



Challenges Faced by Students in Cohabitation Relationships at a Rural University in Limpopo Province

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Abstract

Cohabitation has gained momentum among students in institutions of higher learning, it is seen as a normative culture among students. The study explored the challenges students face in cohabitation relationships at the University of Venda. The study was qualitative in nature using an exploratory research design. A sample of 12 cohabiting students was identified using purposive and snowball sampling methods. The pre-tested, semi-structured interview guide was used to collect data and thematic content analysis was used to analyse the collected data. Findings revealed that physical and emotional abuse, academic difficulties, and relational conflict were the challenges faced by cohabiting students. The study concluded by making important recommendations to different stakeholders to assist in the reduction of cohabitation at universities and also to future researchers in new areas to advance knowledge on the phenomenon.

Keywords

Challenges faced by students, Cohabitation Relationships, Rural University

INTRODUCTION

Cohabitation at institutions of higher learning continues to be a major challenge all over the world (Bryant, 2016; Fox, 2014; Arisukwu, 2013; Gault-Sherman & Draper, 2012). The prevalence of cohabitation in many countries has put the phenomenon at the forefront of discussions on family change (Bhrolchain & Beaujouan, 2013). Goodwin (2010) (cf. Fox, 2014) states that cohabitation has pervaded most, if not all, of tertiary institutions today. A cursory look at various campuses shows that many unmarried students indulge in this act (Arisukwu, 2013). The prevalence and popular acceptance of the phenomenon has shifted contemporary opinion about it from being deviant or alternative lifestyle choice, to one that is a normative experience for young men and women (Pollard & Harris, 2013). A recent study defined student cohabitation as an act of students living together and sharing marital intimacy without being legally married (Ojewola & Akinduyo, 2017).

Svodziwa and Kurete (2017) argue that cohabitation amongst university students has attracted a lot of academic researches and debates in recent times. For example, Sica, Sestito and Ragozini (2014) found that in China, the act of cohabitation has been accepted amongst students in tertiary institutions. Similar trends have been observed in Malaysia, with students adapting to cohabiting unions (Pollard & Harris, 2013). In Africa, Nigeria is one of the countries that has studied cohabitation extensively amongst tertiary students (Kasim, Omirin & Okoro, 2016; Kasim & Falola, 2017; Ojewola & Akinduyo, 2017; Pollard & Harris 2013). It is generally believed that South Africa is showing an increasing trend towards student cohabitation (Preller, 2011). Mashau (2011) however, reports that it is difficult to determine the prevalence of student cohabitation in South Africa because statistics do not provide conclusive evidence of this trend and little has been done on the phenomenon. Bryant, (2016), argued that cohabitation has created barriers to the development and success of the youth, as it results in high levels of unwanted pregnancy and student dropouts (Smeeding, Garfinkel &

Mincy, 2011). Female students involved in this practice and who carry the resultant pregnancy face lots of financial and health problems which result in them dropping out of college to take care of their children (Nnachi, 2017). According to Miller, Sassler, and Kusi-Appouh (2012) male students also drop out of tertiary to fend for their unborn children. The pressure of providing for their partners may lead them along paths of crime and other delinquent activities in a quest to source income to provide for their girlfriends and children. Mashau (2011) postulates that in South African universities, intervention strategies that tackle issues of cohabitation have not yet produced the anticipated results. Peretomode and Ugbomeh (2013) suggest that this is because some of the previously disadvantaged universities have prioritised other socio-economic issues that affects students, such as assisting orphaned students. As such, cohabitation in Limpopo has threatened the education of tertiary students, such as those at the University of Venda. Despite the undisputable evidence that a number of students engage in cohabitation, little has been explored in tertiary institutions in Limpopo province, South Africa. Hence, the current study is aimed at exploring challenges faced by students in cohabitation relationship at the University of Venda, Limpopo Province.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used an exploratory research design, which is an appropriate design when there are few or no earlier studies to refer to or rely upon to predict outcome (Drisko, 2016). This design enabled the researcher to answer the research questions, to achieve the aim of the study, to gain a broader understanding of the subject being studied, to give a well-grounded picture of the situation being developed and to identify a direction for future research.

Population and Sample

The population of the study consisted of both male and female university students, who were aged between 20-30 years old. A sample size was twelve (12) cohabiting university students and both snowball and purposive sampling were used to select participants to be part of the study. The first three (3) were identified by the researcher purposefully, thereafter the researcher asked the selected first three participants for referrals to other participants who meet the inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria were: (1) students who registered at University of Venda, (2) in heterosexual cohabiting relationships, (3) residing on campus, (4) who are between the ages of 20-31.

Data Collection

Institutional ethics were complied with before data collection and written informed consent was obtained from participants' prior taking part in the study. Confidentiality and anonymity of participants were maintained by concealing their identities. Reference to the participants was made in the form of numbers, for example, "participant 1", to protect their identities. To avoid harm to the participants, debriefing was done after the study, and a few students who were identified with the potential for emotional suffering, as a result of physical and emotional abuse by their partners, were referred to student counselling unit; arrangements had already been made prior to the commencement of the study.

An interview guide was used for data-gathering instrument; the researcher probed where necessary for clarity and in the quest to obtain more information. The interviews ranged from 15-45 minutes. Interviews were conducted mostly in English, except for two participants whose interviews were conducted in SiSwati, then taken to a language expert for translation. Data collection included recording and taking notes during the interviews.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic content analysis. LoBiondo-Wood and Haber (2014) define thematic content analysis as a method used for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. Themes were identified and reported in details.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Credibility

The credibility criteria involve establishing that the results of a qualitative research are credible or believable from the perspective of the respondents in the research. From this perspective, the purpose of a qualitative research is to describe or understand the phenomenon of interest from the participants' perception, therefore, the participants are the only ones who can legitimately judge the credibility of the results. To ensure credibility, the researcher adopted well-recognized research methods, debriefed participants and described the phenomenon under scrutiny. The researcher made use of field notes and audio tape when collecting data to ensure that the researcher did not miss any information.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the quality of the results produced by research in terms of how well they are supported by people who were involved in the study and events that were independent of the researcher (Aurini, Heath & Howells, 2016). Marshall and Rossman, (2016) further explain that confirmability refers to the degree to which the results could be confirmed or corroborated by others. To enhance confirmability, the researcher documented the procedures for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study, gave a description of the method used and the way data was collected in

order to allow comparison with existing studies. Additionally, the researcher mentioned the number of participants in the study (sample size) and the number of researchers involved in the study (in this study one researcher conducted the study with guidance from a supervisor). After the study, the researcher conducted a data audit that examined the data collection and the analysis procedures and made judgments about the potential for bias or distortion.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the constancy of the data over similar conditions (Polit & Beck, 2012). This was achieved using audio recordings and field notes and the assistance of a supervisor to concur with the decision at each stage of the research process.

RESULTS

Educational Challenges

The students reported that there are educational challenges when cohabiting. Some indicated that due to doing house chores involved in cohabitation, their school work suffers. This was validated by the following statements:

“you find that I don’t have time to study, most of the time I am doing the room chores, such as cooking and cleaning and washing, all the domestic chores you can think of, like I am a wife in that room” (Participant 1).

“it’s not easy because you have to balance both life, your academic life and the other side of life, like there’s no way if you staying alone when you are staying alone, you can say as long as 10h00pm in the laboratory or the library but if your cohabiting, there comes a time, your girlfriend is going to text you and say are you not going to come? Something like that, it interference with academic work” (Participant 2).

“ it’s not easy, because my school work does suffer, and there are responsibilities, I feel like I have to do a lot because I’m in his space, so I feel like I must always keep the room neat I always have to cook because its him who’s providing food and all of that, so I always feel like I can’t just come in the room and not do anything so I do a lot of the stuff like laundry and all of that and if I don’t do that there’s a lot of tension that is created, but my school work suffer” (Participant 5).

Some respondents indicated that their academic performances are affected due to fights / conflicts in the cohabitation relationship.

“it’s that academically when we fight, I get broken down and I can’t focus academically that takes my academics back because I don’t perform the way I’m used to performing because of these cohabiting problems that we encounter on daily basis that moves me away from my concentration, that some of the reasons that made me fall behind my academics” (Participant 7).

“we are always fighting and then you have to go study, it obviously going to affect your studies you get to a point where you just go to the library you sit there and open your books but nothing is going in. so it affects your studies because you find yourself having to write a test or an exam but you haven’t studied cause of where you stay it’s not nice. And of course you personally get distress in which it affects you because there’s a lot of tension also” (Participant 8).

Relational Conflict

The majority of the participants reported that conflicts in their cohabitation relationship was one of the challenges. They mentioned that some of the conflicts in their relationship were due to finances. This is unveiled from the statements below:

“each and every relationship it’s a relationship, with two people coming together, maybe those two people are not compatible in terms of values so there’s conflict so there are disagreements there are complaints in terms of money, and you know when people are staying together there are always fights, fights over choices of things, ‘I like this... I want you to wear this’ now she’s trying to impose her things on you. It brings conflict those things because she always thinks there’s someone. So in summary I am trying to say there’s conflict, there’s conflict over money. Conflict over friends, she will say don’t talk to those ones and I will be saying those people are my friends and she will say no I don’t like them there are lot of challenges but they are related to personal fights in the relationship, sometimes about the future of the relationship sometimes you can just argue and argue, and it eat your time, remember you are a student and now you have this extra research, a woman” (Participant 11).

“in cohabiting it’s just like marriage, you disagree, there’s always disagreement, that is the only challenge, and the issue of money providing, you have to drop money always, something has to come out of your pocket else you are going to have a problem in the room” (Participant 2).

“the challenges I face as a student who is cohabiting, first and first is that sometimes we get in battles of finance even though we went into that to solve the financial difficulties, where one hides her finances in the relationship while we said we will be helping each other with the finances and then one gets money from home and spend it on her own things, then me I have to come again and provide for her, those are the challenges I get” (Participant 7).

According to participant 4 below, they fight due to the incompatibility of their character/ personality, however, due to the fact that there is a child in the relationship, they stay together.

“in addition, like now we are in the process of knowing each other more, there will be this time where maybe I reveal this other character she didn’t know and it becomes a challenge and we fight, or if maybe she reveal this other character and we fight (relational conflict) but it doesn’t mean we will separate because there’s a child involved, that’s what’s keeping us together. To be honest in this relationship there’s too much ups and downs, when we met it happened so fast because she became pregnant within seven months of dating. So like that’s why I’m saying we are facing some other challenge because she’s revealing this character I am revealing this character she didn’t know and it becomes a challenge and we fight” (Participant 4).

Physical and Emotional Abuse

The participants reported being abused by their partners either physically or emotionally. They further explained that due to the fact that their partners support them financially and give them accommodation, they choose to be silent and endure the abuse.

“sometimes you have to fight physically I’m sorry I’m agreeing that sometimes you have to fight physically because as a man you will be saying she’s taking my manhood also” (Participant 11).

“Sometimes we fight and he beats me, even when I haven’t done anything wrong. I find myself being abused emotionally and in many other aspects, but my situation, doesn’t allow me the freedom to leave him.” (Participant 1).

“sometimes we fight physically, it gets to a point where you’re telling them to do something and they just not listening to you and you feel that the only way they will listen is if you put a slap in there, or sometimes there’s just a misunderstanding and interpretation of things one interprets something another way and one responds without thinking and you end up beating your partner or you guys end up fighting, but I think its caused by lack of communication, when you guys don’t communicate it gets to a point where you feel like the only way to solve things is to fight or beat that person up” (Participant 8).

Emotional abuse can also be seen as an integral part of the humiliation inherent in physical battering, and its effects are more profound than that of physical battering. This is validated by participant 12 below who said being hit by her boyfriend made her feel worthless.

“And he becomes moody sometimes when I tell him about the normal things that he needs to buy for example this other time I asked him to buy more groceries because sometimes he tends to buy more alcohol and drink with his friends. So when I asked him to buy more groceries he snapped at me, called me names, and told me that I always nag him and demand things, at times he gets moody, because there was also this other time he was physically abusive towards me. He slapped me across the face, I know he slapped me but the pain I feel, I feel like I am worthless because I come from a poor family and there’s nothing I can do about that so I feel worthless that’s why it’s more emotional for me” (Participant 12).

Intervention strategies that can be used to address the challenges faced by cohabiting students

Provision of adequate campus accommodation

From the participants in this study, provision of accommodation on campus will help them to stay away from cohabitation. The findings were validated by the following statements:

“there should be more accommodation on campus, and people actually want to stay on campus because it’s easier to study when you’re staying on campus unlike staying off campus, so if the issue of accommodation can be addressed the number of people cohabiting will reduce” (Participant 2).

“I think the university can build more rooms for students, and also the criteria which is used or allocating rooms, it needs to be corrected because most people even if they didn’t qualify they become able to buy rooms from SRC people which leave us who are not able to buy rooms in general, it leaves us vulnerable for having to look out for ourselves ending up staying with boyfriends trying to eliminate this issue of finances” (participant 6).

“the best way to address this challenge would be to sit down with the management of the school and they look at this residence issue, because it’s a measure issue, students are staying in devastating places, so we have to speak to the management to try and construct more residences for the students” (Participant 9).

Increased access to bursaries/ scholarships

The students revealed that access to bursaries or scholarships will assist in reducing the rate of cohabitation at universities. They reported that they would not struggle so much because the bursary would afford them a room on campus and cater for other needs. These findings are validated by the following statements:

“there must be bursaries to be provided so that I won’t stress much about what I can eat, and with bursary everything becomes easy, then I can focus on my studies, not that with this little money my parents give me I have to share with her and the child, bursary can also help limit these things of cohabitation, because if I have a room then I can stay in my room and she stay in hers” (Participant 4).

“Also I think if there was more financial assistance in the form of bursaries, a lot of things can be avoided, because if I had a bursary I would be able to afford a room and other needs that I now depend on my boyfriend for” (Participant 6).

Awareness campaigns

The students suggested awareness campaigns to reduce cohabitation on campus. They suggested these awareness campaigns will teach students about cohabitation and the implications or rather challenges thereof. Some of the awareness campaigns issues suggested by participants include STI’s and HIV. Below are statements to support the findings:

“They should put in place awareness or talks about how we get STIS and how to avoid it and protect ourselves from it, the signs and symptoms, the school should really be concerned about students and our wellbeing, especially in the reses I don’t think they realise what is happening with our lives in the reses” (Participant 5).

“They must create HIV counselling, they create them for students to be able to get the knowledge. As I was talking about HIV campaigns, yes it’s too risky for us students especially when we stay together because we don’t condoms anymore. So they must teach us how to be able to protect ourselves as a couple staying together and not using condoms. They need to talk to cohabiting couples where they give us guidance and how to stay away from such infections” (Participant 7).

According to participant 11 below, these awareness campaigns should be inclusive of the subject of abuse, so that students who are being abused can get counselling and male students be taught on anger management.

“They can run other programs like, maybe ladies you psychology students say no we want to assist people most ladies are being abused here in these cohabiting relationships so yes, men should also be taught how to treat women well. From both parties there should be something done to assist them so they can be able to solve their own problems so it might be skill building, but I don’t know how, what I am sure of is conflict resolution at relationship level, if there are conflicts this is how to solve it. Issues like anger management and communication. There should be social workers and even those counsellors they are not doing anything, they should train these peer counsellors not just donating their time when there are events only cause these issues for ladies they will build up and become a mental health issue” (Participant 11).

Participant 3 below said that these awareness campaigns could also be a tool to warn those students who are not cohabiting to stay away from it by teaching about cohabitation and the challenges.

“I think the university must instil laws that prohibits students to cohabit in the university, and also the relevant sectors must introduce awareness campaigns which teaches the students about the issues of cohabiting and the challenges of cohabiting” (Participant 3).

DISCUSSION

The present study found that cohabitation interfered with students' academic work. In support of the present study Mlyakado (2012) states that students who engage in cohabitation have decreased academic success as compared to those who are not in cohabitation relationships. Similarly, Kasim and Falola (2017) note that the effect of cohabitation on tertiary students is significant, as students miss classes and perform poorly on assignments and tests because of the demands that come with cohabitation. Additionally, students reported that having to do domestic chores (female students) in the rooms affected student's academic work because they do not have enough time to study and do assignments. Bello and Ogunsanwo (2013) also agree that female students are more vulnerable in these cohabitation relationships because they carry the burdens of having to do chores in the rooms, including cooking and laundry; thus, this type of relationship has great implications on the academic performance of students. This study also disclosed that educational challenges arise because of the conflict or relational tensions that emerge in the cohabitation. In support of these findings, Arisukwu (2013) asserts that conflict within cohabitation relationships has negative consequences, among which are stress which inevitably interferes with students' academic performance. This is mainly because when people are stressed or emotionally drained, they are not able to concentrate or be productive. To further the argument, Kasim and Falola (2017) confirm that the majority of cohabiting students perform poorly in their studies and face several problems, which compromised their academic lives. It is taken, therefore, that poor academic performance is an indication of the negative effect of students' cohabiting relationship on their academic wellbeing. The logic is that, students who are cohabiting may become preoccupied with the relationship's related issues, thus, giving diminished importance to academic goals (Rector & Johnson, 2005) (cf. Mlyakado & Timothy, 2014). Students in this study further revealed that there are conflicts which arise in cohabitation relationships. Kang'ethe and Mafa, (2014) and Bello and Ogunsanwo, (2013) also note that cohabiting students were more susceptible to engage in conflict. This may be because their commitment to the union is weak and any small disagreement within assumes a magnitude which neither of the parties have a desire of force to attend to it (Novendwe & Odeku, 2014). This study found that most of the conflict occur due to finances challenges. According to Kgadima (2017) and Semenya (2016) many cohabiting individuals have fewer economic resources than married couples, so financial issues might be more salient to cohabiters. This fact is validated by the findings of the study; most participants reported encountering financial difficulties and not being able to pool and manage their allowances properly; this causes a lot of conflict between them. This point is consistent with Onyike (2010), who argue that cohabiters are less likely to pull their income together.

Dew (2011) suggests that disagreements may occur because the partners are dissatisfied with the financial arrangements. Financial disagreements may indicate that relationship problems exist that are only marginally related to partners' actual financial behaviours (Semenya 2016). Whether cohabiters pool their finances or keep them separate and split living costs, managing financial issues takes some level of cooperation and positive exchange; thus, financial disagreements may indicate that at least one partner feels dissatisfied with relationship exchanges.

This study also revealed that conflicts in the relationship occur due to character/ personality incompatibility. This finding is consistent with Novendwe and Odeku, (2014) who illustrated in their research that different personalities can clash within a cohabiting relationship as certain personality traits emerge and cause conflict between the pair. As a result the cohabitation relationship may come to an end, however, some of students who have children from the relationship highlighted that they endure the conflicts that arise from personality clashes. Semenya (2016) points out that cohabitation itself does not necessarily cause poor relationship quality, but rather that the characteristics of individuals who cohabit contribute significantly towards disagreement and tension (Brown, Manning & Payne, 2015). Adversarial personality traits are likely to escalate conflict and undermine collaborative communication (Sanford, 2014). Certain authors, however, caution that individuals may avoid revealing their true personalities for fear of rejection or possible termination of the relationship (Niehuis, Reifman, Feng & Huston, 2014; Kang'ethe & Mafa, 2014; Kgadima, 2017 Naidoo, Munsami,& Archary,2015). In some instances, couples may be uncertain about aspects of their personalities that are under scrutiny or how they are being evaluated, and this may lead to tension in the relationship (Gold, 2012).

This study showed that students in cohabitation relationship may be physically and emotionally abused by their partners. Arisukwu (2013) explains that cohabiting students lack the experience and training to cope with challenges of living as husband and wife, therefore, these challenges degenerates to abuse by one of the cohabiting partners. Lumper (2015) asserts that female students in cohabiting relationships are about nine times more likely to be killed by their partner than are women in marital relationships. Similarly, Kang'ethe and Mafa (2014) note abuse and oppression as being fatal to cohabiting women. The patriarchal dominance perspective state that continued victimization of women within the cohabitation context is because of the patriarchal system as girls are taught to accept male domination and to be helpless, complying, passive and dependent (Zito, 2015). Male students use abuse as a tool to show their dominance and validate their manhood when, for example, told to buy groceries and other necessities by their female partners.

The physical abuse carries within itself a set of consequences that go beyond bruises, or other physical injuries. Students revealed that being beaten by their boyfriends made them feel worthless and inadequate; some reported that their boyfriends would humiliate them and use derogatory words to refer to them. In support of these findings, Sasani, Tahrekhani, Naji and Salehi (2015) found that degradation causes feelings of deep pain and shame about oneself. Male students use vulnerabilities already existing in their female partners to abuse them, or they exploited those that had been exposed because of the abuse. Female students confided in this study that they tolerate their abusive partners because they financially depend on them. This assertion is parallel to the point of Zito (2015) who states that the abuser ensures his

partner's dependence upon him through control of financial resources. Agreeing, thus with the social exchange theory which bases its emphasis on costs and benefits; that people will weigh the cost to benefit and are more likely to stay in cohabiting unions if the benefit outweighs the cost (Redmond, 2015). The students indicated that challenges they face in cohabitation can be resolved by provision of adequate campus accommodation. This fact is in accordance with the point made by Okpenyong and Okpenyong (2016) that cohabitation is caused mainly by lack of accommodation and problems with roommates which implies that by providing more residences, cohabitation may be subdued. Nimako and Bondinuba, (2013) also identified accommodation as an important factor that enhances tertiary students' living and learning. Tertiary institutions have the responsibility to provide decent accommodation for students who successfully gain admission to pursue various programs of study. Ekpenyong and Ekpenyong (2016) note that because of the exceedingly high demand for student housing, on-campus accommodation has been under pressure, often resulting in informal accommodation arrangements, including cohabitation. All universities must develop strategies for increasing the percentage of residence places available for students to at least 30% of the current total residence capacity within ten years. Additionally, the students reported access to bursaries or scholarships would reduce cohabitation in campus. In agreement with the present study, Kasim and Falola (2017) conclude that more access to bursaries or scholarships would provide students the financial freedom to afford a room and other necessities, such as food and books. According to Arisukwu (2013) the severely limited capacity of many parents and students to fully finance residential accommodation has contributed to student cohabitation and it is incumbent upon the government to explore and develop a fundamentally new approach to student funding that can remedy the situation.

Adeyemi (2011) says it is costly to achieve a tertiary education when a student comes from a low socio-economic background, without financial aid. Affordable student cohabitation is a necessity for students, especially, those in previously disadvantaged universities (Adeyemi, 2011). Nimako and Bondinuba, (2013) posit that an increased access to scholarships and bursaries will assist students with their financial needs and simultaneously reduce the rates of student cohabitation. Perhaps student cohabitation will reduce if students have more access to bursaries or scholarship which will assist in them getting their own accommodation when the university ones are not available.

Kang'ethe and Mafa (2014) write that many people cohabit without the knowledge of the consequences or hurdles waiting ahead. It is, therefore, crucial for social agencies and those in social professions to wage a war against ignorance, through educational workshops, conferences and awareness campaigns, on student cohabitation. This study, hence, revealed that awareness campaign is a key strategy to be used to reduce cohabitation amongst university students. Participants suggested that awareness campaigns should focus on sexually transmitted infections, HIV and AIDS. Dellar, Waxman and Karim (2015) insists that preventing HIV infections among students in South Africa is a public health imperative. This key population has an alarming high risk of acquiring HIV. Furthermore, given that a quarter of all new infections in South Africa occur among students, the goals of an 'AIDS-free generation' will not be achieved without reducing their risk of HIV acquisition. Semenya (2016) believes this can be achieved through awareness campaigns that will teach students about the risk of STIs in cohabitation. Students in this study also indicated that awareness campaigns on communication skills amongst cohabiters is needed, since conflicts occur when partners do not communicate appropriately.

Empowerment, through better communication skills will help with conflict within the cohabitation unions and the abuse that takes place. Zito (2015) also identify communication skills as an essential part of every successful union. For example, some partners are unable to talk about emotional issues without shouting at each other (Sica, Sestito, & Ragozini, 2014). Such individuals require guidance on how to unlearn their negative behaviour and learn new healthy interaction skills. It was emphasized by students in this study that there is need for awareness campaigns on anger management. In support of this, Aluko (2011) advocates that it is imperative to have awareness campaigns on abuse, especially, among cohabiters. Many may think that such topics are stale but they are still a rich source of information that may determine life or death for some people. As long as people are being abused, then these educational campaigns are still needed (Kang'ethe & Mafa, 2014). Lastly, the present study found that these awareness campaigns could also be a tool to warn those who are not cohabiting to stay away or for those intending, to make informed decisions regarding cohabitation. Zito (2015) confirms the point that awareness campaigns that educate about cohabitation will aid couples in their decision-making as they will be aware of the situation they will be getting themselves into.

CONCLUSION

Student cohabitation is characterized as a relatively intense experience based upon a deep level of emotional involvement and interpersonal commitment. It is highly likely that the incidence of cohabitation will steadily increase as the opportunities for more freedom in the selection of residence or roommates becomes more widespread. Even on campuses where housing policies are restrictive, there is evidence of students desiring the option to cohabit. Cohabitation among students is seen as a window of escape from the strangleholds of poverty and the need for accommodation. From disadvantaged universities, it could be pointed out that students engage in cohabitation due to lack of adequate accommodation or financial problems. Other universities, which are economically advanced may report different motivational factors to those of the present study, for student cohabitation. Regardless of the aforementioned statement, most studies seems to point to inadequate accommodation as a motivational factor, prevalent in institution of higher learning, for cohabitation (Bello & Ogunsanwo, 2013; Kasim et al., 2016; Kasim & Falola, 2017; Ojewola & Akundiyo, 2017; Zotorvie, 2017). This could suggest that in the new era, where free education is advanced for those from poor

economic background, if accommodation in institution of higher education is not addressed, students will continue to opt for cohabitation. Additionally, it is observed in this study that cohabitation evokes several challenges for the students, such as exposure to risky sexual behaviours, physical and emotional abuse as well as unplanned pregnancy; it is no wonder that cohabiting students face academic challenges. It must be borne in mind that an emotionally wounded/challenged generation of students cannot make progress academically unless their wounds/challenges are dealt with. Abuse and other sexually risky behaviours or conducts, thus, may jeopardize students' future if left unaddressed. Risky sexual behaviour leads to unplanned pregnancy which causes some students to discontinue studying to look for opportunities to fend for their unborn children. It is concluded in this study that cohabitation at the rural University of Venda campus may necessarily not be motivated by love or desire; it is also not a strategy used to test compatibility or because partners love each other. What motivates cohabiting may be grounded in costs and benefits as outlined in exchange theory for economic reasons and accommodation. The present study also highlighted strategies which can be implemented to reduce the phenomenon of cohabitation. Students have pointed out that sufficient accommodation and financial support can assist combat the dilemma of cohabitation. Additionally, awareness campaigns that focus on sexually-transmitted diseases or challenges of cohabitation can be of some aid. Due to the emotional and physical violence evident amongst students who are cohabiting, anger management, professional counselling and communication skills were indicated as other strategies to deal with challenges in cohabitation. It is undisputable that cohabitation within institution of higher learning needs attention in order for students to progress academically. It should be emphasized that reduction of student cohabitation does not suggest prohibition of sexual freedom. Students can express their sexual freedom, however, this study suggests that institutions should not be seen to promote cohabitation for this to happen as it affects students' educational functioning.

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