Cohabitation among Tertiary Education Students: An Exploratory Study in Bulawayo

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Abstract
Cohabiting has been associated with a number of problems including sexually transmitted diseases and HIV and AIDS, abortions, sexual abuse and violence, low academic performance, increased cost of medical care and unwanted pregnancies. However, there is little documented information on the extent and the factors influencing cohabitation among the youth and especially among tertiary education students. This study therefore sought to fill this gap by investigating factors that lead to the prevalence and practice of cohabitation by tertiary education students. The research adopted the interpretivist philosophy. The qualitative research methodology was employed in order to understand in greater detail the behaviors, attitudes, opinions, and beliefs of the respondents on cohabitation among tertiary education students. The study used the survey research design. Primary research was conducted using questionnaire surveys that were administered to tertiary education students who participated at the Tertiary Education Sports Association of Zimbabwe in July 2016. There were 100 questionnaires distributed and 78 questionnaires were returned making 78% response rate. The respondents were randomly sampled to participate in the study. The study reflects that cohabitation among the Tertiary education students is quite common. The study noted that it is mostly caused by lack of accommodation, problems with roommates, lack of privacy and the need to be close and intimate with one's lover. In results cohabitation exposes students to premarital sex and other consequences such as unwanted pregnancies, abortion, complications and sexually transmitted infections. The study recommends that tertiary education students should be

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enlightened during orientations about the dangers of cohabitation. Parents should be encouraged to visit their children and find where and whom they live with while in school.

Keywords
Cohabiting, Tertiary Education Students, Exploratory

1.0. Introduction
Students in higher educational institutions are experiencing a crunch of spiral college costs (Aluko, 2009; Grossband, 2003). This has shaped the behavior of many students positively and negatively. Schoen (2009), human behavior is shaped and related to the attributes of physical environment. The environment determines the range of behavior than can occur in it. Therefore the students’ behavior is either positively or negatively influenced by the physical environment. The high cost of college fees have in some cases forced students to cohabit. According to Sassler (2004), many younger cohabiters enter into joint living arrangements as a result of financial need while may result in unstable partnerships. Studies have shown that financial distress is a salient predictor of positive aspects of relationship quality for example affection, love and satisfaction, (Lichter, 2006). There is evidence that educational attainment promotes positive interactions within cohabiting couples as noted by Sassler (2004).

There are studies that show that economic well-being is positively related to the odds that contribute to cohabiting. However, Onyike (2010), cohabiters’ are less likely to pool their income together. This may provide greater flexibility to engage in a wide range of economic arrangements, but this is leaves cohabiters more exposed to fluctuations in income. Other studies have found a relationship between objective and subjective measures of financial strain and violent aggression toward female partners (Omonjo, 2014). Lichter (2006) notes that attitudes held during the transition to adulthood are likely to have a substantial influence on family formation behavior for two reasons.

Transition to adulthood is a period of relatively abundant opportunities and individuals are likely to form their attitudes and intentions about one particular activity in explicit comparisons to the alternatives to that activity.
(Omonjo, 2014). Also decisions made during the transition to adulthood have a particularly long-lasting influence on the remainder of the life course because they set individuals on paths that are sometimes difficult to change, (O’Connel, 1994). The basis of this paper was therefore to establish factors which lead to cohabitation among tertiary education students and determine the perceptions and attitudes of students to cohabit. The paper also sought to determine challenges that are being faced by students in cohabiting as well as reflect on the effects of cohabiting on students’ academic performance.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The increase in population of tertiary education students and the inability of the government to adequately provide the needed social infrastructures and funding of higher education in Zimbabwe has led to risky coping mechanisms among the students (Olson, 2000). The constraint on policy framework where females cannot enter males hostels or males enter females hostels, undesirable quality of food at the institution’s dining hall, inadequate meals, no entertainment, finance, souring relationships among roommates at the institution and the desire for “sexual gratification” has led to the students to resort to alternative areas for accommodation.

A situation where students of opposite sex are forced to live together and share things in common without any authorization portends danger to the sanctification of the institution of marriage and family (Kemanto, 2004). It is against the norms and values of our society to allow young and unmarried couple to live together especially where they do not have any family affinity. Most students that live together do not allow their parents to know about it. This therefore exposes the students to all forms of risk and harm as they continue to cohabit (Arisukwa, 2013). Students who live together with their partners lack both family susceptible to attack and abuse by both outsiders and even their partners. Although similar to manage, cohabitation has some distinct function from marriage.

The participants in a cohabitation sitting are not immune from the various problems that besiege it. Problems such as sacrificing of the primary aim of being in school, unwanted pregnancy, the use oral contraceptive by female students and the danger inherent in such practices,
sharing of domestic chores among others (Aluko, 2009). Financial involvement can also bring the unit into serious conflict. The multi-dimensional consequences facing cohabiters are quite numerous. One of the consequences is unprotected sex and its attendant effects such as unwanted pregnancies and other sexually transmitted diseases (Aluko, 2011). These diseases can also affect the financial positions of the cohabiters therefore affecting other aspects like education. There are other educational consequences associated relationships among students.

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 and AIDS disease. Olson (2000) notes that this practice of cohabitating has serious health issue to the health students that may indulge in the use of oral contraceptive in order to avoid unwanted pregnancy that may lead to truncated educational aspirations. But when pregnancy does occur, sometimes the female student is more like to seek abortion as a way out. This practice of seeking for abortion may lead to another problem of exposing the female students to quack doctors who are not licensed practitioners (Manning, 1995). However, some students may not conduct an abortion or even have the money to execute it. This may lead to giving birth to unwanted babies that were not planned for and all the consequences that come with including a threatened academic pursuit.

1.3. Justification for the study

This study contributed in the filling of some gap in the literature on cohabitation among tertiary education students in Zimbabwe. It is also justified on the ground that it provides a base for the understanding of the various consequences from cohabitation and how the situation can be managed. The many consequences of cohabitation among the students were made known to aid government policies on students’ accommodation in Zimbabwe. The wide dearth of knowledge as a result of little work done on this phenomenon were also bridged and members of the public were aware of the consequences that are inherent in such practice and therefore be rational enough to decide against it (King, 2005). When the findings of the study are known, it will help to demystify some of the negative dangers in cohabitation and aid the tertiary education community as well as policy
makers to understand the phenomenon and for adequate measures to be taken to bring the issue under control.

1.4. Research Questions

- What are the factors which lead to cohabitation among tertiary education students?
- What are the perceptions and attitudes of students in cohabiting?
- What are the challenges that are being faced by students in cohabiting?
- What are the effects of cohabitation on students’ academic performance?

2.0. Research Methodology

The research adopted the interpretivist philosophy. The qualitative research methodology was employed in order to understand in greater detail the behaviors, attitudes, opinions, and beliefs of the respondents on cohabitation among tertiary education students. The study used the survey research design which is useful for assessing tertiary education students’ perceptions and attitudes on cohabitation. Primary research was conducted using questionnaire surveys that were administered to tertiary education students who participating at the Tertiary Education Sports Association of Zimbabwe in July 2016. There were 100 questionnaires distributed and 78 questionnaires were returned making 78% response rate.

The respondents were randomly sampled to participate in the study. The student population came from a variety of tertiary education institutions thus polytechnics, teachers colleges and industrial training centers. In order to have vivid understanding of cohabitation, 3 focus group discussions were done and the participants were purposively selected. The researchers deliberately chose participants from the diversified tertiary education institutions that the students came from thus teachers colleges, polytechnics and industrial training centers. Secondary data was used to get an in-depth understanding of cohabitation in tertiary education institutions. Questionnaires were analyzed by using SPSS package and focus group discussions were analyzed by thematic analysis.
3.0. Results

3.1. Sex

Figure 1 shows Figure 1 reflects a sex profile of the sample which participated in the study. It can be noted that the sex profile of the sample appears representative of the disparity in the total population in the students participating at the TESAZ sports. There were 36% males who participated in the study and 64% of the females who participated in the study. The difference in percentage between males and females was 28%.

3.2. Age Range of the Respondents

Table 1 shows the age range of the study respondents. It highlights that the majority of the respondents are of the age from 20-25 years as there were 38 respondents. This was followed by the age range 26-30 years which had 23 respondents. From 36 years and above there were 3 respondents. It is important to note that most of the respondents were between the age range from 20 - 30 years.
and this is in tandem with the norm that in Zimbabwe most of the students are in that age range.

3.3. Awareness of Cohabitation Among Tertiary Education Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 - Awareness of Cohabitation Among Tertiary Education Students

Table 2 shows the awareness of cohabitation among tertiary education students. The study reflects that 76% of the respondents knew about cohabitation and its operations in their various institutions. On the other hand 24% of the respondents noted that they were not aware of cohabitation.

3.4. Cohabiting Students Among the Sampled Population

Table 3 shows that 76% of the sampled population were cohabiting. Most students were cohabiting due to various factors. 24% of the sampled students were not cohabiting. This highlights a 52% difference between the cohabiting students and non cohabiting students.
3.5. Factors Responsible for Cohabitation Among Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Gratification</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Problems</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Accommodation</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependency Syndrome</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>78</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4 - Factors Responsible for Cohabitation Among Students*

Table 4 reflects that the majority of the respondents (54%) noted that they engage in cohabiting due to financial problem. This was followed by sexual gratification which has 21%. The least factor was dependency syndrome with 6%. One male respondent noted that “students with ‘wives’ lead a comfortable life as their partners prepare meals for them and do all the laundry work”.

In a similar study conducted by Popenoe (1999) in the United States the proportion of tertiary education students that considered it is usually a good idea for a couple to live together before getting married to find out whether they really get along was 59%. These results show a strong liberal attitude developing among the youth in Zimbabwe in regard to cohabitation and sexual behavior.

3.6. The Consequences of Cohabitation Among Tertiary Education Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Privacy</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Academic Results</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Based Violence</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infidelity</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>78</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 5 - The Consequences of Cohabitation Among Tertiary Education Students*

Table 5 reflects that the majority of the respondents (49%) noted that in cohabitation there is gender based violence while 5% noted that poor academic results are consequences of cohabitation among tertiary
education students. Due to the fact that there are no strings attached in cohabitation relationship it was highlighted that 32% of the respondents were engaging in infidelity. A participant noted that, “...... every so often, there is a gossip on campus about who has ‘divorced’ whom and who has aborted.......”.

This indicates that many students are aware of cohabitation behavior among their colleagues in campus. Another dimension from another participant noted fears of high HIV and AIDS prevalence rates and it can be noted that multiple partners in cohabitation are a cause as the relations in cohabitation are for a short period and break up and they subsequently move to other relations thereby affecting their sexual reproductive health.

Conclusion

- Cohabitation among the tertiary education students is quite common and the study noted that it is mostly caused by lack of accommodation, problems with roommates, lack of privacy and the need to be close and intimate with one’s lover.
- Cohabitation exposes students to premarital sex and other consequences such as unwanted pregnancies, abortion, complications and sexually transmitted infections.
- The study noted that the trauma the students face or encounter has a direct bearing on future relationships and perceptions of opposite sex.
- Most of the cohabiters refused to let their parents know about their cohabitation status while in college.

Recommendations

- Tertiary education students should be enlightened during orientations about the dangers of cohabitation.
- Parents should be encouraged to visit their children and find where and whom they live with while in school.
- Parents should be able to meet counselors whenever they are in danger or being abused by their cohabiters. They should be quick to save their lives and enhance their academic performances.
- Grants should be awarded to students.
Accommodation should be made affordable to students on campus so that indigent students could not be made vulnerable for all kinds of exploitation including cohabitation.

Quality of food from institutes’ dining halls should be improved.

References


Biographical notes
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