in Ondo State, Nigeria

RESEARCH METHODS

The study adopted the non-experimental design of the descriptive survey type and correlation studies. The survey method was used for its capacity to capture a large sample size from the population of all students of higher institutions in Ondo State and utilization of questionnaire for data collection to describe and interpret the prevailing situation of attitudes towards cohabitation and attitudes towards the use of family planning methods among the higher institution students in Ondo State. The survey method helps to easily enlist respondents to get the necessary information using questionnaires through quantitative research methods (Ponto, 2015). It also employed correlation design to determine the magnitude and direction of the relationship between the independent variable (attitudes towards the use of family planning) and

the dependent variable (cohabitation); without any manipulation by the researcher (Bhandari, 2023). The population for the study was all students in the 7 public higher institutions in Ondo State, Nigeria. Five hundred and sixty (560) higher institution students were selected through stratified and simple random sampling techniques from the seven public higher institutions in Ondo State that formed the sample for the study. Eighty students (40 males and 40 females) were grouped into 20 males, 20 females' off-campus residents, and 20 males, and 20 females campus dwellers. These respondents were finally selected through simple random sampling methods in each of the 7 higher institutions.

The instrument used for the data collection was a structured questionnaire with two sub-scales titled: 'Students' attitudes towards contraceptive use inventory' and 'Attitudes towards cohabitation questionnaire'. The attitude towards cohabitation questionnaire was constructed by the researchers and students' attitudes towards contraceptive use inventory were adapted from Brinton, Darlin and Liff (1995). These sub-scales were structured into four-point Likert format scales. The validity of the instrument was based on construct validity using convergent and discriminant methods adapted from the description of Anastasi and Urbina cited in Whiston (2005); discriminant validation information takes care of evaluating the validity of the personality instrument. While Messick (1995) stressed that, traditionally construct validity has subsumed content and criterion validities. The convergent validity was carried out by administering equivalent tests: contraceptives intent questionnaire by Tina and Corinne (2015); and relationships dynamics scales by Stanley and Markman (1997) against attitude towards contraceptive use inventory and students' attitude towards cohabitation questionnaire respectively on 60 non-participating higher institution students as pilot study. The scores of the 60 students obtained from the responses to each of the two equivalent tests were then correlated with the corresponding sub-scales of the instrument itself. The results of the correlation analysis showed the following coefficient (r): attitude towards contraceptive use inventory (r) =0.68 and students' attitudes towards cohabitation (r) =0.74. These values of r coefficient indicated that each of these sub-scales of the instrument correlated in the expected direction with each of the corresponding equivalent test hence the questionnaire items of each of the sub-scales of the instrument were assumed to be measuring the same construct and contents. The same 60 students also responded to the test anxiety scale adapted from Sarason (1980) administered to determine the discriminant validity (i.e. efficacy of correlating in the expected direction with the instrument perhaps the two sub-scales of the instrument are measuring the same contents or different contents. The scores obtained from the instrument and that of the test anxiety scale were subjected to correlation analysis. The computed coefficient value for r was -0.241. By this low and inverse r-value, the instrument tends towards the opposite direction with the test anxiety scale meaning that the items of the instrument are measuring different contents and traits.

By the rule of Thumb (McIntosh, 1974), the 0.68 and 0.74 for the convergent validities evidence and the -0.241-discriminant validity, evidence are indicators that the instrument is valid and worthy enough for use for this study. The reliability of the instrument was carried out through the test-retest method using 60 students from 3 higher institutions from a neighboring state to Ondo State. The responses of the 60 students on two different occasions of administering the instrument at two-week intervals were scored and analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The value of coefficient r obtained was 0.879. This value, according to the rule of thumb by McIntosh (1974), is high hence the instrument was adjudged reliable enough for this study. The researchers, with the permission of the authorities of the seven public higher institutions in Ondo State smoothly administered 680 copies of the questionnaire in the company of research assistants and some staff of the institutions bearing in mind that the retrieval of the entire questionnaire may not be 100% sure and that not all the questionnaire will be appropriately completed. Out of the 600 copies of the questionnaire retrieved from the students, 560 sets of

questionnaires that were appropriately completed were used for the data analysis. The responses of the 560 students were scored and analyzed using mean, percentage and Pearson Product Moment Correlation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In answering this question, students' responses to questionnaire items 1-12 dealing with attitudes towards cohabitation among higher institution students were scored and analyzed. The minimum and maximum obtainable scores were 12 and 48 respectively. The average of 12 and 48 was obtained as 30.0. This was used to determine the cut-off value and make decisions as to the prevalence or non-prevalence of students' attitudes towards cohabitation among the higher institutions. Low scores below 30.0 were taken as indicators of not-common/ non-prevalent attitudes towards cohabitation while high scores equal to 30 and above were taken to imply a common/prevalent attitude towards cohabitation among higher institution students in Ondo State. The result is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive analysis of Prevalence of cohabitation among higher institution students in Ondo State.

Prevalence of cohabitation	Frequency	Percentage
Common (scores with 30.0 above)	408	72.86
Non-common (scores below 30.0)	152	27.14
Total	560	100.0

A critical examination of the analysis in Table 1 showed higher institution students' frequency counts and percentage responses to prevalence or non-prevalent attitudes towards cohabitation. The analysis showed that 408 respondents representing 72.86% of the total respondents showed that attitudes towards cohabitation are prevalent (common) and on the high side within higher institutions in Ondo State. While 152 (27.14%) out of 560 respondents indicated that attitude towards cohabitation is not common or probably low. Considering these values of percentage (72.86% and 27.14%) for prevalence and non-prevalence by the attitudes of students towards cohabitation, it was deduced that the frequency and percentage of respondents who indicated that cohabitation is prevalent by attitudes of the students of higher institutions in Ondo State is more than those who indicated that cohabitation is not prevalent hence, it was adjudged that attitudes towards cohabitation by higher institution students are highly prevalent among students of higher institutions in Ondo State.

Table 2: Test of relationship between higher institutions students' attitudes toward the use of family planning methods and cohabitation

Variable	N	r	P
planning methods	560	0.479	
Cohabitation		560	0.000

P<0.05 Significant result

Critical observation of Table 2 showed that the calculated r value was 0.479, P<0.05). With the r calculated value of 0.479, and P< 0.05, it means that there was a significant relationship between attitudes of higher institution students towards the use of family planning methods and cohabitation (r=0.479, P<0.05), therefore, the hypothesis that states that; there is no significant

relationship between higher institution students' attitudes towards use of family planning methods and cohabitation in Ondo State is rejected.

Discussion

The result of the analysis of the research question that sought to find out the prevalence of cohabitation among students of higher institutions in Ondo State indicated that the existence of cohabitation among higher institution students is very high. This result corroborated the findings of Aremu et al. (2010) that the level of cohabitation among the students of the three tertiary institutions in the Niger State of Nigeria is high while gaining social influence and protection from their spouse have influence on the academic performance of the cohabiting students. This result might be due to a symbiotic relationship that exists between the spouses. The result is also in line with the theory of motivation propounded by Maslow (1970) and the social exchange theory of Thibaut and Lewis (1959) which deals with satisfying human needs and rewarding each other in a relationship respectively. The result also supported the findings of Duyilemi et al. (2018); Odimegwu et al. (2018); Ojewola & Akinduyo (2017) that 25% -75% of their sampled respondents agreed they engaged in cohabitation at their university. This result might be due to the effect of holiday interaction of students from different institutions coming home to share experiences from their various institutions and in turn return to school to practice the information received from colleagues from another Institution while on holiday. By implication, if the government does not make provision for adequate, affordable and befitting available accommodation within the institution of learning for the students, this unapproved and illegal practice of a couple's life in the name of a cohabitation relationship will expand the rate of prostitution within the society, increase unintended pregnancy and abortion among the young adolescent school girls.

The finding on the hypothesis revealed that the use of family planning methods and cohabitation among higher institution students tend towards the same direction. As the use of family planning methods is becoming increased so also cohabitation among the students is increasing. The finding is almost in line with Anyawie and Manning (2019) result that cohabiting women are more likely to use effective family planning methods than married women possibly because they just engaged in their relationship to have sex for pleasure as revealed by Owuamanam (2004). In these higher institutions, attitudes towards the use of family planning methods and cohabitation are likely common since these students are not married and are not planning for marriage not to talk of intended pregnancy.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that cohabitation is highly common among higher institution students and the use of family planning methods is increasing as attitudes towards practicing cohabitation increase among the students of higher institutions in Ondo State, therefore, it was recommended that government and management team of each higher institution should make available to students enough affordable and attractive hostel accommodation within the school campus and regulate students' visitation to hostels of the opposite sex. Moral education should be inculcated into course programmes of the students to sensitize them on the danger of having illicit dealings with the opposite sex.

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