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Perceived Impact of Peer Influence on Cohabitation among Youth in Selected Off-Campus Areas in Ilorin Metropolis

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Abstract

The trend of cohabitation in our contemporary society, especially among the emerging youth, has increased moral decadence, which has caused more danger to the affected youth and culture. The study examined the perceived impact of peer influence on cohabitation among youth in selected off-campus areas in the Ilorin Metropolis. The study employed a survey method, and a sample size of 525 was randomly selected using purposive sampling for selection of the off-campus areas and simple random for the research participants, but only 497 participants filled out and returned the questionnaires. A Peer Influence Scale (PPS) for peer influence (x=0.87), a Self-developed Scale for gender, age and religion on cohabitation (x=0.85). Hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 significance level using a T-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), while frequency counts and percentages were used to analyse the demographic data. The study found no significant difference in the influence of peers on cohabitation among youth in the Ilorin Metropolis based on gender. There was a significant difference in peer influence on cohabitation among youth in Ilorin Metropolis based on age. There was a significant difference in peer influence on cohabitation among youth in Ilorin Metropolis based on religion. Based on the study's findings, it recommended that concerted efforts should be made by the Social Workers, Social Welfare and other relevant stakeholders to engage in a sensitization programme that will re-orientate the teeming youth on the danger cohabitation can pose to their future well-being and welfare.

Keywords: Cohabitation, Impact, Peer influence, Off-campus areas, Youth.

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Introduction

Cohabitation is conceptualised as a situation where a male and female are living together like husband and wife or having sexual intimacy in the process of living together without the consent and approval of their parents to such relationship (Jiya & Alhassan, 2019). This study focused on peer influence and its interplay with gender, age and religion of the youth who cohabit in the study area. According to Greller and Ruderman (2019), peer influence is one of the potent factors responsible for the higher prevalence of cohabitation among youth in off-campus hostels in Nigeria. Baker (2007) maintains that peer influence is one of the significant determinants of cohabitation among youth. It has predisposed a considerable number of them to pre-marital romantic relationships with its attendant risk factors, which range from unwanted pregnancy, Sexual Transmitted Infections (STIs), indiscriminate arrest by the police and other law enforcement agencies, loss of the future career, emotional depression and a host of others (Sassler et al., 2012; Manning et al., 2014).

Equally, peer influence has made some youth conceive cohabitation as normal behaviour (Baker 2007). Most youths believe cohabitation is a normal and acceptable practice, largely influencing their choices and belief systems (Ojewola & Akinduyo, 2017; Temple et al., 2021). Similarly, peers can be a medium of information sharing, experience and advice, which may change young individuals' attitudes towards cohabitation. This implies that the higher the information flow, experiences and advice among those involved in such relationship, the greater the tendency to assert such influence on those not yet involved (David et al., 2021). Similarly, gender is another viable factor that significantly impacts peer influence towards cohabitation (Geller & Hagan, 2014). According to Lawal (2010), both genders (male and female) cohabit. Studies indicate that the male gender often initiates the practice in the first instance, and the female counterpart accepts the offer due to experience and advice from the co-female gender in similar practices (Greller & Ruderman, 2019; Obikeze et al., 2018).

Mohan and Balaiah (2011) posit that young men often initiate the act of cohabitation, while some young women who intend such an act easily fall victim to the offer (cohabitation). When the attitude of young men/women is positive towards cohabitation, there is a higher tendency to cohabit and vice-versa (Cunningham, & Thornton, 2004). In a similar development, age is significantly associated with the phenomenon of cohabitation among youth, especially those in higher institutions of learning, because most of the contemporary youth commence their higher education at a very young age, which makes some of them susceptible to this act (Adeoye et al., 2012). The young age made most youths conceive cohabitation as a freedom they can enjoy outside their parents' custody (Kuperberg, 2014; Rhoades et al., 2009). It made

them explore cohabitation as an opportunity for sexual exploration for the first time in their life experiences (Jiya & Alhassan, 2019). Furthermore, age is correlated with cohabitation, especially when the affected youth came from broken homes with less parental control and a lack of required support from their parents and guardians and saw their peers indulging in similar acts (Fomby & Bosick, 2013; McLanahan, 2011). Alo (2008) found that cohabitation is more rampant among those aged 15-24. This may be a result of their prime age when they are more sexually active, and such may predispose them to indulge in cohabitation with their loving partner.

Furthermore, religion is also considered a potent factor in the phenomenon of cohabitation among Nigerian youth. Crissey (2005) found that youth who sincerely adhere to their religious dictate are likelier to settle for marriage rather than cohabitation. This implies that cohabitation is more prevalent among youth with less attachment to their religious dictate. Stanley et al. (2006) reveal that individuals brought up in a godly manner and taught the consequences of indulging in pre-marital affairs or cohabitation will likely abstain from such immoral practices. More so, Irma (2015) found that more religious individuals are most likely to follow laid down rules and regulations that revolve around the establishment of marriage rather than cohabitation with unapproved partners. However, studies have shown that cohabitation is gaining more recognition and acceptability among youth because there is deterioration and retrogression in the upholding of religious tenets in the pathway to marriage among African youth in general and Nigeria youth in particular (Dempsey & Devans, 2004; LeBourdais, & Lapierre, 2004; Laplante, 2006).

Many studies (David et al., 2021; Jiya & Alhassan, 2019; Obikeze et al., 2018) have been conducted on cohabitation in Nigeria and other societies worldwide. Little or none of the studies have focused on the variables under investigation in the study area. The absence of the literature and empirical studies in the study area creates a knowledge gap that this study intends to fill. The study will, therefore, proffer a feasible panacea to the study under investigation. Thus, this study explores the perceived impact of peer influence on cohabitation among youth in selected off-campus areas in Ilorin Metropolis.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance in the study:

H_o1 There is no significant difference in the influence of peers on cohabitation among youth in the Ilorin Metropolis based on gender.

H_o2: There is no significant difference in the influence of peers on cohabitation among youth in the Ilorin Metropolis based on age

H_o3: There is no significant difference in the influence of peers on cohabitation among youth in the Ilorin Metropolis based on religion.

Literature Review

The phenomenon of cohabitation among youth in Nigeria off-campus apartments/areas has increased moral decadence in Nigerian society, which demands concerted efforts to address the menace. David et al. (2021) found that cohabitation, in most cases, is usually heterosexual. However, in rare cases, there are also a few cases of same-sex or gay relationships among youth in those off-campus apartments/areas (Gates, 2015). Ogunsola (2004) found that cohabitation is a form of mutual living arrangement between a young man and woman in most cases, with the intention and mission of having a constant intimate and sexual relationship, as it usually occurs among married couples. The contemporary youth in Nigerian society does not see any danger inherent in living conjugal relationships without their parents' knowledge, especially the bride's parents (Obikeze et al., 2018). This trend (cohabitation) is increasing in various off-campus apartments/areas unabated, gradually eroding the culture of marital relationships embedded in traditional African societies (Ekpenyong & Ekpenyong, 2016).

Ogunsola (2004) notes that the youth consider cohabitation a pre-marital test to determine their compatibility when legally marrying. However, Arisukwu (2013) reveal that cohabitation is one of the immoral relationships which negate most religious marital rules and regulations in Nigeria. Mustapha et al. (2017) state that cohabitation is more prevalent among young students of higher institutions in Nigeria owing to their freedom outside their various learning campuses. The trend of cohabitation has drastically increased to about 23% among Nigerian youth in the last two decades (Oni et al., 2015)). Adeyemo and Adeyinka (2017) reveal that 37% of young female students living off-campus in Nigerian universities reported being in a cohabiting relationship. On the other hand, 22% of young male students in off-campus apartments reported having a female partner who is cohabiting with them.

Several previous studies found some factors responsible for this unfortunate phenomenon (Huang et al., 2011; Ekpenyong & Ekpenyong, 2016; Bello & Ogunsanwo, 2013). Jiya and Alhassan (2019) posit that most of the youth who are involved in the relationship are usually lured into such by their friend(s) with the fear of not being regarded as sexually immature friends. Mligo and Otieno (2018) pointed out that cohabitation is regarded as the order of the day among youth, especially among peers, and the majority who find themselves in such situations are influenced by their peers who are already deeply involved in the act. Greller and Ruderman, (2019) found that any peer who refuses to imitate their peers in such practice is often

rejected by those already engaged in it. Equally, some youth see their young age as a period to explore loving relationships, which is experienced by the adult members of society because of their belief that the young age is an opportunity period to have such fun and relationships in life, especially when they are yet to go into marriage so that they can experience what married couples experience and it predispose them to cohabitation (Thorsen, 2017).

Theoretical Framework

The theory adopted by this study is behavioural decision theory, which was initially propounded by Daniel Kahneman in 1954 but was modified by Edward in 1967 to suit the present discourse (Obikeze et al., 2018). The rationale behind adopting this theory is that it attempts to explain why an individual indulges in a particular deviant behaviour such as cohabitation. The theorist emphasised that every individual identifies a certain behaviour suitable for their situation at a specific time, and such behaviour significantly impacts the potential gains and losses on the person executing such action. Although such behaviour might be pleasurable to the person at that particular point, it is detrimental to their future (Greller & Ruderman, 2019). Behavioural decision theory is hinged on the assumption that some of the information acquired from peers is often used in the cohabitation process (Stanley et al., 2006). Similarly, those who indulge in the act believe it is a pathway to having a future wife/husband, which usually does not come true in the long run Rhoader et al., 2009). Obikeze et al. posit that youth indulging in cohabitation conceive it as a practical and sound decision about a future partner, but such a decision might be halted by another factor, which ranges from getting another partner who is better off the current partner, broken heart by either of the partners, losing future focus and career and a host of others.

More so, the theory emphasised two underlying factors predisposing youth to cohabit. First, the desire to maximise pleasure in the romantic relationship they found themselves in and minimize likely consequences such as getting pregnant and starting their new family prematurely, which often predisposed them to engage in the use of contraceptives and abortion, amongst others. Second, decision theory points out that a young man and a lady who indulge in cohabitation utilise their freedom outside their parental custody to be involved in practicing intimate and romantic relationships for personal sexual exploration (Manning et al. 2014). Ojewole and Akinduyo (2017) found that cohabitation behaviour is a descriptive behaviour which negates the normative order of the societal standard of human behaviour, especially the rules and regulations that guide marital relationships in ideal human societies. Ojewole and Akinduyo reveal that those who indulge in the act of cohabitation usually have a strong belief in their judgment that their actions are directed and motivated by their

confidence and desire for exploration of sexual urges. Still, they usually failed to consider some underlying risk factors of such unguided belief in their abilities and knowledge emanating from their overconfidence.

The theory suggests that individuals who are cohabiting evaluate the expected outcomes and consequences of such actions when making the choice (Greller & Ruderman, 2019). Thus, young people who indulge in cohabitation may consider benefits such as reduced living expenses and greater intimacy since the responsibility of legal couples is not involved (Ekpenyong & Ekpenyong, 2016). The individual may weigh this against potential adverse consequences, including relationship instability (Stanley et al., 2006). Seltzer and Blanchi (2013) maintain that social norms and peer pressure can affect decision-making. Thus, young adults may cohabit because they feel pressure from their peers who approve of such behaviour (Greller & Ruderman, 2019). Additionally, social norms around the acceptability of pre-marital relationships or cohabitation may also play a significant role in the trend of youth cohabitation (Adeoye, et al., 2012). The theory pointed out that individuals use the availability heuristic to make choices and decisions, relying on information that is easily accessible to them (Obikeze et al., 2018). Young people who know of their successful cohabiting couples may be more likely to view their situation positively and pursue cohabitation themselves (Rhoader et al., 2009).

Materials and Methods

The study adopted a survey research design to sample the opinions and perceptions of the research participants on the variables under investigation. The method allows researchers to elicit information from the selected respondents in one short survey contact. The study population comprised all the youth residing in off-campus areas in the Ilorin Metropolis. Twenty-one off-campus areas were chosen purposefully from three higher institutions within the Ilorin Metropolis. Thus, the three purposively selected higher institutions off-campus areas were selected based on the judgment of the researchers regarding the characteristics of the participants who would best provide the data needed to answer the study's research questions. Consequently, seven off-campus areas were purposively selected from the University of Ilorin, including Tanke Oke-Odo, Tanke Iledu, Ilesanmi, Tipper Garage, Tan minus, F-Division, and Sanrab area Tanke. Similarly, seven off-campus areas were equally purposively selected from Al-Ikmah University: Apalara, Adewole Estate, Gerewu area, Mandate area, Adeta, Agbo-Oba, and Gaa-Saka. At the same time, seven off-campus areas were also purposively selected from Kwara State Polytechnic, which include Kuelede Estate, Tipper Garage Oyun, Elekoyankan, Idi Ori, Ara, Oke Ose, and Sango area. Five hundred and twenty-five respondents were randomly selected from twenty-one purposively selected off-campus areas from the three higher institutions mentioned

above, making this study's sample size five hundred and twenty-five (525). Twenty-five respondents were randomly selected from each off-campus area purposively selected for this study.

The data procedure was that the researchers, with the help of three research assistants, approached each research participant in their respective residences and administered questionnaires to them. However, out of 525 questionnaires randomly distributed to the selected research participants in the field, fifteen questionnaires were not retrieved, while thirteen questionnaires needed to be corrected and filled out after thoroughly checking for mistakes, omissions and inconsistencies. Therefore, only 497 questionnaires duly completed were used as this study's sample size. A self-developed questionnaire was used to obtain the demographic characteristics of the research participants. The Peer Pressure Scale (PPS) developed by Santor et al. (2000) with a point Likert type scale was adopted with twenty-item and content validated by four experts in Social Work concerned with youth welfare research, and the result yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.87, which was endorsed appropriate for the study. A self-developed Scale titled Gender, Age, and Religion on Cohabitation Questionnaire (GARCQ) was used to elicit responses on the influence of gender, age and religion on cohabitation as predicted by peer influence. It contained eighteen items, six on gender, age, and religious outcome on cohabitation. The instrument was subsequently administered to fifteen youths residing in off-campus areas outside Ilorin Metropolis who did not partake in the sample study. The Cronbach alpha formula was adopted to test the internal consistency reliability, and a reliability coefficient of 0.85 was acquired.

Descriptive statistics were analysed with frequency count and percentage. At the same time, the inferential statistics were analysed with a T-Test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) at 0.05 significance level. Ethical approval was sought from research participants on the agreement that the information collected would be treated with utmost confidentiality and for academic purposes only, and their identity would not be divulged to anybody under any circumstances.

Table 1: *Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents*

S/No	Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Gender	Male	301	60.6
		Female	196	39.4
		Total	497	100
S/No	**Variable**	**Categories**	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
2	Age	21-24	269	54.1
		15-20	210	42.3
		25 years and above	18	3.6
		Total	497	100
S/No	**Variable**	**Categories**	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**

3	Religion	Islam	336	67.6
		Christianity	150	30.2
		Africa Tradition Religion (ATR)	11	2.2
		Total	497	100
S/No	**Variable**	**Categories**	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
4	Nature of Ownership of the Residence	Rented Apartments	428	86.1
		Owned Apartments	69	13.9
		Total	497	100

Source: Researchers' Fieldwork (2023)

Table 1 shows the socio-demographic distribution of the research participants. The distribution of the respondents by gender indicates that 301 (60.6%) were male, while 196 (39.4) were female. The distribution of the respondents by age shows that respondents between the age bracket 21-24 years were 296 (54.1%) which implies that more than half of the research participants, followed by 210 (42.3%) of the respondents who were between age bracket 15-20 years of age, and 18 (3.6) of the respondents were between the age range of 25 years and above. The distribution of the respondents by religion indicates that 336 (67.6%) of the research participants were Muslims, followed by 150 (30.2) of the respondents who were Christians, and 11 (2.2%) of the research participants were adherent to the African Tradition Religion. The distribution of the respondents by the nature of the ownership of the apartments shows that 428 (86.1%) of the research participants rented the apartments they were residing in. In contrast, 69 (13.9) of the respondents owned the apartments either by their parents or their relatives, which implies that they were not paying for the residence.

Result and Discussion of Findings

The results obtained in the analysis of data collected from research participants are presented below:

Analysis of hypotheses

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in the influence of peers on cohabitation among youth in the Ilorin Metropolis based on gender.

Table 2: *Mean, Standard Deviation and t-values on the influence of peer on cohabitation among youth based on gender*

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	Cal. t-value	Cri. t-value	Sig.	Decision
Male	301	48.6423	6.42003	495	0.265	1.96	0.791	Accepted
Female	196	48.4692	6.06489					

Source: Researchers' Survey (2023)

Table 2 shows that the calculated t-value of 0.265 is less than the critical t-value of 1.96 (p=0.791 > sig. =0.05). Therefore, hypothesis one states that there is no significant difference in the influence of peers on cohabitation among youth in the Ilorin Metropolis based on gender is accepted

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in the influence of peers on cohabitation among youth in the Ilorin Metropolis based on Age

Table 3: *ANOVA results on age and peer influence on cohabitation*

Age	Sum of Square	Df	Mean Square	Cal. F-ratio	Cri. F-ratio	Sig.	Decision
Between Groups	254.331	2	127165.5	4.166	2.70	0.133	Rejected
Within Groups	15080.586	494	30.528				
Total	15334.917	496					

Source: Researchers' Survey (2023)

Table 3 shows that the calculated f-ratio of 4.166 is greater than the critical f-ratio of 2.70 at 0.133 (<0.05) significant level. Therefore, hypothesis two, which states that there is no significant difference in the influence of peers on cohabitation among youth in Ilorin Metropolis based on Age, is rejected.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant difference in the influence of peers on cohabitation among youth in the Ilorin Metropolis based on religion.

Table 4: *ANOVA results on religion and peer influence on cohabitation*

Religion	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	Cal. F-ratio	Cri. F-ratio	Sig.	Decision
Between Groups	187.454	2	93.727	3.057	2.70	0.319	Rejected
Within Groups	15147.4643	494	30.663				
Total	15334.9183	496					

Source: Researchers' Survey (2023)

Table 4 shows that the calculated f-ratio of 3.057 is greater than the critical f-ratio of 2.70 at 0.319 (<0.05) significant level. Therefore, hypothesis three, which states that there is no significant difference in the influence of peers on cohabitation among youth in Ilorin Metropolis based on religion, is rejected.

Discussion of findings

The study explores the impact of peer influence on cohabitation among youth in the Ilorin Metropolis. The first hypothesis tested showed no significant difference in the influence of peers on cohabitation among participants based on gender. This indicates that both genders indulge in the practice of cohabitation. This study is in tandem with David et al. (2021), and Oni et al. (2015), who averred that cases of cohabitation are rampant among both genders (male and female) and are often heterosexual rather than same-sex or gay relationships. Similarly, this study is in line with Obikeze et al. (2018), who noted that the male gender often initiated the practice in the first instance, and the female counterpart after that accepted the offer as a result of experience and advice from the co-female gender who engaged in a similar act. In addition, the study corroborates with Cunningham and Thornton (2004), who assert that when the attitude of young men/women is positive towards cohabitation, there is a higher tendency to cohabit and vice versa. More so, Migo and Otieno (2018) maintain that cohabitation is regarded as order of the day or norms among youth, especially peers. Most of those who indulge in the act are usually lured into it by their already deeply involved peers. However, this study is contrary to Kelani et al. (2020), who discovered that young males are more inclined to sexting behaviour and indulge in the act than their female counterparts.

The study also discovered a significant difference in the influence of peers on cohabitation among youth based on age. This study supports the stance of Adeoye et al. (2012) and Kuperberg (2014) that age is significantly associated with the phenomenon of cohabitation among youth, especially those in higher institutions of learning because most of them usually commence their higher education at a very young age when they are still to be under tutelage of their parents and thereby made them more vulnerable to indulge in the act of cohabitation. Furthermore, Jiya and Alhassan (2019) reveal that young age made most of the youth conceive cohabitation as a kind of freedom, and they often utilize such freedom out of their parental custody to indulge in cohabitation for sexual exploration for the first time in their life experiences. This study agrees with Alo (2008), who found that cohabitation is more prevalent among those aged 15-24. It also noted that this might be attributed to their prime age when they are more sexually active, and such may predispose them to consider cohabitation as a means of expressing romantic acceptance to their loving partner (Greller & Ruderman, 2019).

Lastly, the study reveals a significant difference in the influence of peers on cohabitation among youth based on religion. The findings of Irma (2015) support this study that individual youth who are more religious are most likely to follow laid down rules and regulations that established institutions of marriage rather than cohabit with an unapproved partner. Moreover, this study also aligns with Crissey (2005), and Smith (2018) who found that youth who sincerely adhere to their religious dictate are most likely to settle for marriage rather than cohabitating. Jiya and Alhsssan (2019) argue that there is a vital interplay between peer influence, age, gender and religion. Jiya and Alhsssan noted that most of the youth who indulge in cohabitation are often influenced by peers who are of the same age or gender or those who neglect the basic tenets of their religious commandments regarding rules and regulations that establish marital relationships.

Conclusion

The study explored peer influence's impact on youth cohabitation in the Ilorin Metropolis. Factors that influence peer influence on cohabitation significantly include gender, age and religion. The findings reveal that both males and females indulge in the phenomenon of cohabitation in the study area in a similar proportion, and their romantic relationships are often more heterosexual than gay relationships. Equally, young age impacted cohabitation significantly and made most young men and ladies more susceptible to the menace of cohabitation. Also, religion was an essential determinant of cohabitation among youth. It is, therefore, pertinent to be aware of the identified factors when the social workers, social welfare, and other relevant stakeholders concerned with youth welfare in Nigerian society are designing important interventionist programmes.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made

- Concerted efforts should be made by the social workers, social welfare and other relevant stakeholders to engage in sensitization programmes that will re-orientate the teeming youth on the danger cohabitation can pose to their future well-being and welfare.

- Social welfare workers should collaborate with relevant professional teams to recommend appropriate and professional interventions for the youth involved in cohabitation.

- Landlords should review the rules and regulations that guide house rent to minimize the phenomenon of cohabitation in our society.

- Since the menace of cohabitation is more prevalent in off-campus areas, the school management should collaborate with the landlords in those areas to monitor the affairs of their students, especially those fond of indulging in the act to enhance their moral uprightness.
- Community associations should intensify efforts to checkmate the incidence of cohabitation in their respective communities.
- Parents should always pay unscheduled visits to their youngsters living outside their domain to know the kind of life they are living.
- Religious leaders should also emphasise the importance of legal marital relationships in their teachings, entrenched in their various scriptures, to serve as internal regulators for our contemporary youth.

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