

COUPLEDOM AND COHABITATION AMONG UNMARRIED UNDERGRADUATES IN A NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

The study adopted a descriptive design of survey type. The population for the study consisted of all undergraduate students in the faculty of Education in the selected university. The target population consisted of the 400-level undergraduates students in the selected Departments. A sample of 280 undergraduates were deliberately selected using non-probability sampling technique across four Departments in faculty of Education, University of Ilorin. A self-constructed questionnaire was used for data collection. The reliability of the instrument was carried out using the Cronbach alpha with 0.80 reliability value. Percentage, mean, ANOVA, and t-test statistics were employed for the analysis of the information obtained from the respondents at a 0.05 level of significance. The study revealed among others that unmarried undergraduates sees coupledness and cohabitation as a common thing to be practiced which was described as deviation and disregard to social and cultural order in this study. The consequences that were rated high among unmarried undergraduates were the compromise on religious and ethical beliefs of the unmarried couple. A significant difference exists in the perceived reasons for and consequences of coupledness and cohabitation among undergraduates based on Departments. However, no significant difference existed in the perceived reasons for and consequences of coupledness and cohabitation among unmarried undergraduates based on age and gender. The study attributed the outcome of this study to parents and religious institutions indifference to child upbringing. It was recommended that parents, and religious institutions through their clerics should rise up to their duty in guiding the youth on the ideals of marriage..

Keywords: Cohabitation, Cohabiting-Partners, Consequences, Coupledness, Unmarried Undergraduates,

Introduction

Nigeria's society is characterized by a lot of social issues, but the perceived root cause of many of the social issues seems to be hidden because it has not been given the desired attention in the field of education. The phenomenon in mind in the context of this study is even beyond social issues because it is already affecting the value and belief system of the way a society ought to operate. Ideally, marriage institution precedes many of the institutions that make up the society, and should be propagated by religious institutions for every child to grow steadily to know very well that chastity is a moral virtue that God hold in high esteem. It is only a child, male or female raised with this consciousness of chastity that keeps the hope of their society alive for growth and stability.

Children who operate differently of this virtue constitute the bulk of individuals who find themselves having a form of unregulated behaviour thereby breaching the refined convention of chastity instituted by society as a normative behaviour and order (Ojewola & Akinduyo, 2017). In a clear term, chastity is the condition of abstaining from any sexual activity considered immoral and avoidance of any form of romantic sinful act. To engage in any lawful and un sinful romantic and or sexual relationship, the couple must be married. However, when a grown-up male and a female are living together and having a sexual relationship without being married it is called premarital cohabitation. Furthermore, it is a state of an emotional and physically intimate relationship that includes a common living place for the unmarried couple without legal and religious sanction (David, Hassan & Francis 2021). Indeed, the lack of religious and legal sanctions secretly or openly were among the reasons for the escalation of this unholy act and menace in Nigeria.

The publication of the Punch News Paper of 27 May 2017 reported the efforts made by the Burundi government where President Nkrunziza appealed to the Burundians to demonstrate their active citizenship by getting married properly to show their patriotism to their country. The Burundian government further stated that there would be no rest for unmarried couples in the country as certain penalties are being imposed on them. For instance, there was an order across the Burundi provinces that the unmarried couples who had been put on a special list to get married properly for a specific date and those who refused to abide by the efforts put in place by the government would be penalized accordingly. Among the penalties put in place by the Burundian government for unmarried couples who are found guilty of this issue include the use of local officials to threaten unmarried Burundian couples to pay a fine of 50,000 Burundian Franc; denying the Burundian children born out of wedlock of free education and medical facilities and so on. These sanctions are possible for implementation because the government has already put in place the mechanism of providing free education and medical costs to the masses in the country. The Burundian government's move in this direction shows that coupledness without marriage is a patriotic issue which should be a concern for the state and should not be taken with levity.

Ogadinma (2013), asserts that cohabitation among individuals of opposite sex is a predisposing factor to the initiation of sexual activities. Cohabitation occurs when a couple chooses to live together and form a romantic relationship while remaining unmarried. Mustapha et al, (2017), described cohabitation as a situation where two opposite-sex persons, who are unmarried put up together and demonstrate and enjoy many of the values attached to married couples due to a marital relationship. Jiya & Alhassan, (2019) defined cohabitation as an arrangement where two people who are opposite sex and are not married live together like husband and wife without the consent and approval of their parents to such relationship. Cohabiting people of the opposite sex are typically emotionally and sexually intimate. Cohabitation is becoming a common practice among young adults as a precursor to marriage (Sassler & Lichter, 2020). The study of David, Hassan and Francis, (2021) maintained that cohabitation is when two people who are romantically involved choose to live together without any authorization or legalization, thereby eroding the sanctification of the marriage and family institution. This is the focus of this study as it calls for concern because no society, whether developed or underdeveloped accepts this as a normative.

In the olden days, in some African cultures, it was a known fact that it was illegal and even considered taboo for unmarried couples to be seen or live together, for example, any child born from such cohabitation is called a bastard. Parents, elders in every community, religious leaders and other stakeholders who believe in society stability openly and secretly played their roles by frowning at such unacceptable acts and the perpetrators, legal or religious sanctions can be

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applied when necessary just to instil sanity in the society and to prove to the adolescents that such practice is unacceptable by the society. Today the practice has become common, somewhat acceptable, and a trend in this part of the world. In Nigeria today, African culture which does not support cohabitation seems to have been abandoned,, the expected stakeholders are not raising any concerns again (Adeyera, Omisore, Balogun, Akinwusi, Abiodun & Adesina 2023). In recent time, there is increase in the number of undergraduates of the opposite sex living together under the camouflage of lack of hostel accommodation in Nigeria's higher institutions of learning. This is one of the contributing factors by the university to pre-marital cohabitation among undergraduates where two persons of the opposite sex, without being conventionally or formally wedded, reside mutually and enjoy all or some of the values of a marital relationship (AbdulHameed et al, 2024;Mustapha, et al, 2017).

The earlier studies (Brown,Manning and Payne, 2015; Mustapha, Odeboode and Adegboyega, 2017) revealed that many components of marriage are noticeable among cohabiting partners, it includes; sharing of home, responding to some matrimonial duties, engaging in intimate sexual relationships, sharing of economic resources, and sometimes bearing children. The female cohabiting student performs the house chores, cooking in large quantities to satisfy the cohabiting couples and sometimes their visiting friends, washing clothes including their partner's, cleaning the house, and lots more, leaving little time behind for primary assignment which is their studies. These are negative and positive indicators of relationship quality among cohabiting partners. These categories of undergraduates are commonly referred to as living a couple's life, having a campus marriage, and campus couple and so on (Adeyera, et al 2023). Whereas all these freedoms of choice are without the knowledge of their parents or any formality of marriage.

Few shop owners around the off-campus hostels where these categories of unmarried couples reside (Oke-odo in particular) along university of Ilorinroad attested to the submission of the earlier studies. This would be illustrated with two typical cases according to the narration by one of the shop owners who sells daily needs to the off-campus undergraduates. A woman identified two to three couples who patronizes her for daily needs, when thesecohabiting undergraduate student has an amount as a balance to be claimed later with the woman, the woman usually asks either of the identified unmarried couples who will come for the balance between the husband or wife, these undergraduates never raise concerns why they were addressed as husband and wife without being married. The woman addressing them as husband and wife has reinforced what should be unacceptable to her as a community mother, she only gladly, and unconsciously carried away with the gains from the unmarried couples' being regular customers, thereby leaving her role to contribute to shaping their behaviour. This contributes to why many undergraduates don't see anything wrong with cohabitation.

In Nigeria, the study of Jiya and Alhassan (2017) reported that peer pressure, inadequate hostel accommodation, poverty, access to pornographic materials, and inability to manage sexual urges are the prevailing factors of premarital cohabitationamong the undergraduates of the Federal University of Technology Minna, Niger State. Other researchers have pointed out why unmarried couples cohabit together, for instance, Onoyase, (2020) and David et al (2021) reported that freedom from parental supervision, loss of religious inclination, abandonment of the valued African culture, sexual gratification, financial distress, studying each other for marriage, shortage of on-campus accommodation, and higher institution fees are among the factors responsible for cohabitation among undergraduates in Nigerian universities. Adeyera et al (2023) in their study found that financial constraints, being closer to a partner, sexual gratification, insistence on partners and peer influence are the common reasons for coupledness and cohabitation among undergraduates in a Nigerian university. Also, on freedom from parental

care and financial distress, their study has revealed that more males, older respondents in their study and those whose parents were not responsible for their finances have cohabited and still cohabiting. Another factor that could influence cohabitation among undergraduates is age. AbdulHameed et al (2024) stated that, nowadays, many students commence higher institutions at very young ages and as such naive and could easily be lured into this act. They are not wise enough to handle the experiences or challenges they are being faced with in the tertiary institution instead they rely more on their wisdom and advice from friends with the same level of understanding which most times is not profitable. Therefore age was considered as a moderating variable in this study.

Many consequences associated with coupledness and cohabitation of unmarried undergraduates can not be left undiscussed. The study of Mustapha et al, (2017) reported that male and female adults differ significantly in their expression of the impact of premarital cohabitation on marital stability. AbdulHammeed et al, (2024) examined the perceived impact of peer influence on cohabitation among youth in selected off-campus areas in the Ilorin metropolis. Their study revealed the significant difference in the influence of age and religion on cohabitation among youth in the Ilorin metropolis.

Among the consequences of premarital cohabitation that formed the reason for this study includes two experiences of the undergraduates who were students of one of the departments where this study was carried out, includes pre-marital pregnancy and baby from 300-level undergraduates of university of Ilorin, all efforts made by the parent to complete her university education proved abortive. On the other hand, second lost the 2019/2020 academic session. However, she enjoyed the cooperation and support of an elderly member of the church she attends who helps in nurturing the baby. This gave her the courage to continue her university education successfully. Till the time of graduation of the class of 2022 in October 2023 in university of Ilorin. Her male cohabiter refused to claim ownership of the baby, making it a typical child born out of wedlock. There are many cases with different peculiarities, but the two cases illustrated are considered important in this paper because they are students in one of the Departments in university of Ilorin. Also, the student who eventually graduated voluntarily narrated her story to the lead author of this paper. This is an indication that unmarried undergraduates, who truly cohabit were part of the participants of this study.

The study of AbdulHammeed et al (2024) established that there are cases where the male may likely be the initiator, while the female consented due to influence from the co-female friends who are involved in a similar practice. Hence, gender was considered an important moderating variable in this study. Also, through the narratives, the consequences of pre-marital cohabitation include but are not limited to unplanned and unwanted pregnancy, illegal marriages, female victims dropping out of school, population explosion, greater conflicts and damaging violence on the unmarried couple, continuous threats to peaceful society and so on. These among other negative consequences call for concern, hence this study raised the following questions as guide.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceived reasons for coupledness and cohabitation among unmarried undergraduates at the University of Ilorin Nigeria?
2. What are the perceived consequences of coupledness and cohabitation among unmarried undergraduates at the University of Ilorin Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

The following research Hypotheses were formulated and tested in this study.

H0₁: There is no significant difference in the perceived reasons for and consequences of coupledness and cohabitation among unmarried undergraduates in the University of Ilorin based on the Departments.

H0₂: There is no significant difference in the perceived reasons for and consequences of coupledness and cohabitation among unmarried undergraduates at the University of Ilorin based on sex.

Methodology

The study used a descriptive survey research design of survey type. This design enables the researcher to answer the research questions regarding the reasons and consequences of coupledness and cohabitation among unmarried undergraduates in the selected university in Nigeria. The population for the study comprised all undergraduate students in the Faculty of Education University of Ilorin Nigeria (2021/2022 Academic Session). 280 undergraduates were sampled for the study using a non-probability sampling technique and based on the willing participants, due to the nature of the study. The Department of Social Sciences Education has a greater number of willing participants because the intact class was used during the administration of the questionnaire.

A self-constructed questionnaire on reasons for and consequences of coupledness and cohabitation was used to elicit information from the deliberately sampled undergraduates. The questionnaire contained three parts, which included section A which sought demographic information such as the Department, age, and sex of the respondents. Section B contained ten items on each of the reasons and consequences of premarital cohabitation among undergraduates. The content of the questionnaire directed the respondents to state their level of agreement with the items of the questionnaire to measure the variables of concern in this study using the four-point Likert Scale of Agree (4); Neutral (3); Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1). The validation of items of the questionnaire were done by the experts in Social Studies and Test and Measurement in the Department of Social Sciences Education, University of Ilorin, after which the updated version of the questionnaire was administered to twenty undergraduate students randomly selected from the faculty not used for this study. The reliability of the questionnaire was also done and the reliability value stands at 0.80, this value is an indication that the instrument for this study is reliable. The analysis of the raw data of the respondents was analyzed using Mean and rank order to provide answers to the research questions, while the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and t-test were used to test the hypotheses.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the perceived reasons for coupledness and cohabitation among Unmarried undergraduates at the University of Ilorin.

Table 2: Mean Ranking on Reasons for Coupledness and Cohabitation among Unmarried Undergraduates

S/N	Undergraduates practice premarital coupledness and cohabitation because	Mean	SD	Rank
1	Undergraduates sees premarital cohabitation as a common thing to be practiced	3.26	.755	1 st
2	Some indigent male and female undergraduates opted for premarital cohabitation to save accommodation expensive	3.14	.717	4 th

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3	Many of my undergraduate peers choose to cohabit just to have a romantic partner	3.22	.690	3 rd
4	They lack commitment to cultural values and morality	3.23	.752	2 nd
5	Cohabitation among undergraduates is a reflection of the changing attitudes towards marriage and family	2.45	.890	8 th
6	Sexual urge motivates couples to cohabit before marriage	3.03	.881	5 th
7	Cohabitation before marriage is a good idea	2.29	.977	10 th
8	Cohabitation among undergraduates is as a result of the changing social patterns of the current generation	2.77	.962	6 th
9	Cohabitation among undergraduates is a personal choice that should be respected	2.49	.997	7 th
10	Premarital cohabitation is becoming more acceptable in society	2.41	.896	9 th

Key: Disagree = 1.00 – 2.54 Agree = 2.55 -4.0

Table 2 shows the responses of respondents on the reasons for premarital coupledness and cohabitation among undergraduates. It reveals the respondents were unanimous in their agreement on the 7 items as none of the responses were below the 2.54 benchmark. Also, the respondents disagreed with only three items as indicated in the table, their level of disagreement is shown in the benchmark of below 2.54.

Research Question 2: What are the perceived consequences of coupledness and cohabitation among unmarried undergraduates at the University of Ilorin Nigeria?

Table 3: Mean Ranking on Consequences of Coupledness and Cohabitation among Unmarried Undergraduates

S/N	Consequences of premarital coupledness and cohabitation among undergraduates	Mean	SD	Rank
1	Premarital cohabitation can lead to a stronger bond between partners who intend to get married	2.74	1.03	8 th
2	Premarital cohabitation can lead to emotional disturbance due to break-up of the couple	3.12	.76	2 nd
3	Premarital cohabitation can negatively impact one of the couple's financial stability	3.00	.85	4 th
4	Premarital cohabitation can lead to a higher risk of infidelity after marriage	2.98	.835	5 th
5	Premarital cohabitation can lead to a compromise on religious and ethical beliefs between partners	3.14	.836	1 st
6	Cohabiting before marriage can lead to a lack of commitment in a marriage relationship	2.95	.825	6 th
7	Cohabitation before marriage makes the relationship more stable	2.44	.95	10 th
8	Cohabitation before marriage reduces the risk of divorce	2.45	1.01	9 th
9	Cohabitation that doesn't end in marriage can damage the couple's emotional and mental health	2.49	.97	7 th
10	Cohabitation before marriage increases the likelihood of experiencing partner abuse	3.04	.91	3 rd
	Weighted mean	2.84	Agree	

Key: Disagree = 1.00 – 2.54 Agree = 2.55 -4.00

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Table 2 shows the responses of respondents on the consequences of premarital cohabitation among undergraduates. It reveals the extent of agreement of the respondents except for the 7th, 8th and 9th items of which they disagreed. The weighted mean of 2.84 is also a numeric confirmation of the extent of their agreement.

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the perceived reasons for and consequences of coupledness and cohabitation among unmarried undergraduates in the University of Ilorin based on the department.

Table 4: ANOVA on Perceived Reasons and Consequences of Premarital Coupledness and Cohabitation among Undergraduates Based on Departments

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Inference
Between Groups	252.384	3	84.128			
Within Groups	2819.159	276	20.729	4.058	.008	Significant
Total	3071.543	279				

$\alpha=0.05$ $P < 0.05$ H_{01} Rejected

Table 5 shows the result of the one-way between-groups analysis of variance, which was conducted to explore the perceived reasons for and consequences of cohabitation of unmarried undergraduates in the University of Ilorin based on level. This was analyzed based on categorizing the respondents into four Departments. There was a statistically significant difference at $p < .05$ level of significance among the respondents across the four groups: $F(3, 139) = 4.058$, $p = .008$. This implies that the null hypothesis which stated that, there is no significant difference in the perceived consequences of premarital cohabitation among undergraduates in the University of Ilorin based on Departments is therefore rejected. The group with the difference is reported in Table 5.

Table 5: Tukey Post Hoc Test on Perceived Reasons and Consequences of Coupledness and Cohabitation among Undergraduates

Department	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05 1
Adult and Primary Education	76	27.3684
Educational Management	28	27.5714
Educational Technology	28	27.9286
Social Sciences Education	148	30.2027

Table 5 shows that the Social Sciences Education group has the mean difference among the departments, meaning that the difference exists there. As a result, there is a significant difference in the perceived reasons for and consequences of coupledness and cohabitation among the unmarried undergraduates at the University of Ilorin based on Departments.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the perceived reasons for and consequences of coupledness and cohabitation among unmarried undergraduates at the University of Ilorin based on sex.

Table 6: t-test on Perceived Reasons for and Consequences of Premarital Cohabitation among Undergraduates Based on Sex

Sex	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Remark
Male	150	29.1733	4.77995				
				.622	278	.535	Not significant
Female	130	28.6769	4.63043				
$\alpha = 0.05$ $P > 0.05$ H_{02} retained.							

Table 6 shows the result of the t-test on the perceived consequences of premarital cohabitation among undergraduates at the University of Ilorin based on gender. It shows a calculated t-value of .622 and a p-value of .535 testing at an alpha level of 0.05. There was no significant difference in the observation for Male ($M = 29.1733$, $SD = 4.77995$) and Female ($M = 28.6769$, $SD = 4.63043$; $t(140) = .622$, $p = .535$, (two-tailed). Since the P-value is greater than the alpha level ($p > 0.05$), hypothesis two is retained. Consequently, there is no significant difference in the perceived reasons for and consequences of coupledness and cohabitation among undergraduates at the University of Ilorin based on sex.

Discussion of the Findings

The study investigated the reasons and consequences for coupledness and cohabitation among unmarried undergraduates. Undergraduates who were involved in coupledness and cohabitation constitute part of the respondents while others gave their perception based on what they know. The reasons for coupledness and cohabitation among undergraduates include; economics reasons, because they see it as a common thing to be practised, peer influence among the undergraduates who entered the university innocently; lack of commitment to cultural values and morality, desire to fulfil having a romantic partner (Adeyera, et al 2023), to save accommodation expenses and seeing it as a personal choice because there is no known law that kicks against it and they wouldn't know whether it is acceptable or not by the society. For economic reasons, the finding is also in line with that of Adeyera et al (2023) and Onoyase, (2020) and David et al (2021).

The consequences of premarital cohabitation among undergraduates include compromise on religious and cultural beliefs between partners, higher risk of break-ups, likelihood of partner abuse, higher risk of infidelity after marriage, lack of commitment in marriage relationships, and damaged emotional and mental health. The respondents' level of agreement and disagreement on the items shows that unmarried undergraduates do not care about what the religion or their culture upholds about this phenomenon, they just indulge in it based on the common practice and

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they see nothing wrong in it. This finding is supported by the findings of the previous study of Rhoades et al (2012) and AbdulHameed et al (2024).

There was a significant difference in the perceived reasons for and consequences of Coupledness and cohabitation among undergraduates in the University of Ilorin based on Departments. This implies that the null hypothesis which stated that, there is no significant difference in the perceived reasons and consequences of coupledness and cohabitation among undergraduates in the University of Ilorin based on Department is therefore rejected. The Department with the difference is the one which has the highest number of respondents as shown in Table 5.

The study further revealed that coupledness and cohabitation among unmarried undergraduates do not depend on being a male or female and age. Hence both sexes perceived reasons for and consequences of coupledness and cohabitation in the same way as reflected in their responses. Hence, male and female undergraduates should be conscious of the importance of morality in this direction and promote marriage before cohabitation among themselves. This finding is in line with AbdulHameed, et al (2024) But differ from the finding of Adeyera et al (2023) No significant difference exists in the perceived reasons for and consequences of premarital cohabitation among undergraduates at the University of Ilorin based on age. This finding is related to the recent study carried out by AbdulHameed, et al (2024).

Conclusion.

A review of related literature of this study has shown that coupledness and cohabitation among unmarried undergraduates are prevalent in Nigerian universities, this is evidenced in the title of the literature used for this study as seen in the reference list. The perception of those who were not involved clearly showed in their response that parental guidance and religious inclination have been shaping and keeping them away from premarital cohabitation which has become popular among Nigerian undergraduates. This study has revealed that premarital cohabitation among undergraduates in Nigeria universities has become a perceived threat that required the attention of the stakeholders such as parents, religious clerics, university teachers, and others. Efforts should be made by relevant stakeholders to reshape the registered notions in the brains of undergraduates who practice premarital cohabitation as a common thing, abandonment of cultural values and morality, including, bad peer influence. They are also saddled with the responsibilities to intensify more efforts to create awareness on the consequences of premarital cohabitation as revealed in this study.

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