

**PREVALENCE, CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF PREMARITAL COHABITATION  
AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF UNDERGRADUATES OF NNAMDI  
AZIKIWE UNIVERSITY, AWKA**

**MARY NNEKA NWIKPO (PhD)**

**Department of Educational Foundations,  
Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka**  
[nm.nwikpo@unizik.edu.ng](mailto:nm.nwikpo@unizik.edu.ng)

**&**

**ONYINYE ADAOBI OFFODUEZE**

**Department of Educational Foundations,  
Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka**  
[Giftrobinson0@gmail.com](mailto:Giftrobinson0@gmail.com)

**ABSTRACT**

*This study was carried out to ascertain the prevalence, causes and consequences of premarital cohabitation on academic performance of undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The study employed descriptive survey research design. Three research questions guided the study. The population of the study comprised 26,545 full-time Regular undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka in the 2020/2021 academic session. Multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select 180 undergraduates from the population who served as the sample of the study. The instrument for data collection was a researcher-developed 16-item questionnaire titled "Premarital Cohabitation on Academic Performance (PCAP)" which was duly validated by two experts in the Faculty of Education of the university under study. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach alpha statistic which yielded mean alpha coefficient of 0.82. The research questions were answered using the mean. The findings of the study revealed a high prevalence of premarital cohabitation among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Further, the study revealed that cushioning the effect of high on-campus accommodation fees as well as uncontrolled exercise of freedom from parental monitoring and control is the main causes why undergraduates cohabit. Finally, the study revealed that premarital cohabitation could become a source of distraction during study moments to those students who are committed to it and also expose them to contraction of sexually transmitted disease which, tampering with their health, could affect their academic engagement and eventual poor academic performance. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended among others, that the government in conjunction with the university authority should provide more on-campus hostel accommodation at affordable cost for the students, especially for the female students. Organizing counseling and orientation programmes from time to time could go a long way in helping students who are misdirected to find their bearing. Suggestions for further studies were equally made.*

**Keywords: Premarital Cohabitation, Academic Performance, Undergraduates, Parental Monitoring, UNIZIK.**

### **Introduction**

Education is the foundation that enables an individual to make a worthwhile living and function as a relevant member of the society he lives in. In Nigeria, the national educational goals include among others; inculcating the right types of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and Nigerian society. This explains why Nwikpo, Anierobi, Okeke and Etodike, (2021) averred that for one to be said to be educated, he/she should be found worthy in character and learning, able to uphold the norms and values of the society and impact, meaningfully and positively, to the lives of others and by so doing, contribute in making the environment a better and more pleasant place of existence for all. Education is a powerful driver of development and one of the strongest instruments for reducing poverty and improving health, gender equality, peace, and stability. This agrees with UNICEF (2019) which asserts that education reduces poverty, drives sustainable economic growth, prevents inequality and injustice, leads to better health, and helps to protect the planets.

Education, as a human right (World Bank, 2021) entitles every child, irrespective of gender, colour, religion or culture, the right to quality education (UNICEF, 2010). Education can be informal or formal. While informal education entails the experiences acquired away from the auspices of a school; formal is the type where the experiences are acquired within the formal school setting. In the education system of the school setting, educational attainment is determined through the acquisition of certificates. In the Nigerian setting, just as in many other countries of the world, education goes through the levels of pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary.

Tertiary education refers to all formal post-secondary education acquired in school settings called tertiary institutions otherwise called institutions of higher education. Tertiary education is instrumental in fostering growth, reducing poverty, and boosting shared prosperity (World Bank, 2021). Tertiary or Higher education covers a wider range of higher learning institutions such as colleges of education, Polytechnics, technical training institutes, and vocational schools including the university.

A university represents both a higher learning institution and a community of scholars or persons who are engaged in study and research. A university has stronger power to the attraction of students and teachers or academic staff than the other higher education forms (Alemu, 2018). It is the right of both male and female gender to access university education. As observed by Alemu, P 210, "A university is a higher learning institution that brings men and women to a high level of intellectual development in the arts and science, and the traditional professional disciplines, and promotes high-level research." In Nigeria, the university provides the last stage of formal education. It takes a minimum of 4 years, to complete the 6-3-3-4 educational system. A university is established, funded and managed by the first tiers of government (Federal and State) and by private individuals who have the wherewithal to run it. This explains why there are Public and private universities in Nigeria. Public universities are established, funded and managed either by the federal government or state while Private ones are established, funded and operated by individuals.

University education in Nigeria follows the three-tier degree structures which are the bachelor's, masters and doctoral-level studies. In addition, certificate and diploma programmes are offered at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Students at graduate levels are the ones enrolled on master's and doctoral university programmes and they are referred to as post-graduate students. Those at the undergraduate level are the ones who are bachelor-level students. At bachelor-level study, undergraduates pursue general bachelor's degrees which involve 4 years of full-time study while specialized and professional fields such as engineering and technology, law, medicine and dentistry, nursing and pharmacy etc span 5 to 6 years. Successful completion of master's and doctoral-level studies lead to an award of master's ( M.A, M.Ed, M.Sc, LL.M etc) and doctoral (PhD) degrees respectively while that of bachelor-level leads to an award of bachelor's degree like B.A, B.Ed, BA/Ed, B.L, B.Pharm and so on.

It is not news that many of the students who got enrolled in the university education programme eventually do not qualify for the award of a degree or if at all, one with honours. Only those who acquire the high level of intellectual development needed to achieve the required academic success get awarded. The students who fail to meet the utmost commitment to the rigorous academic tasks university students go through to guarantee their academic success, would have to repeat or out-rightly forfeit years and resources invested. The academically under-performed students are the students in this category. Under-performed students, therefore, are those who failed to attain the educational objective at the end of the learning process (Uchendu, 2021). Their performance usually reveals a significant departure from their expectation of them. Researchers have noted factors that cause under-performance which Nomaan, Hanif, & Rehna (2016) categorized under family, school, personal, and peer factors.

Research revealed that the most popular peer characteristics influencing students' achievement and adjustment are their tendencies to form affiliations and friendships, and the obvious need to strive for peer acceptance which could lead to taking risks to avoid peer rejection (Obimma, 2021; Nwikpo&Ebenebe, 2014 &Nwikpo, Okeke, Anierobi&Umunna, 2020). Students at the undergraduate level had left home and away from dependence on family and supervision by parents for the tertiary institutions into which they gained admission where the school managers are expected to continue from the point the family supervision stopped. Regrettably, the reverse is the case with Nigerian tertiary institutions especially the universities as they are faced with either a poor or total lack of learner support services and student personnel services (Ogundele& James, 2014; Ejeh, Okenjom, & Chiziwoko,2016). Agu, Omenyi, and Odimegwu (2010) also noted that in the Nigerian university environment, students cater for themselves without the needed support from the adult community because they are perceived as adults. Elaborating on their finding, Agu and her colleagues stressed that the university pays no attention to the student's needs because she (university) sees her students as a part of a self-sufficient adult community who can take full responsibility for their actions; an attitude which estranges the students. Arisikwu (2013), therefore, thinks that this lack of protection from both families and the tertiary institution is what leaves the students vulnerable to different forms of endangeredness.

It is reasonable to infer, without fear of contradiction, that when students deem themselves “freed” from the prying eyes of significant adults, and left alone in their world, they begin to explore and try out some opportunistic mal-adjustive behaviours like cultism, weapon-related violence, harmful relationships and sexual behaviours among others. Because the ages of these students are between 16 and 21 and in their stage of adolescence noted for trying out things, one of the harmful relationships which entangle them is romantic involvement with the opposite sex where emotional and sexual intimacy becomes a way of life. This situation is made worse by the fact that many of these students live off-campus where university authority has no power of control. This provides an opportunity for these “lovers” to take the romance to the level of sharing apartments for easy reach of each other as and when they need to satisfy their sexual urges. When this happens, the relationship status becomes that of cohabitation.

Cohabitation is the living together of two people who are romantically involved without having joined as one in marriage, either through native law and custom or legally. Cohabitation excludes sharing an apartment with people for any other reason aside from being romantically involved. Such people are referred to as roommates rather than cohabiters. This is why Adeniyi (2019, P.10) maintained that “the term cohabitation is not commonly used to describe people who are merely sharing a living space or who call themselves roommates.” He maintained that for people to qualify as cohabiting couples, they are typically emotionally and sexually intimate. Odimegwu, Ndagurwa, Singini and Baruwa, (2018), defined cohabitation as the co-residence of unmarried partners who live like husband and wife with or without children, Cohabitation pertains more to heterosexual couples although it may be used to refer to same-sex couples. Abullahi (2013) stated that cohabitation can be an alternative type of housing for at least one of the cohabiters. Ogunsola(2011) posited that cohabitation has shared accommodation, shared sex life, shared economic resources, shared matrimonial duties, and sometimes procreation as its common features

Given the above features, should a student who was sent into the university to be made worthy in learning and character be caught in the web of cohabitation? The answer is a “no.” Unfortunately, evidence of the prevalence of premarital cohabitation, colloquially referred to as ‘couples life,’ ‘campus marriage, marriage for convenience,’ ‘marrying for marriage,’ or ‘trial marriage’ (Arisukwu 2013; Duyilemi, Tunde-Awe, and Adekola-Lois 2018), are rife among Nigerian male and female undergraduates (Thomas, 2022). The malady seems to have come to stay among young adults Kasim&Falola (2017) observed that its popular acceptance has shifted contemporary opinion about it from a deviant lifestyle choice to one that is a normative experience for young men and women. Pollard and Harris (2013) affirm the acceptability of cohabitation as a norm for young people.

One place that is a hive of young people who are eager to exercise freedom away from home is tertiary institutions, especially the universities. Among others, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka in Anambra state, is an example of such an institution in Nigeria with a teeming population of youths where premarital cohabitation manifests among students (Unachukwu&Iloakasia, 2018). Lamenting that the culture of premarital sexual behaviours which, in time past, was taboo in Nigeria, has become the order of the day, Kalu, Ejiogu, Chukwukadibia and Nleonun (2021) stressed that living together and having a sexual

relationship without being married (cohabitation) is a trend that has virtually eroded the level of morality among youth, particularly students of Nigerian higher institutions. Further, Duyilemi, Tunde-Awe and Lois (2018) in their study revealed that between 25% and 50% of university students engage in the act of cohabitation. This observation projects a disturbing fact that cohabitation is a menace among Nigerian university students including NAU, Awka.

Considering that a university system is a place in which the students are expected to deepen critical thinking and research skills to lead constructive and satisfying life and equally successfully contribute to society (Nwosu et al, 2019; Nwikpo et al, 2022), any issue that cuts short this expectation poses a lot of concern to stakeholders of the education system. This explains why many researchers had made concerted efforts to find out what causes this bothersome situation. Among factors found to cause and sustain it are; shortage of on-campus accommodation, high on-campus accommodation fees and sexual gratification (Onoyase, 2020); academic dependency, financial dependency and erroneous belief that sex is love ( Adeniyi, 2019); sex on regular basis, desire for intimacy and lack of conducive hostel facilities ( Fareo and Moses, 2018); abandonment of valued African culture which forbids premarital sexual activities ( Arisikwu 2013 & Adeoye, Ola and Aliu, 2012) and freedom from parental supervision ( Ogunbamila, 2013). In the same vein, researchers have found many effects of male and female cohabitation in Nigerian universities. From a seemingly positive perspective, a few researchers such as Unachukwu & Iloakasia (2018) and Adeniyi (2019) saw premarital cohabitation as what could serve as a platform for students to learn fidelity and marital expectations and also be a prelude to marriage. This notion, however, seemed like one which died before it arrived, going by the findings from studies by Bumpass (1990) and Bumpass, Martin, and Sweet (1991) that Cohabitation doubles the rate of divorce. They found that people who lived together before marriage divorce at about twice the rate of couples who do not cohabit before marriage, and four times the rate if they marry someone other than their cohabiting partner. They concluded that many of the young adult cohabiters who participated in the study expressed uncertainty about their future together.

Though the saying that change is constant is well-noted and times and people change which might make it possible for one to guess that the observation of Unachukwu et al and Adeniyi about cohabitation having the tendency to lead to marriage might be right which many can take for a positive effect, yet the negative effects, especially on academic performance of students, outweigh its advantages. For example, Onoyase (2020) pointed out that premarital cohabitation could lead to a high incidence of involvement of undergraduates in cybercrimes and robbery to maintain upkeep of themselves and their partners, unwanted pregnancies and abortions and in most cases death which results from an abortion. Thomas (2022) averred that the trend affects its captives academically, mentally and physically. On academics, Thomas stated that while 5 per cent of cohabiters excel in their academics, 95 per cent fails. Other researches show that students who cohabit with the opposite sex sometimes drop out. Some fall into depression, some commit suicide, while some get pregnant and are distracted from paying attention to their studies hence causing them to underachieve/ perform academically (Kalu et al, 2021). Obikeze, Obi and Mmegbuanaeze (2018) observed that premarital cohabitation is commonly associated with various risk-taking behaviours such as weapon-bearing, drug use clubbing, physical fights and delinquency, all of which have a serious negative effect on students' academic engagement and performance.

Elaborating on the risk factor of low academic performance which may result from premarital cohabitation, many researchers had found a lack of quality time for studies due to the distraction of wife and husband duties. On the harm cohabitation does to the academic life of female undergraduates who cohabit, Adeniyi (2019 P.13) noted:

*Another important issue to note is the fact that the female students involved are the parasitic host upon which the males feed, having to perform some domestic chores more even as students, cooking in ample quantity, washing more clothes including that of their partners. These are time consuming activities which give little or no time for studies which is the primary reason for being in school after all."*

He further noted that delay in graduation as a result of carry-overs and sometimes outright withdrawal from school and also low academic grades from lack of enough time to read are some of the negative consequences premarital which cohabittees are often faced with. Adewoye (2019), equally noted the same consequences in his assertion that cohabittees struggle to graduate due to accumulated low academic outcomes throughout their studies as well as inadequate reading time. According to him, many students who indulge in cohabiting often drop out of school while some others have their years on the course extended. These assertions made from studies on some tertiary institutions that cohabitation could be contributory to poor academic achievement kindled the interest of this current researcher to carry out a similar study in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka to ascertain if the variable could be found to have same consequences on academic performance of her students.

### **Statement of the Problem**

All students in the universities including Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, irrespective of gender, are expected to invest in and be committed to academics which is the most outstanding pursuit that involves them. The need for them to identify and participate in academic tasks and be generally engaged in activities geared toward achieving their goal of enrollment cannot be overemphasized. However and quite, unfortunately, not many of them are found in that category. It is worrisome to note that rather than get along with their lecturers, make effort to explore ideas and knowledge both inside and outside school, spend enough time on their work, meet deadlines, and not skip classes, many of them are found to be engaging on the contrary. Little wonder many either come out with low grades or graduate behind record time while in extreme cases, many suffer outright withdrawal. The level of manifestation of this academic underperformance of Nigerian university undergraduates remains a greater concern to stakeholders of university education. What would have made these undergraduates fail in this regard? Many researchers have sought to answer this pertinent question, using some Nigerian universities as a case and maintaining that one of the keys to academic low performance is the issue of premarital cohabitation which does not only distract undergraduates academically but leaves them with consequences like unwanted pregnancies and sometimes brings untimely death and brokenness. Many researchers have equally tried to tackle the issue of low academic performance among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka from diverse variables yet the problem persists. The current researchers then consider it necessary to look at the problem of Nigerian university undergraduates through the perspective of premarital cohabitation, hence, the fundamental problem of this study was to investigate the prevalence, causes and consequences of

premarital cohabitation on academic performance of undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of the study was to investigate the prevalence, causes and consequences of premarital cohabitation on academic performance of undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Specifically, the study sought to determine the:

1. Prevalence of premarital cohabitation among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.
2. Motivation factors of premarital cohabitation among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
3. Consequences of premarital cohabitation on academic performance of undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the prevalent of premarital cohabitation among the undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?
2. What factors motivate Nnamdi Azikiwe University's undergraduates' premarital cohabitation behaviour?
3. What are the consequences of premarital cohabitation on academic performance of undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?

### **Hypothesis**

There is no significant difference in academic performance of undergraduate cohabitantes and those who do not cohabit.

### **Method**

The study employed the descriptive survey research design. According to McCombes (2022), this type of study seeks to accurately and systematically describe a population, situation or phenomenon. Usually, only a few people or items considered to be representative of the entire group is observed and measured without manipulating the variables. This design is considered appropriate for the present study which sought to study the issue of cohabitation among undergraduates. The population consists of undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Unizik or NAU for short. Regular undergraduates were used for easy access as part-time students (CEP and Sandwich) are mainly adults and working men and women who are married and might not be entangled in the web of cohabitation. A sample size of 180 respondents; single and regular, were used. The sample was selected using multistage sampling (stratified, random and purposive) using campus location as stratum. The participants were selected from Awka and Agulu campuses of the Nnamdi Azikiwe University. First, simple random sampling technique was used to select six faculties out of the total number of 14 faculties in Awka main campus. Then, one department from each of the six faculties was selected. From each of the departments 20 students were selected giving rise to a total of 120 students from Awka main campus while a total number of 60 were randomly selected from Agulu campus which brought the number to 180 that constituted the sample of the study. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure the selection of 120 participants

from Awka main campus and 60 from Agulu respectively. Data were collected with a researcher-developed instrument titled “Premarital Cohabitation on Academic Performance (PCAP)” which was divided into 2 sections; A and B. Section A addressed the demographic characteristics of the respondents while Section B consists of questions arranged in 3 clusters (A, B & C). Cluster A with 5 items answered questions bordering on involvement of NAU undergraduates in premarital cohabitation, Cluster B contained questions on the conditions under which premarital cohabitation was considered an option while Cluster C answered questions on the consequences which premarital cohabitation have on the academic performance of undergraduates. The instrument was structured on a 4-point likert type scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) with numerical values of 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The research instrument was validated by two experts in Educational Psychology and one from Measurement and Evaluation. A trial testing was conducted, using 40 adolescents from Nnewi campus of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka who were not part of the final sample. A reliability co-efficient of 0.82 was obtained. Researchers and their assistants administered the questionnaire using Direct Delivery Method which allowed them the opportunity to explain any word/item which was not easily understood by the respondents. Following the use of the Direct Delivery method, the questionnaires distributed were all retrieved. It took the researchers three weeks to administer and retrieve the data for the study. To protect the anonymity of the students, the researchers instructed them not to write their names on the questionnaire. Mean scores was used to answer the research questions. The cut-off point for accepting an item was put at 2.50. Thus, the decision rule that any item mean score from 2.50 and above was taken as agreement while items with mean scores below 2.50 was taken as disagreement.

**Results**

**Research Question One:** What is the prevalence of premarital cohabitation among undergraduate students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?

**Table 1:** Mean ratings of respondents on the prevalence of premarital cohabitation among undergraduate students (N=180)

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	No of respondents	Total		Remark
1.	I am aware that premarital cohabitation exists in the university	109 436	11 33	55 110	5 5	180	584	3.24	Agree
2.	I have friends who are into premarital cohabitation	75 300	28 84	71 142	6 6	180	532	2.95	Agree
3.	Premarital cohabitation is a common phenomenon in the university	80 320	13 39	65 130	22 22	180	511	2.88	Agree
4.	In my neighbourhood, there are people into premarital cohabitation	78 312	15 45	65 130	22 22	180	509	2.82	Agree
5.	People are not shy of premarital cohabitation	83 332	07 21	67 134	23 23	180	510	2.83	Agree
<b>Cluster Mean</b>								<b>2.94</b>	<b>Agree</b>

NOTE: A=Agree; D=Disagree



Data in Table 1 revealed that all items in the table recorded mean scores of 2.50 and above showing agreement. This indicates that the respondents agreed that there is a prevalence of premarital cohabitation in universities. This is owing to the respondents' agreement that they are aware that premarital cohabitation exists in the university, that they have friends who are into premarital cohabitation, that premarital cohabitation is a common phenomenon in the university, that in their neighbourhood, there are people into premarital cohabitation and that people are not shy of premarital cohabitation. The table further revealed the grand mean score to be 2.94 which is above the cut-off mean of 2.50. This indicates that there is a high prevalence of premarital cohabitation among undergraduate students.

**Research Question Two:** What are the causes of premarital cohabitation among undergraduate students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?

**Table 2:** Mean ratings of respondents on causes of premarital cohabitation among undergraduate students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (N=180)

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	No of respondents	Total	Mean	Remark
1.	To cushion the effect of high on-campus accommodation fees	84	36	55	5	180	559	3.10	Agree
2.	To cushion the effect of high tuition fees	50	53	71	6	180	507	2.81	Agree
3.	Shortage of on-campus accommodation	55	38	65	22	180	486	2.70	Agree
4.	For sexual gratification	53	40	65	22	180	484	2.68	Agree
5.	To test the marriage compatibility of those that have plans to marry	68	22	67	23	180	495	2.75	Agree
6.	To enjoy freedom from parental control and supervision	75	45	55	5	180	550	3.05	Agree

NOTE: A=Agree; D=Disagree

Data in Table 2 revealed that all Items in the table were viewed as causes of premarital cohabitation among undergraduates. This is given that all the items in the table have a mean score of 2.50 and above showing agreement. To this end, the respondents agreed that cushioning the effect of high on-campus accommodation fees, cushioning the effect of high tuition fees, shortage of on-campus accommodation, enjoying sexual gratification, testing of marriage compatibility of those that have plans to marry and enjoying freedom from parental control and supervision are the causes of premarital cohabitation among undergraduate students. The Table further revealed that items 1 and 5 have the top-most mean scores of 3.10

and 3.05. This indicates that a record number of respondents are of the view that cushioning the effect of high on-campus accommodation fees and enjoying freedom from parental control and supervision are the topmost causes of premarital cohabitation among undergraduates.

**Research Question Three:** What are the consequences of premarital cohabitation on the academic performance of undergraduate students at NnamdiAzikiwe University, Awka?

**Table 3:** Mean ratings of respondents on the consequences of premarital cohabitation on the academic performance of undergraduate students (N=180)

S/ N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	No of responde nts	Tot al		Remar k
1.	Premarital Cohabitation may result in unwanted pregnancy which may affect the students' concentration academically	62 248	31 93	65 13 0	22 22	180	493	2.73	Agree
2.	Premarital Cohabitation may result in the contraction of sexually transmitted diseases which could make them sick and consequently affect students' concentration academically.	65 260	55 165	55 11 0	5 5	180	540	3.00	Agree
3.	Premarital Cohabitates may normally stay up all night for frivolities which could take a toll on their academic performance	64 256	29 87	65 13 0	22 22	180	495	2.75	Agree
4.	The premarital cohabiters may become a source of distraction to each other during their study moments.	93 372	27 81	55 11 0	5 5	180	568	3.15	Agree
5.	Premarital cohabiters may be caught up in the web of sexual gratification which could affect their concentration academically	59 236	44 132	71 14 2	6 6	180	516	2.86	Agree

NOTE: A=Agree; D=Disagree

Data in Table 3 revealed that all items in the table were viewed as consequences of premarital cohabitation on the academic performance of undergraduates. This is given that all the items in the table have a mean score of 2.50 and above showing agreement. As such, the respondents agreed that unwanted pregnancy which may affect the students' health and concentration academically, contraction of sexually transmitted disease which could affect students'

concentration academically, staying up all night for frivolities, becoming a source of distraction to each other during their study moments, being caught up in the web of sexual gratification which affects their academic concentration are the consequences of premarital cohabitation on the academic performance of undergraduates. The Table further revealed that items 4 and 2 have the top-most mean scores of 3.15 and 3.00. This indicates that a record number of respondents are of the view that becoming a source of distraction to each other during their study moments and the contraction of sexually transmitted diseases which could affect students' concentration academically are the major consequences of premarital cohabitation on academic performance of undergraduate students.

## **Discussions**

The findings of the study revealed a prevalence of premarital cohabitation among Nigerian university undergraduates. The respondents are not only aware that premarital cohabitation is a common phenomenon in university campuses, but openly admitted they, their friends or neighbours indulge in it. This finding agrees with that of Duyilemi, Tunde-Awe and Adekola-Lois (2018) who in their study of cohabitation among undergraduates of Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State Nigeria, found that between 25% and 50% of university students engage in the act of cohabitation. This moral disorder is also not gender-dependent as Thomas (2022) observed that it takes both males and females to thrive. Further, the boldness with which many of the respondents of this study admitted involvement in premarital cohabitation could be attributed to the fact that such lifestyle which previously was considered deviant had come to be accepted as a norm among the youngsters. This opinion of the researchers aligns with Kasim and Falola (2017) who observed that the popular acceptance of cohabitation has shifted contemporary opinion about it from a deviant lifestyle choice to one that is a normative experience for young men and women. Pollard and Harris (2013) equally affirm the acceptability of cohabitation as a norm for young people.

Another major finding of the study was that factors which among others, include: shortage of on-campus accommodation, cushioning the effect of high tuition fees and high on-campus accommodation fees, enjoyment of sexual gratification, testing of marriage compatibility of those that have plans to marry and celebration of freedom from parental control and supervision are the factors which motivate and sustain premarital cohabitation among undergraduates. The finding is in consonance with Ogunbamila (2013); Jiya and Alhassan (2019); Onoyase (2020) etc. Like this study, they found the need to cushion the effect of high on-campus accommodation fees and uncontrolled enjoyment of freedom from parental control and supervision as well as uncontrolled desire for sexual gratification as the most prevailing causes of premarital cohabitation among undergraduates.

Further, the study revealed that premarital cohabitation has a lot of ugly consequences on the general well-being of undergraduates and specifically on their academic performance. Among the consequences found were; contraction of sexually transmitted disease which affects students' health and lower academic engagement, occurrence of unwanted pregnancy which may affect the students' concentration academically, staying up all night for frivolities leading to lateness to lectures the next morning or in extreme case truancy, constituting a source of distraction to each other during their study moments, being caught up in the web of sexual gratification which affects their academic concentration. The finding corroborates Thomas

(2022) who averred that the trend affects its captives academically, mentally and physically. On academics, Thomas stated that while 5 percent of cohabiters excel in their academics, 95 percent fails. The current research finding equally supports those of Kalu et al (2021) and Obikeze, Obi and Mmegbuanaeze (2018) who both considered premarital cohabitation as having a serious negative effect on students' academic engagement and performance because it distracts them from paying attention to their studies hence causing them to underachieve/perform academically. The cohabiters could become a source of distraction to each other during their study moments and the contraction of sexually transmitted diseases which could affect students' concentration academically are the major consequences of premarital cohabitation on the academic performance of undergraduates. Conversely, a few researchers such as Unachukwu & Iloakasia (2018) and Adeniyi (2019) though believed that premarital cohabitation could be hurtful to students' academic performance, they however, seemed to have found a positive effect of premarital cohabitation as they posited that premarital cohabitation might serve as a platform for students to learn fidelity and marital expectations and also be a prelude to marriage. Prior studies by Bumpass (1990) and Bumpass, Martin, and Sweet (1991) did not support this as they found that Cohabitation doubles the rate of divorce. They found that people who lived together before marriage divorce at about twice the rate of couples who do not cohabit before marriage, and four times the rate if they marry someone other than their cohabiting partner. They concluded that many of the young adult cohabiters who participated in the study expressed uncertainty about their future together.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were made:

1. Nigerian university undergraduates practise cohabitation and no longer consider it a moral disorder.
2. Factors that motivate and sustain cohabitation in our Nigerian public universities are both government-related e.g high tuition fees, unavailability of on-campus hostel accommodation and as well as student-related e.g desire for sexual gratification and uncontrolled enjoyment of freedom from parental control and supervision.

Although cohabitation may serve as a platform to learn to stay faithful to a partner and be an introduction to marriage, its negative consequences on moral and academic developments outweigh its perceived good effect.

## **Recommendations**

1. Adequate counselling and a good orientation programme will help many of these innocent students find their bearing not to misbehave and be misdirected. Such a step will go a long way to curtail premarital cohabitation.
2. Parents and guardians must not only send their children and wards to school, but they must also pay regular unscheduled visits to them to know how and what they are doing in school. This will go a long way to curtail premarital cohabitation.
3. The University authority should provide more on-campus hostel accommodation for the students, especially female students. The hostel accommodation provided by the university should be conducive and affordable for the entire students.
4. The school authority should monitor students living off campus to curb their excessive behaviour, especially regarding cohabitation. The University authority could

collaborate with the community leaders to curb the incidence of cohabitation among university students.

5. Students should be able to visit school counsellors when faced with the challenges of social vices such as cohabitation. Good counsel will help the students to imagine the bigger picture of premarital cohabitation and retrace his steps.

### **Suggestions for Further Studies**

The following are suggestions for further studies:

1. The present research could be replicated in another area, using a larger population and a wider scope.
2. Future research can be done on the solutions to premarital cohabitation among undergraduate students in Anambra State.

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