

Rising Death Toll In Nigerian Varsities As Uncontrolled Cohabitation Continues

By **Our Correspondents** - January 11, 2020

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LAGOS – *Favour Daley-Oladele was a female, Nigerian undergraduate who was gruesomely murdered by her boyfriend, Adeeko Owolabi, 22, whom she had gone to visit. Upon investigation, it was discovered that Favour, final year Sociology student of Lagos State University (LASU), was allegedly killed by her boyfriend's prophet, Segun Philip, 42, in Ikoyi-Ile, Osun, on December 8, 2019, as part of the process for money rituals. Favour's murder, which was not discovered until January 2020 was a rude-awakening for parents with children in higher institution of learning. It revealed the many happenings that occur in higher institutions of learning where students are exposed to unsafe conditions as a result of the freedom they enjoy away from the watchful eyes of their parents.*

Upon investigation, Saturday INDEPENDENT discovered that the level of degradation, immorality and perverseness in Nigeria's higher institutions of learning is further encouraged in institutions where a larger population of the students reside off-campus, thereby allowing for cohabitation among students of different genders. This has caused a rise in the number of avoidable deaths among young undergraduates, as in most cases, female students cohabiting with male undergraduates are exposed to the dangers in the lives of their live-in partners.

Cohabitation in Nigerian universities is a concept as old as the university system. In many instances, students away from home, who are experiencing unbridled freedom for the first time, tend to explore newer concepts, experiences and adventure, and quite a number begin to cohabit, all for different reasons.

An HND student of the Federal Polytechnic Ilaro responding to the trend said, "We call it couple's life. It is very common and it is even easy, especially for people who stay alone." Preferring to stay anonymous, the young man further explained, "From my Year One days, I had a girlfriend. Her parents gave her money to rent a place, but the money was not enough. I think they wanted her to get a roommate. Since I stay alone in a self-contained, it was easier for her to stay with me so that I can protect her, and she used the money to buy a new phone. Since then, we have been staying together. Every year, when they give her money for rent, we spend it together and we decide what we want to use it for. Last year, we used the money to buy a generator, and we are both happy. She cooks, cleans and washes, and I ensure she does not have any problem in school," he explained.

The young man's explanation, while alarming is an indication of the fact that most parents and guardians are not privy to the activities of their

children and wards in school. The lax system of accommodation in most government-owned tertiary institutions allows for a lot of premarital cohabitation.

Many Nigerian universities, polytechnics and colleges of education have no hostels or halls of residence for their students. Those that have do not have enough space to accommodate all the students that attend the school. This leaves the students at the mercy of Off-campus landlords who sometimes charge ridiculous amounts in rent that forces students to pair up.

According to Mrs. Eniola Osuji, businesswoman, ^{close}mother of two and old student of Ogun State University said the cohabitation trend has actually saved many lives.

“I attended one of the most notorious schools in the southwest, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago Iwoye. At the time I was in school, it was known as OSU, Ogun State University. An average OSUite guy is a cultist and many of them like to rape girls. So many of the girls would like to live with their boyfriends for protection. Whenever there is a problem in school, and the students go on a rampage, girls that stay with their boyfriends have no problem because everybody knows that you are someone’s girl, so they won’t touch you. At least that way, you know it is only your boyfriend that you are sleeping with.”

Despite the advantages the respondents outlined, Saturday INDEPENDENT looked deeper into the trend and discovered that cohabitation has created many more problems than it has solved for students.

In October 2010, a 400-Level student of English Education of the Olabisi Onabanjo University, OOU, Ago Iwoye, Ogun State was raped and killed at her boyfriend’s residence in town.

Miss Ruth Loveth Sanusi was gang-raped, macheted to death, and had a pipe stuck in her vagina after she was found at her boyfriend’s residence by suspected cultists who had come to attack. The room,

located at Iyalaje area, opposite the then Texas Kitchen, was rented by the boyfriend, Omotayo.

While the school had been on strike for about three weeks, Loveth had remained in school at her boyfriend’s place, even though her own place of residence was at Abobi area in Ago Iwoye.

Another young undergraduate simply identified as Osinachi, a 200-Level student of Delta State University Abraka, also cohabited with her boyfriend in a house she rented. A naive Osinachi had been enamoured by the boy’s money, gotten through his ‘yahoo-yahoo’ scheme and had allowed him free run of her home. After a few weeks of housing her

‘yahoo-yahoo’ boyfriend, friends noticed Osinachi was losing weight and looking sickly by the day. The situation deteriorated so much that she was taken home by her concerned friends where it was discovered that the boyfriend had stolen a pair of her panties and used for some sort of get-rich ritual.

Benedict John, a student of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka said, “co-habitation in schools, precisely higher institutions, is definitely real. I never really believed until I heard about Silvia Maduka, a 21-year-old lady, studying Medicine and Surgery at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. I was told that Silvia was born with a silver spoon. After gaining admission into the university through her father’s help, Silvia began ^{close} to have an ‘aje-butter’ life.

“After a year of battling with exams, Silvia became frustrated and decided to get a helping hand and this led her to Dave, a fellow course-mate, who among their course- mates was known as a ‘first-class material’.

“After a series of persuasion from Silvia’s friends, Daniel decided to help Silvia through schoolwork. As time went on, Silvia and Daniel began to fall in love. After two months of being in a relationship, they decided to live together. This was because Daniel, who was an only child, was from a poor background. He could no longer be able to pay his accommodation fees and Silvia, who was head-over-heels in love with him, could not go a day without seeing him. So, in order to save her the stress of wanting to see him all the time, she decided to rent a self-contained apartment which she furnished herself.

“Silvia, who never ran out of money didn’t see this as a problem.”

These and many other bizarre stories abound, each worse than the other.

While many brush off the stories with the notion that cohabitation among students of both genders in higher institutions of learning is a practice that is as old as higher institutions of learning, and not a cause of worry, Esther Akinniyi, a psychologist in Ibadan said it will affect the parties involved.

“I saw it a lot in my days as an undergraduate. Most times, it is the girls that bear the brunt of it. Besides the stigma that she suffers through, the girl might be so overwhelmed with these self-imposed wifely duties that she forgets the reason she is in school in the first instance. Her studies may suffer and eventually, she may discover belatedly that the guy was just using her. More than 60% of those I have seen don’t eventually get married, so what was the point of it all?”

Saturday INDEPENDENT reached out to Prof Duro Oni of the Creative Arts Department, University of Lagos, (UNILAG) to hear his opinion on the trend. He said, “Cohabiting among students is odd. It is certainly not anything that anyone should encourage. You can’t live like a couple at that

age when you are in school. Even if the parties involved are mature students, I don't think it is right.

“Some schools regulate the kind of places where their students can stay off-campus. UNILAG has a couple of private hostels around the school, but it is strictly for female students. In schools where people simply go and rent apartments and start sharing it, that's not right. Two or even four female students can share an apartment, and the boys can do the same. If they like, they can visit each other. But to be living and sleeping together on a daily basis? Where is the level of morality in society? How do they concentrate on their studies? It is like a proper marital situation, and that is not good. Maybe we belong to the old school, but it is ^{close} actually wrong.”

When asked if he believes some parents are aware of the situation and may be financially unable to change it, he said, “What parent would be aware of cohabiting and allow it? If you can't afford an apartment of your own, then you can look for people of the same gender to share with you. You can almost be sure that those who engage in that are not likely to do well in terms of their academics. Society must be turning upside down.”

Prof. Oni added “Schools should try to regulate the kind of private hostels where their students can stay, even if it is off-campus because the students still carry the names of the school. In a situation where a student simply goes to rent a place in town and gets a cohabitant, that may be very difficult to regulate, but the school should not encourage those things. UNILAG regulates the private hostels off campus that are single-gender, so schools should do that.”

Prof. Olusiji Sowande, Lagos Zonal Coordinator, ASUU said, “Of course, cohabitation can never happen within the university campus. It is usually in off-campus systems that we have such situations.

“The trend is becoming more popular, and it is not the best. Recently, I received information that some of the ladies who cohabit with men get pregnant and without telling anyone would go and abort and have complications. Unfortunately, because these are off-campus situations, there is little or nothing that the university administration can do because it is not within the campus.

“So it means that it is the parents that should actually monitor their wards and be sure that they know where their children are residing and who their co-tenants or roommates are. In most cases, parents who monitor their wards hardly find their wards running into that kind of lifestyle.”

On what he believes started the trend, Sowande explained that even though it is not necessarily a recent trend, it seems to be in vogue these days. “And because many parents do not usually have time for their children, it happens without their knowledge.

“For some students whose parents have reared them in what I can call highly monitored systems and did not allow them to mingle with other genders, when they get to higher institutions, many of them feel that it is the best time for them to just express themselves. And because they don’t have anyone to advise them, they believe they are free and can live their lives the way they want.

“Some of them get into drug addiction and other things because of the kind of people they relate with. It is really problematic and parents should be up and doing in monitoring their children,” he said.

“Also, the age at which some of the children in higher ^{close} institutions get admission now is not as mature as it used to be, like in the last 20 years. Before, some would be 20 before they get admission, but now you have 15-year-olds getting admission, and many of them do not have the required maturity to know that there is a difference between those who are married and those who are not married and that living together is not the best option,” he explained.

Among other reasons, Sowande added that “Poverty is another factor. An affluent student can draw another student into the situation because he or she is the one footing the bills. The poverty level in the land is very high, and people are looking for all kinds of ways to survive.

“As long as we have off-campus accommodation, the problem would persist. The only solution is for the institutions to accommodate a very high percentage of their students within the campus where they can be properly monitored. Increase the number of hostels within the campus, and let 80 or 90 per cent of the students within the higher institution community be accommodated within the campus and you can monitor them. Definitely, there would be no room for cohabitation.”

Federal institutions of learning like UNILAG who have a good number of on-campus accommodation can still only cater for less than 10,000 students as opposed to the number the school actually admits on a yearly basis. For this reason, the school employs a balloting system to enable the space allocation be free and fair.

In furtherance of creating a solution to the problem of cohabitation, many institutions without hostel facilities are beginning to create on-campus accommodation for their students, while those who already have are expanding to accommodate all their students.

For example, the Lagos State Government recently signed a Build, Operate and Transfer (BOT) agreement with a private developer to deliver 8,272 hostel units for Lagos State University (LASU) students.

The agreement, signed with six private property developers in Lagos, would ensure the delivery of the hostel within 18 months, which

according to the Lagos State Governor, Babajide Sanwo-Olu, was a strategic move that would have a positive impact on the lives of students.

With the agreement, LASU is set to become a residential tertiary institution, 36 years after it was established.

The concessionaires are: Costa Del Sol Ltd, Seamless Integrated Ltd, Aircom Nigeria Ltd, Clay Hall Ltd, First Investment Development Company Ltd, and Advent Integrated Services Ltd.

Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti (EKSU) is also set to become residential as the school management and two estate management firms on Wednesday, January 8, signed a memorandum of understanding for the construction of a 6,000-bed hostel.

The MoU also includes the construction of residential quarters for the Vice-Chancellor and some top officials of the varsity, a move which is aimed at deepening students-staff relationship.

The State Governor, Dr Kayode Fayemi commended the university management for the initiative which he described as a “game-changer” for the university in view of its dream to rank among the best in Africa.

Dr Fayemi, who noted that the project would prevent further encroachment on the university’s land, said the proposed hostel accommodation would also meet the yearnings of students who have at various fora complained about the high cost of rent in the varsity community.

The governor, who assured of support for the success of the project, said he was aware that the University management would not manage the hostel accommodation but would regulate the activities of the investors who are putting up the structure in the overall interest of the students.

The project is scheduled for completion before the end of 2020. The memorandum of understanding was signed by the Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Edward Olanipekun and the representatives of the two firms.

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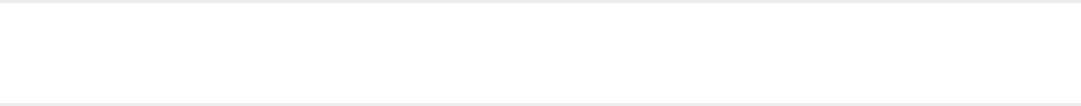
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