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INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT AND SELF- ESTEEM ON COHABITATION BEHAVIOUR AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS IN EKITI STATE

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ABSTRACT
This research aims to examine the influence of social support and self-esteem on cohabitation among undergraduate students in Higher institutions in Ekiti State, Nigeria. This study utilized a descriptive research design of correlational type to examine the influence of the variables. Three research questions were raised and analyzed. Two thousand (2000) undergraduate students were randomly selected from government owned tertiary institutions in Ekiti State. Standardized instruments were administered to the participants. Descriptive statistics and Pearson product moment correlation.was used to analyze the data. The study revealed a negative relationship between social support and cohabitation behavior among undergraduate students in higher institutions in Ekiti State; an inverse relationship between self-esteem and cohabitation behavior among undergraduate students in higher institutions in Ekiti State and a high level of social support experienced by undergraduate students' in higher institutions in Ekiti state. It is therefore recommended that since social support is found to bring about a boost in relationship satisfaction and individual self-esteem, policies should be introduced in order to build strong support networks for cohabiting partners.

Keywords: Adolescents, Social support, Self-esteem, Cohabitation

Introduction
Adolescence is a crucial developmental period marked by noticeable shift in social, emotional and cognitive functioning. For undergraduates, many of whom are in the latter phase of their adolescence or early adulthood, these psychological shifts come with new experiences in romantic relationships. Universities are set up to promote societal, professional and personal development. In Nigeria, university education is replete with maladaptive behaviour notwithstanding these three goals (Oladejo, 2022). This may be because majority of undergraduates these days are young between the ages of 18 and 21 when they gained admission into our ivory towers (Onayose, 2020). These students are involved in and experience all manners of vices such as stealing, killing, abortion, cultism, examination malpractices and cohabitation (Adeniyi, 2019). Cohabitation is the most unsettling of these. Living with

a romantic partner outside of marriage, or cohabitation is one of such practices that is becoming increasingly common among young adult especially in undergraduate students in higher institutions. Oyeniyi and Adeniran (2021) explored the increasing rates of cohabitation among students in Nigerian Universities and discovered that 55% of students had cohabited with a partner at least once during their University years. In the same vein Owolabi et al. (2020) examined the prevalence of cohabitation in Nigerian polytechnic and Universities, reporting that over 60% of the students interviewed acknowledged either cohabiting or knowing someone who was cohabiting during their academic journey. The exposure to Western ideology and inherent globalization have caused cultural shifts in the Nigerian society. That which used to be frowned upon in years past is becoming normalized in and around us, especially in the urban centres. Ogunleye and Adeyemi (2020) examined this shift and discovered that the younger generation is beginning to have liberal views to marriage and relationships.

Cohabitation festers for several reasons, financial constraints (Ogunyemi and Folarin, 2021), convenience Akinwale and Adeyemi, 2021), peer influence (Okere and Nnaji, 2022), weakening traditional religious norms (Sanni and Adebayo, 2021), emotional and relationship stability (Ibrahim and Omotola, 2021), experimentation and freedom (Nwafor and Ekpo, 2022).

Social support can provide emotional, practical and informational support, all of which are essential for adjusting to life changes and maintaining interpersonal relationships. Availability of social support is traceable to individual's overall wellbeing and is capable of providing an individual with needed stability and help to avoid negative experiences. For undergraduate student social support can have a significant influence on their decisions to engage in cohabitation – living with a romantic partner without being married. As societal standard change and attitude towards traditional relationship change. This stage of life characterized by self-exploration and relationship development often witness an increase in cohabitation practices.(Oni and Oke , 2021). Social support is essential for cohabitation to thrive , when family and friends emotionally support or offers a base of security and comfort which attract students' preparedness and choices to live together (Akinbode and Olusola, 2022). Conversely, those without social support tend to face increased stress and uncertainty which may impact negatively on their decision to engage in cohabitation (Adeyemo and Adesina, 2023). Past studies have showed the important of social support in shaping cohabitation tendencies among undergraduate students. For instance, strong family support can significantly influence cohabitation decisions by providing emotional and practical resources that enhances relationship stability (Musa and Akpan, 2021). However a lack of social support poses a great challenge. Students who are without support may experience stress and conflict which may bring about dissatisfaction and instability within their cohabitation relationship (Akinola and

Adebayo, 2022). This underscores the importance of understanding how different layers of social support significantly influence cohabitation practices and outcomes among undergraduates' student in Nigerian Universities.

Self-esteem which includes an individuals' feeling of confidence and self-worth, has a significant on different parts of life, especially in the crucial years of late adolescence and early adulthood. This stage offers special chances and challenges because it is frequently associated with growing independence and the exploration of intimate relationships.

Cohabitation is influenced by social norms, emotional preparedness and financial security. Among all these self-esteem plays a critical role. High self-esteem is significantly related to with positive relationship outcomes because people who have a strong sense of their own value are more likely to approach cohabitation with assurance and specific intentions. They frequently set up appropriate limits for their relationships and make deliberate decisions (Wangs &Shek, 2023, Olawole et al. 2017). On the other hand, those with poorer self-esteem might choose to live with someone in order to feel emotionally secure or validated, which could result in decisions that are more motivated by insecurity than by readiness or compatibility on both sides (Luo et al. 2023). The significance of self-esteem in relationship dynamics and cohabitation practices cannot be down played. Research has indicated that high sense of self-worth is positively correlated with both happier cohabitation and heathier relationships pattern. For example people who have poor self-worth are more likely to handle relationship difficulties well and have a healthy cohabitation schedule (Crocker and Park, 2022). On the other hand, those who have poor self-esteem may find it harder to manage their fears and voice their needs, which can lead to more relationship instability and conflict (Adeyemo and Adesina, 2023). While students with higher self-esteem might make more thoughtful decisions based on long term relationship goals and personal readiness, students with lower self-esteem might view cohabitation as a workable solution to financial pressure or a way to ensure relationship continuity (Schoen and Ross, 2022).

Several studies have examined the influence of social support and self-esteem on marital relationships especially among married couples but there seems to be paucity of research on the mutual significance of the twin factor of self-esteem and social support on cohabitation among undergraduate students (unmarried) in Government owned Universities in Ekiti State. This is the gap that this study seeks to address.

Research questions

The study addressed the following research questions, which were developed to direct the study's conduct:

1. Is there any significant relationship between social support and cohabitation behavior among undergraduate students in higher institutions in Ekiti State?
2. Is there any significant relationship between self-esteem and cohabitation behavior among undergraduate students in higher institutions in Ekiti State?

3. What is the level of social support experienced by undergraduate students' in higher institutions in Ekiti state?

Research Method

Research Design: This study adopted a descriptive research design of correlational type in which questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents. This method seeks to establish investigation among variables by observation which researcher has no control over the variables of interest and therefore cannot manipulate them. It is expected that the sample drawn would be generalized and inferences will be made on the whole population of the study. Also, the variables were being observed as have been treated in their natural occurrence.

Population: The population for this study comprise all public tertiary institution in Ado-Ekiti. There are four (4) tertiary institutions in Ado-Ekiti metropolis.

Sample and Sampling Techniques: Simple random sampling technique of balloting was used to select five (5) faculties in each of the tertiary institutions. One hundred students were randomly selected from each faculty. Five hundred (500) undergraduate students were used for the study in each of the tertiary institution. The total number of two thousand (2000) students were used for the study.

Instrumentation: Social support was measured by multidimensional scale of perceived social support assessment designed by Zimet et al (1990). It is 12 item scale of perceived social support from family and friends. The origin response format is 7 points. Hence, each item is scored 1-7. Total is sum of all 12 items, possible range for total is 7-84. All items are scored: Very Strongly Disagree = 1 Strongly Disagree = 2 Mildly Disagree = 3 Neutral = 4 Mildly Agree = 5 Strongly Agree = 6 Very Strongly Agree = 7 Algorithm Total = 69-84 High Acuity Total = 49-68 Moderate Acuity Total = 12-48 Low Acuity. This study will adapt the scale to be four points response formats**.**

Self-esteem was measured by adopting the self-report measure of self-esteem scale developed by Rosenberg (1965) which consist 10 statements related to overall feelings of self-worth or self-acceptance. The items are answered on a four-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Items 2, 5, 6, 8 and 9 are reversely scored while all the scores for all the ten items are summed together. Higher score indicates higher self-esteem. Cohabitation was measured with 10 items which were adapted from cohabitation questionnaire used in description and analysis of cohabiting sample in America by Donald Wayne Bower. The response format was four-point scale and Cronbach alpha reliability rate generated in this study is .88.

Participants: The sample for this study consists of 2000 randomly selected from the government tertiary institutions in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Four tertiary institution were used for the study. 500 students were selected from each school through a process of simple random sampling technique (using ballot method). However, out of 2000 questionnaire administered, 1801 questionnaires were received back, giving the attrition rate of 9.95%. The summary of biodata information received from the participants, showed that 829 (46.0%) were male while 972 (54.0%)

were female. 1340 representing (74.4%) reside in off campus, 305 representing 16.9% reside on the campus while 156 representing 8.7% live with parents or guardians. In relation to religion, 1544 respondents (85.7%) were Christians and 234 respondents (12.9%) were Muslims while 22 respondents (1.2) practice African traditional religion. Respondents parents' marital status shows that 984 (54.6%) were married, 648 (36.0%) were single, 33 (1.8%) were divorced, 112 (6.2%) were widowed while 24 (1.3%) were remarried. A further breakdown showed that 10 (0.6%), 1292 (71.7%) and 499 (27.7%) of the respondents were between the age range of below 16, 16-21 and above 22 years respectively. Their mean age was 19.5.

Method of Data Analysis: The data was analyzed using Simple percentage and the Pearson Product moment of Correlation at 0.05 level of significance.

Presentation of Results

Research Question One: Is there any significant relationship between social support and cohabitation behavior among undergraduate students in higher institutions in Ekiti State?

Table 1: Descriptive statistics and correlation between social support and cohabitation among undergraduate students in higher institutions in Ekiti State

Variables	N	Mean	SD	R	Sig
Social support	1801	36.44	6.826	-.080	.001
Cohabitation behavior	1801	22.73	7.039		

Table 1 reveals the descriptive statistics and correlation between social support and cohabitation among undergraduate students in higher institutions in Ekiti state. As shown in table 1, social support is significantly correlated with cohabitation behaviour ($r = .080$; $p<.05$). Meaning that social support is inversely related with cohabitation behavior. Those who scored high in social support scored low in cohabitation behavior and vice versa. Hence, there is a significant negative relationship between social support and cohabitation among undergraduate students in higher institutions.

Research Question Two: Is there any significant relationship between self-esteem and cohabitation behavior among undergraduate students in higher institutions in Ekiti State?

Table 2: Descriptive statistics and correlation between self-esteem and cohabitation among undergraduate students in higher institutions in Ekiti state

Variables	N	Mean	SD	R	Sig
Self esteem	1801	28.63	4.122	-.107	.000
Cohabitation behavior	1801	22.73	7.039		

Table 2 reveals the descriptive statistics and correlation between self-esteem and cohabitation among undergraduate students in higher institutions in Ekiti state. As shown in table 2, self-esteem is significantly correlated negatively with cohabitation behaviour ($r = .107$; $p<.05$). Meaning that those students that indicate a high score in self-esteem also score low in cohabitation behaviour while students that indicate low score in self-esteem score high in cohabitation behaviour. Hence, there is a significant negatively relationship between self-esteem and cohabitation among undergraduate students in higher institutions in Ekiti state.

Research Question Three: What is the level of social support experienced by undergraduate students' in higher institutions in Ekiti state?

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics showing the level of social support experienced by undergraduate students' in higher institutions in Ekiti state

Social support	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Low	111	6.2
Moderate	601	33.4
High	1089	60.5
Total	1801	100.0

Table 3 revealed that 111 participants which represented 6.2 scored low in social support diagnostic measure administered, 601 respondents representing 33.4% scored average while 1089 participants representing 60.5% scored high in social support measure. This implies that majority of the undergraduate students in this study have access to social support. Hence, there is high level of social support experienced by undergraduate students in higher institutions in Ekiti state.

Discussion

This study examined the combined influences of social support and self-esteem on cohabitation behaviour among undergraduate students in Higher institutions in Ekiti State. The study also examined the level of social support experienced by undergraduate students' in higher institutions in Ekiti state. According to the study's findings there is a significant negative relationship between social support and cohabitation among undergraduate students in higher institutions. The study was corroborated by some researchers. Olumide and Adeyemi (2020) revealed that strong family support systems discourage cohabitation as families often perceive cohabitation as contrary to Nigerian culture and religious value. However, students with limited family support tend to cohabit, relying more on peers for social and emotional support. Studies by Adeoye et al. (2012) and Akanbi (2017) suggest that while peer attachment and social circles can influence decisions to cohabit, cultural and religious factors often lead students to avoid cohabitation despite peer pressures. These dynamics show that social support from both family and peers can either encourage or discourage cohabitation depending on the context and individual circumstances.

The study further revealed that there is a significant negatively relationship between self-esteem and cohabitation among undergraduate students in higher institutions in Ekiti state.

This study aligns with that of Raley et al. (2021) who indicated that while both marriage and cohabitation offer emotional support and improve self-esteem cohabitating couples often face more relationship instability potentially affecting long- term satisfaction. The revelations of the study was also confirmed by Rettner, 2021 who indicated that cohabitation may boost self-esteem and happiness in ways similar to marriage but this might diminish over time. This is possible because changes in one can affect how the individual cohabiting partner feels about self and the relationship. For instance, one study following couples for over 10 years found that cohabiting mothers experienced a significant decline in relationship satisfaction compared to married mothers. This suggests that while cohabitation seems to boost self-esteem, the long- term effects may diminish.

In addition the study shows there is high level of social support experienced by undergraduate students in higher institutions in Ekiti state. According to Lamers (2021) emotional and practical support from friend and family contributes to greater satisfaction in cohabiting relationship. This means undergraduate students in higher institutions in Ekiti experience great satisfaction in cohabitation. This finding also show emphasize the significance of social support in enhancing relationship satisfaction and stability among cohabiting couples in higher institutions in Ekiti. This is in consonance with Rhoades et al. (2021) who disclosed that those with strong social networks report higher self-esteem and lower anxiety.

Recommendation

It is therefore recommended that since social support is found to bring about a boost in relationship satisfaction and individual self-esteem, policies should be introduced in order to build strong support networks for cohabiting partners. The findings also have implications for university-based interventions that will promote self-esteem programs, facilitate open communication and relationship education.

Conclusion

The study underscores the significance of social support and self-esteem in determining the happiness, stability and longevity of cohabiting partners. Strong social network and self-esteem are non-negotiable factors for enhancing relationship success. They also play a mitigating role with respect to the challenges faced by the cohabiting partner.

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