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**OPINION OF POSTGRADUATES OF UNIVERSITY  
OF ILORIN ON PREMARITAL COHABITATION AND  
SUBSEQUENT MARITAL STABILITY**

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**Abstract**

This paper examined the opinion of postgraduates of University of Ilorin on premarital cohabitation and subsequent marital stability. The research design for this study was the descriptive research method of the correlational survey type. The population for this study comprised all postgraduate students of University of Ilorin. Two questionnaires were used to collect the necessary data. Premarital Cohabitation Questionnaire (CPQ) was used to gather data on premarital cohabitation, while Subsequent Marital Stability Questionnaire was used to collect data on subsequent marital stability. The demographic data collected for this study were described using percentage, while the Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistical tool was used to test the generated hypotheses at the significance level of 0.05. The findings revealed that the opinion of the majority of the postgraduates was in support of premarital cohabitation. The study also found that the opinion of the majority of the postgraduates was also in support of subsequent marital stability. In addition, the findings also showed that there was no significant relationship between premarital cohabitation and subsequent marital stability among postgraduates

of University of Ilorin. This research provides a starting point for a more nuanced understanding of the influences of cohabitation on marital stability among Nigerian youths. More broadly, findings from this study will contribute to our understanding of marital stability and recent family change.

Keywords: Premarital Cohabitation, Subsequent Marital Stability, Selection and Causation

### Introduction

Cohabitation has increased dramatically in the U.S., rising from 500,000 couples in 1970 to nearly 5 million in 2000 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2001). Among persons in their twenties and thirties, more than one-half have experienced cohabitation, suggesting that cohabitation is now a normative stage in the family life course (Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Smock, 2000). Cohabitation, most often, serves as a prelude to marriage as about 75 percent of cohabitators report plans to marry their partners and the chief reason why cohabitators report living together is to test the relationship's viability for marriage (Bumpass, James & Andrew, 1991; Brown & Booth 1996s).

Despite the popular, seemingly intuitive notion that cohabitation is a worthwhile testing ground for marriage that will help couples avoid divorce, research has consistently documented that premarital cohabitation is associated with lower levels of marital quality and higher levels of marital instability and divorce (DeMaris & MacDonald, 1993; Kamp Dush, Cohan & Amato, 2003; Teachman, 2003). Premarital cohabitation is positively related to marital disagreement, conflict, and instability as well as negatively associated with marital interaction, satisfaction, communication and commitment. Its association with marital happiness is unclear; two studies show a negative association (Nock, 1995) whereas two others found none (Booth & Johnson, 1988; Thomson & Colella, 1992). In addition to its negative associations with marital quality and stability, premarital cohabitation is also positively related to divorce (Kamp Dush, et. al. 2003; Teachman, 2003). Early research suggested this effect may attenuate among younger cohorts (Schoen, 1992), but a more recent study indicated there had been no

attenuation effect between two marriage cohorts (KampDush, et. al., 2003).

Less clear is the mechanism(s) linking premarital cohabitation and subsequent marital outcomes. There are two primary explanations, typically referred to as (1) selection and (2) causation. According to the selection explanation, cohabitation is selective of people who are less traditional in their family-related attitudes (Axinn&Thornton, 1992; Clarkberg, Stoltzenberg & Waite 1995) or are poor marriage material (Booth & Johnson, 1988). The same people who are more likely to cohabit premaritally also are more likely to opt for divorce in the event of an unsatisfactory marriage. Several studies have identified multiple risk factors associated with both premarital cohabitation and divorce, including weaker commitment to marriage, greater acceptance of divorce, and poorer interpersonal relationship skills, supporting the selection argument (Booth & Johnson, 1988; KampDush, et. al., 2003). Additionally, Lillard, BrienandWaite(1995) used econometric techniques to model the endogeneity of cohabitation before marriage to demonstrate that statistically correcting for selection reduces to nonsignificance the effect of premarital cohabitation on divorce.

The causation explanation is that the experience of premarital cohabitation itself actually decreases marital quality and heightens instability and the likelihood of divorce. Rather than poor marital outcomes being a function of preexisting differences between cohabitators and noncohabitators (as posited by the selection argument), the logic here is that cohabitation somehow changes people, whether by affirming the ability to maintain intimate relationships outside of marriage or by weakening commitment to marriage as a lifelong institution, that undermines marital success (Bennett,Blanc& Bloom, 1988; Booth & Johnson, 1988; Axinn& Thornton, 1992). For instance, Axinn and Thornton (1992) found that the experience of cohabitation is associated with increases in young adults' acceptance of divorce, net of their levels of acceptance prior to cohabitation. Amato (1996) showed that marrieds' level of acceptance of divorce is positively associated with divorce, net of the number of perceived marital problems. Taken together, this pattern of findings is consistent with the causation argument.

Both explanations have received empirical support, although the

causation argument, which is more difficult to test, has been supported by comparatively fewer studies (Smock, 2000; KampDush, et. al., 2003; Teachman, 2003). Importantly, it is possible that both selection and causation may be at work (Booth & Johnson, 1988). Recent research suggests cohabitation per se is not associated with increased odds of divorce (Teachman, 2003). Indeed, premarital sex and premarital cohabitation with one's husband only is not significantly associated with divorce. Rather, it is involvement in either or both of these activities with a previous partner (who is not the current spouse) that is positively related to divorce among women, leading Teachman to conclude that premarital sex and cohabitation that is limited to one's spouse is a normative feature of marital formation.

On face value, it might be expected that a period of cohabitation would give couples unique insight into their compatibility, thereby helping them to make informed decisions about whether or not to marry. However, most of the research into this issue in Australia and other western countries suggests quite the opposite trend: marriages preceded by cohabitation (here called "indirect marriages") tend to have a shorter lifespan than direct marriages (Lillard, et. al., 1995; Australia, Parliament 1998; Smock, 2000). This paradox has sparked a great deal of research and discussion in the literature. Nevertheless, times have changed. Premarital cohabitation is now normative and thus no longer the preserve of the more unconventional adults in the society.

Several authors such as De Maris and Rao, (1992); Schoen (1992); Diekmann and Engelhardt (1999) have thus argued that the self-selection should have weakened for more recent cohorts, although research into this proposition has yielded inconsistent results. On the other hand, as direct marriages have become the exception, those who choose this pathway may have become increasingly homogeneous in ways that enhance marital stability – a point noted by Brüderl, et. al., (1999). For instance, in a broad social context in which both indirect marriage and divorce are sanctioned (de Vaus, 1997), those who tend to resist indirect marriage may also resist divorce as a solution to marital unhappiness. Alternatively, partners in these marriages may share characteristics that increase their chances of enjoying a happy marriage.

A second explanation for the enhanced risk of instability of indirect marriages suggests that cohabitation and marital instability are causally linked. According to this explanation, the experience of cohabitation may change attitudes or behaviour in ways that are detrimental to marital stability. While there is some evidence that cohabitation may increase acceptance of divorce (Axinn & Thornton, 1992), there appears to be general agreement in the research literature that selectivity is considerably more influential than causal processes in explaining the greater instability of indirect than direct marriages.

An additional factor that has generated considerable debate in the literature, and is becoming an increasingly common phenomenon, is the role of premarital cohabitation (Bumpass, Sweet & Cherlin, 1991; Ermisch & Francesconi, 2000; Hoem, Kostova, Jasilioniene & Muresan, 2009; Thornton & Philipov, 2009; Gabrielli & Hoem, 2010). While some might imagine that premarital cohabitation would stabilise subsequent married unions, most of the literature suggests that it is in fact related to higher risks of marital dissolution. Various reasons for this empirical finding have been suggested, but one important factor that has not usually been controlled for adequately is the role of unobserved selection. Those who cohabit prior to marriage may have different unmeasured characteristics compared to those who do not and, if true, selection effects may mask the positive role that premarital cohabitation plays in subsequent marital stability.

According to Teachman, Thomas and Paasch (1991), one might expect premarital cohabitation to help stabilise subsequent married relationships, because those who cohabit will gain more information about their spouse than those who do not live together. Cohabiting partners who find they are well suited might consider marriage, while those who find they are incompatible will end the cohabitation. Such "trial marriages" (Bennett, et. al., 1988) involve relatively low investment and are therefore easier to terminate; unsuccessful partnerships are effectively "weeded out" (Cherlin, 1981; Klijzing, 1992). Indeed, most young adults appear to believe that cohabitation improves the chances of a subsequent marriage (Kline, Stanley, Markman, Olmos-Gallo, St Peters, Whitton & Prado, 2004), suggesting that lay people's views about premarital cohabitation concur with this theoretical perspective.

However, the majority of empirical studies have found that premarital cohabitation is associated with higher risks of subsequent marital dissolution compared to couples who married without prior cohabitation (Wagner & Weiss, 2004). Bumpass, Sweet, and Cherlin (1991), Hoem and Hoem (1992), and Trussell, Rodríguez, and Vaughan (1992) noted this effect in Sweden. Teachman and Polonko (1990), Teachman, Thomas, and Paasch (1991), Axinn and Thornton (1992) and Thomson and Colella (1992) observed the disruptive effect of premarital cohabitation in the US. Hall and Zhao (1995) found the same in Canada, Bracher, Santow, Morgan and Trussell (1993) in Australia, Manting (1992) and Klijzing (1992) in the Netherlands, Berrington and Diamond (1999) and Haskey (1992) in Britain, and Kiernan (2002) and Liefbroer and Dourleijn (2006) in a number of European countries. Indeed, premarital cohabitation is also associated with lower marital satisfaction (Brown & Booth, 1996), higher rates of wife infidelity (Forste & Tanfer, 1996), and lower commitment to the partnership (Stanley, Whitton & Markman, 2004). While there is some limited evidence that the effect of premarital cohabitation on the risk of marital dissolution may have reduced for more recent birth cohorts (Schoen, 1992; Brown, Sanchez, Nock & Wright, 2006; Reinhold 2010), other research suggests that this is not the case (Kamp Dush, Cohan & Amato, 2003).

Some have suggested that the duration of the union has an effect on this relationship. Bennett, et. al., (1988) and Thomson and Colella (1992) found that marriages were more susceptible to divorce for those who cohabited for longer periods of time. Teachman and Polonko (1990) found that while prior cohabitation raised the risk of dissolution of subsequent marriage, once the duration of the entire union was accounted for the effect disappeared. Similarly, Hall (1996) found that those who cohabited for at least one year prior to marriage did not have a higher risk of marriage dissolution. However, the duration of prior cohabitation was not found to influence subsequent marital instability by Lillard, et. al., (1995) and short cohabitations appeared to offer no advantage compared to longer cohabitations. More recently, Kline, et. al., (2004) showed that those who are engaged at the point when the couple starts cohabiting are at much less risk of subsequent marital break-up. Hence, commitment to the relationship appears to

be an important aspect influencing later partnership success (Stanley & Markman, 1992).

Others have argued that premarital cohabitation raises the risk of marriage dissolution because of selection effects. Cohabitors may have unobserved characteristics that make them more prone to separation, such as less conventional attitudes about marriage and, perhaps, higher expectations about the quality of unions, or poorer relationship skills (Bennett, et. al., 1988; Thomson & Colella, 1992; Hall, 1996; Smock, 2000). For example, those who cohabit tend to be more liberal, less religious, and more supportive of egalitarian gender roles (Clarkberg, Stolzenberg & Waite, 1995; Lye & Waldron, 1997). For cohabiters, relationships in general, be they marital or non-marital, may be characterised by a lack of commitment and stability and they may be more willing to contemplate divorce if a subsequent marriage proves unsatisfactory (Bennett, et. al., 1988). Early studies seemed to support this selection hypothesis: Carlson (1986) reported that cohabiters were much more likely to view marriage as a response to social pressure than married couples, while Axinn and Thornton (1992) showed that cohabitation was selective of those who were less committed to marriage and more approving of divorce.

Apart from Ariyo (2013) who studied pre-marital cohabitation factors, all other studies reviewed by the researchers are foreign based researches and this has created a research gap that these researcher tried to fill.

Generally, the literature reviewed indicated that researchers agreed that premarital cohabitation have influence on subsequent marital stability. Therefore, there is the need for further research to establish their veracity or otherwise in Nigeria. It appears, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, that no research of this nature has ever been done among postgraduates of University of Ilorin and in Kwara State as a whole. This therefore motivated the researchers to undertake the study to find out the opinion of postgraduates on premarital cohabitation and subsequent marital stability.

#### Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to examine the opinion of postgraduate students on premarital cohabitation and subsequent

marital stability.

### Research Questions

This study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the opinion of postgraduates of University of Ilorin on premarital cohabitation?
2. What is the opinion of postgraduates of University of Ilorin on the subsequent marital stability?
3. What is the opinion of postgraduate students on the relationship between premarital cohabitation and subsequent marital stability?

### Research Hypothesis

$H_{01}$ : There is no significant relationship between premarital cohabitation and subsequent marital stability among postgraduate of University of Ilorin.

### Method

The research design that was employed for this study was the descriptive research method of the correlational survey type. The population for this study comprised all postgraduates of University of Ilorin. The selected sample for this study were all postgraduates of University of Ilorin. Postgraduates of the Faculty of Education, University of Ilorin were purposively selected. In total 234 postgraduates of Faculty of Education were randomly sampled for this study. Questionnaires were used to collect the necessary data. Premarital Cohabitation Questionnaire (CPQ) to collect postgraduates of University of Ilorin opinion on premarital cohabitation and Subsequent Marital Stability Questionnaire, to elicit postgraduates of University of Ilorin opinions on subsequent marital stability. The demographic data collected from this study were described using frequency counts and percentage, while the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistical tools were used to test the generated hypothesis at the significance level of 0.05.

### Results/Findings



Table 1: Distribution of the Respondents by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	139	59.4
Female	95	40.6
Total	234	100.0

Table 1 showed that out of the 234 postgraduates that participated in the study, 139 representing (49.4%) were male, while 95 representing (40.6%) were female. This revealed that there were more male respondents than female respondents that participated in this study.

Research Question 1: What is the opinion of postgraduates of University of Ilorin on the premarital cohabitation?

In order to answer this research question, responses of the postgraduates to items on the premarital cohabitation questionnaire were collated. The data collected from the study was analyzed as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Opinion of Postgraduate of University of Ilorin on the Premarital Cohabitation

Premarital Cohabitation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Positive	173	73.9
Negative	62	26.1
Total	234	100.0

Table 2 indicated that 173 representing (73.9%) of the respondents had positive opinion on premarital cohabitation, 62 representing (26.1%) had average negative opinion on premarital cohabitation. This shows that the opinion of the majority of the postgraduates of university of Ilorin was in support of premarital cohabitation.

Research Question 2: What is the opinion of postgraduates of University of Ilorin on the subsequent marital stability?

In order to answer this research question, responses of the postgraduates to items on the subsequent marital stability questionnaire were collated. The data collected from the study was analyzed as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Opinion of Postgraduate of University of Ilorin on the Subsequent Marital Stability

Premarital Cohabitation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Positive	163	69.7
Negative	71	30.3
Total	234	100.0

Table 3 indicated that 163 representing (69.7%) of the respondents had positive opinion on subsequent marital stability, 71 representing (30.3%) had negative opinion on subsequent marital stability. This shows that the opinion of the majority of the postgraduates of University of Ilorin is in support of subsequent marital stability.

H <sub>01</sub> : There is no significant relationship between premarital cohabitation and subsequent marital stability among postgraduate of University of Ilorin.
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In order to test the hypothesis, responses of the respondents on the premarital cohabitation and subsequent marital stability questionnaires were collated. The data collected from the study was analyzed as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: (Pearson r) Relationship between Premarital Cohabitation and Subsequent Marital Stability among Postgraduate of University of Ilorin

Variables	No	Mean	Std.	df	Cal.r-Value	Sig. (2-tailed)	Decision
Premarital Cohabitation	234	35.85	4.23				
Subsequent				232	0.41	0.68	Accepted

Marital Stability	234	36.05	4.41
p<0.05			

Table 4 shows the summary of the comparison of premarital cohabitation and subsequent marital stability among postgraduates of University of Ilorin. The sig (2-tailed) of 0.68 is greater than 0.05 significant level at which the hypothesis was tested. This implies, therefore, that the null hypothesis is accepted, meaning that, there is no significant relationship between premarital cohabitation and subsequent marital stability among postgraduate of University of Ilorin.

#### Discussion of the Findings

Finding revealed that the opinion of the majority of the postgraduates of University of Ilorin is in support of premarital cohabitation. This finding is in agreement with that of Axinn and Thornton (1992); Axinn and Barber (1997); Cunningham and Thornton (2005) who found out that young adults are more in supportive attitudes toward divorce and cohabitation after cohabiting.

Findings revealed that the opinion of the majority of the postgraduates of university of Ilorin is in support of subsequent marital stability.

Findings revealed that there was no significant relationship between premarital cohabitation and subsequent marital stability among postgraduate of University of Ilorin. This finding is in line with that of Teachman (2003) who found out that premarital sex and premarital cohabitation with one's husband only is not significantly associated with subsequent marital stability (divorce). Also, for Booth and Johnson (1988), cohabitation per se is not associated with increased odds of divorce. Brown, et. al., (2006), relying on data from Louisiana, found that premarital cohabitation is not associated with marital stability after accounting for the type of marriage.

On the contrary, Axinn and Thornton (1992) found that the experience of cohabitation is associated with increases in young adults' acceptance of divorce, net of their levels of acceptance prior to cohabitation. Also, Kamp Dush, et. al., (2003) found out that experience of cohabitation itself leads to an increased risk of marital instability

difficulties.

Leifbroer and Dourleijn (2006) reported that in Finland, there was a negative cohabitation effect on marital stability. Phillips and Sweeney (2005) found that cohabitation has a significant negative effect on marital stability among whites, but no effect among Blacks and Mexican-Americans.

Studies by Balakrishnan, Rao, LaPierre-Adamcyk and Krotki (1987); Bennett, et. al., (1988); Trussel and Rao (1989); Bumpass and Sweet (1989); Teachman and Polonko (1990); Trussel, et. al., (1992); Bracher, et. al., (1993); Hall and Zhao (1995); Gostomski, et. al., (1998) unanimously agreed that marriages with a prior history of cohabitation show a higher risk of divorce than those in which the partners did not live together before marriage.

#### Conclusions and Recommendations

Cohabitation has become part of the marriage process in the Nigeria and is a normative step on the pathway to marriage. Despite the empirical evidence that cohabitation has been associated with higher rates of marital instability, young Nigerians still believe that cohabitation helps to select good spouses that will ensure stable marriages.

This research provides a starting point for more nuanced understanding of the effects of cohabitation on marital stability among Nigerian youths. More broadly, findings from this work will contribute to our understanding of marital stability and recent family change.

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