

Factors associated with cohabitation among university students in Nairobi, Kenya

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ABSTRACT: Cohabitation is emerging as an important factor in mate-selection in many societies in Kenya. This study focused on cohabitation among university students in Nairobi. The objectives included: determining the prevalence of cohabitation and establishing the relationship between students' attributes, family background and social factors and cohabitation. Methodology was guided by Brofenbrenner's ecological model of human development. A survey of 176 students from one public university in Kenya was conducted. Results showed that the prevalence of cohabitation was 27.4%. The significant factors that influenced cohabitation included fathers' occupation ($p = 0.016$), mothers' occupation ($p = 0.029$), parents' residence ($p = 0.000$), family income ($p = 0.000$) and peer influence ($p = 0.000$). However, the factors of students' age and sex were not significantly related to cohabitation. Implications for family life education, reproductive health and strengthening of students' guidance and counseling services were included.

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RESUMEN: La convivencia se está convirtiendo en un factor importante para la elección de la pareja en muchas sociedades de Kenia. Este estudio se centró en la convivencia entre los estudiantes universitarios en Nairobi. Los objetivos fueron: determinar la prevalencia de la convivencia y establecer la relación entre las características de los estudiantes, los antecedentes familiares, los factores sociales y la convivencia. La metodología se basó en el modelo ecológico de desarrollo humano de Bronfenbrenner. Se llevó a cabo una encuesta con 176 estudiantes de una universidad pública de Kenia. Los resultados mostraron una prevalencia de convivencia de 27.4%. Los factores más importantes que conducen a la convivencia comprenden la profesión del padre ($p = 0.016$), la de la madre ($p = 0.029$), el lugar de residencia de los padres ($p = 0.000$), el ingreso familiar ($p = 0.000$) la influencia de los amigos ($p = 0.000$). Sin embargo, factores como la edad y el género de los estudiantes no se relacionaron de modo significativo con la convivencia. Se incluyeron las repercusiones por la educación familiar, la salud en materia de procreación y el fortalecimiento de la orientación a los estudiantes, así como los servicios de asesoramiento.

Key words: cohabitation, premarital relationships, mate-selection, dating, courtship, come-we-stay marriages.

Palabras clave: convivencia, relaciones premaritales, elección de la pareja, salir con alguien de manera regular, noviazgo, unión libre o matrimonios de hecho.

INTRODUCTION

Background

Cohabitation is a living arrangement between persons of the opposite sex who engage in intimate relationship without legal commitment. The traditional Kenyan marriage and social interaction leading to marriage involve a lengthy process marked with negotiations and ritual. In traditional society, being married

signifies community recognition that a person holds a position of maturity and responsibility. Marriage has familial, economic, social, legal and spiritual significance (Wilson, Ngige, & Trollinger, 2003: 98). Couples who cohabit without any recognized marriage ceremony are considered to have violated the traditional cultural norms. In traditional society, cohabitation was rare and cohabiters were regarded with scorn until the couple formalized their marriage (Ngige, Ondigi, & Wilson, 2008: 230).

Kenyan couple formation and marriage are the result of a diverse and variegated process reflective of ethnicity, generation, education, religion, urbanization, and marriage legislation. Young people in Kenya find themselves faced with difficult choices between holding onto and preserving traditional marriage practices on one hand, and adopting contemporary lifestyles, mores and values on the other or even finding some way in which to mesh the two views together. In the last few decades, there has been a paradigm shift in marriage and family life for example the shift from polygamous to monogamous marriage forms; extended to nuclear family forms; parent-arranged marriages to individual mate selection; large to small family sizes; and rural to urban residence (Ngige *et al.*, 2008: 230-232).

In contemporary society, an increasing number of young people are postponing marriage and opting to live together without formalizing their marriage. Cohabitation is also practiced among adults working in urban areas. According to Kenya demographic and health survey (Kenya, 2009: 10), the number of females who reported they were cohabiting were 4.1% compared to 2.3% of male respondents. These figures indicate an increase in cohabitation from a similar survey conducted in 1998 that showed 3% for females and 1% for males respectively (Kenya, 1998: 12).

In contrast, western societies report higher levels of cohabitation than Kenya. In a sample of 1,293 American adolescents,

55% regarded living together as an option before marriage (Manning, Longmore, & Giordano, 2007: 568). Of 1,319 undergraduates at a large southeastern university in United States of America, 71.9% reported that they would live with a partner they were not married to, and 16% were or had already done so (Knox & Corte, 2007: 79). Reasons for the increase in cohabitation included career or educational commitments; increased tolerance of society, parents, and peers; improved birth control technology; desire for a stable emotional and sexual relationship without legal ties; and greater disregard for convention. Schoen, Landale, & Daniels (2007: 807) surveyed university students and found that 62% paid little attention to social conventions. Almost 60% of women lived together with their boyfriends before age 24. Most of these relationships were short-lived, with 20% resulting in marriage (Schoen *et al.*, 2007: 807). It is reported that people who lived together before marriage were more likely to be less religious or traditional (Baxter, 2005: 300). Cohabitants were also less likely to receive economic support from their parents (Eggebeen, 2005: 1097).

Cherlin (2004: 856) has argued that marriage is becoming increasingly “deinstitutionalized” in American society, citing the increasing prevalence of cohabiting unions among young adults as an important aspect of the transition occurring within traditional marriage. Cohabitation has become part of the pathway toward marriage (Manning *et al.*, 2007: 559). More recently, however, a new pattern is emerging. Young adults are increasingly more likely to choose to cohabit before marriage (Cherlin, 2004: 854). Cohabitation may or may not progress to marriage, but it is more often seen as a path toward marriage rather than simply a substitute (Stanley, Rhoades, & Markman, 2006: 501). On the other hand, being in a cohabiting relationship is not always an indicator of strong continuous commitment (Stanley *et al.*, 2004: 512).

Changes in the family and rates of cohabitation

Family change may occur with growing uncertainty about the future. Young adults may perceive cohabitation as a future union choice in a context of high uncertainty (Stanley *et al.*, 2006: 503). Uncertainty can apply to specific relationships, economic prospects, and the importance of marriage. Cohabitation may be a way to move a relationship forward without making a strong interpersonal commitment (Stanley *et al.*, 2004: 512-513). Structural changes have led to less clearly delineated movement through the higher education system and less certainty about transitions to stable employment with financial security. Cohabitation may be a viable relationship option during times of uncertain economic futures and may allow for flexibility that is not possible in marriage. The current generation of young adults grew up with high divorce rates and may be concerned about replicating this pattern in their own lives (Manning *et al.*, 2007: 556). Cohabitation may be viewed as a way to test relationships in a context of low levels of confidence in marriage as a stable relationship (Smock, Huang, Manning, & Bergstrom, 2006: 680).

Attitudes toward cohabitation

Young adults' attitudes and behavioral expectations are useful in understanding subsequent behavior including cohabiting. Union formation expectations may have considerable predictive power. For example, young adults' prior positive attitudes about cohabitation are associated with cohabitation (Barber, Axinn, & Thornton, 2002: 45; Cunningham & Thornton, 2005: 710).

Family background and cohabitation

Young adults' may model their parents' family formation behavior. Prior work indicates that children from divorced, stepparent, or single-parent families report lower expectations and weaker support for marriage (Crissey, 2005: 2) and express more positive attitudes toward cohabitation. Teenagers who experience parental divorce may be especially sensitive to the instability of marriages and may view cohabitation as a way to avoid divorce and to test the relationship (Smock *et al.*, 2006: 2). Similarly, adolescents living with cohabiting parents may be more likely to expect to cohabit because they have experience with this family form. Additionally, social learning approaches indicate parents' attitudes about marriage and cohabitation has an impact on their children's marriage and cohabitation attitudes. Parents who are more religious have children who express more positive attitudes toward marriage and less supportive views of cohabitation (Cunningham & Thornton, 2004: 710). Thus, parents who express less traditional attitudes may more often have children who expect to cohabit, whereas parents who express traditional beliefs may have children who expect only to marry and not to cohabit (Wilson *et al.*, 2003: 114).

Parents' socio economic status and cohabitation

Parents with more resources have greater expectations that their children will pursue college education and get married and are able to support their children's transitions into adulthood such as paying for college education or wedding ceremonies (Smock, Manning, & Porter, 2005: 680). Children whose parents come from a low socioeconomic status may be less certain about their economic future and less able to achieve the economic standards necessary for marriage. Thus, young adults from more disadvan-

tagged families are likely to have higher expectations to follow marriage paths that require fewer parental investments, such as cohabitation.

Religion and rates of cohabitation

Young adults who are less religious will have more positive cohabitation expectations (Cunningham & Thornton, 2004: 710). In addition, adolescents' strong religious beliefs are positively associated with their marriage expectations (Crissey, 2005: 2). Young adults faced with decisions between cohabitation and marriage are more likely to cohabit than to marry. Research also indicates that young adults who are traditional in their views about marriage and who report greater religiosity have lower cohabitation expectations (Manning *et al.* 2007: 568).

The Kenyan context and cohabitation

Education has been identified as one of the leading forces of modernity that has created major shake-ups in many African institutions including marriage and the family (Ngige *et al.*, 2008: 212). One of the emerging trends in society is the increase in the number of cohabitants (Kenya, 2009: 10; Wilson & Ngige, 2006: 265). In Kenya, cases of cohabitation have been reported among undergraduate students (Muriithi-Kabaria, 2006: 33; Siringi & Waihenya, 2000: 19). It is believed that cohabitation in the universities were on the rise mainly as a result of higher education reforms mounted in the 1990's that initiated cost-sharing of fees between the government and students (Njonjo, 2000: 10). In the face of sexually transmitted infections, HIV/AIDS, abortions, sexual abuse and children born out of wedlock, cohabitation among young adults becomes a major concern (Muriithi-Kabaria, 2006:

34; Njue, Rombo, & Ngige, 2007: 52; Wilson *et al.* 2006: 268). In Kenya, cohabitation has widely been a matter of public debate with limited systematic studies to map out the trend, nature and correlates among various groups of the population. In an effort to fill this gap the current study focused on cohabitation among university undergraduate students. The purpose of the study was to determine the contextual factors that contributed to cohabitation among university students in Nairobi.

Theoretical background

To explore factors associated with cohabitation among Kenyan university students, the study employed an ecological perspective derived from Bronfenbrenner's model of human development (1986). The theory proposed that intra-familial processes are affected by extra-familial contexts which in turn affect individual family members. This framework has been used to examine young adults' cohabitation behavior in a university context. The study utilizes variables at the family, individual, relationship and extra-family levels in order to investigate the students' cohabitation behavior.

Null hypotheses

The following hypotheses reflected the purpose and objectives of this study.

- Ho-1. There is no relationship between individual attributes (age, sex, college year) and cohabitation among university students.

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- Ho-2. There is no relationship between family social economic status and cohabitation among university students.
- Ho-3. There is no relationship between family social factors (parental marital status, history of family members' cohabitation) and cohabitation among university students.
- Ho-4. There is no relationship between extra-familial factors (religion, friends/peer influence) and cohabitation among university students.

METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted in 2005-2006 academic year in one selected public university in Nairobi, Kenya, as part of a masters' research project. At the time of the study, all undergraduate students registered in the regular programs resided in the university halls of residence. Data was obtained from a survey of 176 randomly selected undergraduate students enrolled in the school of education and human resource development. Students in their second and fourth year of study were chosen to participate in the research because second years had already gained some college experience while fourth years were seniors in their final year of undergraduate program. Informed consent was obtained from respondents and confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process and in all subsequent reports. Information was gathered by use of self-administered questionnaires.

RESULTS

Sample description

Respondents' characteristics

Results showed that males constituted 51.7% while females made up 48.3%, and the ages ranged from 21 to 23 years. In terms of religion, 40.2% were Catholics and 59.8% were protestants. The distribution by year of study showed that 43.2% were second years and 56.8% were in their fourth year of study.

Parents' characteristics

Majority of parents were married (89.6%) and only 10.4% were single parents. In terms of the highest level of education, more fathers (29%) had attained tertiary education as compared to mothers (17.4%). Mothers who had attained primary education were 27.3% compared to 17.2% of the fathers. In terms of employment, more fathers (35.5%) than mothers (20.8%) were in business and managerial positions and about equal numbers were involved in farming. The monthly family incomes ranged from Kenya Shillings 5,000 to 20,000 (Note: 80 Kenya Shillings was equivalent to one (1) US dollar in february 2011). Majority of parents lived in rural areas (67.2%) compared to their urban counterparts (32.8%).

Prevalence and attitudes toward cohabitation

The prevalence of cohabitation was assessed by asking the respondents whether they have ever cohabited before the study

period. The results indicated that 27.4% of the respondents were cohabiting at the time of the study while 72.6% reported they had never cohabited. About one-third of the respondents approved of cohabitation while two thirds disapproved of the practice. A small proportion of respondents (6.7%) whose parents had cohabited before marriage reported that they would follow their parents' example of trial marriage. The students had mixed feelings on the effect of cohabitation on marital success. The results showed that 41.8% of the students felt that cohabitation could jeopardize one's marital success in future. An almost equal proportion (41.2%) indicated that cohabitation could not jeopardize one's marital success in future. The remaining 17% were not sure of the effect of cohabitation on marital success.

Factors influencing cohabitation

Data obtained from respondents who were engaged in cohabitation was subjected to further analysis and hypotheses testing. The selected factors influencing cohabitation were measured by ranking 15 items related to the reasons for cohabitation. The mean score for the factors are presented in table 1 (p. 120). The results indicated that the most highly ranked factors influencing cohabitation was desire for intimacy and sex on a regular basis followed by strong emotional relationship and strong physical attraction toward someone. The lowest ranked factors were awareness of high divorce rate followed by friends/peer influence and loneliness. Other factors highly believed to be crucial in cohabitation included high cost of living on campus and the need to share economic and domestic responsibilities that were ranked as the 6th and 7th reasons respectively.

TABLE 1
FACTORS INFLUENCING COHABITATION IN RANK ORDER

<i>Rank order</i>	<i>Factors influencing cohabitation</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Dev.</i>
1	Desire for intimacy and sex on a regular basis	9.6	4.77
2	Being in a strong emotional relationship	9.52	5.10
3	Strong physical attraction toward someone	9.29	6.66
4	Desire to experiment with new living	8.94	3.95
5	Desire to test compatibility for marriage	8.58	3.50
6	High cost of living on campus	8.50	4.08
7	Sharing economic and domestic responsibilities	8.34	4.02
8	Permissive sexual attitudes	8.18	11.47
9	Sexual frustration	7.82	4.16
10	Education demands that do not allow for early marriage	7.60	4.54
11	Fear of marital commitment	7.52	4.17
12	Desire for personal growth	7.24	4.30
13	Loneliness	7.12	3.47
14	Peer influence	6.73	4.09
15	Awareness of high divorce rate	6.65	4.89

Hypotheses testing

The following hypotheses were tested using the chi-square test for statistical significance.

Ho-1. There was no relationship between family social economic status (parents' education, occupation, income and residence) and cohabitation among university students.

Ho-2. There was no relationship between individual attributes (age, sex, college year) and cohabitation among university students.

Ho-3. There was no relationship between family social factors (parental marital status and history of family members' cohabitation) and cohabitation among university students.

Ho-4. There is no relationship between extra-familial factors (religion, friends/peer influence) and cohabitation among university students. The results of hypotheses testing are indicated in tables 2 and 3 (p. 126).

Family socio-economic status and cohabitation

The variable for family socio-economic status was measured by six indices namely fathers education, occupation, mothers' education, occupation, family income and residence. Results in table 2 showed that there were significant relationships between four family socio-economic status variables namely, mothers' and fathers' occupations, family income and residence, and students' cohabitation. However parents' marital status, parental cohabitation prior to marriage, and their educational levels were not significantly related to cohabitation.

TABLE 2
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAMILY SOCIO-ECONOMIC
STATUS AND STUDENT COHABITATION

<i>Family SES Variable</i>	<i>Value (χ^2)</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Significance</i>
Mothers education	1.575	3	0.665
Fathers education	6.943	3	0.074
Mothers occupation	10.757	4	0.029*
Fathers occupation	12.162	4	0.016*
Family income	24.47	4	0.000**
Family residence	12.15	1	0.000**

* Significant at $p \leq 0.05$

** Significant at $p \leq 0.001$

Fathers' level of education and student cohabitation

Education is an important component in growth and development of individuals.

The results of cross tabulation between fathers' level of education and student cohabitation showed that the largest proportion of cohabiters was found among students whose fathers had secondary level of education (19%). The least proportion of cohabiters was recorded amongst students whose fathers had primary (3.1%) and university education (5.5%). The chi-square results indicated that there was no significant relationship between fathers' level of education and student cohabitation ($p = 0.074$). The null hypothesis was therefore retained. Nonetheless, the probability value was less than $p \leq 0.10$ and given that this study was exploratory, this was an indicator of positive relationship between fathers' level of education and cohabitation among university students.

Mothers' level of education and student cohabitation

Results showed that the highest proportion of cohabiters was recorded among students whose mothers had secondary education (17.3%) followed by respondents whose mothers had primary education (6.8%). The least proportion of cohabiters was recorded among students whose mothers had university education (3.7%). However the chi-square test results revealed that there was no significant relationship between mothers' level of education and students' cohabitation ($p = 0.665$). The null hypothesis was therefore retained for mothers' education.

Fathers' occupation and student cohabitation

Parents' occupation was considered as a key determinant of the socio-economic status of the student. The fathers' occupation was cross tabulated with cohabitation and the results indicated that students whose fathers were in managerial positions had the lowest proportion of cohabiters (6.0%), followed by those respondents whose fathers were in the teaching profession (7.4%). The highest proportion of cohabiters was recorded among students whose fathers were in unskilled non-formal occupations and small scale farming activities (16%). The chi-square test results indicated that there was a significant relationship between fathers' occupation and students' cohabitation practices ($p = 0.016$). Fathers' occupation was a very strong socio-economic indicator and the results indicated that respondents whose fathers had higher to middle status occupations were less likely to cohabit than those in the lower status occupations. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected for fathers' occupations.

Mothers' occupation and student cohabitation

The mothers' occupation was cross tabulated with cohabitation and the results indicated that students whose mothers were in managerial and business positions had the lowest proportion of cohabiters (1.2%), followed by those respondents whose mothers were in the teaching profession (9.2%). The highest proportion of cohabiters was recorded among students whose mothers were in unskilled non-formal occupations and small scale farming activities (17.2%). The chi-square test results indicated that there was a significant relationship between mothers' occupation and students' cohabitation practices ($p = 0.029$). Therefore Mothers' occupation was a very strong socio-economic indicator for stu-

dent cohabitation. The results indicated that respondents whose mothers had higher to middle status occupations were less likely to cohabit than those in the lower status occupations. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected for mothers' occupations.

The results for parental occupations by both fathers and mothers had strong positive relationship with student cohabitation.

Pooled family income and student cohabitation

The largest proportion of respondents who were cohabiting (15.4%) was found among the category whose monthly pooled family income was less than Kenya Shillings 10,000 followed by 10,001 to 19,999 (10.3%) and the least was 20,000 and above (7.4%) (note: 80 Kenya Shillings was equivalent to one (1) US dollar in february 2011). The chi-square test results revealed that there was a significant positive relationship between pooled family income and student cohabitation ($p = 0.000$). The null hypothesis stating that there was no significant relationship between family income and student cohabitation was therefore rejected. This was related to previous findings in this study, which showed that low socio-economic status of parents was a very strong indicator of cohabitation, while high socio-economic status was negatively related to student cohabitation. This may suggest that when both parents were in high status occupations, the pooled family income was greater and therefore there was more disposable income to support the university students without having to cohabit in order to share living expenses.

Parents' residence and cohabitation

Results revealed that students whose parents were in the rural areas for at least two years before the study had the largest frequency of cohabitation (24.4%) compared to those whose parents were living in urban areas (3.0%). The chi-square test results indicated that there was a significant positive relationship between family residence and student cohabitation ($p = 0.000$). The null hypothesis that there was no significant relationship between family residence and cohabitation was therefore rejected. This may have been because of the variations in the socio-economic status between the urban and rural areas. According to Kenya (2003: 1), 75% of the poor live in rural areas compared to only 25% in urban areas.

Student attributes and family social factors by cohabitation

The variables for student attributes were measured by three indices namely gender, age, and university year of study. Family social factors were measured by parents' marital status, history of cohabitation by family members, while extra-familial factors were derived from religion and friends/peer influence. Results in table 3 showed that there was a significant relationship between friends/peer influence and students' cohabitation. However student gender, age, university year of study, parents' marital status, history of family members' cohabitation, and religious affiliation were not significantly related to student cohabitation.

TABLE 3
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STUDENTS' ATTRIBUTES, FAMILIAL
AND EXTRA-FAMILIAL FACTORS BY COHABITATION

<i>Independent Variable</i>	<i>Value (χ^2)</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Significance</i>
Gender	0.242	1	0.623
Age	5.245	2	0.730
University year of study	0.064	1	0.064
Friends/peer influence	15.69	1	0.000*
Religious affiliation	0.480	1	0.826
Parents' marital status	4.270	3	0.230
History of cohabitation by family members	2.12	1	0.146

* Significant at $p \leq 0.001$.

Relationship between student gender and cohabitation

The results indicated that slightly more male students (15.2%) engaged in cohabitation than female students (12.2%). However the chi-square test result ($p = 0.623$) was not significant for gender. The null hypothesis for gender and cohabitation was retained.

Relationship between students' age and cohabitation

The highest proportion of cohabitation was recorded in the age group of 22 years (12.20%) followed by those aged 23 years (11.0%) with those aged 21 years recording the least number of cohabiters (4.3%). The chi-square test results revealed that there was no significant relationship between age and cohabitation among Kenyan university students ($p = 0.73$). The null hypothesis for age and cohabitation was therefore retained.

Relationship between university year of study and cohabitation

In this study participants were drawn from students in their second and fourth years of university education. The results indicated that a larger proportion of fourth years (19.9%) had engaged in cohabitation compared to their second year counterparts (8.1%).

The chi-square test results indicated that there was no significant relationship between year of study and cohabitation among university students ($p = 0.064$). Therefore the null hypothesis for university year of study and cohabitation was retained.

Relationship between religious affiliation and cohabitation

The results showed that there was a higher proportion of cohabiters among the Protestants (15.9%) than among the Catholics (11.6%). Other religious groups, which included African traditional religion and Islam, were not represented due to the small numbers in the university population and in the national population as a whole (Kenya, 2009: 10). The chi-square test results indicated that religious affiliation was not significantly related to cohabitation ($p = 0.826$). The null hypothesis stating that there was no significant relationship between religious affiliation and cohabitation was therefore retained. According to Yoon (2004: 151), studies on religion and adolescent sexual behavior are inconsistent. Some studies indicate that religion is an influential factor in adolescent sexual involvement, while other studies show little or no effect.

Relationship between friends/peer influence and cohabitation

The results indicated that all students who were cohabiting had friends who were also engaged in cohabitation. The chi-square test results showed that there was a significant positive relationship between cohabitation and friends/peer influence ($p = 0.000$). The null hypothesis for friends/peer influence and cohabitation was therefore rejected. These results were similar to the findings by Macklin (1988: 120) that showed that as teenagers grew older the reference group of the greatest importance switches from parents to peers. This is supported further by Yoon (2004: 153), who asserted that as adolescents grew older into young adulthood, peers become progressively more influential and parents less influential.

Parents' marital status and student cohabitation

The results showed that the students whose parents were single (divorced, separated, never married, and cohabiting) had the lowest proportion of those who had ever cohabited (4.3%). The largest proportion of those who had ever cohabited was recorded among respondents whose parents were married (22.7%). The chi-square results revealed that there was no significant relationship between parents' marital status and student cohabitation ($p = 0.230$). The null hypothesis stating that there was no significant relationship between parents' marital status and student cohabitation was therefore retained. This may have been as a result of an over representation of respondents who had their parents in the married category which could not allow for fair comparison between married and single parent categories. This could also be because the rates of divorce and separation

(6.1%) are not be as high in Kenya as in the developed world (Kenya, 2009: 10). However, these findings contradict those of a similar study by Cunnington & Thornton (2004: 1), which showed that the marital status of parents directly affected the cohabiting rates of young adults. Parental intact marriages resulted in lower cohabitation rates by young adults while respondents from divorced parents had the highest rates of cohabitation. On the other hand, a similar study conducted by Macklin (1988: 120) showed that cohabitants were no more likely to come from broken or unhappy homes.

History of family members' cohabitation and student cohabitation

Results revealed that the highest frequency of those cohabiting was found among respondents whose family members had a history of cohabitation before marriage (15.2%) compared to those who indicated no history of family members' cohabitation (12.2%). The chi-square results showed that there was no significant relationship between history of family members' cohabitation and student cohabitation ($p = 0.146$). The null hypothesis stating that there was no significant relationship between history of family members' cohabitation and student cohabitation was therefore retained. In a similar study conducted by Stanley *et al.* (2004: 496) results showed that there was no linkage between history of family members cohabiting and young adults' cohabitation practices. This may be explained by the fact that the family as an institution was no longer the epicenter of marriage preparation, family life education and moral training as was the case in the traditional African family (Wilson & Ngige, 2006: 265).

DISCUSSION

The results of the current study indicated that the prevalence of cohabitation among undergraduate students in Nairobi was 27.4 %. This figure is similar to the one reported for universities in the United States by Macklin (1998: 120). Thus the cohabitation levels among the respondents were comparable to that reported in more developed countries. Such trends if not checked are bound to rise in the face of rising cases of sexually transmitted infections, Aids, abortions, sexual abuse and children born out of wedlock (Njue *et al.*, 2007: 52; Wilson & Ngige, 2006: 268). One of the peer counselors warned that these “trial marriages” had severely compromised education standards particularly among female students. She reported that, “Female students remained behind in the hostels washing clothes and cooking for their boyfriends, who never missed their lectures.” This was particularly worrying given that the results of the study indicated a break-up rate of 47%. Moreover, those who broke up and were pregnant had to leave the university halls of residence. They ended up raising their children alone, missed classes when the child was sick and were forced to discontinue their studies for a semester thus compromising their education. Such young women who were single and pregnant suffered from stigma and discrimination by their families and the larger community. In the traditional Kenyan society, cohabiting couples faced stiff penalties such as banishment from the community (Wilson *et al.*, 2003: 104).

Despite the high levels of break-up of cohabitation, some respondents approved of cohabitation before marriage and others indicated they were intending to cohabit. However, the results revealed that there were mixed feelings among the students as to the effect of cohabitation on marital success with equal proportions holding contradicting perspectives. According to Wilson & Ngige (2006: 265), cohabitation was not an option

in a traditional African family. However in contemporary families there is a growing approval of cohabitation among young Kenyan adults and university students are not an exception. The results of the current study indicated that despite the striking similarities between the study subjects and results of some studies in the United States, there were some notable differences between the factors influencing cohabitation in the United States and Kenya. According to Manning *et al.* (2007: 559), the main causes of cohabitation in America were mainly psychological and environmental. Macklin (1988: 120) argued that cohabitation in America could also be explained in economic terms. Among the Kenyan respondents, socio-economic factors including occupation, income and residence of parents or guardians were among the significant factors influencing cohabitation alongside friends/peer influence. Other socio-cultural factors such as sex, age, education, marital status and family history of cohabitation were not significant in this study.

Studies conducted in the west show that marriages that are preceded by living together have 50% to 100% higher disruption rates than marriages without premarital cohabitation (Popenoe, 1999: 527). Cohabitation is regarded as a half way house for people who do not want the degree of personal and social commitment that marriage represents. Studies show that cohabitation experience affects the quality of marriage. Marriages in which at least one spouse is an ex-cohabiter are 50% more likely to end up in divorce than are marriages in which neither spouse experienced premarital cohabitation. Spouses who cohabited before marriage reported lower levels of commitment to marriage as an institution. Cohabitation may therefore have far reaching negative effects in the lives of young adults later in life (Stanley *et al.*, 2004: 496).

The meaning and experience of cohabitation varies considerably and reflects the different needs of individuals. For some couples, living together is a new stage in a dating relationship.

Different studies have cited a number of reasons for cohabitation by college students. A common pattern found among college students, living together was a logical step in getting to know and share their lives with another person (Muriithi-Kabaria, Ngige, & Mugenda, 2010: 19). For other couples in college, cohabitation represented a cheaper way to live; for example, sharing expenses might enable younger cohabitants to commit more time and energy to education or career development while at the same time providing them with companionship on a daily basis (Muriithi-Kabaria *et al.*, 2010: 20).

According to Stanley *et al.* (2006: 496), some of the reasons given by cohabiting college students in the United States included loneliness, high expenses of living alone, disenchantment with traditional dating and courtship, fear of marital commitment, awareness of the high divorce rate, sexual frustration, education or career demands that preclude early marriage, strong physical attraction toward someone, being in a strong emotional relationship, desire for intimacy and sex on a regular basis, desire to experiment with a new living arrangement, desire for personal growth and example of peers. In the Kenyan context, for most young adults who enter such arrangements, cohabitation is clearly part of the courtship and mate-selection process rather than an alternative to legal marriage. It is often viewed as a means of testing a relationship prior to marriage, and thus as an aid to appropriate mate selection (Wilson *et al.*, 2003: 115).

According to Muriithi-Kabaria *et al.* (2010: 21), many young people espouse a variety of arguments in support of cohabitation. It provides an opportunity to establish a meaningful relationship; source of financial, social, and emotional security; provides central pleasures of marriage for example steady sexual partner and companionship without as much commitment and responsibility; a chance to increase self understanding while relating to another person on an intimate basis. It enables partners to develop a more

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realistic notion of each other and it provides an opportunity for self-disclosure and realization of personal goals.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The main factors that were associated with cohabitation among university students in Nairobi, Kenya, were family socio-economic status and friends/peer influence. Results showed 27.4% of undergraduate students cohabited while more than half approved of cohabitation and indicated intent to cohabit. The key variables that showed significant positive relationship to cohabitation included fathers' occupation ($p = 0.016$), mothers' occupation ($p = 0.029$), parents' residence ($p = 0.000$) and family income ($p = 0.000$). The factor of friends/peer influence ($p = 0.000$) was the only significant factor in the context of social environment. However, the students' factors of age and sex were not significantly related to cohabitation. The results indicate a need for promoting student-friendly family life education and provision of reproductive health services among undergraduate students. The need to strengthen students' guidance and counseling services at the university cannot be overemphasized.

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