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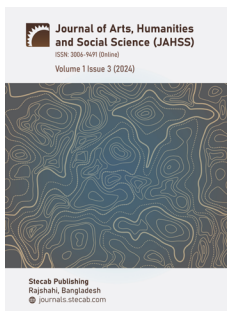
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Research Article

Couples under One Roof: A Quantitative Analysis on Cohabitation and Relationship Dynamics

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About Article

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ABSTRACT

Cohabitation, defined as two individuals living together without marriage, became increasingly prevalent, particularly in the Philippines. This study employed a quantitative research methodology to analyze the relationship dynamics of cohabiting couples in General Santos City. Utilizing a descriptive correlation design, data were collected from 60 randomly selected cohabiting couples through adapted survey questionnaires. The study explored how cohabitation impacted relationship satisfaction and stability, addressing questions regarding various cohabitation statuses and their influence on relationship dynamics. Results indicated that cohabiting couples reported high satisfaction levels, with an aggregated mean score of 3.58, suggesting that their experiences were comparable to those of married couples. Furthermore, a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.323^{**}$) was found between cohabitation status and relationship dynamics ($p = 0.000$), indicating that while cohabitation was not the sole determinant of relationship quality, it significantly shaped couple interactions and support mechanisms. The findings aligned with existing literature highlighting the dual nature of cohabitation; while it could enhance intimacy and shared experiences, it also introduced challenges related to commitment and shared responsibilities. The study concluded that understanding the complexities of cohabitation was essential for promoting relationship stability among couples. Recommendations for future research included exploring factors contributing to initial satisfaction levels and developing community support programs tailored for cohabiting couples to enhance their long-term relationship quality.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Cohabitation, the practice of living together without being married, has become increasingly common in many parts of the world, including the Philippines. This shift in relationship dynamics has prompted researchers to explore its implications on relationship satisfaction and stability. The phenomenon of cohabitation is multifaceted, serving various roles such as a precursor to marriage, an alternative to marriage, or simply a stage in the relationship progression (Sassler & Cooperstock, 2023). Understanding these roles is crucial for comprehending how cohabitation influences the quality and longevity of relationships. The comparison between married and cohabiting couples expresses less satisfaction in their relationship. Several problems associated with cohabitation can impact relationship satisfaction and stability, including a lack of commitment. Unclear expectations may also be associated with cohabitation; couples may have differing expectations about the nature of their relationship. Cohabitation may have a beneficial and non-beneficial response for every cohabitated couple, depending on their sides.

Historically, cohabitation was often viewed as a trial period before marriage, allowing couples to test their compatibility (Bumpass & Lu, 2000). However, recent studies suggest that cohabitation can also be an alternative to marriage, particularly in societies where marriage is delayed or less emphasized (Geiger & Livingston, 2019). The increasing prevalence of cohabitation has significant implications for family structures and child-rearing practices, as many children are now born into cohabiting households (Kennedy & Bumpass, 2008). Research indicates that the economic foundations of cohabiting couples play a critical role in their relationship outcomes. Couples with greater and more equal salaries are less likely to separate, implying that financial stability and equality help to maintain relationship stability (Ishizuka, 2018). Additionally, the social and cultural context in which cohabitation occurs can influence relationship satisfaction and stability. For instance, cohabitation may still carry a stigma in more traditional societies, potentially affecting the couple's relationship dynamics and societal support (Brown *et al.*, 2012).

1.1. Conceptual framework

This paper anchored various theories that support the idea of cohabitation and the impact of living under one roof together on relationship dynamics. The first theory is the Intimate Relationships Theory of Orbuch (2015), which focuses on the nature of intimacy in relationships, emphasizing the development of trust, communication, and emotional support. Cohabiting couples often focus on these aspects to build a strong partnership. The dynamics of intimacy in cohabiting relationships are central to understanding how couples manage conflict, support each other, and sustain their relationship over time. The second theory is the Triangular Theory of Love of Sternberg (1986); this theory suggests that relationships, including cohabitation, focus on emotional intimacy, companionship, and mutual satisfaction, rather than traditional roles and responsibilities. Cohabiting couples often prioritize emotional connection and compatibility over formal institutions. They seek to build a partnership based on equality and personal fulfillment.

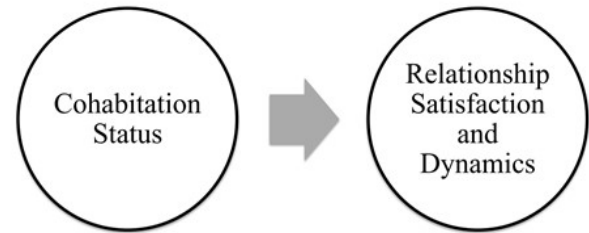


Figure 1. Conceptual Paradigm of the Study

This paper aims to provide a quantitative analysis of how cohabitation affects relationship dynamics among couples. By deepening our understanding and discovering the impact of living together and its satisfaction and stability on relationships, explicitly living with partners or cohabiting couples could help various individuals navigate its effects on their relationship stability. This sought to answer the following questions: (1) What are the different cohabitation statuses of the couples?, (2) How does cohabitation impact the relationship dynamics of cohabiting couples?, and (3) Is there a significant relationship between the state of cohabitation of the couples and relationship dynamics?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Cohabitation has become a prominent feature of contemporary relationships, significantly affecting couple dynamics. Research shows that cohabitation rates have surged, with many couples considering this living arrangement as a trial for marriage (Bumpass & Lu, 2000). This trend signifies a shift in societal attitudes, where cohabitation is increasingly recognized as a valid alternative to traditional marriage. While studies indicate that cohabiting couples often enjoy enhanced relationship satisfaction due to increased intimacy and shared experiences, they also encounter distinct challenges that can lead to conflicts (Stanley *et al.*, 2006). For instance, cohabiting partners may grapple with issues related to commitment and unclear expectations regarding their relationship's nature. Historically perceived as a testing phase for compatibility, recent findings suggest that cohabitation may also serve as a substitute for marriage, especially in cultures where marriage is less emphasized (Geiger & Livingston, 2019). The implications of this trend extend to family structures and child-rearing practices, as many children are now born into cohabiting households (Kennedy & Bumpass, 2008). Overall, while cohabitation can foster intimacy and shared experiences, it also presents unique challenges that require careful navigation to maintain relationship satisfaction and stability.

The study of Rosenfeld and Roesler (2019) found that couples who cohabited before marriage experienced lower rates of marital dissolution in the first year of marriage compared to those who did not cohabit. However, this initial advantage appeared to diminish over time, suggesting that while premarital cohabitation may offer short-term benefits, it could lead to long-term challenges in marital stability. This aligns with previous research indicating that the transition to cohabitation can negatively impact relationship quality, characterized by increased conflict and decreased satisfaction. Whereas Gonzalez and Goesling (2022) explored relationship dynamics among



unmarried couples participating in healthy marriage programs. The study made clear how common it was for people to endure physical or psychological abuse in relationships, underscoring the significance of addressing these problems in the context of cohabitation. The report suggested that relationship education programs could improve cohabiting couples' communication and conflict resolution skills.

Research conducted by Foran and colleagues (2022) examined the relationship between cohabitation and relationship adjustment. The study revealed that cohabiting couples often face unique challenges that can decrease relationship satisfaction. Specifically, the authors noted that while cohabitation might initially enhance intimacy, it can also introduce stressors related to shared responsibilities and financial pressures, which may contribute to conflicts. Additionally, a study by Gonzalez and Goesling and Goesling (2022) focused on the effects of cohabitation on relationship stability among young adults. The researchers found that cohabiting couples reported lower levels of commitment than their married counterparts, which could contribute to higher rates of relationship dissolution among cohabitators. This finding underscores the need to explore further how commitment levels evolve within cohabiting relationships. However, the comprehensive review of Marcén and Morales (2017) highlighted the evolving nature of cohabitation across different cultural contexts. The authors emphasized that societal attitudes toward cohabitation significantly influence relationship dynamics, with cultural norms shaping expectations around commitment, conflict resolution, and overall relationship quality.

Conflict resolution is a critical component of relationship dynamics in cohabiting couples. The stressors associated with shared living conditions, such as financial burdens and household responsibilities, can exacerbate conflicts if not addressed effectively (Rhoades *et al.*, 2009). Research suggests effective communication strategies are essential for resolving disputes and maintaining relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, the impact of gender roles within cohabiting relationships has been explored extensively. Couples who adhere to traditional gender roles may encounter more significant conflict over domestic responsibilities, whereas those who share these duties tend to report higher satisfaction levels (Del Valle, 2024). Cohabitation is often perceived as a testing ground for compatibility, allowing couples to assess their relationship before making a formal commitment (Manning & Smock, 2005). However, longitudinal studies indicate mixed outcomes regarding transitioning from cohabitation to marriage. Some research suggests that couples who cohabit prior to marriage may face higher divorce rates compared to those who marry without prior cohabitation (Sassler & Lichter, 2020). This complexity underscores the need for couples to consider the implications of their living arrangements carefully.

In collectivist cultures, individuals may experience familial pressure against cohabitation, impacting their relationship dynamics and overall satisfaction (Bejanyan *et al.*, 2015). Conversely, those from individualistic cultures often embrace cohabitation as a normative practice. Parenting dynamics among cohabiting couples also introduce unique challenges that can strain relationships. Research indicates that differing parenting

styles or expectations can lead to conflict, necessitating effective collaboration in parenting roles (McClain & Brown, 2017). The influence of social support networks cannot be overlooked; supportive friends and family members can buffer against stressors associated with living together, enhancing relationship satisfaction (Holt-Lunstad *et al.*, 2012). Additionally, the rise of technology has transformed communication among cohabiting couples. While technology facilitates constant interaction, it can also lead to misunderstandings if partners rely too heavily on digital communication rather than face-to-face conversations (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2013). Hence, while cohabitation is increasingly recognized as a typical relationship arrangement, more longitudinal research is needed to examine the long-term effects of cohabitation on relationship dynamics. Most existing studies focus on short-term outcomes, leaving a gap in understanding how these relationships evolve.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research design

This study used a quantitative research methodology, especially a descriptive correlation research design, because it was more adaptable and inductive, allowing the researchers to change the strategy based on the findings throughout the process. The descriptive correlation design was used to address how satisfaction and stability in relationships were related among cohabiting couples. It is used to examine the relationships between variables without manipulating them. This design allows the researchers to identify patterns and associations, making it particularly useful for understanding how different factors relate to one another in real-world settings (Sullivan & Artino, 2013). The researcher focused on understanding the impacts that couples in cohabitation experienced, including their relationship satisfaction and stability.

3.2. Research locale

Data were gathered from cohabiting couples in General Santos City, South Cotabato. Based on the 2020 census, the population of General Santos City was approximately 594,446, representing a significant portion of the total population of South Cotabato, estimated at around 1,025,000. The city covers an area of approximately 142.6 square kilometers (55.0 square miles) and is divided into 26 barangays, each contributing to the diverse community structure and dynamics within the area. This demographic information highlights the significance of studying cohabiting couples in General Santos City, as it provides insights into their relationship satisfaction and stability within a specific cultural and social context (PSA, 2021; LGU Gensan, n.d).

3.3. Research participants and sampling technique

The participants were sixty (60) cohabiting couples from General Santos City, South Cotabato, randomly selected to participate. They were chosen because their insights were likely to drive the study forward. Random sampling was employed as a study approach to ensure that each individual in a bigger population has an equal probability of being chosen (Noor *et al.*, 2022). The researchers tallied all cohabiting couples and randomly selected participants from this group.



3.4. Research instruments and validity

Table 1. Scoring Plan for the position and level of responses of the participants in General Santos City.

Scale	Interval	Description	Impact
4	3.25 – 4.00	Strongly Agree	Extremely Satisfied
3	2.50 – 3.24	Agree	Moderately Satisfied
2	1.75 – 2.29	Disagree	Slightly Satisfied
1	1.00 – 1.74	Strongly Disagree	Not Satisfied

Scale	Interval	Description	Impact
4	3.25 – 4.00	Strongly Agree	Major Impact
3	2.50 – 3.24	Agree	Moderate Impact
2	1.75 – 2.29	Disagree	Slightly Impact
1	1.00 – 1.74	Strongly Disagree	No Impact

The adapted and modified questionnaire was utilized to collect data based on the study's setting. Survey questionnaires were given to each participant. A single participant was interviewed to confirm the survey results. Each questionnaire had two parts, with participants using a Likert scale to show their

level of agreement, neutrality, or disagreement regarding the presented items.

3.5. Statistical treatment

To ascertain the frequency distribution and percentage, the researchers employed statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics employed frequency and percentage. In the frequency-percentage analysis, the researchers converted the numerical data gathered from the questionnaire into a frequency distribution table and percentage. The process of determining the mean involved multiplying the weight (or likelihood) attached to a certain event or result by the corresponding quantitative consequence, and then adding up all of the results. Specifically, this approach presented data on both the independent and dependent variables. The study also utilized the Pearson correlation coefficient (r), the most common method for measuring linear correlation. A value between -1 and 1 indicates the relationship between the two variables, including its direction and strength.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section outlines the findings from the survey questionnaires completed by participants. The results are organized according to the research problem statements: the status of cohabiting couples, the relationship dynamics among them, and the significant correlations between cohabitation and these relationship dynamics.

Table 2. Quantitative interpretation of the state of cohabiting couples in general santos city

Indicators	Mean	Response	Interpretation
Q1: We live together as a couple without the marriage.	3.70	Strongly Agree	Extremely Satisfied
Q2: We live our life as a regular married couple.	3.58	Strongly Agree	Extremely Satisfied
Q3: We decided to live together to get to know each other better.	3.67	Strongly Agree	Extremely Satisfied
Q4: We live together and intend to get married soon.	3.47	Strongly Agree	Extremely Satisfied
Q5: We are a live-in couple, acknowledging failure and success in the relationship.	3.57	Strongly Agree	Extremely Satisfied
Q6: We live together in an intimate and committed relationship.	3.42	Strongly Agree	Extremely Satisfied
Q7: We responsibly rear our children the same as married people do.	3.52	Strongly Agree	Extremely Satisfied
Q8: We live together outside of marriage as a couple and have a good relationship with our family.	3.53	Strongly Agree	Extremely Satisfied
Q9: We live together and share our household tasks as a married couple.	3.58	Strongly Agree	Extremely Satisfied
Q10: We agreed on how to raise our children and ensure a better future.	3.72	Strongly Agree	Extremely Satisfied
Aggregated Mean	3.58	Strongly Agree	Extremely Satisfied

Table 2 shows the interpretation of the couples' state of cohabitation in General Santos City. The score on all ten questions falls within the response of "strongly agree," with an aggregated mean across all the indicators of 3.58. Generally, the participants reinforce that cohabiting couples experience

high satisfaction levels comparable to married couples. This data underscores the evolving nature of relationships in contemporary society and suggests that cohabitation can be a fulfilling alternative to traditional marriage.



Table 3. Quantitative Interpretation of the Relationship Dynamics of the Cohabiting Couples in General Santos City

Indicators	Mean	Response	Interpretation
Q1: Despite being unmarried, my partner and I share complete joy in caring for our children.	3.72	Strongly Agree	Major Impact
Q2: My partner and I willingly accept and understand that men and women should share tasks equally despite their cohabitation status.	3.62	Strongly Agree	Major Impact
Q3: My partner and I plan to marry to give our children a blissful and legitimate family.	3.62	Strongly Agree	Major Impact
Q4: I and my partner make great efforts to bear a child-centered family despite being unmarried.	3.50	Strongly Agree	Major Impact
Q5: I and my partner stay firm and courageous in the face of difficult situations despite being unmarried.	3.55	Strongly Agree	Major Impact
Q6: My partner and I maintain healthy and good relationships with each other, especially with our children, even without being lawfully married.	3.53	Strongly Agree	Major Impact
Q7: I and my partner successfully resolve problems through open and proper communication.	3.63	Strongly Agree	Major Impact
Q8: My partner and I always find time to express how happy we are in our relationship despite being unmarried.	3.63	Strongly Agree	Major Impact
Q9: I and my partner work hard to ensure convenience for our children despite being unmarried.	3.58	Strongly Agree	Major Impact
Q10: My partner and I always try to maintain solid and harmonious relationships despite being unwedded.	3.65	Strongly Agree	Major Impact
Aggregated Mean	3.60	Strongly Agree	Major Impact

Table 3 illustrates the interpretation of the responses of the cohabiting couples in General Santos City. The score on all ten questions comes within the response of "strongly agree," with an aggregated mean of 3.60. The aggregated mean score reinforces that cohabiting couples experience significant

satisfaction and commitment comparable to married couples. This data highlights the evolving nature of family structures in contemporary society and suggests that cohabitation can provide a fulfilling environment for both partners and their children.

Table 4. Significant relationship of cohabitation and the couples' relationship dynamics

Indicators	Significance of Cohabitation on Relationship Dynamics			Decision on Null Hypothesis
	r-value	p-value	Remarks	
State of Cohabitation	.323**	.000	Highly Significant	Reject Ho

Note: * $p < 0.05$ (significant); ** $p < 0.01$ (highly significant)

Cohabitation, defined as two individuals living together without marriage, has become a prevalent arrangement in modern relationships. The data indicating a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.323^{**}$) between cohabitation and relationship dynamics suggests that while cohabitation is not the sole determinant of a relationship's quality, it plays a significant role in shaping couple dynamics. The highly significant p-value ($p = 0.000$) further reinforces the reliability of this correlation, indicating that the observed relationship is unlikely to be due to random chance.

4.1. Discussion

The study reveals that cohabiting couples in General Santos City report high satisfaction levels, with an aggregated mean score of 3.58, indicating substantial agreement with statements

about their relationship quality (Table 2). This finding aligns with previous research by Stanley *et al.* (2006), which suggests that cohabitation can enhance relationship satisfaction due to increased intimacy and shared experiences. The perception of cohabitation as a legitimate alternative to marriage has been supported by Bumpass and Lu (2000), who noted that many couples view this arrangement as a trial period for assessing compatibility. However, while initial satisfaction levels may be high, the study also highlights potential challenges associated with cohabitation. For instance, couples may face unclear expectations regarding their relationship status, leading to conflicts over commitment and responsibilities (Sassler & Cooperstock, 2023). The literature indicates that these challenges can ultimately affect long-term satisfaction and stability, as Dush *et al.* (2021) noted that shared responsibilities



often introduce stressors that may diminish relationship quality over time.

The result also shows that cohabiting couples experience significant relationship dynamics, with an aggregated mean score of 3.60, indicating substantial agreement on their interactions. This finding supports the Triangular Theory of Love by Sternberg (1986), which emphasizes emotional intimacy and mutual satisfaction as central to relationships. Cohabiting couples often prioritize equality and personal fulfillment, which can enhance their relationship dynamics compared to traditional marriages. Moreover, the study's findings regarding the correlation between cohabitation and relationship dynamics are particularly noteworthy. Table 4 shows a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.323^{**}$) between cohabitation status and relationship dynamics, with a highly significant p-value ($p = 0.000$). This suggests that while cohabitation is not the sole determinant of relationship quality, it plays a significant role in shaping how couples interact and support each other. This is consistent with Rosenfeld and Roesler (2019), who found that premarital cohabitation, is associated with lower rates of marital dissolution in the initial years of marriage. However, this advantage may diminish over time.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Overall, this study offers insightful information about the situation of General Santos City's cohabiting couples. The findings suggest that while cohabitation can initially lead to high levels of satisfaction and positive relationship dynamics, it also presents unique challenges that must be navigated effectively. By situating these findings within a broader literature context, it becomes evident that understanding the complexities of cohabitation is essential for enhancing relationship stability among couples living together.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that further research be conducted in order to investigate the particular variables that lead to the high initial satisfaction levels among cohabiting couples, based on the study's findings. Comprehending these variables can aid in determining tactics to maintain contentment in the long run. Additionally, further research could examine the role of communication and conflict resolution skills in managing the challenges associated with cohabitation. It is also recommended that community organizations and policymakers develop support programs tailored explicitly for cohabiting couples. These programs could include effective communication, conflict resolution, and financial management training. Giving couples access to therapy services can also assist them in navigating the nuances of their relationship and resolving problems before they become more serious. By offering these resources, communities can help cohabiting couples build stronger, more resilient relationships, ultimately enhancing their long-term satisfaction and stability.

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