



SOCIOCULTURAL FACTORS INFLUENCING COHABITATION OF MALE AND FEMALE STUDENTS AT NNAMDI AZIKIWE UNIVERSITY, AWKA, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Cohabitation among university students has become an emerging social reality in many Nigerian tertiary institutions despite strong cultural, religious, and moral disapproval associated with the practice. Among students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, cohabitation has continued to increase due to several socio-cultural and economic factors such as peer pressure, financial hardship, inadequate hostel accommodation, emotional attachment, and exposure to changing social values. This paper examined the socio-cultural factors influencing cohabitation among male and female students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria. The paper also examined the existence and various forms of cohabitation practiced among students, the consequences associated with the practice, as well as possible interventions for addressing the challenges arising from it. The study adopted Social Learning Theory as its theoretical framework and used questionnaire and in-depth interviews for data collection. Findings revealed that cohabitation is common among students and is largely influenced by peer influence, accommodation challenges, and economic pressures. The study further revealed that cohabitation exposes students to emotional stress, academic distractions, and reproductive health risks. It was recommended that the university management, parents, religious bodies, and other relevant stakeholders should collaborate in providing adequate hostel accommodation, effective counseling services, mentorship programmes, and moral guidance to students in order to reduce the prevalence and challenges associated with cohabitation among undergraduates.

Keywords: Cohabitation, Hostel accommodation, Peer influence, Socio-cultural factors, Undergraduate students

INTRODUCTION

Cohabitation, defined as unmarried individuals living together in an intimate relationship, has become increasingly prevalent among university students worldwide, including in Nigeria. It is also referred to as a non-marital living arrangement in which a male and female partner reside together in an intimate relationship. While traditional or cultural norms in parts of

Nigeria, which represent shared expectations and rules guiding behaviour within the society strongly, discourage premarital co-residence, evidence indicates that cohabitation is increasingly practiced among undergraduates in various Nigerian institutions (Ugwu & Onele, 2024).

Cohabitation among university students presents a complex social issue within the Nigerian cultural context. At Nnamdi Azikiwe University (UNIZIK) in Awka, Anambra State, this phenomenon is influenced by a complex interplay of sociocultural factors rooted in Nigeria's diverse ethnic, religious, and economic landscape. Traditionally, Nigerian society, particularly Igbo cultural norms predominant in the Southeast region where UNIZIK is located, emphasizes marriage as the legitimate framework for intimate partnerships, often viewing cohabitation as a deviation from moral and familial values (Uzoh & Odika, 2023). However, rapid urbanization, exposure to Western influences through media and education, economic pressures such as high living costs and inadequate hostel accommodation, and shifting gender roles have contributed to its rise (Oladejo & Oseni, 2024).

In the context of Nigerian higher education, cohabitation among male and female students often emerges as a practical response to financial hardship/constraints, limited on-campus housing, peer pressure, exposure to social media, and the desire for emotional or academic support amid stress (Toryuha et al., 2023). Recent studies confirm that premarital heterosexual cohabitation exists and is rising among Nigerian university students, including at UNIZIK, where it manifests in various forms such as full-time shared living or part-time arrangements (Uzoh & Odika, 2023; 2024). On their part, Saheed and Seedat-Khan (2024) reported that peer influence and social media engagement have been identified as important socio-cultural determinants of cohabitation attitudes among Nigerian undergraduates. At UNIZIK, with its large student population exceeding 40,000, these factors are amplified by the university's urban setting in Awka, which fosters anonymity and independence from parental oversight

Despite researches in broader Nigerian contexts, there is limited empirical investigation specifically examining how these socio-cultural factors operate among male and female students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University. Without institution-specific evidence, university administrators and policymakers may lack the contextual information necessary to design effective student welfare strategies and guidance interventions. This study addresses these gaps by systematically examining the existence, forms, factors, consequences, and solutions

to cohabitation among male and female students at UNIZIK. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to investigate the existence, forms, sociocultural factors influencing cohabitation among male and female students, as well as its consequences and potential solutions at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

The general objective of this study is to examine the practice of cohabitation among male and female students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. To determine the extent to which cohabitation exists among students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University.
2. To identify the various forms of cohabitation practiced by students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University.
3. To examine the sociocultural factors influencing cohabitation among students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University.
4. To assess the consequences of cohabitation on students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University.
5. To propose solutions or interventions for addressing the challenges associated with student cohabitation at Nnamdi Azikiwe University.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Cohabitation

Cohabitation has been defined in various ways in sociological literature. Manning and Cohen (2015) describe it as a residential union in which two unmarried partners share a household in a marriage-like relationship. Similarly, Kuperberg (2014) also views cohabitation as living together in a romantic relationship without legal marriage. Cohabitation is defined sociologically as the practice where unmarried male and female university students share a residence, engage in intimate (often sexual) and domestic relations, and frequently adopt marital-like roles without legal marriage or religious sanction. In Nigerian tertiary institutions, it is commonly referred to as "campus marriage," "campus coupling," or premarital cohabitation, serving as a pragmatic response to challenges such as accommodation shortages, financial constraints, and emotional needs, while conflicting with

traditional cultural and religious norms that reserve intimacy for marriage (Uzoh & Odika, 2023; Nwikpo&Offodueze, 2023; Oladejo & Oseni, 2024).

Concept of Sociocultural Factors

Sociocultural factors encompass the social, cultural, religious, familial, economic, peer-related, and media-driven elements that influence attitudes, values, and behaviors in society. In the Nigerian university context, particularly at institutions like Nnamdi Azikiwe University (UNIZIK), these include peer pressure, economic hardships (e.g., high hostel fees prompting cost-sharing), reduced parental supervision in urban settings, disregard for traditional Igbo/Southeastern norms emphasizing premarital chastity, selective religious adherence, exposure to Western/liberal media, and institutional gaps like inadequate on-campus housing (Toryuha et al., 2023; Uzoh & Odika, 2023; Nwikpo & Offodueze, 2023).

Existence/Practice of Cohabitation among University Students

In Nigerian tertiary settings, several studies indicate the prevalence of cohabitation among undergraduates, although the degree of prevalence and contextual factors vary by institution. For instance, Okoye and Adebayo (2021) conducted a study at University of Nigeria Nsukka and reported that a significant number of students, especially those living off-campus, engaged in cohabitation as a result of accommodation shortages and financial constraints (Okoye & Adebayo, 2021). The authors found that while cohabitation was socially discouraged, the economic realities of paying high rents near campus contributed to its occurrence.

Similarly, Eze and Nwankwo (2019) investigated cohabitation patterns among students of University of Lagos and found that a significant number of respondents had lived with an intimate partner outside of marriage during their study period. Their findings suggest that the practice is not isolated, and it cuts across different faculties and levels of study (Eze & Nwankwo, 2019).

Okoye and Adebayo (2021) conducted a study on cohabitation among undergraduates at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The researchers employed a survey research design and administered questionnaires to 400 students selected through simple random sampling. The study found that a significant number of students (42%) were engaged in off-campus cohabitation, largely due to inadequate hostel accommodation and financial constraints. The implication of this finding is that cohabitation is a visible and growing phenomenon among

Nigerian university students. For the present study, this finding will help establish whether cohabitation is similarly prevalent among students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University.

Forms of Cohabitation among University Students

Research has identified several forms of cohabitation among students, often linked to different motivations and contextual factors within campus life. In their study at the University of Ibadan, Ajayi and Oladimeji (2020) found three distinct patterns of cohabitation: (i) romantic cohabitation, where partners share residence for emotional attachment, (ii) economic cohabitation, where partners combine living spaces to reduce costs, and (iii) convenience cohabitation, which is short-term or specific to holiday periods (Ajayi & Oladimeji, 2020). Their analysis indicated that economic cohabitation was the most prevalent form among students because of high accommodation costs.

Likewise, Adeyemi (2018), in a study of undergraduates at University of Ibadan, reported that some students engaged in trial-marriage cohabitation co-residence that resembles marriage but is intended to test compatibility before future commitment (Adeyemi, 2018). Although trial-marriage cohabitation or co-residence is less common than economic cohabitation, this form was observed mainly among final year students who are close to graduation.

Ajayi and Oladimeji (2020) investigated the forms of cohabitation among undergraduates at the University of Ibadan. Using a descriptive survey design, 300 respondents were sampled and administered structured questionnaires. The study identified three main forms of cohabitation: (i) romantic cohabitation for emotional attachment, (ii) economic cohabitation to reduce accommodation costs, and (iii) trial-marriage arrangements to test compatibility before marriage. The study highlights that cohabitation is not homogeneous and varies according to motivation and circumstances. For the current study, these findings provide a framework for identifying the specific forms of cohabitation practiced among students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University.

Socio-Cultural Factors Influencing Cohabitation among University Students

Socio-cultural determinants have been widely explored in the literature. In Nigeria, Okafor and Omotayo (2021) examined the influence of cultural beliefs on cohabitation at University of Calabar. They found that students with strong traditional and religious beliefs were less likely to cohabit, whereas those from more liberal family backgrounds showed higher

acceptance levels (Okafor & Omotayo, 2021). The study further found that economic hardship and family expectations intersected with cultural factors to influence cohabitation decisions.

Nkansah and Boateng (2022) conducted a study on socio-cultural determinants of cohabitation among students at the University of Ghana. The study used a cross-sectional survey design with 250 respondents, and data were collected via structured questionnaires. The study found that peer influence, social media exposure, and liberal attitudes toward relationships significantly increased students' likelihood of cohabiting. Students who associated with peers that cohabited were more likely to normalize the behaviour, while frequent social media users were more receptive to modern relationship model. Additionally, religious commitment and family expectations moderated the decision to cohabit. These findings are relevant to the present study as they provide insight into the socio-cultural factors that may influence cohabitation among students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University.

These findings demonstrate that socio-cultural influences on cohabitation are multifaceted, involving peer norms, religious values, media influence, and economic conditions.

Consequences of Cohabitation among University Students

Numerous studies have examined the consequences of cohabitation among students. Further, Mensah and Ofori (2020) conducted a study in Ghana and found that cohabitation was associated with psychological stress, unstable relationships, and increased risk behaviours such as unprotected sex. The authors argued that these consequences were more pronounced among students who cohabited out of economic necessity rather than emotional readiness (Mensah & Ofori, 2020).

Adeleke and Yusuf (2019) studied the effects or consequences of cohabitation on undergraduate students' academic performance at the University of Ilorin. Using a survey research design with 350 respondents, the study revealed that students who cohabited often experienced decreased academic concentration, missed classes, experience relationship-related stress, and perform poorly in examinations compared to their non-cohabiting counterparts. The study also noted psychological and social implications such as emotional instability and interpersonal conflict.

These findings provide a basis for understanding the potential consequences of cohabitation among students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University. The studies also highlight the multifaceted

impacts of cohabitation on academic, psychological, and social wellbeing, while propelling the need to explore whether these effects are similar among students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University.

Solutions or Interventions to Address Cohabitation Challenges among University Students

Scholars have suggested several interventions to mitigate the challenges associated with cohabitation among university students. For instance, Okoye and Adebayo (2021), in their study at University of Nigeria Nsukka, recommended the provision of adequate on-campus hostel accommodation to reduce the need for off-campus co-residential arrangements. They argued that when students have access to safe and affordable housing within university premises, the incidence of cohabitation for economic reasons declines significantly.

Similarly, Ajayi and Oladimeji (2020) emphasized the role of regular student counselling sessions, orientation programs on relationship management, and mentorship initiatives in reducing risky cohabitation and shaping students' attitudes toward cohabitation. Their study at University of Ibadan found that students who participated in regular moral and values education sessions were more likely to make informed decisions regarding intimate relationships, including delaying cohabitation until after graduation or marriage.

Other studies have highlighted the importance of parental and peer engagement. Nkansah and Boateng (2022) found that when families maintain regular communication and reinforce cultural or religious expectations, students are less likely to engage in cohabitation. Additionally, structured mentorship programs where senior students or role models promote healthy relationship practices have been identified as an effective strategy in minimizing risky co-residential arrangements (Mensah & Ofori, 2020).

Despite these recommendations, most studies note that interventions are often partial or reactive rather than comprehensive. Structural solutions, such as housing and financial support, must complement behavioural strategies like counselling and mentorship. This highlights the need for integrated approaches that address both socio-economic and cultural-behavioural factors to effectively reduce cohabitation challenges among students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University.

These strategies are relevant to the present study as they could inform recommendations for mitigating the challenges of cohabitation among students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

For the purpose of this study, Social Learning Theory (SLT), first formulated by Albert Bandura (1977), is adopted as the theoretical framework. The theory emphasizes that behavior is learned through observation, imitation, and modeling, rather than being solely a product of innate traits or direct reinforcement. According to Bandura, individuals acquire new behaviors by observing the actions of others and the consequences of those actions. The learning process involves four key components: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. That is, an individual must first notice a behavior, remember it, be able to reproduce it, and be motivated to do so, often through expected rewards or social acceptance.

In the context of university students, SLT suggests that cohabitation can be learned behavior. Students may observe peers or role models engaging in cohabitation, perceive positive outcomes (such as emotional support, companionship, or economic convenience), and adopt similar behaviors themselves. For example, when students see others cohabiting successfully without immediate negative consequences, they may be motivated to imitate these practices. Similarly, social media, peer networks, and campus culture serve as mediums through which cohabitation behaviors are transmitted and reinforced.

SLT further explains that the social environment plays a critical role in shaping behavior. Reinforcement can be direct, such as receiving approval from peers or financial benefits from shared living, or vicarious, where the observer sees someone else benefiting from cohabitation. Conversely, negative outcomes or disapproval may serve as deterrents. This framework helps explain why cohabitation may be more prevalent in certain student communities or faculties, depending on the strength and type of social influences present.

SLT provides adequate lens for understanding how socio-cultural factors such as peer influence, media exposure, and normative beliefs contribute to the adoption and perpetuation of cohabitation among male and female students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University. By applying SLT, this study interprets cohabitation not merely as a personal choice but as a socially learned practice, influenced by observable behaviors and reinforced through social and environmental interactions.

Despite its strengths, SLT has been criticized for overemphasizing observational learning while underplaying structural factors such as economic constraints, institutional policies, or housing availability. Critics argue that not all behavior is learned solely from others;

individual circumstances and personal values also shape decisions. Nevertheless, the theory remains highly applicable for understanding behavioral patterns that are socially transmitted, making it suitable for analyzing cohabitation among students.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The area of the study is Nnamdi Azikiwe University (UNIZIK), Awka, Anambra State. It is a federal university established in 1991. Located in Awka's urban setting, the university has approximately 25,000 undergraduate students across various faculties. The target population comprised all undergraduate students of UNIZIK, estimated at 25,000 (uniRank, 2024). The sample size was 20.

Simple random sampling was used to select five faculties: Social Sciences, Arts, Law, Education, and Management Sciences. Thereafter, convenience sampling technique was also used to select four students from each faculty, making a total of 20 on whom structured questionnaire with items measured on a four-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) were administered. According to Ogunbameru (2005) and Asika (2006), purposive sampling and a sample size of up to 20 are acceptable in exploratory studies where the researcher's goal is not necessarily generalization but preliminary understanding.

However, one student per faculty was also purposively selected for in-depth interview. This comprised of three females and two males, all of whom have experienced off-campus and on-campus residence and are in 200- 400 levels. An IDI guide was used for qualitative data collection. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts and simple percentages, while qualitative data from IDIs were analyzed using manual content analysis.

RESULTS/FINDINGS

A uniform questionnaire was administered to 20 undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Findings are presented below according to the five research objectives/themes that guided the study.

Study Objective 1: Determine the extent to which cohabitation exists among students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University.

TABLE 1: Distribution of Respondents on Existence of Cohabitation

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	8	40.0%
Agree	9	45.0%
Disagree	2	10.0%
Strongly Disagree	1	5.0%
Total	20	100

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The above table indicate that 8 respondents (40.0%) Strongly Agreed and 9 respondents (45.0%) agreed that cohabitation exists among students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University. Together, 17 respondents (85.0%) affirmed the existence of cohabitation, while 2 respondents (10.0%) Disagreed and 1 respondent (5.0%) strongly disagreed. This indicates that cohabitation is a recognized phenomenon among students at UNIZIK. An IDI respondent stated thus;

Cohabitation is very real here in UNIZIK. Almost everyone knows someone who is living with their boyfriend or girlfriend off-campus. In my area behind Ifite, you see many students of opposite gender and not related sharing rooms and living like husband and wife. Some people even call it 'campus marriage.' It has become so common that nobody even raises an eyebrow anymore. The off-campus life gives you freedom that you cannot get inside the school hostel, so many people take advantage of that to live with their partners. (Male, 400-level, Off-campus, 25 years)

Study Objective 2: Forms of cohabitation practiced by students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University

TABLE 2: Distribution of Respondents on Forms of Cohabitation

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	9	45.0
Agree	7	35.0
Disagree	3	15.0
Strongly Disagree	1	5.0
Total	20	100

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 2 indicates that 9 respondents (45.0%) Strongly Agreed and 7 respondents (35.0%) agreed that students cohabit mainly for romantic or emotional reasons, representing 80.0% in agreement. Conversely, 3 respondents (15.0%) disagreed and 1 respondent (5.0%) strongly disagreed. This suggests that romantic motivations are a significant driver of cohabitation among students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University. An IDI respondent elaborated on the various forms of cohabitation:

The truth is that most people cohabit here because of money. Renting a room in Awka is expensive. A single room in places like Ifite or Aroma costs between 350,000 to 700,000 naira per year. When you share with your partner, you split the cost. It's simple economics. Some people start living together for financial reasons, and then emotions develop along the way. Others genuinely love each other and want to be together. But for many students, the pocket dictates the arrangement more than the heart. I also know people who are just testing the relationship to see if they can get married after school. So it's different for different people. (Female, 400-level, Off-campus, 24 years)

Study Objective 3: Sociocultural factors influencing cohabitation among students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University

TABLE 3: Distribution of Respondents on Sociocultural Factors Influencing Cohabitation

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	12	60.0
Agree	6	30.0
Disagree	1	5.0
Strongly Disagree	1	5.0
Total	20	100

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 3 shows that 12 respondents (60.0%) Strongly Agreed and 6 respondents (30.0%) agreed that peer influence encourages cohabitation, totaling 90.0% in agreement. Only 1 respondent (5.0%) disagreed and 1 respondent (5.0%) strongly disagreed. This indicates that peer influence is a dominant factor shaping cohabitation decisions among students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University. An IDI respondent provided insight into the interplay of sociocultural factors:

When I first came to UNIZIK, I was very strong in my faith and believed cohabitation was wrong. But after two years in the hostel, I started seeing my friends living comfortably with their partners off-campus. They shared rent, cooked together, and always had companionship. Meanwhile, I was struggling alone. My friend kept telling me, 'Why are you suffering alone? Find someone and settle down.' Eventually, I gave in. The pressure from friends, the financial struggles, and the fact that there's no accommodation on campus for

higher levels pushed me into it. My pastor would say it's a sin, but when you're here facing reality, church teachings don't pay your rent. (Female, 200-level, On-campus, 20 years)

Study Objective 4: Consequences of cohabitation on students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University

TABLE 4: Distribution of Respondents on Consequences of Cohabitation

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	11	55.0
Agree	6	30.0
Disagree	2	10.0
Strongly Disagree	1	5.0
Total	20	100

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 4 reveals that 11 respondents (55.0%) Strongly Agreed and 6 respondents (30.0%) agreed that cohabitation may cause emotional stress, representing 85.0% in agreement. Meanwhile, 2 respondents (10.0%) Disagreed and 1 respondent (5.0%) strongly disagreed. This suggests that emotional stress is a widely recognized consequence of cohabitation among students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University. An IDI respondent captured the dual consequences of cohabitation:

Living with my boyfriend has its good and bad sides. The good side is that he carters to my expenses. He pays the rent, buys the food, and I don't struggle as much as I used to when I was alone. But the bad side is that when we fight, it affects everything. I can't concentrate in class, I can't read, and sometimes I even miss lectures because of the drama. Also, the fear of pregnancy is always there. Even when you use protection, you still worry. Last semester, I almost withdrew because I thought I was pregnant. It was a scare that messed up my exams. So, it's a mix. You gain financially but you pay emotionally. Female, 300-level, Off-campus, 22 years)

Study Objective 5: Solutions or interventions that can be implemented to address the challenges associated with student cohabitation at Nnamdi Azikiwe University

TABLE 5: Distribution of Respondents on Solutions/Interventions

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	12	60.0
Agree	6	30.0
Disagree	1	5.0
Strongly Disagree	1	5.0
Total	20	100

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 5 shows that 12 respondents (60.0%) Strongly Agreed and 6 respondents (30.0%) agreed that increasing hostel accommodations and reducing cost of renting will reduce cohabitation, totaling 90.0% in support. Only 1 respondent (5.0%) Disagreed and 1 respondent (5.0%) strongly disagreed. This indicates strong student support for structural interventions over other approaches at Nnamdi Azikiwe University. An IDI respondent offered a practical perspective on solutions:

If the school really wants to reduce cohabitation, they should build more hostels. Many of us live off-campus not because we want to, but because there's no space in school hostels after 200 level. If there was affordable accommodation on campus, most people would not go through the stress of renting outside. Counseling and orientation are good, but they don't solve the real problem. You can tell a student not to cohabit, but if they have nowhere to stay, what do you expect? The school should address the root cause first. (Male, 300-level, Off-campus, 23 years)

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study revealed that 85.0% of respondents affirmed the existence of cohabitation at UNIZIK, supporting earlier findings by Okoye and Adebayo (2021) at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and Uzoh and Odika (2023) at UNIZIK specifically.

Regarding forms of cohabitation, 80.0% recognized romantic motivations, aligning with Ajayi and Oladimeji (2020) at the University of Ibadan who identified similar patterns among undergraduates.

On sociocultural factors, peer influence (90.0%) emerged as a primary driver, while religious beliefs showed weaker influence. This corroborates Nkansah and Boateng (2022) at the University of Ghana, who found that social factors often override moral considerations in shaping cohabitation attitudes.

The consequences of cohabitation revealed emotional stress (85.0%) as a major drawback, supporting Adeleke and Yusuf (2019) at the University of Ilorin and Mensah and Ofori (2020) in Ghana.

Regarding solutions, respondents strongly favoured increasing hostel accommodation (90.0%), consistent with Ajayi and Oladimeji's (2020) recommendations. On the overall, the findings validate Bandura's Social Learning Theory, demonstrating that cohabitation behavior

is learned through observation of peers and perceived benefits within the campus social environment.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE

The study is significant both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, has enriched existing body of knowledge on cohabitation and socio-cultural transformation among university students in Nigeria. It will also serve as reference material for students and researchers, particularly those interested in sociology, criminology, social work, psychology, and gender studies. Furthermore, the findings validate Bandura's Social Learning Theory, demonstrating that cohabitation behavior is learned through observation of peers and perceived benefits within the campus social environment. It also provides baseline data that may support the development or refinement of theoretical frameworks explaining cohabitation practices within the Nigerian socio-cultural context.

Practically, the study offers valuable insights to university authorities, education policymakers, and social development stakeholders. It enjoins institutional administrators to re-evaluate existing student accommodation policies, welfare structures, strengthen moral guidance programs and promote a balanced academic environment within Nnamdi Azikiwe University and similar institutions across Nigeria, in the light of emerging social realities among undergraduates.

On the overall, recommendations of this study will assist in strengthening institutional responses to issues surrounding student cohabitation. Thus the study is of immense benefit to the university community, parents, policymakers, and the general public in understanding contemporary relationship dynamics among students.

CONCLUSION

This study examined socio-cultural factors influencing cohabitation among students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The findings confirm that cohabitation exists and is recognized among undergraduates, driven primarily by peer influence, romantic motivations, and accommodation shortages. Emotional stress is a major consequence, while students favour structural solutions like hostel expansion over purely moral approaches. The study validates Social Learning Theory, showing cohabitation as learned behaviour within campus social environments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Therefore, the following recommendations are put forth to help address the social cultural factors influencing cohabitation among students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

- Expand on-campus hostel facilities through public-private partnerships and alumni interventions to reduce the need for off-campus living where cohabitation thrives.
- Institutionalize regular counseling and orientation programs addressing relationship management, financial planning, reproductive health, and academic implications of cohabitation.
- Strengthen parental involvement through parent-school partnership platforms, orientation programs, and regular communication channels.
- Enforce existing hostel regulations strictly while reviewing policies that push higher-level students' off-campus.
- Establish peer education and mentorship programs harnessing positive peer influence through trained peer educators and role models.
- Collaborate with religious organizations for holistic support while recognizing that moral appeals alone are insufficient without structural interventions.
- Conduct further research with larger samples and longitudinal designs to deepen understanding and inform evidence-based policymaking

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