

Cohabitation and Academic Performance of Undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State – Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of cohabitation on academic performance of undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The study objectives included to identify factors responsible for cohabitation amongst the undergraduates, effects of cohabitation on the undergraduates and measures that can be taken to curb cohabitation among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The anomie theory formed the theoretical framework of the study. Mixed methods research design was used for the study and a sample size of 204 respondents was selected for the administration of the instrument. The instrument of data collection was the questionnaire. The study used multi-stage sampling procedure comprising of simple random and systematic sampling techniques to select the respondents. The data generated from the field through the questionnaire was analysed using descriptive statistics such as the frequency counts and simple percentages. The hypothesis formulated to guide the study was tested using Chi-square () test statistic. The study found that cohabitation is a serious problem among students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Factors responsible for cohabitation include financial problems such as lack of feeding money, inadequate hostel space, lack of parental guidance and peer pressure. Negative effects of cohabitation were found to include unwanted pregnancies, exposure to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and poor academic performance. Based on these findings, the study recommended amongst others the need for the creation of more hostels by the university management to reduce cases of cohabitation among students. The University administration also needs to engage the undergraduates in awareness creation about cohabitation and its negative consequences in institutions of higher learning in Nigeria and the society at large.

Key Words: Academic performance, campus dating, cohabitation, peer pressure, undergraduates

Introduction

Although sociologists treat cohabitation as a new phenomenon, it is generally recognised that cohabitation has existed long enough to predate marriage (Wu, 2000). Cohabitation can be seen as when two independent people, live together almost like roommates, but share a sexual and emotional relationship instead of a commitment to one another for the rest of their lives, that is, marriage. Ogunsola (2004) holds that cohabitation is a situation where unmarried people live together like husband and wife to test their compatibility before the actual marriage. Cohabitation refers to an intimate sexual union of two unmarried partners living in the same residence for a sustained period of time (Waite, 2000).

Cohabitation which is defined by social scientists as two adults of the opposite sex living together in an intimate, non-marital relationship has been on the increase since 1970 and by 2002, roughly 50% of women, and 45% of men had already cohabited outside of marriage by age 25, with nearly 10% of males and 16% of females under age 20 previously in a cohabiting union (Popenoe, 1999). Today, the practice has become common worldwide. Some scholars argue that cohabitation is one of the cultural changes in Africa that originated from western culture. The non-static process of acculturation occasioned by the influx of the western culture appears to be exerting its powerful influence on African society, with the trend increasing rapidly in the majority of the higher institutions of learning, some reasons being: financial situation of students, sexual gratification, shortage of campus accommodation, studying each other for marriage among

others. This has led to the emergence of an unacceptable trend in most of the universities which in one way or another negatively influence the academic performances of the students.

Academic performance is the measurement of students' performance across various academic subjects. Teachers and education officials typically measure achievement using classroom performance, graduation rates and results from standardized tests. The student's assessment is based on the scores or grades achieved in the different courses during the school and college years. Students' academic performance is affected by several factors which include students' learning skills, parental background, peer influence, teachers' quality, learning infrastructure and in this case, cohabitation. Some of the major consequences cohabitations have on academic performance include: not attending classes, not sitting for exams, going late for classes, dropping out of school among others.

Popenoe and Whitehead (2002) asserted that what makes cohabitation so significant is not only its prevalence but also its widespread and popular acceptance. They went further to say that in recent students' representational survey, nearly 66% of high school senior boys and 61% of the girls indicated that they agreed or mostly agreed with the statement claiming that it is usually a good idea for a couple to live together before getting married to find out whether they can get along. Yet, cohabitation before marriage has been consistently associated with poorer marital communication quality, lower marital satisfaction and higher levels of domestic violence. Abullahi (2013) states that cohabitation can be encapsulated as both a status and a process and it is also an alternative type of housing for at least one of the cohabiters. He further stated that cohabitation is not a new phenomenon. However, the prevalence and popular acceptance of the phenomenon has shifted contemporary opinion about it from deviant or alternative lifestyle choices to one that is a normative experience for young men and women. Pollard and Harris (2008) opined that cohabitation as a new form of living arrangement is in a situation of flux associated with changing lifestyle, societal values and norms. They further stated that Students in institutions of higher learning also manifest this phenomenon.

Students' cohabitation has attracted a lot of policy and academic researches and debates in recent times. Students in higher educational institutions are experiencing a critical situation in terms of higher tuition fees and other associated college costs related to facilities and service provision, especially on-campus accommodation. Although the prevalence and patterns of cohabitation have generally been well documented, we know little about the influence of cohabitation on undergraduates' academic performances. Therefore, there is need to examine the influence of cohabitation on the academic performance of undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University in Awka, Anambra state -Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Since cohabitation is against the norms and values of our society, most students that live together do not allow their parents to know about it. The participants in a premarital cohabitation setting are not immune from the various problems that besiege it. Problems such as sacrificing the primary aim of being in school, unprotected sex, sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies, the use of oral contraceptives by female students and the danger inherent in such practice.

This, therefore, exposes the students to all forms of risk and harm as they continue to cohabit. The health dimension aspect of the problem is worrisome. Cohabiting students will most likely engage in unprotected sex which could result in sexually transmitted infections and the much-dreaded HIV/AIDS disease (Ogunsola, 2004). The female students may indulge in the use of oral contraceptives to avoid unwanted pregnancies. But when pregnancies do occur, the female students involved are more likely to seek abortion as a way out. This may expose them to quack doctors who are not licensed practitioners and this may result in septic abortion associated with haemorrhage, sepsis and acute renal failure all of which endanger life.

Depression is a major consequence of cohabitation. Bulanda and Lee (2005) noted that cohabiting women exhibit significantly more depressive symptoms than married women. Consequently, all these extra curriculum activities often result in the students abandoning their main aim of coming to the University in the first place. They experience role conflict because they find it difficult to perform the role of a companion and that of a student simultaneously thereby creating a problem for themselves academically, morally and socially. Thus, this study is set out to examine the influence of cohabitation on the academic performance of undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra state.

Objective of the Study

1. The objective of this study is to examine the influence(s) cohabitation has on the academic performance of undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Research Question

1. How does cohabitation affect academic performance of undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?

Study Hypothesis

1. There is a significant relationship between cohabitation and poor academic performance of undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Impact of Cohabitation on the Academic Performance of Undergraduates in Nigeria Universities

It has been observed that cohabitation affects academic performance of students in higher institutions in Nigeria (Okigbo, 2016). Being involved in a romantic relationship means that undergraduates could lose concentration and experience poor study habit. For this reason, Chukwu (2016) noted that schools and parents that want to predict how certain students will perform academically would do well to look at the type of relationships they keep. This point is very important because it appears that engaging in romantic relationship can hamper academic performance of undergraduates in many ways. This is because the time and energy spent cuddling, smooching, and getting intimate when properly used could improve one's academic performance. Simply put, cohabitation can impact negatively on student's grades in school. It makes undergraduates not to reach their full potentials in terms of academic achievements. According to Okoroji (2015), campus dating when poorly managed can make students to get carried away, become truants and absent from school activities and this can significantly affect their ability to perform well during school tests and examinations.

Poor academic grades as observed among undergraduates in Nigerian Universities are part of the major consequences of cohabitation (Okoroji, 2016). Sometimes, undergraduates who engage in romantic campus relationships may lose touch with reality or whatever that is happening in their immediate environment. 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 organized during school hours, even when they are organized in the night, it prevents undergraduates 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 (2016) 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. This agrees with Ukwayi (2015) who maintained that students who engage in cohabitation usually get carried away and may easily involve themselves in situations that make them lose focus from school activities. The consequence

however is that such students run the risk of having poor academic grades their courses at the end of the semester.

According to Ezenwa (2015), if one takes a closer look at what qualities it takes to have an excellent academic performance, it is obvious that these are the same qualities required to be successful in life. To have a good academic performance the student has to be consistent, determined, focused, and disciplined. Good academic performance most times does not only reflect individual student's level of intelligence but also level hard work and seriousness. Regardless of how one defines success, having a good academic certificate will be a boost to achieving one's goal (dream job). However, cohabitation has been found to hamper the academic performance of undergraduates to a large extent. Engaging in romantic relationships limits students' desire to put in their best to study hard. According to Amadi (2016), in the school, peer pressure has a strong influence on student's involvement with the opposite sex. For some students, instead of engaging in academic activity they spend their precious time on social activity with friends.

On the other hand, cohabitation contributes to the spread of sexually transmitted infections in Nigerian universities. Sexual debut is considerably initiated in Nigerian universities because of cohabitation just as reported in many other countries. Sexual aspect of cohabitation is now high in institutions of higher learning in Nigeria and may constitute a bigger problem in the future (Abanihe, 2015). Cohabitation also leads to risky sexual behaviour and one of the outcomes is spread of sexually transmitted infections. Various forms of STIs according to Unigbe (2017) tend to be prevalent among youths aged 18 years and above and may be due to sexual misconducts, ignorance, moral decadence as well as factors related to cohabitation.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical thrust of this study is the anomie theory associated with the French Sociologist Emile Durkheim. Durkheim used anomie to describe a condition of deregulation that occurs in the society during a period of profound social change and disorder as a result of economic collapse, political or social revolution or even sudden prosperity. Anomie refers to a breakdown of social norms and it is a condition where norms no longer control the activities of members of the society.

In Durkheim's formation, anomie becomes the explanation of deviant behaviour in society resulting from social revolution or sudden prosperity. In Durkheim's view, the evolution of society from a simple non-specialization form, where people's behaviour is following the norms to the modern society where society becomes more complex has led to changes. These changes can be observed in the family. Women now work outside the sphere of home; young people are detached from their immediate family for reasons like employment, education and skill acquisition, all of which is new to society.

This condition has also affected the way people think and react toward certain issues formerly seen as taboos. This has led to dissatisfaction and deviant behaviour like cohabitation. People no longer see anything wrong with living together before marriage, the traditionally identified means of getting married has been watered down or waxed off. Also, the normative reaction towards the issue of cohabitation has been muted, people engage in it and socially nothing is done to them as punishment. So, people now see it as a way of life that attracts no punishment or penalty. This theory neglected factors like peer pressure which can propel people to engage in deviant behaviour. It also neglected parental influence that is, one's parent who encourages deviant behaviour. It focuses on social change and sudden prosperity that undermines other factors.

Methodology

This study adopted the cross – sectional survey research design. The area of the study was Awka town while the study institution was Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The target population for the study comprised

of twenty – five thousand and five hundred and thirty – one (25, 531) regular students across the ten Faculties in the main campus of the University at Awka which the focus of the study was. The sample size for the study was two hundred and four (204) respondents which was statistically determined using Taro Yamane’s formula for sample size determination. The multistage sampling procedure comprising of cluster, simple random, and systematic sampling techniques was used in selecting the respondents for the study. The instrument of data collection was the questionnaire schedule. The questionnaire was administered by the researcher aided by a research assistant was trained by the researcher on the objectives of the study. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used in processing the raw data collected from the field through the questionnaire. The data was presented, interpreted, and analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequency tables and simple percentages. The hypothesis formulated to guide the study was tested using the chi – square (χ^2) inferential statistic.

Data Presentation and Analysis

In this study, 204 copies of questionnaires were distributed by the researcher with the help of the research assistant. However, 195 copies of the questionnaires representing 95.6% response rate were correctly filled and returned. Consequently, the quantitative analysis for the study was carried out based on the 195 copies of correctly filled and returned questionnaires.

Personal Data of Respondents

Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents such as gender, age, level of study, marital status, family background among others are presented in table 1 below.

Table 1: Personal Data of Respondents

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Gender		
Male	100	51.3
Female	95	48.7
Total	195	100.0
Age		
16 – 18 years	30	15.4
19 – 21 years	71	36.4
22 – 24 years	72	36.9
25 years and above	22	11.3
Total	195	100.0
Marital Status		
Single	137	70.3
Married	49	25.1
Divorced	3	1.5
Widowed	2	1.5
Separated	4	2.1
Total	195	100.0
Religious affiliation		
Christianity	175	89.7
Islam	3	1.5

Traditional religion	17	8.7
Total	195	100.0
Faculty		
Arts	97	49.7
Social Sciences	98	50.3
Total	195	100.0
Department		
History and International Studies	49	25.1
Linguistics	48	24.6
Psychology	48	24.6
Sociology/Anthropology departments	50	25.6
Total	195	100.0
Level of Study		
100 level	0	.0
200 level	0	.0
300 level	0	.0
400 level	195	100.0
Total	195	100.0
Family background		
Single parent	66	33.8
Both parent	85	43.6
Divorced	44	22.6
Total	195	100.0

Field Survey, 2022

Table 1 shows that out of the 195 copies of questionnaires that were properly filled, 51.3% of the respondents are males while 48.7% of them are females. This implies that majority of the respondents are males. Age distribution of the respondents indicates that 15.4% of the respondents are within the ages of 16–18 years, whereas 36.4%, 36.9% and 11.3% of the respondents are within the ages of 19–21 years, 22–24 years and 25 years and above respectively. This shows that most respondents are in their early twenties as at the time of this study. With regards to marital status of the respondents, table 4 shows that 70.3% are single, 25.1% are married, 1.5% are divorced, another 1.5% are widowed while 2.1% of the respondents are separated. This implies that majority of the respondents are single. Distribution of the respondents according to religious affiliation shows that 89.7% of the respondents are Christians, 1.5% are Muslims while 8.7% of the respondents are traditional believers. The implication of this finding is that Christianity is the dominant religion among students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University. But why these same students who practice Christianity still engage in cohabitation outside the school environment is another area that needs to be explored in future studies.

Furthermore, table 1 shows that 49.7% of the respondents are Art students while 50.3% of them are students of Social Sciences. This shows that majority of the respondents are Social Sciences students. A similar finding was observed at the department level where 25.1%, 24.6%, another 24.6% and 25.6% of the respondents are students of History and International Studies, Linguistics, Psychology and Sociology/Anthropology respectively. As for the level of study, the study confirmed that only final year students were sampled for this study. In terms of family background, 33.8% of the respondents came from

single parent families, 43.6% came have both parents while 22.6% of the respondents came from divorced homes. This implies that majority of the respondents still have both of their parents intact.

Analysis of Research Question

Research Question: How does cohabitation affect academic performance of undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?

Table 2: Respondents' views on whether cohabitation promotes poor academic performance amongst Undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Yes	120	61.5
No	40	20.5
No comment	35	17.9
Total	195	100.0

Field Survey, 2022

Table 2 shows that 61.5% of the respondents confirmed that cohabitation influences poor academic performance, 20.5% of the respondents disagreed while 17.9% of the respondents did not indicate any comment. By and large, this implies that cohabitation can negatively influence academic performance of students.

Table 3: Respondents' views on the influence of cohabitation on academic performance of Undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Reduces academic performance	151	77.4
increases academic performance	24	12.3
It does not affect academic performance	20	10.3
Total	195	100.0

Field Survey, 2022

With regards to the influence of cohabitation on academic performance of undergraduates, 77.4% of the respondents said cohabitation can effectively reduce academic performance of students, 12.3% of the respondents disagreed with the above assertion but instead insisted that depending on how a student handles the situation, cohabitation can enhance academic performance, especially in a situation where the two partners are focused and committed to their studies. Thus, 10.3% of the respondents reaffirmed that cohabitation does not reduce or affect academic performance. Nevertheless, this finding still implies that cohabitation has all takes to reduce academic performance of undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Test of Hypothesis

Hypothesis: There is a significant relationship between cohabitation and poor academic performance of undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Data in table 4 formed the basis for testing the hypothesis.

Table 4: Relationship between cohabitation and poor academic performance of undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

<i>Have you ever engaged in cohabitation as a student of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?</i>	<i>If yes, do you think that cohabitation influences poor academic performance?</i>			
	Yes	No	I don't know	Total
Always	70	15	14	99
Sometimes	35	10	11	56
Never	15	15	10	40
Total	120	40	35	195

= 15.557, df = 4, p = 0.001

Table 4 shows that the computed value of chi-square is 15.557, while the table value of chi-square at 0.05 level of significance with a degree of freedom (df) of 4 is 9.488. Since the computed value of chi-square is greater than tabulated value, the alternative hypothesis was accepted while the null hypothesis was rejected. This confirms that there is a significant relationship between cohabitation and poor academic performance among the undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Thus, it can be inferred from this that undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka who engage in cohabitation are more likely to experience poor academic performance than those who do not.

Discussion of Findings

In every research undertaking, it is important to discuss the findings. The research question was formulated to examine the influence of cohabitation on the academic performance of undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Despite the numerous problems associated with cohabitation, this study confirms that many undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka still engage in this social problem known as cohabitation. Apart from unwanted pregnancies, this study found that cohabitation influences poor academic performance. This implies that there is close link between cohabitation and poor academic performance of some undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. This finding aligns with a previous study by Egwumba (2015) which found that there is a significant relationship between cohabitation and poor academic performance. It follows therefore that cohabitation has a significant negative effect on the academic performance of students. The study showed that the Grade Point Average (GPA) of undergraduates who engage in cohabitation were 0.4 points lower on average for males and females. It was found that the effect of romantic affairs on campus on GPA peaked for ninth graders and declined thereafter and that dating affected GPA more by reducing the likelihood of high grades and increasing the likelihood of low grades.

The tested hypothesis was designed to measure the relationship between cohabitation and poor academic performance among the undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The result confirmed in a very strong terms that cohabitation among students leads to poor academic performance.

Conclusion

In Nigeria, cohabitation affects academic performance of students in the Universities. Being involved in a romantic relationship means that undergraduates could lose concentration and experience poor academic performance. This point is very important because it appears that engaging in romantic relationships particularly cohabitation negatively affects academic performance of undergraduates. This is because time

and energy spent cuddling, smooching, and getting intimate when properly used could improve one's academic record. This study found that cohabitation is a serious issue amongst undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Factors responsible for cohabitation among undergraduates are financial problems such as lack of feeding money, inadequate hostel space, lack of parental guidance and peer pressure. Negative effects associated with cohabitation among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka include, unwanted pregnancy, exposure to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and low academic performance. To this end, there is need to recommend measures that when considered would help to curb cohabitation and its negative effects on undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka in particular and Nigeria in general.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Religious leaders should engage in massive awareness creation about factors that make students susceptible to cohabit and the numerous problems associated with cohabitation in the society.
2. University management should create more hostels to discourage students who engage in cohabitation due to lack of adequate accommodation on-campus. This will also go a long way towards reducing cases of unwanted pregnancies and the spread of sexually transmitted infections among cohabiters in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.
3. Families and parents must create time to supervise the activities of their children. This includes knowing the whereabouts of their children while they are in school and also paying them surprise visits so as to take them unawares. Such moves will encourage undergraduates to sit-up and focus on their studies.
4. Government must improve the standard of living in the country so that parents will be able to provide for their children especially the female students while in school. Also, University management should set up student monitoring unit to supervise the activities of undergraduates to reduce the prevalence of cohabitation amongst them.

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