



Motives and Consequences of Premarital Cohabitation Practices among University Students in Iringa Municipality, Tanzania

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Abstract

This study was done in order to establish motives and consequences of premarital cohabitation practices among university students in Iringa Municipality through qualitative research approach and phenomenological research design. Snowball and purposive sampling were used to obtain a representative sample of 36 students, 3 deans of students, 3 wardens, and 4 ministers of residences. The obtained data was subjected to thematic analysis and presented in quotes of respondents' voices. The findings indicate that university students do cohabit to meet accommodation demands, not lose sexual lovers, exercise freedoms and acquire status from their peers, satisfy sexual urges and secure financial collaboration from partners. Furthermore, cohabitation leads students to encounter unplanned pregnancies, engage in abortions, attain poor academic performance, acquire sexual transmitted diseases, be subjected to physical and sexual abuse, emotional neglect and psychological disturbances. Therefore, it is recommended that students should not cohabit because the practice is associated with negative effects that may hinders life goals and expectations.

Keywords: Motives; Premarital Cohabitation; University Students; Iringa Municipal

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Introduction

Premarital cohabitation is a practice whereby two people who are romantically involved choose to live together without making formal commitment of marriage. In this study, it is considered as a tendency of university students to engage in romantic relationships and decide to live together as husband and wife without any legal authorization

from the commissioner of marriage oaths. Arguably, cohabitation is typically involving romantic relationships of unregistered spouses, who live together autonomously without marital orientation, emotional stability and secured trust (Argentova 2018). At its core, cohabitation is perceived as a state by which sexual partners live together in one room/house and do sexual activities that might be

associated with conception/child bearing (Ogunsola, 2011; Posel and Rudwick 2014). Culturally, it is viewed as a state by which sexual lovers have not discern consent from parents/guardians, but they may be permitted to engage themselves and live together as husband and wife (Ayandele and Ayoola, 2019).

Cohabitation is argued to be an agent that undermines and erode core values and virtues of African traditions and customs regarding marriage (Okyere-Manu, 2015). Those who have once engaged in cohabitation before being married were later on said to face infidelity due to marital instability and marital insufficiencies, thus lacking commitment to their marriages (Goodwin et al., 2010; Ogunsola, 2011; Attah, 2012); Mernitz, 2018). The study of Waite (2000) indicates that those who previously cohabited have a greater possibility to be associated with lack of confidence, worse communication and divorces when they will happen to be married. The study of Arisukwu (2013) indicates that cohabiters are likely to face psychological trauma and domestic violence that include abuse, exploitation, intimate partner violence, murder and suicide. Other cohabiters were reported to be assaulted by their lovers while the rest be killed by their partners (Agyekum, 2016). For those who are still in academic arena were reported to miss assignments, suffer low performance, be emotionally disturbed and drop out from their academic pursuit (Arisukwu, 2013; Mlyakado & Timothy, 2014; Ojewola & Akinduyo, 2017; Duyilemi et al., 2018). Others were found to get unexpected pregnancy, engage in abortion and be infected with sexual transmitted infections/diseases like HIV/AIDS (Popenoe, 2009; Ogunsola, 2011; Mashau, 2011; Arisukwu, 2013; Svodziwa & Kurete, 2017; Duyilemi, Tunde-Awe & Adekola-Lois, 2018).

Ever since cohabitation is guided by “come we stay together” slogan, studies indicate that adolescents in Botswana, Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa are mostly influenced to practice it (Arisukwu, 2013; Kamgno & Mengue 2014; Posel & Rudwick 2014; Jensen et al. 2015; Uka, 2015; Agyekum, 2016; Baloyi, 2016; Duyilemi et al., 2018). Those who are still in higher learning institutions were found to engage in cohabitation due to insufficient on-campus hostels, rigidity of parent treatment, freedom of creating new friendships and financial insufficiencies (Ayandele & Ayoola, 2019). Elsewhere like in United Kingdom (UK), cohabitation was reported to inline from 20.6% to 24.3% among

adolescents in Universities by the year 2011 (Kislev, 2021). In 2016, Russia reported that about 14% of higher learning students were cohabiting, contributing to about 27% of child births (Argentova, 2018). In China, cohabitation was reported to incline from 5.05% to 24.54% among university students of 25 to 27 years (Zhang, 2021). In Tanzania, Ndimbo and Paul (2022) recommended more studies on cohabitation in order to determine its motives and consequences. Therefore, this study was set to establish the motives and consequences of premarital cohabitation among university students in Iringa Municipal.

Methodology

Design

The study used the qualitative research approach. The approach was used to enabled the researchers generate possible methods of collecting in-depth data regarding the topic understudy. Therefore, the approach helped the study to collect both text data from qualitative sources. The study employed the phenomenological research design in order to obtain individuals’ experiences regarding the topic understudy. This was effective through interviews that helped the study to acquire in-depth data from respondents.

Area of the Study

This study was conducted in Iringa Municipality. This is one of administrative councils that is found in Iringa region, Tanzania. This area was considered for the study because it has university students who are matriculated in and live nearby Mkwawa University College, University of Iringa and Ruaha Catholic University (RUCU). Furthermore, it was chosen because Iringa Municipality is reported of several sexual activities among unmarried university students, thus possibly some might have engaged in cohabitation (Mugane, 2022).

Population and Sampling

University students, deans of students, wardens and ministers from students’ government were the targeted population. Students were targeted because they are subjected to romantic/sexual relationships and possible cohabitation. Deans of students were targeted because they deal with students’ welfare, thus being exposed to issues or cases brought by cohabiting students. Wardens were targeted because they are concerned with students’ residences, thus being aware of students engaged in cohabitation. Finally, ministers of students’ residences were targeted because they

are concerned with reports of students' welfare in their hostels, thus being exposed to issues brought by cohabiting students. Non-probability sampling was employed to obtain a representative sample of 46 people through purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Snowball sampling was employed to obtain 36 students, some of them cohabiting and others not cohabiting, who were not previously known by the researcher. Purposive sampling was employed to obtain 3 deans of students, 3 wardens of students and 4 ministers of students' residences based on their roles and experiences in dealing with cohabiting issues.

Instruments

Interviews were used to collect data from deans and wardens and focus group discussion was used to collect data from students. They were conversational-based guided by open-ended items that sought to inquire individuals' opinions and experience regarding cohabitation. Through the interview and focus group discussion guides, the researchers had an opportunity to refer the questions, impose them to respondents and obtain the intended data. Hence, through interviews and focus group discussion, the study managed to obtain respondents' views, experiences and opinions regarding the topic under study.

Treatment of Data

Data was collected through recording, note taking and jotting down major identified themes out of respondents' opinions and experiences. Furthermore, data were thematically analyzed based on identified themes as obtain during data collection.

Ethical Considerations

Permissions from director of Iringa Municipal Council and respective universities were asked and granted to the researchers for the official conduct of the study. Respondents were then informed of what was to take place so they may willingly participate in the study. Conversations between the researchers and respondents avoided ruin/insulting languages that demotes their dignity and confidentiality. This was manifested through setting a safe place with less interactive environment and avoiding criticisms based on comparisons. Hence, these enabled the study to be conducted to the extent of collecting the intended data.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the results that were obtained from the field. The presentation of the findings is categorical and is based on research questions as they appear in the subsequent sections.

Research Question 1: What are the motives of premarital cohabitation practices among university students in Iringa Municipality?

To answer this question, deans of students, wardens and students were subjected to interviews so they may share their experiences and opinions. The findings indicate that students did cohabit so they may meet accommodation demands, not lose their lovers, exercise their freedom and acquire status from their peers, satisfy their sexual urges, together with seeking financial collaboration from partners. For instance, one respondent said: "Most cohabiting students live off campus along rented rooms in streets. They are free to decide to live with either friends or sexual partners along their ghettos, so they may carter accommodation expenses like rent and meals" (Dean of students 03, University C). The other respondent added:

Some students living inside hostels are used to visit their partners living off-campus—this is especially to female university students. The more they visit their sexual partners, the more they are influenced to stay outside hostels, so they may have quality enough time with their partners. Thus, most have finally cohabited despite the fact that they have paid hostel fees" (Warden 02, University B).

Such findings are similar to those of Jiya et al.,(2019) and Onoyase (2020) who indicated that students who reach the second or third year tend to rent outside the university campus, so they may leave the fresh year students to occupy the hostels. Those with sexual partners are likely moved to live together with their boyfriends or girlfriends so they may share or do things in common—sleep, cook and eat together (Alo & Akinde, 2010; Svodziwa & Kurete, 2017; Adeniyi, 2019). Interestingly, those who happen to rent outside the campus while not engaged in sexual relationship are likely to initiate sexual relationships and decide to live together with their partners (Chandra et al., 2010; Akanbi, 2015).

On another angle, students seem to engage in cohabitation so they may attain sexual gratification

and maintain their romantic relationships. For instance, one respondent said:

I decided to live with my boyfriend after noticing some changes in our relationship. Previously, I used to stay with my friend but after encountering unending misunderstandings and quarrels, I finally decided to stay with him, so that we may have close attachments and build trust over each other” (Cohabiting Student 13, University B).

The other respondent added:

Sexual urges and loneliness made me to live with my girlfriend. It reached a time when she was living in hostels and by night I felt loneliness and in need of sex but she was absent. Thus, I convinced her to come and stay with me, then she accepted (Cohabiting Student 07, University A).

The findings are similar to those of Ogunsola (2011) and Whitehead and Popenoe (2006) who similarly indicated that students opt to cohabit so they may have an access to regular sexual activities with their sexual partners. They also indicate that students opt to cohabit so they may assess whether they really fit to marry each other. Hence, those who will prove their choices right are likely to maintain their sexual relationships and introduce the relations to their families (Adeoye et al., 2012).

Furthermore, students seem to cohabit so they may gain fame from their fellow peers who are also cohabiting. For instance, one respondent said:

I decided to stay with my girlfriend because my friends usually come to greet me or make stories. When they come, they need to eat something and find the room is properly designed. So, with such regards, I had to live with my girlfriend because she is capable of discharging such duties (Cohabiting Student 26, University C).

The other respondent added: “I decided to live with my partner after seeing most friends of mine are living with their boyfriends. That gave me a reason of staying together with him, while establishing our room with decorative furniture and domestic equipment” (Cohabiting Student 15, University B).

Such findings are similar to those of Arisukwu (2013), Duyilemi et al.(2018) and Adejumo et al.

(2017) who indicated that peer influence and struggle to attain peers’ recognition influences students to live together with their sexual partners. Those who happen to cohabit tend to feel comfortable and count themselves as married despite the fact that they are not even known to their partners’ families.

Research Question 2: What are the consequences of premarital cohabitation practices among university students in Iringa Municipality?

To answer this question, wardens, ministers of students’ residences and cohabiting students were subjected to interviews so they may share their experiences and testimonies. The findings indicate that students do encounter unplanned pregnancies, engage in abortions, attain poor academic performance, acquire sexual transmitted diseases and are subjected to physical and sexual abuse, emotional neglect and psychological torture due to cohabitation. For instance, one respondent said:

I am one of those who have ever aborted after getting unplanned pregnancy. I decided to abort because the one who impregnated me was not known to my family although we were living together as husband and wife. Also, because our culture rebukes childbirth before marriage, I then decided to abort after being impregnated with my boyfriend who we used to live together” (Cohabiting Student 33, University C).

The other one added: “Getting pregnancy before marriage is Sin and unethical in our societies. This made me to abort in order to veil my Sin of fornication that made me to be impregnated by my boyfriend who we used to live together” (Cohabiting Student 23, University B). The other one also added:

Living one room with a woman is direct proportional to impregnation. This happened to me when I was living together with my girlfriend. It was a serious-disturbing condition that made us to think and find means of doing abortion. Later on, we succeeded to abort because we thought of being unable to take care of the offspring due to dependence (Cohabiting Student 29, University C).

Such findings are similar to those of Arisukwu (2013) and Ojewola and Okinduyo (2017) who indicated that cohabiting students in universities do conduct

regular sexual activities without considering family planning—they do consider sexual activities as part of pleasure and leisure, forgetting to establish means of controlling impregnation. That has made them to be perplexed and confused, thinking of doing abortion so they may not postpone studies or be blamed by their parents/sponsors and fail to get educational assistance.

In similar regards, the findings show that cohabiting students have been associated with such sexual transmitted infections/diseases as UTI, gonorrhoea, syphilis and possibly HIV/AIDS. For instance, one respondent said:

I was previously troubled by Urinary Tract Infections (UTI) when I was living together with my boyfriend. At first, I thought maybe sharing of public toilets was the major cause, but later on I came to prove myself wrong. I came to discover that my boyfriend was having sexual intercourse with some college-mates who possibly suffered from UTI. Hence, he was the one who infected me” (Cohabiting Student 05, University A).

The other one added:

Cohabitation is very dangerous. It has caused some of my friends to be HIV positive and others to get other STIs. I remember one of cohabiting friends of ours used to feel pain when urinating and sometimes urinating pus. When he went for checkup he was found to be infected with syphilis” (Cohabiting Student 08, University A).

Such findings are similar to those of Oyediran and Isiugo-Abanihe (2005) and Mwaba and Naidoo (2005) who reported that students doing cohabitation are highly subjected to sexual transmitted infections/diseases. That might be due to practicing unprotected sex—sexing without using condoms or before HIV test and retests. Mugane (2023) supplement that by saying:

Most students do commit sexual activities without considering their vulnerability. They tend to not even go for HIV test or retests due to over trust, especially when they meet again after holidays. Hence, some have acquired HIV/AIDS from their partners who might have been infected during the holidays.

On another angle, the findings indicate that students doing cohabitation have always attained poor academic performance. For instance, one respondent said:

Some of cohabiting students do miss or plan to not attend lectures due to relationship pressures. Others might attend and not be attentive due to hidden issues in between, thus, having lower chance of coping with academic race and achieve a reasonable academic performance (Minister of Residence 01, University A).

The other one added:

There are cohabiting students who do not get time to do assignments or attend group discussions and presentations. Some might be due to having leisure trips in the nearby national parks/recreational centers, running their small-scale businesses, or engaging in tireless sexual activities. Therefore, at last, students’ academic performance is likely to be poor” (Minister of Residence 04, University C).

Such findings are similar to those of Sabia and Rees (2009), Duyilemi et al.(2018) and Adeniyi (2019) who reported that cohabitation has often blocked students from attending class sessions or accomplish their assignments on time, thus failing to achieve a reasonable academic performance.

Finally, the findings show that students engaged in cohabitation do encounter physical harm, abuses and psychological disturbances from their partners or outsiders. For instance, one respondent said:

Some of cohabiting students do quarrel and fight each other due to certain reasons. Others might be due to sexual jealousy and extra-sexual activities among themselves—a partner having another lover and a proof is found through pictures, videos, voice notes or text messages. All these might influence physical injuries and emotional disturbances among cohabiting partners” (Warden 01, University A).

The other one added:

Cohabitation has made students to enter into conflicts and influence them to have suicidal ideation or sometimes suicidal

attempts. Others have encountered sleeping difficulties, eating disorders, mood disorders and stress and other-related disorders due to relationship pressures and instability (Minister of Residence 03, University B).

Such findings are similar to those of Stockman et al. (2015) and Leemis et al. (2022) that cohabiting students are subjected to unresolved conflicts due to jealousy and distrust over each other. Others are likely to engage in intimate partner violence (IPV) that sexually abuses partners or physically harm their physiological wellbeing (Breiding & Basile, 2015; Johns et al., 2017; Niolon et al., 2017). Others have encountered sleeping difficulties due to overthinking and eating disorders due to low self-esteem.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Based on the findings, it concluded that university students do cohabit to meet accommodation demands, not lose sexual lovers, exercise freedoms and acquire status from their peers, satisfy sexual urges and secure financial collaboration from partners. Further, cohabitation has made students to encounter unplanned pregnancies, engage in abortions, attain poor academic performance, acquire sexual transmitted diseases, be subjected to physical and sexual abuse, emotional neglect and psychological torture. Therefore, premarital cohabitation is still effective and affecting among university students.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions, it is recommended that students should not cohabit because the practice is associated with negative outcomes that may hinder life goals and expectations. Universities should set residential systems that would allow only married students to live together. This would minimize the rate of cohabitation and limit students to have chances of cohabiting. More studies on how to prevent premarital cohabitation should be done so as to come up with effective ways of rescuing university students from cohabitation and its effects.

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