



## The Role of Peer Influence and Tertiary Institution Type on Attitude Towards Cohabitation Among Adolescents in Nigeria

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### *Abstract*

The descriptive study examined the role of peer influence and tertiary institution type on attitude toward cohabitation among adolescents in southwestern Nigeria. A sample of 620 males and females with ( $M=19.56$  years,  $SD=6.18$ ) completed a survey that comprised demographic information, measures of attitude toward cohabitation and peer pressure. Findings revealed that there was significant influence of peer influence on attitude toward cohabitation. There was no influence of tertiary institution type on attitude toward cohabitation. The study concluded that peer influence was a major determinant of attitude toward cohabitation. The study therefore recommended that psychologists should give proper orientation to students on the destructive tendencies that peer influence could have on their intention to have positive attitude toward cohabitation.

**Keywords:** Attitude toward cohabitation, peer influence, tertiary institution type.

### 1. Introduction

Human behavior is dynamic and the 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed an unprecedented transformation in virtually all aspects of human endeavor among adolescents. These changes in behavior include a host of extra-moral activities or behavior which cohabitation remains pertinent among adolescents. Cohabitation, sometimes called consensual union or de facto marriage is perceived to be two unmarried people with love interest choose to live together as though they are married (Marriage Strengthening Research and Dissemination Centre, 2020; Manning & Smock, 2005). Couples who practice cohabitation are known to engage in sexual and emotional intimacy. The term “cohabitation” does not necessarily apply to persons who share a living space or are best describable as “roommates.” Cohabitation is most commonly used to reference heterosexual couples although it also pertains to same-sex couples. Although in the United Kingdom, cohabitants do have some legal protection in several areas, cohabitation gives no general legal status to a couple, unlike marriage and civil partnership from which many legal rights and responsibilities flow (National Centre for Social Research, 2019). Sociological perspective says Cohabitation as marriage-like relations in which there has been no marriage ceremony but in which the partners live together (Jan & Dalia, 2015). Research shows that the formation and stability of romantic relationships have changed considerably over time, as dating has become much less common among recent generations of adolescents than it was for those born earlier. These forms of relationships, such as marriages on campus, marriage for marriage, campus

matching/pairing, among others, come in various ways and aliases. It was specifically intended to give this unwholesome act an acceptable nomenclature. This rising trend in Nigerian tertiary institutions is gradually eroding the level of morality among youths. Calvès (2016), observed that among Burkinabe youth, in Burkina Faso cohabitation was on the upward trend, and many children were exposed to cohabitation in the formative years. As reported in some quarters, children who do not participate in premarital sex are perceived as ignorant, boring and unsophisticated by their peers, with the implication that children practice sex at younger ages than ever before. Similarly, Arisukwu (2013) realized that University students happen to be the main practitioners of cohabitation in this clime. Ogunbamila (2013) corroborates this finding when he averred that cohabitation is rife among undergraduates since their first year in university happens to be their first taste freedom after high school. As a result, the tendency to explore their new-found freedom is ever-present since they are beyond the prying eyes of their parents and guardians.

Alo and Akinde (2010) note that cohabitation is prevalent among adolescents (between age 15-24 years). In a study on premarital sexual behaviors among undergraduates in Nigerian universities, Adeoye, Ola and Aliu (2012) realized that adolescents within the age range 14-15 years and 19-25 years to have practiced premarital sexual behavior at almost the same rate. Thus, age did not appear to be a significant precursor of sexual behaviors among adolescents.

Studies such as (Kenney & McLanahan, 2006; Rhoades, Stanley & Markman, 2009; Fareo & Moses, 2018; Kasim & Falola, 2017; Unachukwu & Iloakasia, 2018) have all revealed that cohabitation have some negative consequences among student population which includes increased rate of abortions, contracting sexually transmitted diseases, intimate partner violence, future marital problems, poor academic performance and high level of moral decadence.

So many reasons have been adduced for cohabiting in higher institutions of learning. According to Ojewola and Akinduyo (2017), the practice of cohabitation is common in Nigeria among higher institutions that are non-residential while residential institutions have strict rules that aid to guide against cohabitation. This could be as a result of restrictions placed on private tertiary institutions as against public institutions. Besides, Pat-Mbano et al. (2012), claim that tertiary students live in privately owned off-campus residences, pay high rents, and struggle for accommodation with other home-seekers. Other studies identified the reasons for cohabitation, the correlates and the negative implications of cohabitation (Duyilemi et al., 2018; Ekpenyong & Ekpenyong, 2016; Kasim & Falola, 2017; Ojewola & Akinduyo, 2017; Soboyejo, 2013; Onoyase 2020). Specifically, Kasim and Falola (2017) noted that one of the reasons for students' cohabitation is lack of financial support. Nevertheless, the afore-mentioned studies did not examine the role of peer pressure and tertiary institution.

## 2. Review of related studies

In a study carried out by Augustinah, Bola and Louis (2018) among students of Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State, it was discovered that 30% of the respondents were involved in cohabitation for social influence and pleasure-seeking, 20% of the respondents engaged in cohabitation for companionship, while 10% indicated it to lack of accommodation and love for their partner. A total of 15.2% said they cohabit for financial dependence to provide money to pay cost maintenance in the rented apartment. 6.5% adduce intimacy with the cohabiting partner, and 4.3% give a lack of parental guidance as a reason. Some other respondents (2.2%) gave reasons such: compatibility reasons, depression issues, inferiority complex among others, loneliness, marriage prospect, peer influence and lack of moral upbringing, and lastly, due to security reasons for cohabitation. Similarly, Akanbi (2015) in his research found out that some of the reasons students of tertiary institutions cohabit includes

accommodation constraints, marital prospect, resource management, sexual intimacy, academic purposes, financial assistance, management of cost of living and so on.

Svodziwa and Kurete (2017) averred that inadequate on-campus accommodation is largely culpable for cohabitation among undergraduates because it leaves the student with no other option than to reside off-campus. This is often the case with students of Nigerian public universities. Svodziwa and Kurete (2017) pointed out that as stipulated in the University of Ibadan Students' Handbook, accommodation is only available to students in the first and final year of study, albeit on "first come, first serve" basis. Hence, the larger percentage of students in their second or penultimate years are left stranded, and can only opt for accommodation in communities around their institutions. The abandonment of African cultural ethos that forbids pre-marital sexual relationship seems to be the primary cause of cohabitation among students of higher education institutions. Adeniyi (2019) expressed a similar opinion when he averred that the burning need to save cost on feeding, rent and other survival expenses appear to be the primary motivation for cohabitation among students of higher institutions. Bello, Oluseye, Abidemi and Oludare (2018) revealed there are four social factors of physical intimacy, compatibility test, lack of hostel accommodation and academic dependency which as a positive correlation with cohabitation

Fareo and Moses (2018) explored the prevalence of cohabitation among students of tertiary institutions in Adamawa State, Nigeria. The findings of the study revealed that urge for copulation, emotional intimacy, inadequate lodging and accommodation amenities and financial constraints are among the many reasons why the practice of cohabitation is rife among the students. For some students, the quest to avoid the harsh rules and regulations student stay in halls of residence is behind the prevalence of cohabitation. In another study by Akanbi and Alayande (2017), the scholars investigated the influence of religiosity, parenting styles and peer attachment on attitude towards premarital cohabitation among tertiary institution students in Oyo State, Nigeria. The results of the study showed that on the one hand, those students who are immersed in their religious ethos and practice, as well as those who were raised via flexible parenting styles, exhibited negative disposition towards premarital cohabitation. On the other hand, those individuals that were raised with the authoritarian or permissive parenting styles, as well as those who have undeniable attachments to peer groups, exhibited positive disposition towards premarital disposition.

In a study carried out by Augustinah, Bola, and Louis (2018) among students of Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State, the researchers found out that 71.8% of the respondents agreed that cohabitation contributes to a high level of moral decadence in the society, thus confirming that cohabitation has a negative impact on students' moral development and invariably their health and academic development. Also, most of the respondents (80.9%) agreed that it increases the risk of unwanted pregnancies among girls. Fareo and Moses (2018) realized that the after-effects of cohabitation include the tendency to get sickened with sexually-transmitted infections (STIs), low academic outcome, philandering and extended studentship term, abortion indulgence, demise, depression and suicidal ideation or attempt.

Cohabitors experience unexpected suicidal ideation, unwanted pregnancy and premarital childbirth due to disappointment from their partners (Mashua, 2016). Similarly, Hadari (2014) found out that the effects of cohabitation are: possible demise from incessant abortion, uterus damage, STIs, low academic outcomes, rustication. Adeniyi (2019) avers that cohabitation is culpable for the increasing rate of abortion in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Cohabiting females are susceptible to getting pregnant because they are unprepared for parenting and also take to abortion as an outlet to save face. Indulging in abortion endangers the lives of female cohabiters because they run the risk of losing their lives or having a vital component of their reproductive system damaged.

Adeniyi (2019) further stated that it is a common sight to find cohabiting pairs suffering on STI or the other. Persons practicing cohabiting tend to engage in vices and acts such as theft; cybercrimes and burglary in a bid to sort survival expenses. The scholar also notes that in most cases, female cohabiters suffer abuse, molestations and battery from their male cohabiters during disputes and disagreements. The implications of these acts are grave as they sometimes suffer psychosocial trauma that impacts their health, well-being and educational pursuits. Adewoye (2019) asserts that cohabiters struggle to graduate due to accumulated low academic outcomes throughout their studies as well as inadequate reading time. Many students who indulge in cohabiting often dropout from school while some others have their years on the course extended.

Ojewola and Akinduyo (2017) submitted that students who practice cohabitation are prone to assault and vilifications from outsiders and their partners. Notwithstanding the steep after-effects of cohabitation, the practice appears to be on a rise especially among undergraduate students. This trend can be attributed to the positive attitude and fondness that has been expressed towards cohabitation by young adults today (Akanbi & Alayande, 2017). Akanbi (2015) in a study on the attitude of students of tertiary institutions in Oyo State, Nigeria towards premarital cohabitation discovered that young adults choose to practice cohabitation irrespective of their knowledge about its after-effects.

Manning, Cohen and Smock (2012) in their research on the influence of peer pressure on cohabitation among the youth observed peer pressure is an important determinant of whether a young adult will cohabit or not. A study conducted among South African Christians by Mashal (2011) indicates that the majority of the young adults that indulge in cohabitation do so because of peer pressure. Despite abstinence and sanctity of marriage teachings given in church seminars and sermons, the young adults look at their peers and give in to the cohabitation temptation because “everyone does it”. They get into this act despite the church teachings to avoid being laughed at and to gain affirmation from peers. This influences acceptance in a particular age group. In agreement with the research carried out by Mashal and Litcher (2012) further argues that pressure from the society is likely to coerce young people irrespective of their religious affiliations to venture into union formation before undergoing critical preparation. Adamopoulou (2012) posited that marital decision is significantly influenced by peers. The objective of this study was to examine the influence of peer influence on attitude towards cohabitation among adolescents in Nigeria.

### 3. Material and methods

The research design adopted for this study is descriptive survey. The population for the study cuts across three tertiary institutions, from two states within the South Western region of Nigeria. The institutions include a Federal Institution (University of Ibadan), a State Institution (Ekiti State University) and a Private Institution (Oduduwa University, Ipetumodu). The sample comprised six hundred and twenty students (620) from three institutions. Due to culturally induced labelling attached to cohabitation and other forms of pre-marital sex in the study setting, chain referral sampling technique was used to identify cohabiting students in their various communities. The questionnaire comprised of three sections, section A covers socio demographic variables of respondents, while section B elicit information on cohabitation scale and section C was captured using the 10 item peer pressure scale developed by Santor, Messervey and Kusumakar (2000). Twenty items were used to elicit response from the respondents. Four points Likert-type scale format of strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed were used to elicit response from the respondents. The students were administered with the questionnaire and it was retrieved immediately. The data was analyzed using t-test and one-way ANOVA.

## 4. Results

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents (N=620)

Category	Level	N(%)
Age	Mean age (19.56) SD (6.18)	
Gender	Male Female	330(53.2) 282(45.5)
Ethnicity	Yoruba Igbo Hausa Other	466(75.2) 76(12.3) 32(5.2) 3(.5)
Religion	Christian Islam Traditional	454(73.2) 158(25.5) 4(.6)
Tertiary type	Federal State Private	106(17.1) 397(64.0) 117(18.9)
Family type	Monogamous Polygamous	395(63.7) 190(30.6)

Fieldwork: 2020

The table above illustrates the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents in the study. Respondents' age ranges from 14-40year with a mean age (19.56years) and SD (6.18). On gender 330 (53.2%) were males, 282 (45.5%) were females while 8 (1.3%) did not indicate their gender. In term of ethnicity, majority 466 (75.2%) were Yoruba, 76 (12.3%) were Igbo, 32 (5.2%) were Hausa, while 3 (.5%) are from other ethnicity. In terms of religion affiliation, 454(73.2%) were from Christianity, 158 (25.5%) were from Islam while 4 (.6%) are from traditional worshipper. In term of tertiary institution type, 106 (17.1%) are from federal institution, 397 (64.0%) are from state institution while 117 (18.9%) are from private institution. Lastly, 395 (63.7%) were from Monogamous while 190 (30.6%) were from polygamous home.

Table 2. Summary table of independent sample t-test showing influence of peer influence on attitude toward cohabitation

	Peer influence	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	df	T	p
	Low	202	27.69	8.83			
<b>Attitude toward cohabitation</b>					618	4.25	<.05
	High	418	62.55	10.95			

Table 2 shows that there is influence of peer influence on Attitude toward cohabitation among students ( $t=4.25$ ;  $df=618$ ;  $p<.05$ ). This implies that adults who are high on peer influence

( $X=62.55$ ;  $SD=10.95$ ) significantly reported higher on attitude toward cohabitation than students who report low on Attitude toward cohabitation ( $X=27.69$ ;  $SD=8.83$ ). The stated hypothesis was accepted.

Table 3. Summary of one-way ANOVA showing the influence of university type on attitude toward cohabitation

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean squares	F	<i>P</i>
Between Groups	205.724	2	102.862	1.297	
Within Groups	48926.315	617	79.297		.274
Total	49132.039	619			

The results presented in Table 3 shows that there is no significant influence of university type on attitude toward cohabitation  $F(2, 617)=1.297$ ;  $p=>.274$ ).

## 5. Discussion

The study investigated the role of peer influence and tertiary type on attitude toward cohabitation. Based on the hypothesis formulated, the study found that peer influence attitude toward cohabitation. The finding conforms with the study done by Ojewola and Akinduyo (2017); Onimajesin, Saheed, Atiku and Olasunkanmi, (2020), but it negates the findings from Abiodun and Erhabor (2018), study revealed that peer connectedness did not have significant independent relationship with attitudes toward premarital sex. The study also found that tertiary institution type did not have any influence on attitude toward cohabitation. The justification why the finding was so is because students in either in state, federal or private see the need to have affection which could also come in form of cohabitating which they perceive as normal way of life in school.

## 6. Conclusion and recommendations

Based on the finding of the study, we concluded that peer influence has significant role on attitude toward cohabitation while tertiary institution type did not have any role on attitude toward cohabitation among undergraduates. The study therefore recommends that psychologists should give proper orientation to students on the destructive tendencies that peer influence could have on their intention to have positive attitude toward cohabitation.

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