



**Cohabitation among young people in Durban, South Africa:  
Exploring perspectives and experiences**

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## COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

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## **Abstract**

Cohabitation has recently become a norm among young people. While it has been done even in the past, it was not as common as it is nowadays. The study explores the attitudes of young people towards cohabitation. The study draws on in-depth interviews conducted amongst young people residing in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. In total, there were 20 interviews that were conducted with both males and females. The findings indicate that cohabitation relationship among youth is becoming more prevalent and normal especially in the cities. Most cohabiting couples have different experiences as well as challenges. Both men and women have different attitudes when it comes to cohabitation. There are positive and negative impacts associated with being in a cohabiting relationship. Some couples get a chance to raise their children in an environment where there is a father and a mother as well. Other reasons for cohabitation include the high costs of lobola. The study suggested that people from rural areas should be educated about cohabitation in different ways, as the study has shown that in rural areas cohabitation is regarded as a taboo or disrespectful. There are some recommendations which were proposed such as there should be some facilities in rural areas where people will be taught more about cohabitation. There should also be some support groups that will accommodate people or couples who are facing challenges while cohabiting.

**Keywords:** Cohabitation, youth, lobola, South Africa, Durban, KZN, Qualitative.

### **List of acronyms**

COVID: Coronavirus Disease 2019

HSSREC: Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

NGO : Non- Governmental Organisation

SASAS: South African Social Attitude Survey

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## Chapter one: Introduction

### 1.1. Background to the study

Marriage can be defined differently across various cultures. Marriage is also called matrimony or wedlock, which is a culturally recognised union between people who establish rights and obligations between them as well between their children and their in-laws. Marriage varies around the world, also between cultures and religions. It also goes together with religious aspects as well. Based on the South African Constitution, Act 25 of 1961, “marriage is a union of two people who are legally registered by South African law”. There are different types of marriages that are legally recognized in South Africa such as civil union, customary marriage, and civil marriage. Since the world is very diverse with different cultures as well as religions, it is commonly known that marriage is a union of two people who love one another and are willing to spend their life together. Kgadima (2017) suggests that marriage is guided by religious beliefs; however, there are those who prefer common marriage which is referred to as civil union. Patterns of marriage and family formation in South Africa have changed dramatically in recent years. Marriage rates have declined, and this can be attributed to economic and social reasons (Kgadima, 2017). South Africa is a country with a high unemployment rate, with more than 35% not currently employed (Statistics South Africa, 2021). Young people, in particular, are facing a crisis of high unemployment in South Africa which has also been contributing to declining marriage rates. The families are also a contributing factor that leads young people to not get married. In a way that they have so much of expectations once a young person in the family starts to work. Even if the young ones try to pay for the lobola but the African families they have turned the lobola into a money-making scheme. They charge or asked for lot of money once a groom start to pay the *lobola* during the negotiations. For example, a bride’s family will request that a lobola should be cash that will mean one cow will be R8000 and will request such amount as an exchange of their daughter.

Budlender et al. (2004) stated that marriage is not common in South Africa. The rate of marriage has dropped since the 1950s and has continued to decline in the following decades (De Haas, 1984; Hunter, 2010; Posel et al., 2011; Preston-Whyte, 1978; Hosegood et al., 2009). While marriage rates have decreased, cohabitation rates have increased. In 1995 only 5% of African women aged 20 to 45 years reported cohabitating with a partner; by 2008 this had

increased to 14% (Posel et al., 2011). Nonetheless, relative to the share of African women who are unmarried; 76% of those aged 20 to 45 years in 2008, cohabitation rates remain low (Posel et al., 2011), particularly among women who are mothers.

The role of cultural norms and attitudes towards marriage and cohabitation across different social settings are not well researched. Cohabitation may be caused by different reasons. It is defined as the state of two people living together and having sexual relationships without being married. It is also an agreement where two people are not married but live together. They often are involved in a romantic and sexually intimate relationship in the long-term.

A study conducted by Rudwick and Posel (2012) in a township in Durban explores the rise of legitimate cohabitation whereby relatively small amounts of bride wealth related payments can enable a couple to live together. Such relations are in what appears to be a growing social space between 'full' marriage and 'ukukupita', a term suggesting illegitimate cohabitation. Sharp declines in both first marriage rates and rates of remarriage have been largely offset by increasing cohabitation. The increase in the proportion of unmarried young people should not be interpreted as an increase in "singlehood", as traditionally regarded, due to the fact that nowadays most young people do not get married or they opted to not get married for different reasons. Statistics South Africa (2010) states that the characteristics of cohabiting couples indicate that the least educated are usually living together. While most cohabiters expect to marry their partner, there is a substantial proportion who disagree about marriage, and a high proportion are concerned about the stability of their relationship.

According to Khomari and Tebele (2012), in patriarchal societies men are dominant whether there are married or cohabiting. If a man has paid lobola or bride wealth they usually exert power and control and expect women to be submissive. In rural communities, patriarchal norms are entrenched, and communities subscribe to strong cultural practices, beliefs, and traditional laws, which subordinate women. Women are oppressed and are expected to be submissive to their male partners. This occurs between married and cohabiting couples. One example of men exerting power is control is when safer sex needs to be negotiated (Madiba and Ngwenya, 2017). According to Kumar et al. (2017) when a woman tries to broach the topic of safer sex, they may face violence inflicted by a male partner. The abuse cannot be reported because the families usually believe that once a married woman lives with her husband, she is obliged to bear children for the man regardless of how she feels (Kumar et al., 2017). While married women in general are vulnerable to HIV infection, married and cohabiting older women in

rural communities are at significantly higher risk of HIV infection compared to their counterparts in urban communities (Kumar et al., 2017). Women living in rural areas are marginalized, disempowered, and face geographical barriers in terms of accessing HIV knowledge and services.

According to Kumar et al. (2017) marital quality has an influence on individual's health and their well-being. Marriage provides protection when individuals encounter stressful life events and health problems. Married individuals are more likely to practice healthy behaviours. For example, if one is facing a life crisis it becomes easier when there are married because they share the problem with their partners

## **1.2 Motivation of the study**

Marriage is a lifetime commitment of two people. According to Moret and Dahinden (2021) it is not just a physical union, it is also a spiritual and emotional bond. Hence it is seen as leading to great fulfilment after marriage. According to Statistics South Africa (2016), marriage rates have dropped over the period from 1996 to 2016 and it has consistently declined from 39,5% in 1996, to 34,5% in 2001, 32,0% in 2011, and finally 28,3% in 2016. In contrast, the proportion of cohabiting persons has increased from 5,0% in 1996 to 8,3% in 2016. The statistics clearly show that there has been an increase in cohabitation compared to marriage. According to Statistics South Africa (2016), between 1996 and 2011, over 19% of the population aged 25 to 29 years were cohabiting. The highest proportion of cohabiting has shifted to the age group of 30 to 34 years, as per the 2016 South African Community Survey (Statistics South Africa, 2016).

Social media may have an influence on cohabitation and according to Moret and Dahinden (2021), conducting a study such on cohabitation among young people will aid in identifying how African traditions have evolved predominantly. In addition to this, Shisane (2016) suggests that recently South Africa has experienced declining marriage rates and increasing levels of cohabitation. Thus, this study aims to explore the perspectives and experiences of cohabitation among young people in Durban, South Africa.

According to Kok and Leinarte (2018) cohabitation is a common path to marriage for many millennials, with two-thirds of couples living with a significant other at least once before marriage. By delaying or opting out of marriage in the early years, couples may be less

financially prepared for retirement in later years. A previous study done by Marins et al. (2016) found that men and women who are in debt are more likely to be cohabiting with their significant others, yet they are also associated with a high risk of relationship dissolution. For example, when a partner intends to buy a house with another partner this is associated with a likelihood of transitioning to marriage because of the higher entry and exit cost of purchase.

Cohabitation may also cause stress which may lead to high levels of depression and anxiety (Rosenfeld and Roesler, 2019). It can also have an impact on the quality of life of an individual. When a couple decides to live together there are some changes that happens within themselves. Conducting this study will help the researcher to find out or gather more information on how the lives of those who are cohabiting has changed and how cohabiting has led them to stressful times as well.

### **1.3 Rationale and significance of the study**

According to Statistics South Africa (2019) the rate at which people cohabit seems to be high at an estimated 64%. Cohabiting relationships were not covered by the same coherent body of law available to married couples or civil partners. Many cohabitants mistakenly believe that they acquire legal rights after several years of cohabiting, but this is not correct. In South Africa there were some laws which protect or fight for people who are cohabiting, such as the African Customary Act, if the couple had begun with the *lobola* negotiations. If one partner dies while cohabiting, the other partner has some right to their partners assets if they had been together for a period that is more than 6 months.

South African customary law is an uncodified legal system that has been developed and practised by indigenous communities in the country. Customary laws and practices are recognised by the South African Constitution. For example, a Zulu couple whom have completed the process of paying *ilobolo* are instantly recognised by customary law as husband and wife. However, constitutional law, as per Marriage Act 25 of 1961, only recognises couples who have registered their marriage with the government as legally married. Constitutional law does not acknowledge those who are cohabiting as equal to those who are registered as husband and wife. However, customary law recognises that if a couple lives together for about 5 years they are recognised as married to one another. Bonthuys (2018) states that customary law has made some establishments that a family member should support the extended members.

Children born in wedlock are the responsibility of paternal families while unmarried women and their children are the responsibility of maternal families.

#### **1.4 Statement of the research problem**

The study focuses on cohabitation of young people. Research suggests that married couples have better physical health, more financial stability, and greater social mobility than unmarried couples (Thomson,2010). Furthermore, marriage is an indicator that families can be built and potentially lead to the formation of strong communities. Therefore, family breakdown is potentially a problem to society and the South African population has been experiencing declining marital rates, hence mandating the need for this study. According to Statistics South Africa (2016), only 38% of African women are married or cohabiting, 62% of Whites are living together or married. About 48% of adult African women have been married as compared with only 17% of Whites, and 35% of other races. Based the evidence by Statistics South Africa (2016) Africans have the highest percentage of married and cohabiting couples. The problem is that more of Africans are in cohabitation than marriage.

#### **1.5 Aims of the study**

The overall objective of the study is to shed insights into cohabitation among young people in Durban. The specific objectives are to:

- To explore the perspectives and experiences of young people who are cohabiting in Durban
- To explore attitudes towards cohabitation among young people in Durban.
- To examine the factors that encourage or hinder cohabitation among young people.

To address the aims of the study, the following research questions guided the study:

- What are the perspectives and experiences of young people who are cohabiting?
- What attitudes do young people have about cohabitation?
- What are the factors that encourages and hinders cohabitation among young people in Durban, KwaZulu–Natal?

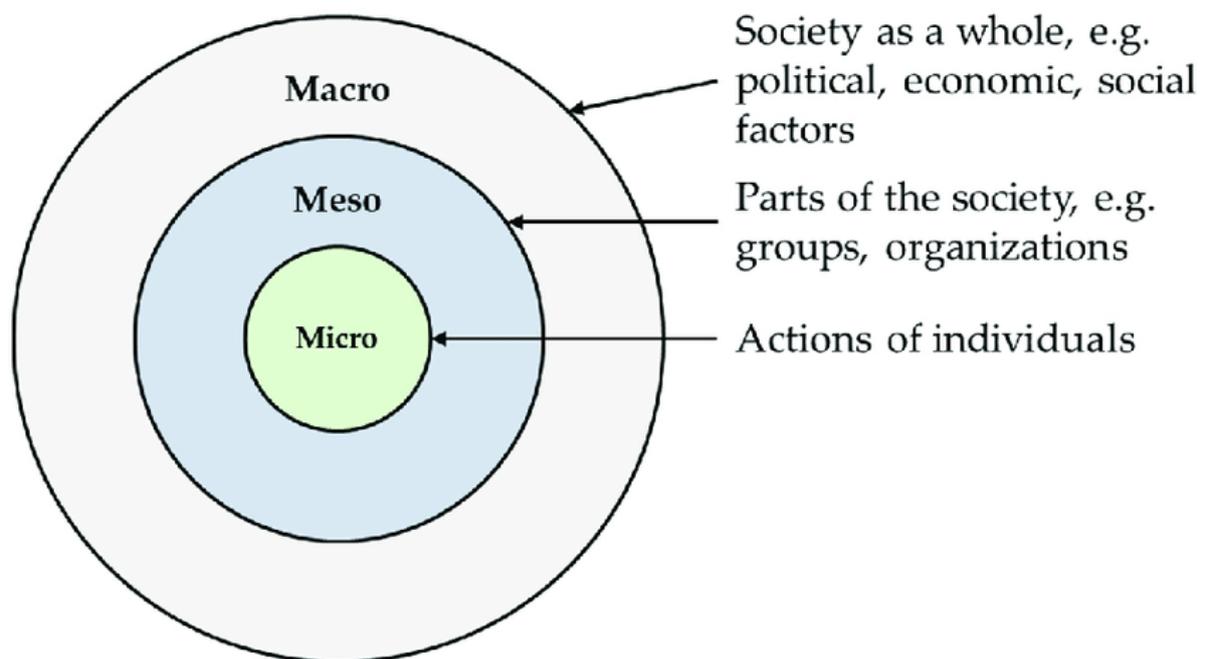
## **1.6 Theoretical framework**

The theoretical framework that was used in this study was the systems theory. The systems theory helps us understand that a person is a product of his or her social environment, at multiple levels of that environment. According to Thorbecke (2013) this model looked at how multiple social systems and levels of the social environments (individual, micro, meso, exo, and macro-systems) impact an individual's experience and behaviour. The micro level is the location of intimate and family relationships, the meso-level is the location of institutions and organizations, the exo-level include workplaces, the neighbourhood and the places where an individual spend most time in and the macro-level is the location of society-wide factors such as culture or laws, all of which shape who we are and how we develop.

Since the study was about cohabitation thus, using this theory helped the researcher to find a better understanding of the individual who were interviewed based on the surroundings of that individual. It made it a bit easier to understand a person's thoughts and actions based on how their families, communities and people around them think or do. Looking at families and the community of those who were cohabiting also shows how the individual behaves because a person's behaviour was interrelated and affected by many factors.

Figure 1.1 below provides a brief explanation and indicated that the individual was part of the micro-system which looks at a person as an individual. The meso-system involves family and society. Lastly, the macro-level involves the government.

### **Figure 1.1: The Ecological Framework**



Source: Posel and Rudwick (2019)

This theory is relevant to the study as it looks at family, environment, and the surroundings of a particular individual. Habits of thinking are developed and form the basis of our evaluation and judgement on how to behave (misconceptions, cognitive distortions, and irrational thinking). **According to Soloviev and Belinsky (2019)** this theory was appropriate for this study because it takes into consideration multiple factors and how they interact and influence the decision to cohabit. Additionally, the strength of this theory lies in the ability to holistically examine a phenomenon on many levels; individual, family, community and societal which can enhance understanding of the behavioural outcome of cohabiting and how this influences other spheres and institutions. This approach can also provide a framework to design and implement programs to support healthy family life based on knowledge of individual, family, community, and environmental interaction.

According to Freestone and Balci (2019) in a family, the systems theory description of marital conflict, which attachment theories conceptualize as the interaction of the preoccupied and dismissive partners. Families may face some problems, such as conflict over money which are common when a couple is cohabiting. Such conflicts may lead to children suffering. This theory helps to identify one's background as systems theory looks at all aspects of a person's life and their upbringing from the time they were a child.

## **1.7 Organization of the study**

Chapter one introduces and presents the background of the study, the motivation and rationale, as well as the aims and objectives. The theory used in this study is also presented. Chapter two is the literature review, which explores the existing literature on the study topic. Chapter three is the methodology, which outlines the research design and approach of the study. Chapter four presents the main findings from the interviews. Chapter five is the final chapter which contains the discussion, conclusions, and recommendations of the whole study.

## **Chapter Two: Literature review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter reviews past and current research that are relevant to this study. The chapter examines the different findings and perspectives of cohabitation by other authors. It also looks at how cohabitation is seen by the African culture. Cohabitation is something that had been occurring over some time in different countries in Africa, even though it is prohibited in many African cultures. This chapter looks at family structure and then discusses cohabitation in sub-Saharan countries. The chapter then further discusses the effect of unemployment on youth and how it influenced their choices in cohabitation. Lastly it discusses how health affects cohabiting families. The purpose of the literature review is to look at studies that have been done on cohabitation around the world and South Africa as well.

### **2.2 Cohabitation and African culture**

According to Adadjanian and Yabiku (2014), in the past decade marriage among women in sub-Saharan Africa could be described as early and near universal. However, there is a trend towards the delay in the onset of marriage and early marriage has become less prevalent. This trend is most likely to be found in urban areas and among “better-educated” segments of the population. According to Statistics South Africa (2016) the number of marriages that was registered in Gauteng is 26.1% followed by KwaZulu-Natal (15.4%) and Western Cape (14.7%). The number of married South Africans is lower than the percentage of people who are cohabiting. These statistics shows that the South African citizens are cohabiting more than getting married. These statistics are registered with the Department of Home Affairs.

According to Kamgno and Mengue, (2014) many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have a high prevalence of cohabitation except for Mozambique. Births that occur among cohabiting parents seem to be more than among those who are legally married. There is a rise in number of children born in cohabiting families and also there is a decline in the number of children that are being born to married parents. According to Kamgno and Mengue (2014) in countries where there is high rate of cohabitation there is also stability in terms of living arrangements of children. Education, religion, wealth status, and place of residence are significant predictors of cohabitation.

According to Ansell (2001) the Zulu culture believes that it is very disrespectful for a man to cohabit with a woman while he has not paid *lobola* (bride wealth). It is seen as an unacceptable act in the Zulu culture. Cohabitation without *ilobolo* payment is widely interpreted as a behaviour of disrespect towards the Zulu culture and tradition, the immediate family and the Zulu community. For a husband to gain respect of his wife's family, he must pay *lobola* to the family. This is usually negotiated when the families gather. Today the parties nearly always agree on a sum of money, though the amount is still commonly determined by the current cost of a certain number of cattle. It is one of the convenient ways of conducting such negotiations with the in-laws. A *lobola* has become a financial negotiation which makes it easier to do payment when compared to traditional methods in which real cows or cattle were used as a payment. Even though in some places this method is still practiced, it happens mainly in rural areas (Madiba and Ngwenya, 2017). According to Semenya (2014) most South African people do not register their marriage or convert it to a civil partnership after they have given or paid *lobola* to the bride's family this is seen as a confirmation that the marriage is valid. Traditional marriages must be registered as a customary one. The law views traditional marriages as cohabitation because the marriage will not be registered.

People who are cohabiting are often less secure financially compared to married couples, who usually share their expenses (Larson, 2001) while in a cohabiting relationship, an individual is responsible for his or her own expenses. This means that is likely to have an impact on their relationship status as well as their economic status in that a couple have children, they have to take care of the children individually (Perelli et al, 2010).

It is also important to make a distinction between cohabitation prior to remarriage, also referred to as post-divorce cohabitation as opposed to premarital cohabitation. Premarital cohabitation describes co-residence of heterosexual couples involved in an intimate sexual relationship. Many young adults who are not married cohabit to test-run their marriage as well as assessing compatibility with their partner. According to Madiba and Ngwenya (2017), variables such as low socio-economic status in the form of unemployment, low educational attainment and low income are associated with comparatively high levels of cohabitation in Africa.

### **2.3 Family structure and education**

Dominguez and Martins (2013) stated that, in the United States and 17 other European countries, it was discovered that children born to cohabiting couples are about 96% more likely to see their parents split by the time there are 12 years compared to those who were born to

married couples. These same countries with highly educated cohabiters who had children were more likely to split as compared to married parents with less education. This shows that education also plays a part when it comes to cohabitation and the dissolution of the relationship between the parents. According to McLanahan and Percheski (2008) in the United States it had been noted that there are clear education attainment differences in how families are formed. Well educated couples tend to marry first and will have children later, compared to cohabiting couples.

According to Thomeer (2016), in Europe it has been found that cohabiting relationships are seemingly more stable and constant when compared to others. However, European cohabitation in most cases result in break-ups (Cherlin, 2016). This study found that the highest level of family instability is in the Northern Hemisphere.

According to Thomson and Bernhardt (2010), the impact of education on cohabitation structurally and ideologically continues to be poorly understood. In many aspects, cohabitation is like marriage. Brown and Manning (2009) categorize cohabitation as an alternative to marriage or as a transitional stage before marriage. Therefore, this explains how education affects the formation of intimate cohabitation, including marriages and cohabitations (Thomson and Bernhardt, 2010). The theory of economics suggests that education can positively or negatively influence the possibility and timing of cohabitation (Macalino et al, 2015). According to Treas and De Ruijter (2008), the negative economic theory argues that education lowers the incentive to enter cohabitation or marriage by increasing the opportunity cost.

Education tends to play a positive role in providing resources for people to enter into cohabitation in places where cultural practices and social policies promote gender equality and work-family compatibility. Despite this, the positive economic theory still applies to men in situations where gender role specialisation is high, as education relates to a higher earning potentials that better satisfies the 'bread-winner' role. As a result, women face a substantial opportunity cost when it comes to bearing children and cohabitation (Thomson and Bernhardt, 2010). It is possible that highly-educated women are more likely to cohabit in such cases (Jalovaara and Andersson, 2018). Most women with high levels of education usually cohabit with their first husband prior to their marriage. The rate of well-educated women with a stable job has increased when it comes cohabitation in the current time. According to Posel and Rudwick (2013), cohabitation has remained the most common among women who have

obtained a bachelor's degree when compared to those women with only a high school education. It shows that the education gives women more choices, so they are not forced into situation. It is more educated women who are more likely to cohabit than women with less education.

Married and cohabiting men experience wage gains often at the expense of their female partners (Aveller and Smock, 2005). This has been happening over some time that men gain financially as there are cohabiting or married. According to Jones (2017) it began with a cohort of women who were born in the mid-1960s. This suggests that there is a possibility that a woman's earnings are less likely to be affected by the entry into marriage or cohabitation. In an African context it is well known that a man must provide for the family. Most African men are socialised from an early age to believe that they must provide for their own family - which is what makes them a true man.

There has been a lot of emphasis in Africa on the education of women and employment equity for women, which further explains the decline of marriage. Odimegwu and Somefun (2017) found that women with secondary education have 46% lower chances of getting married than women with primary education. According to a study conducted in South Africa based on attitudinal data from the SASAS, almost 70% of Black South African women emphasise the importance of fulfilling career aspirations before getting married (Moore and Govender, 2013), confirming this pattern. Prior to commitment, financial stability and resource accumulation remained the top priorities.

Education may also serve to increase a woman's bargaining power thus increasing her status in the relationship and facilitating the formation of a marriage instead of a less stable cohabiting relationship (Hiekel et al., 2014). Therefore, a higher-educated couple are more likely to enter a formal marriage than a cohabitation union. Education attainment for women improves their economic opportunities and independence while it reduces the dependency on marriage for economic or financial reasons. This increases the opportunity cost of marriage because marital formation will likely be accompanied by reduced independence. Furthermore, greater economic opportunities for women increases their expectations in the marriage market, thereby reducing the pool of acceptable potential marital partners. Consequently, women tend to prefer cohabitation to marriage.

## **2.4 Marriage patterns**

Currently, many families across the world have been undergoing alterations resulting in new family configurations because of industrialisation and urbanisation (Lee and Payne, 2013). Family structures has undergone significant changes because of urbanisation and has been the focus of much discussion for a considerable period of time (Hunter, 2016). Belloun et al. (2011), was the first scholar who investigated shifts in family configurations in a systematic way, and he was one of the pioneering social scientists who argued that society was changing under the influence of urbanisation and industrialisation. There has been a shift from the rural to urban areas as more families have moved for various reasons, such as greater job opportunities, better educational purposes, or in search of greener pastures. The move to urban areas has resulted in new types of family structures. Recently there are less families with large family sizes residing in the cities, unlike in the rural areas. When a couple marries, they are expected to have children with the purpose of growing their family. It is very common that a woman in a rural area bears many children, unlike in urban areas. In the African context it is distinguish into different types of families, the type of families existing according to the places. Indeed, in rural areas there are extended families and all members are regarded as one family. While in some urban areas there are predominantly nuclear families. Nuclear families consist of households with only two generations of family members living under the same roof, for example, a father, mother, and their children. Extended families consists of three or more generations living in the same household including parents, children, grandparents, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces or others. Extended families are more common in rural areas and while everyone may not necessarily live under the same roof, they live in very close proximity to one another (Magezi, 2018).

Posel and Rudwick (2013) argue that it is commonly known that in rural areas the man is provider within the family's household, while in the urban area a woman is also the provider of the family, and they could both jointly serve the needs of the household. That also includes taking care of the needs of the child as well as childbearing. Families can be classified into one of three categories namely; patriarchal families that may be called extended families today, then there is a stem families which are now called or being referred to as nuclear families.

A study by Rosenfeld and Roesler (2019) shows that there is a sharp increase in premarital cohabitation within the United States of America, with many young people preferring to living

together rather than marry. More families are being formed by cohabitation instead of legal marriage. According to Dush et al (2003) about 40% of young persons who were cohabiting as early as the age of 34 and about 60% of younger compared to 34 years who were cohabiting at a very early stage in life. The advent of data on premarital cohabitation and divorce overturned the early preconceptions, as premarital cohabitation was found to be associated with higher rates of divorce. Premarital cohabitation has risen dramatically in the United States. It is often disagreed on whether the divorce rates of premarital cohabiters and non-cohabiters have converged. The results show that in the first year of marriages, couples who cohabited before marriage have a lower marital dissolution rate than couples who did not cohabit before marriage, the difference may be due to the practical experience of cohabitation, as couples who have cohabited learned to adapt to each other. We find that the association between marital dissolution and premarital cohabitation has not changed over time or across marriage cohorts (Poopole and Ayandele, 2019).

Based on a study by Esteve et al (2021) it shows that cohabitation has been happening globally and it started long time ago and instead of it decreasing it has been steadily increasing almost every year and more and more woman are cohabiting. Young adults who are not married simply prefer cohabiting as a means of 'practising' for life in marriage. The reasons for cohabitation may be external and internal. Cohabitation is a type of trial on how life will be when they are living with their partner (Rosenfeld and Roesler, 2019).

During the twentieth century, black South Africans who wished to marry had a choice. They could marry under civil law, and indeed, by the mid-twentieth century, many black Christians did so. The remaining black South Africans, constituting the majority, marry solely within the customary group of which they consider themselves a part. The customary rules determining how a marriage will be formed for the two families who have becomes one but it is usually the bride who simply leaves all her family and moves into the homestead of her husband. She will be expected to do everything that is required of a woman or a wife. In South Africa, there are different types of marriage and they have some rules or laws that support them. For example, a customary marriage marks not the joining of two individuals together with their families as well. Cohabitation or the birth of a child, the couple is considered married within their customary group. They were never, however, considered "married" under the laws of South Africa. Instead, they were treated as partners in a mere "customary union," which was a legally

recognized relationship that carried consequences for pensions, taxation, and so forth, but civil "marriage" was accorded a higher legal status. Just as the rules of lobolo were determined by customary law, so too were most of the consequences of a customary marriage (South African Constitution, Act 25 of 1961).

## **2.5 Cohabitation in Sub-Saharan Africa**

Cohabitation does not conform to cultural norms in most African settings. Being unable to pay for a bride's price (*ilobolo*) blocks the way in which the relationship can go forward. The *ilobolo* is the only key that allows a man to have a full access to women in an African culture. In most cases it becomes an economic factor for the bride to get paid for lobola, this contributes to the high rate of cohabitation. Men and women who do not have stable employment tend to cohabit instead of getting married. According to Posel and Rudwick, (2013) cohabitation has become a substitution for marriage in countries such as South Africa. In Burkina Faso, LeGrand and Younoussi (2009) found evidence of cohabitation being used as a stepping-stone to marriage among 20% to 40% of the study sample.

According to Kamgno and Mengue (2014), in Cameroon, among young women aged 15-34 years the rates of cohabitation have increased. By 1991 the cohabitation rates were 15% but it eventually increased in 1998 to 31.5% and it also increased in 2004 to 38.9%. In Sudan less women are cohabiting; with rates in 1998 at only 3% and in 2004 it was about 3.8% (Kamgno and Mengue, 2014). Countries such as Central African Republic, Mozambique, Ghana South Africa, and Cameron have showed the high prevalence of cohabitation.

According to statistics by the Central Statistics Office (2011) Botswana was the first country to include data on men and women who were living together as a separate marital status category. After the census was conducted the result showed that about 12.2% of all people aged 15 years and above were cohabiting. By the time of the 2001 census, the overall proportions of current cohabitants among the population aged 15 years and above had increased to 18.6% with the male and female. Regarding the proportion of current cohabiting unions relative to all current unions, the 1991 census results showed that 30.1% of the population aged 15 years and above who were in a union were cohabiting. The male and female figures were 29.7% and 30.5% respectively. In the 2001 overall figures of cohabitation had increased to 48.1% while the male and female had increased to 46.8% respectively.

Southern Africa also stands out in terms of the percentage of cohabitants among all women aged 15-49 years, it was above 10%. A similar pattern is observed in Central Africa where all countries except Chad (1996/97) exhibit proportions of cohabitants that are less than 10%. In seven of the twenty-nine countries of Southern Africa, more than one third of all women of reproductive age who are in union are cohabiting. In African countries less than 10% of unions is cohabitation. Botswana has one of the highest rates of cohabitation in sub-Saharan Africa and in Southern Africa as well. With 17% of all women of reproductive age in cohabiting unions and 48% of all its current unions defined as cohabiting, the prevalence of cohabitation in Botswana closely resembles that of Latin American and Caribbean countries (Kamgno and Mengue, 2014).

The highest proportion of individuals that are cohabiting was found amongst Blacks, rather than White South Africans (Amoateng et al., 2011). Cohabitation in South Africa is predominantly a phenomenon within the 20-40 years age group, and it has grown by about 50% since 1996 (Palamuleni, 2010). There is an increase in cohabitation specifically amongst Black South Africans (Hosegood et al., 2009). However, given the limited longitudinal panel data, it is difficult to ascertain how rates relate to marriage rates i.e., what percentage of the cohabitants who enter move into marriage and what percentage exit relationships?

According to Moore and Govender, (2013) in 2007, the rate of cohabitation in South Africa was close to 13% for women and 15% for men in the 30-34 years age cohort. Behind these national averages are considerable racial differences in the age cohort in which cohabitation rates shift'. For the age group of youth from 15-19 years, the rates of cohabitation are the same for both Black and White South Africans. However, cohabitation rates are higher for women than for men. One reason may be that they depend on their parents financially as they are not able to provide for themselves. Moreover, in Zulu culture, when a girl has been impregnated out of wedlock, customs require the father of the child to perform *inhlawulo*, which is the payment for 'damages' to the family. While this may grant him rights to the child, it does not permit him to cohabit with the girl (Posel and Rudwick, 2013). In addition, some young men are unable to afford *inhlawulo*, and therefore the couple would not be permitted to cohabit nor would the father obtain rights to the child.

Traditionally, men have been viewed as the providers in the household and women played a more domestic role (Posel and Rudwick, 2013). However, migration of men from the home, due to difficulties experienced in finding employment and housing in urban areas, the increasing level of female participation in the labour market shifted the quality of the relationship between men and woman. Cultural researchers assert that families are rooted in separate social, cultural and environments which give rise to differences in gender and family norms that affect behaviour. Cultural norms and differences are believed to be a key variable in understanding changes in family patterns, but there is limited research that contribute to changing family patterns in South Africa (Kamgno and Mengue, 2014). Traditional norms, such as the importance of patrilineal descent and obligation, are the core feature of the Black South African household system. In urban black South African households there is higher support for the conjugal family and rejection of traditional domestic practices such as polygyny, absent fatherhood, and multi-generational households.

## **2.6 Effects of unemployment**

Unemployment is a major problem in South Africa and is a factor that also influences young people's decision to cohabit. In many African cultures, it is expected that a man should pay *ilobola* or bride-wealth. Bride wealth is quite expensive, and the payment amount often varies depending on the bride's family. Therefore, if a man is unemployed, he may not be able to fulfil the lobola demands of the bride's family and thus the marriage cannot take place (Posel, Rudwick, and Casale, 2011). According to Folgueras and Martin (2013), it may be argued that South African youth tend to cohabit simply because of financial instability which often leads to families with children born out of wedlock. In the case that a couple is living together, the financial costs are lower than if they were living apart, as living expenses would be shared by both partners.

Kuperberg (2019) states that unmarried women with only a secondary or lower level of education have a lower rate of fertility with higher rates of unemployment. This shows that as much as these young women may have a low fertility rate, many of them are unemployed, which contributes to the decision to cohabit. If their partner is working, they will most likely make the decision to move in with him in the hope of financial assistance and would perform all the duties that is expected of a woman in a marriage.

According to Kuperberg (2019) couples are also likely to postpone or forego parenthood when the cost of childrearing increases in relation to their long-term income. It may also happen the

other way around when a couple decides to cohabit, they may do that when one partner is unemployed and the other one is employed. When two people are living together the cost will be shared and this is in sharp contrast to those couples who are living separately.

## **2.7 Health issues in cohabiting families**

According to Rosenfeld and Roesler (2019), one's physical and mental health shapes the way in which they interact with their families. Financial issues may cause stress and behavioural changes as the lack of income may compromise the ability of the entire family to meet their needs. In most cases, it is mainly men or fathers that are affected when there is no income or money to provide for their families. Bloomberg (2018) states that they become aggressive and angry, and some ended up abusing their partners and children.

Health issues may also result in financial costs and risks, which may contribute to distress and increase the likelihood of the relationship ending. Couples who live in impoverished situations may not be able to afford good health care. Poor health, especially mental distress, may affect the way in which family roles and responsibilities are fulfilled (Amato, 2014). When a person is affected by depression it may result in lower levels of positive parenting and higher levels of negative parenting behaviours (Percheski and Meyers, 2018). A focus on the institutionalization and legal status of marriage suggests that married parents may be less likely than cohabiting parents to dissolve their unions when one partner has poor health as they have greater legal and social commitment to each other (Cherlin, 2014). Married parents are more likely to jointly own a home (Percheski and Gibson-Davis, 2016) and income finances (Kenney 2006), both of which potentially raise the gains from marriage but also increase the costs should the relationship come to an end.

The emotional health of cohabiting couples is less stable than that of a married couple. Cohabiting mothers, on average, rate their partners as less emotionally supportive in the years following first childbirth than married mothers (Mashau, 2011). Cohabiting fathers' self-reported confidence in their relationship and commitment to their partner declined more than that of married fathers following a childbirth (Barer and Elizabeth, 2014). Parenting couples who have less social support from family and friends, less emotionally supportive relationships, and lower levels of commitment to each other may be more likely to break up when faced with the stresses of poor health. There might be a stronger association between poor health and union dissolution for cohabiting couples (Forero et al, 2007).

## 2.8 Religion and Culture

Cohabitation is beneficial to both parties in traditional societies where women's educational attainment and participation in the labour market is much lower than that of men, since men and women adopt specialized roles in the labour market and family (Marchetta and Sahn, 2016). Women have become more independent of men's financial support due to increased education and employment opportunities, making marriage less attractive. Despite the fact that cohabitation is less desired as a form of union, there are fewer commitments with cohabitation compared to marriage (Berrington et al., 2015). For dual-earner couples, cohabitation may be an alternative to marriage.

According to Moller (2013), cohabitation has become increasingly common in today's society because it is commonly used as a test-marriage to evaluate the compatibility of both the individuals involved in the relationship. Despite its social acceptance, it appears to contradict the most essential societal values and morals of most religions. Okyere-Manu (2015) suggests that cohabitation is a method of marital status. On the other hand, a long-term relationship without the recommended cultural rites and ceremonies is considered taboo by most belief systems. Kaunda and Kumalo (2015) explore cohabitation in modern societies over several decades, mainly because it appears to reflect changing trends in demography and kinship but also because it appears to indicate shifts in moral values and social stigmas (Kaunda and Kumalo, 2015).

Some religions do not promote cohabitation due to beliefs that it is a sin to have children or sex before marriage. According to Agadjanian and Yabiku (2014) religious beliefs had varying implications on the odds of cohabitation across the four sub-regions of Africa. There are higher levels of cohabitation in non-Muslim religions, especially in Central and West Africa. Muslim women across Africa had significantly lower odds of cohabiting relative to their Catholic counterparts (Agadjanian and Yabiku, 2014). According to Ashraf et al. (2014), Catholics in Sub-Saharan Africa are the most likely to cohabit compared to followers of other belief systems.

Among the Zulus, the payment of *ilobolo* is significant in the dynamics of marriage and cohabitation. In most Zulu societies, there is widespread resistance to cohabitation and it is often seen as improper and couples that cohabit are often frowned upon. The rise in

cohabitation and the way it appears to have become accepted in society is contrary to many people's religious beliefs, since many religious belief systems actively oppose cohabitation. Noeth (2010) debated whether Christian partners who cohabit have conflict with God or suggest that they are generally careless about it, implying that they do not 'truly love Him'.

## **2.9 Summary**

This chapter reviewed existing research on aspects of marriage and cohabitation. The review suggest that there are more couples that are opting to cohabit. Marriage rates are on the decline and this is contributing to more couples living together. However, there are strong cultural taboos that regulate behaviour in African culture. The high costs of lobola is contributing to the decline in marriage and greater uptake of cohabitation. This is certainly the case among young people. It would seem that it is much more financially feasible for couples to cohabit rather than live separately.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

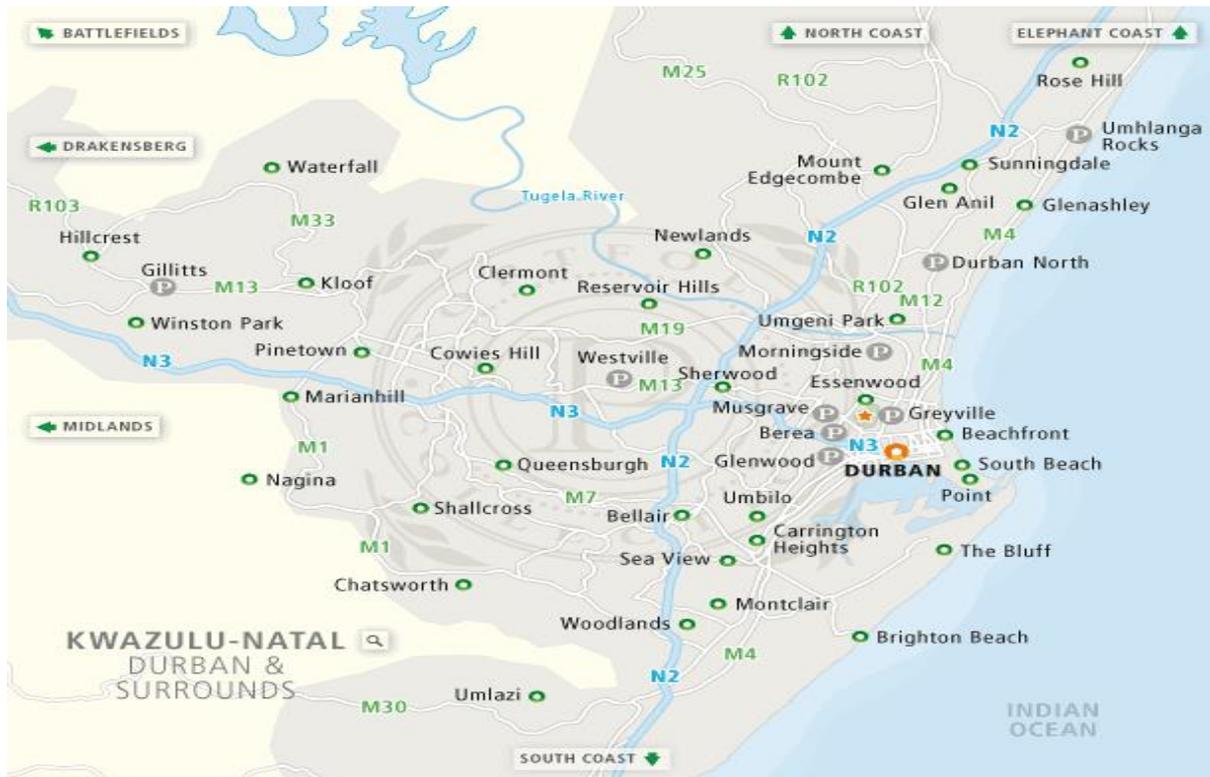
### **3.1 Introduction**

Increasingly, cohabitation is becoming quite common among young people. This qualitative study offers insights into some of the reasons for cohabitation among young people. A qualitative method was effective in gaining a detailed understanding of cohabitation. This chapter is divided into four sections, the first section provides a brief overview of the study area. The second section explores the research design adopted in this study. The third section summaries the data collection measures, along with the research instrument and sampling strategy. The final section focuses on the data analysis procedure, ethical consideration, reliability, and the limitations of the study.

### **3.2 Study context**

The study was conducted in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. The population of the city of Durban is approximately 3.8 million. Durban covers a total area of over 87 square miles, with a population density of 6800 people per square mile. Almost 51% of the population is Black African, 24% is Indian/Asian, 15.3% for Whites and 9.7% Coloureds (Statistics South Africa, 2011). There are several markets on the streets, which largely includes the sale of traditional medicine, clothing, and spices, as well as larger industries surrounding the central business district which offer diverse forms of employment. Zulus are the largest ethnic group. Durban has several informal, semi-formal and formal trading activities. Figure 3.1 below provides a map of the city.

**Figure 3.1: Map of Durban**



Source: Google Maps (2021)

### **3.3 Research design**

The study was conducted using a qualitative approach. According to Collins and Ocaithain (2009) a qualitative approach can be distinguished as a general way of thinking, it also allows the researcher to explore ideas and experiences in detail. Qualitative research tells the story of a particular individual's experiences in their own words, focusing on narratives and not on numbers. The logic of qualitative research can be challenging for researchers who use the traditional deductive approach. Most of the qualitative research employs an inductive approach in which the researcher first collects the data and then attempts to derive explanations from the information therefore it tends to be more exploratory. According to Miller (2018) a qualitative approach is when a researcher seeks to establish the meaning and phenomenon from the point of view of participants. A qualitative approach is mostly narrative, consisting of open-ended questions during the interview with participants. The participants are interviewed to determine their experiences with the issue or problem under investigation. Furthermore, the focus is on the individual, the meaning the individual attaches to their behaviour and there is an emphasis on understanding the complexity of the situation.

A qualitative research approach allowed for genuine ideas to be collected from specific individuals. These ideas are then turned into data that can be used to create valuable content. When this process is performed properly, everyone benefits from the insights obtained (Miller, 2018). Qualitative research relies on a smaller sample size as more information is collected from each participant. Smaller sample sizes equate to lower research costs. Not only does this research process save money, but it can also produce faster results. If data was needed quickly, this is one of the best research options that is available today. Research often wants facts instead of opinions. The qualitative research process goes in a different direction than traditional research. This format eliminates the bias that tends to come through collected data as respondents attempt to answer questions in a way that pleases the researcher. Participants are encouraged to be themselves.

There were some limitations when using a qualitative approach. Data had to be recognized by the researchers in qualitative research for it to be collected. That means there is a higher level of trust present in the data collection process than other forms of research. This method provides research data from perspectives only. The data collected through qualitative research is dependent upon the experience of the researchers involved in the process. According to Sandelowski (2000) a researcher must also have good interviewing skills, have the courage to ask follow-up questions, and be able to establish rapport with participants to ensure the accuracy of the data. As researchers follow numerous themes when collecting data, it takes more time to gather it. Navigating through all the extra data takes time as well. Every data point was suggested to be evaluated subjectively, so the worth of it was always in question. Qualitative research may be effective in collecting authentic data, but the small sample size of the research can be problematic. To make an important decision, numerous perspectives are often required to avoid making a costly mistake.

### **3.4 Study sample**

The sampling that was used in this study was non-probability convenience sampling. According to Merriam (1998) a non-probability sampling is a sampling procedure that ensures that all elements in the population have a chance to be included in the study sample. For this study, convenience sampling was used. Convenience sampling is used to collect information from a conveniently available pool of participants for qualitative research. In many cases,

members are easily approachable to be a part of the sample study. It has advantages such as: low cost, readily available sample, collects data quickly, and is an inexpensive strategy.

A total of (10 young males and 10 young females) interviews that were conducted. To be eligible for the study, participants had to be residing in Durban where the study was based. Participants had to be between the ages of 18 and 35 as it is the age range of the youth cohort. Participants also had to be cohabiting. The youth cohort is a group of people who fall under the age of 35 years.

### **3.5 Data collection**

The data used in this study was collected via the use of an interview guide. According to Fraley (2000), open-ended questions, which were employed in the interview guide, would allow people to express what they think in their own words. Open-ended questions enabled the participant to answer in detail.

Interviews resemble everyday conversations, although they are focused on the researcher's needs for data. They also differ from everyday conversations because they are conducted in the most rigorous way to ensure reliability and validity (i.e. 'trustworthiness'). This means that both the researcher and those who use the results can be as confident that the findings reflect what the research set out to answer, rather than reflecting the bias of the researcher, or a very atypical group.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic there were no face-to-face interviews. Therefore, social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Zoom, were used as alternative methods to conduct the interviews. All the interviews were recorded and later transcribed. To recruit participants the researcher used social media such as Facebook and WhatsApp to advertise. The advertisement contained information about the study and the contact details of the researcher. If a participant came forward to express interest in the study, then an appointment was arranged to conduct the interview. The researcher used snowball sampling to recruit participants until the required number of participants was obtained. Participants had to sign an informed consent form indicating their willingness to participate in the study. They were also assured of confidentiality and anonymity. They were told that there was no negative comeback for participating in the study. Each interview lasted on average 15 minutes and took place at a time that was convenient for the participants. All the interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants.

### **3.6 Data analysis**

The interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and were thereafter analysed thematically. This was done by grouping together information under relevant and recurring themes. The researcher used NVivo, which is a qualitative data analysis software, to code the data for the analysis. According to Sandelowski (2000) NVivo is a software program that can be used for qualitative and mixed-methods research. The researcher engaged telephonically with the participants to build rapport and ensure that rich information was shared. Transcribing the data verbatim ensured that the results accurately reflected what the participants had communicated. The researcher ensured that ethical considerations are adhered to throughout the research process.

### **3.7 Ethical considerations**

The researcher obtained ethical approval from University of KwaZulu-Natal's Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC). All participants were informed of the aim of the study and what it entailed. The participants were assured that their participation was voluntary, and their identities would remain anonymous. The researcher used pseudonyms instead of real names. Participants were not forced to answer any questions that made them feel uncomfortable. Furthermore, the interviews were conducted when it was most convenient for the participant. Therefore, they could suggest a time that the interview would be held as they may have wanted to have the conversation when it was best suited for them and was private.

The ethical considerations may be regarded as a guideline that help the researcher follow a proper way of conducting the research. The researcher had to follow steps to ensure no harm was caused to participants. According to World Health Organisation (2017) informed consent form signed by a patient prior to a medical procedure to confirm that he or she agrees to the procedure and was aware of any risks that might be involved. The primary purpose of the informed consent form was to provide evidence that the participant gave consent to the interview.

According to Rhodes et al (2011) voluntary participation refers to a human research subject's exercise of free will in deciding whether to participate in a research activity. International law, national law, and the codes of conduct of scientific communities protect this right. In deciding whether participation was voluntary, special attention was paid to the likely participants' socioeconomic circumstances in determining which steps must be put in place to protect the

exercise of free will. The level of effort involved in clarifying voluntariness was not fixed and depends on several circumstances, such as the participant's ability to resist pressures like financial inducements, authority figures, or other forms of persuasion. During the research there was no information that was not correct or misleading to the participants.

### **3.8 Study limitations**

Due to the pandemic, there were no face-to-face interviews. The participants had to use the social media platforms and some participants may not have had enough data to continue with the interview. Some participants were not used to technological applications such as zoom or video calls and this would have been problematic. Some participants did not have a smart phone, so the researcher used her own funds to call them telephonically. Some participants were not available for a telephone interview and others were not willing to answer all questions because they were not comfortable with some topics. The researcher struggled to reach the required number of participants as many people were reluctant to participate in the study.

The researcher had to use the social media platform to recruit participants and in some cases, had to provide data to participants in order for the interview to take place. The researcher arranged for a time that was best suited for the participant to conduct the interview.

### **3.9 Summary**

This chapter outlined the research methods that were deployed in this study. A qualitative research approach was used for conducting interviews with (10 young males and 10 young females) who were cohabiting and living in Durban. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain an in-depth understanding of cohabitation. The data was analysed using thematic analysis by identifying recurring key themes in the study. The chapter also outlines the ethical considerations that were taken in the study and the main limitations of the study.

## **Chapter Four: Results**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the key findings from the in-depth interviews conducted with both men and women who were cohabiting at the time of the study. The aim of this study was to investigate cohabitation among young people in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. The data that is presented in this chapter was collected through interviews that were conducted telephonically to achieve the research objectives. This chapter begins by presenting the demographic characteristics of the study sample. The focus of this chapter is to understand the experiences of (10 young males and 10 young females). The chapter explores the attitudes and experiences of the participants who are cohabiting. Thereafter, the factors which promote, and hinder cohabitation are presented.

### **4.2 Study sample characteristics**

In total, 20 interviews were conducted with (10 males and 10 females), all of the Black African population group. Their ages ranged from 22 to 40 years. All participants were residents of Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. Their levels of education varied; 13 s indicated that they attained a tertiary education, while the other seven only completed high school. Out of the 20 participants that were interviewed, only two participants did not have children while the rest had at least one child. One participant indicated that they had four children. Table 4.1 displays the study sample characteristics.

**Table 4.1: Study sample characteristics**

<b>Participant ID</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Number of Children</b>
<b>P1</b>	40	Male	Black	Tertiary	2
<b>P2</b>	36	Male	Black	Tertiary	2
<b>P3</b>	25	Female	Black	Tertiary	1
<b>P4</b>	31	Male	Black	High school	3
<b>P5</b>	43	Female	Black	High school	4
<b>P6</b>	22	Female	Black	Tertiary	0
<b>P7</b>	29	Female	Black	High school	1
<b>P8</b>	35	Female	Black	High school	2
<b>P9</b>	32	Male	Black	Tertiary	3
<b>P10</b>	31	Female	Black	Tertiary	1
<b>P11</b>	38	Female	Black	High school	2
<b>P12</b>	31	Female	Black	Tertiary	0
<b>P13</b>	28	Female	Black	High school	3
<b>P14</b>	33	Female	Black	Tertiary	2
<b>P15</b>	35	Male	Black	High school	2
<b>P16</b>	27	Male	Black	Tertiary	3
<b>P17</b>	31	Male	Black	Tertiary	1
<b>P18</b>	32	Male	Black	Tertiary	1
<b>P19</b>	35	Male	Black	Tertiary	2
<b>P20</b>	29	Male	Black	Tertiary	3

#### **4.3 Positive and negative experiences towards cohabitation: family environment, relationship development, abuse, dependency**

The majority of participants expressed positive views on cohabitation. They felt that cohabiting was beneficial because they had a chance to cultivate a family environment where their children could grow up with both parents in the household. Others felt that, by living with their partners,

they got a chance to bond with them and form relationships with them. They felt that this was beneficial to the relationship because it cemented the ties between the partners.

*“Basically, I want my child to grow up in a nuclear family where there is a mother and father and I think this will work for me since I no longer have a mother. I do not have someone I can call if I am late or held up at work and my partner has to be there for our child as well. I want to have my own family” (P3).*

Some stated that it makes life more convenient, and they hoped that it would be legalised. They also believed that people should have the choice to cohabit.

*“Yes, they are fully aware, and they are trying by all means to encourage me to do what is right so that at the end everything will be done accordingly” (P 18).*

*“Cohabitation should be allowed to those who wish to do it and it should be legalised” (P 12).*

On the contrary, others did not have positive attitudes towards cohabiting. Some of the participants felt that they were forced to cohabit with their partners because of certain situations, such as not being able to make a living, and instead they have to rely on their partner. Some of the participants, both men and women, had no other option but to cohabit, because their partners were employed and were providing them with financial support which allowed them to meet their basic needs. They were therefore dependent on their partners for support, and they felt unhappy with this situation.

*“It is not easy; it needs a person who is strong and can accept any situation that may come across. No, I do not want to continue but I do not have a choice since I am not employed, and my partner is the one who is supporting at the house” (P14).*

Others opposed cohabitation and revealed that they did not want to be in this situation. They also mentioned that they would not allow their own children to cohabit with a partner because of some of their negative experiences. One of the participants had mentioned that her partner would go and drink alcohol and come home to verbally and physically abuse her. She had to remain living with her partner because she was advised to do so by her elders.

*“I was asked to go and stay at home and look after the home because there was no elder, all his parent have died so there was nobody at his home” (P5).*

Others, who mentioned that they would not allow their children to cohabit, believed that it is against their culture and many encounter challenges with their partners. All the participants were from the Zulu culture which they reported does not allow people to cohabit.

*“No, it does not allow it, but some decisions you must take them on your own without having to answer to anyone” (P7).*

*“Basically, it does not but due to the times we live in it as completely changed from the past” (P2).*

Some also felt that there is no respect maintained between partners and as a result they may be subject to negative experiences. They mentioned that if a person is financially capable of supporting themselves it puts them in a better position to take care of themselves and leave abusive relationships.

*“No. I would not allow my child to cohabit, cohabiting it is not a good thing and I do not want my children to do it as I am. In cohabitation some people end up being hurt, it will be better if my child will be financially stable” (P1).*

*“No, I cannot because it did not help me. When you are in love with a person and start drinking alcohol and continues to drink more often and when you try to talk to your partner, he does not change and on top of that they will disrespect you and also abuse you” (P5).*

*“No, because it against our culture” (P9).*

#### **4.4 Perspectives of cohabitation: bonding, discovery, disrespect, taking advantage**

The experiences as well as the perspectives of the study sample differed. Some of the participants mentioned that it was a simple decision to cohabit with their partners. They felt that it was an opportunity to bond with their partners. Some believed that the experience of living with a partner is different in comparison to living apart as you can discover more about the person you are in a relationship with. Others were motivated by spending more time with their partners.

*“For me, I would encourage it to other people as I know it something that people do not want, that is where you get to know your partner and that is where you see if you can make a future with your partner because when you stay with a person it is where*

*you get to see a person's true colours unlike when you are living apart from each other"* (P3).

One participant reported that this is an opportunity to get to know a person before you marry them. Cohabitation was an important step that ultimately leads to marriage. It was also seen as a necessary step that allows both partners to get to know each other better.

*"Spending time with your partner and getting to know her as these women cannot be trusted so it is very wise to spend some time and see if they really are the type of a person, they portray to be so you can be sure if you want to marry them"* (P18).

Some felt that they would not cohabit as it was a waste of their time especially if they shared different goals and aspirations.

*"No, I would not be cohabiting ever again and living with your partner is not right. You can stay with a person for long time but end up wasting your time"* (P5).

*"Time wasting and draining, especially when you have not met the right person who has the same mindset as you and also having the same dreams and ambitions that are the same as yours"* (P5).

A number of the participants reported that cohabiting was not easy, and they experience a number of challenges. Often, they do not communicate about these challenges as they are accepting of their partner's behaviour because they are dependent on them. Others reported that overall, their experience of cohabiting was not positive. They also felt that they did not have any autonomy and had to disclose all information to their partners, finances for example, as they needed to combine their income to support the household. Men did not want to be controlled by their female partner and this created some tension in the relationship.

*"We men do not want to be open about almost everything, it makes me feel like she wants to control me but as you think out of the box you see that she only wants the life to be easier"* (P1).

Some felt that they have been mistreated by their partners especially when they were intoxicated with alcohol. As a result, they felt disrespected. Women were more likely to complain about feeling disrespected by the men.

*“When you are in love with a person and start drinking alcohol and continues to drink more often and when you try to talk to your partner, he does not change and on top of that they will disrespect you” (P5).*

Others felt that they were constantly reminded of their situation and that some of their partners expressed that they were not married therefore, their homes were not a shared asset. They also felt that they could not talk to their partners.

*“Having a partner who cannot talk to you well and always having to remind you that the house belongs to him, we resolved that, we sit down and tell him how I feel when he talked about it” (P8).*

Most expressed negative experiences stating that they felt that there was a lack of respect in their relationship because they are cohabiting. Some of their partners do not give their partners the level of respect they require. This is because they take advantage of the fact that their partners depend on them.

*“Yes, there is that element of taking each other for granted, in a way that one person knows that there is another person who at the house will look out for some of the things in a way that you feel in between of marriage and dating” (P3).*

*“When you are in love with a person and start drinking alcohol and continues to drink more often and when you try to talk to your partner, he does not change and on top of that they will disrespect you” (P5).*

*“Not being able to provide as a man is supposed to and women can be disrespectful” (P15).*

However, they continue to cohabit simply because they feel that they are vulnerable and dependent on their partners for their financial well-being. Others do not have family to rely on.

*“Because I have no one except my partner. Not having a family” (P9).*

*“Having unstable families, that would result to people wanting to find their own place to stay and be themselves” (P7).*

## **4.5 Factors promoting cohabitation**

### **4.5.1 Finances**

Most of the participants who are cohabiting reported experiencing financial difficulty. Thus, they decided to live with their partners as it was an opportunity to improve their financial situation. Some of the women who were cohabiting were not working and they were dependent on their partners for finances. As a result, they felt that this gives a man some power to have control over their partners. Men who are cohabiting and living with their partners who are employed experience the same situation where there is a lack of respect towards them. Based on the narratives of the participants that have been interviewed, it is clear that many are cohabiting because of unemployment.

*“I think there were sometimes for me where I could not be able to support myself financially and that is the main reason for me to cohabit was the financial constraints” (P2).*

*“At the moment I am facing financial instability” (P16).*

Others who are facing finances challenges and experience pressure from their own families decide to leave their homes to cohabit.

*“Pressure from the family and the expectations that once you work will have to do lot of things at home while they do not know your financial needs” (P7).*

### **4.5.2 Changing cultural norms and expectations**

We are currently living in a modernised era and there have been many changes in society resulting in altered norms and expectations. Many young people who live in urban areas have adopted new ways of living and are doing things differently to what is traditionally expected. It has become normal for young people to live with their partners without being married. In rural areas this is not expected, yet it is becoming more common in urban areas. This is because it is frowned upon in rural areas. In the city, many young people have moved away from their parents and are cohabiting without their knowledge. In many of the communities of Durban, cohabitation has become a norm. It is not acceptable for Black African people to cohabit, however; many have adjusted to it. **According to Guetto, Vignoli and Bazzani ( 2021)** it is

not allowed because there is a certain way in which Africans are expected to adhere to certain processes. For instance, there should be a traditional payment between the two families before their children cohabit. Some reported that they were secretly cohabiting because they were ashamed to inform their parents.

*“No matter how modern we can be, but as African cohabiting is not a good thing and people are shy to speak about it and do it, but what happens is that they do it secretly”*  
(P3).

Others reported that they are persuaded by their partners to cohabit even though they know that this is against their family customs and beliefs.

*“Cohabitation happens almost every day and mostly young people tend to do it as they listen to their partners. For me, no child should cohabit at all”* (P5).

Some only decided to cohabit when they informed their family of the intention to do so, and they agreed.

*“Both of our families they approved our relationship because they understand everything”*  
(P2).

Cohabitation usually occurs in urban communities where many young people are renting homes which are far away from their parents. Usually, young people come to these cities for job opportunities. Some of the participants reported that cohabiting is common in their communities and many young people are doing so. Most said that they believe that some couples found it easier to manage finances when they live together. For example, when a couple lives together they would only have to rent one place and therefore they are able to save money.

*“Yes, to some it is common but for the unknown reasons, but what I think is that some people can afford financially but they decide to just cohabit”* (P2).

*“What would I say I would say it is common because most of the people are living with their partners most of the time it is because of work”* (P7).

*“Yes, it is common because people are living with their partners and it is acceptable”*  
(P8).

The participants believed that as much as cohabitation is not favoured according to their cultural beliefs, it should be accepted because of changing norms. Not everyone wants to get

married as some prefer to just live with their partner. Getting married is complicated as there are a number of cultural conditions to adhere to.

*“It needs to be embraced but unfortunately it will not. Looking at times we live in, looking at the generations of young people, about 70% of people who are young they do not see themselves getting married or just a having a family” (P2).*

Others felt that society should be more open to cohabitation as it is part of developing a relationship.

*“Well, I cannot think of anything besides the fact that people should come clean about that they do it. People should learn that cohabitation is part of a growth in a relationship” (P9).*

#### **4.5.3 Relocation for employment purposes**

The participants were asked why they are cohabiting and most of them responded that they are doing so because they are working. Instead of them renting two houses with their partner they would simply move in with them to reduce the cost of living. Most of these participants had mentioned that, because they live in rented houses and the expenses are high, it is very common for them to simply cohabit. One participant has mentioned that they did not plan to cohabit, however, they frequently visit their partners until they make the decision to live together. Another participant has also mentioned that they cohabit because it is close to their working place and it is very far from their home of which it makes things to be easier for them as well as their partners to travel.

*“Sometimes you do not plan to cohabit it just happens as you and your partner do visit then as the time goes by you will end up cohabiting. It simply happens and there may be different reasons to that” (P1).*

*“It is close to my workplace and I work long hours and I do not have enough time to get back from work and take care of the child, yet when he is available, he assists me” (P7).*

*“Because it is closer to my workplace and also my partner’s workplace as well” (P20).*

By living with their partner, the participants believed that they could minimise their expenses and share the costs of paying for rent with their partners. They feel that this allows them to budget and spend money wisely. They could also share responsibilities, such as childcare.

*“It [cohabitation] saves money, most men usually do not know how to budget but having a woman by your side makes it easier and spend wisely, it also helps me there to stay with my partner” (P1).*

## **4.6 Factors hindering cohabitation**

### **4.6.1 Family**

Families play an important role in shaping the lives of young people. During the interviews it was discovered that some of the participants came from dysfunctional families and as a result they chose to cohabit as a means to leave their family home. Leaving the family homestead was a way for the participants to find some peace. For example, a participant had mentioned that she did not have parents and was living with her extended family. However, they provided her with no assistance or support. This influenced her decision to cohabit. Others felt that they did not have privacy and their own space because they lived with their extended family in the home. They felt that cohabiting with a partner is a chance for them to also have their own space and privacy.

*“Unsupportive family forces people to cohabit” (P6).*

*“Having unstable families, that would result in people wanting to find their own place to stay and be themselves” (P8).*

Another reason that influenced the participants to leave their families and cohabit is conflict. As some participants mentioned that they leave their families because there are frequent arguments. This happens often especially when there are no longer elders within the household.

*“[I prefer cohabitation] because the family I am coming from is very chaotic” (P8).*

*“My friends were understanding because they are aware of the family I am coming from and they were supportive. People do talk but I do not care what other people are saying about me as long as I am happy and at peace” (P11).*

Some of the participants wanted to escape their family situation as there was conflict in the household and they felt that they were not living in peace. As a result of the conflict which they experienced in their homes they decided to leave and live with their partners. Some of the

participants who were cohabiting mentioned that respect between their partners was a serious concern.

*“Yes, there is that element of taking each other for granted, in a way that one person knows that there is a person who at the house will look take care of things as if they are married” (P3).*

Others find their family situation too demanding as they were living in stressful home environments. Therefore, to evade emotional and mental health challenges, they felt that it was best to leave their home and cohabit with a partner.

*“It depends on I personally would not judge a person who simply decides to cohabit because we all have different problems; in some other families you can only find out that a person may even want to commit suicide only because of stressful environment” (P7).*

#### **4.6.2 Religion**

In South Africa there are a number of different religions which are practiced and most, if not all, suggest that a couple should ideally be married before they live together. For instance, one religion, the Nazareth Baptist Church (or the Shembe Church) encourages girls to maintain their virginity until their day of marriage. When the participants were asked about their religious principles regarding cohabitation, all suggested that their religion did not allow them to cohabit. However, they chose to go against their religion. Christianity, which is one of the most widespread religions in South Africa, specifies that a couple should be married first before they live together. Overall, religion advocates for marriage and not cohabitation.

*“According to my religion it does not allows us to take someone and live with them without having to do things in a proper way but as I have said times have changed, we are living in the modern world” (P15).*

*“It does not go with cohabitation, yet it does happen though” (P10).*

*“Does not allow cohabiting” (P11).*

Even though the participant had mentioned that their religion does not allow them to cohabit, they had done so anyway. This is difficult as they are frowned upon in the church and within the religious community. For an example a married woman is known within the church that she is married, and she must sit in a designated position. This is a similar situation for virgins.

Once a girl decides to break their virginity will have to move from that place and in most cases, this becomes a challenge as she will be stigmatised. The participants also mentioned that it becomes a challenge when a person wants to cohabit and only to find that their parents are very strict because of their religious views. Parents are usually strict because they do not want to embarrass the family because cohabitation is seen as shameful in the African culture and across many religions.

*“Having parents who are very strict” (P5).*

#### **4.6.3 Culture and norms**

All the participants are Africans and based on their tradition and culture, cohabitation was not encouraged. There are several cultural expectations which must be met before a couple may live together. For instance, a man is required to pay lobola (bride-wealth) for a woman before they can live together. Lobola is usually paid in the form of cattle or livestock to the woman’s family which then allows the couple to live together.

*“No since I am from a Zulu culture it does not allow cohabitation as men must pay lobola first then after they can stay together with their partners” (P1).*

However, the participants in this study were all cohabiting even though this was against their cultural expectations. Some of the participants reported that their families were not aware that they are cohabiting. The Zulu culture does not promote cohabitation; however, the youth tend to do so without their families being aware. A participant stated that she was cohabiting, but her family did not know, and they believed that she is staying in a rented house as she is working. She was willing to maintain this lifestyle.

*“No in African culture does not allow cohabitation to happen where a couple can stay together while ‘they haven’t paid lobola” (P3).*

*“Not sure but I heard stories that back then it was allowed but the next generation it is not, but I heard that before it was allowed but I think it is allowed” (P6).*

These cultural expectations that a couple must go through before they are married may be overwhelming. For example, in the past if a man had to pay lobola he would simply take cows and continue with the negotiations and will get married. However, this cultural tradition is used as an opportunity of making money by some families. Thus, it has become difficult for young couples to fulfil all these expectations before they can live with their partner.

#### 4.7 Advantages of cohabiting

The majority of participants mentioned that they are cohabiting because it reduces their financial costs. For example, if both partners are working, they will divide the expenses for groceries and rent.

*“The advantage is financial responsibility; you be able to plan everything such as the expenditures” (P3).*

*“The advantage is that your partner supports you financially more especially if you are unemployed” (P13).*

Others felt that their partners would help them to budget, and they could use this to easily navigate their finances. They felt that when you are living with a partner you will not spend your money carelessly; instead, you would take care of responsibilities.

*“You do not spend money carelessly women can budget well” (P9).*

If a couple has a child, then this child would be able to grow up in the presence of both their parents. It also becomes easier for both parents to share childcare and financial responsibility of raising the child.

*“Children growing up having both parents and you also under control when it comes” (P5).*

*“You can take care of yourself and what you think it is right for yourself and children get a chance to grow up in front of their mother and their father” (P8).*

Others felt that it is peaceful to live with their partners and move out of their family homestead. This is because many are expected to take care of the family home and this becomes stressful. They also feel that living with a partner is peaceful and you get to call this place your own home.

*“There is no stress from the family them not caring it brings peace to me” (P6).*

*“You can have a place you can call it home” (P10).*

Living together is also an opportunity to get to know your partner. This allows you to bond with your partner and provide some indication of how your future could be. It is a chance to learn about your partner and build a relationship with them.

*“You get to know your partner” (P12).*

#### **4.8 Challenges experienced while cohabiting**

As the interviews were conducted, the participants also revealed that there are some challenges that they face as while there are cohabiting. These challenges that they face were very different from one another. The participant had pointed out that the lack of respect was the major issue in which people who are cohabiting face. As a man it becomes even more challenging especially when it is a woman who is working and providing financially. Some men lose their self-esteem and pride. Some women feel that they can disrespect their partners because they are the breadwinners.

*Not getting respect from your partner” (P17).*

The other challenge in which the participant has also mentioned was the issue of a partner who does not consider their feelings or opinions. This seems to be a common challenge among the participants. However, some mentioned that they were able to communicate

*“We had financial issues, so we sat down and came up with a plan on how to solve the problem we faced” (P9).*

They also have mentioned that one of the challenges in which they face is having a partner who will do not consider the other partners feelings. The partners speak to them with no respect, and they are always reminded by their partner that they do not own anything in the house. More especially when the couple is having an argument or quarrel. The participants mention that usually one partner belittles the other when they have some powers over them because they control the material or financial resources.

*“Being taken for granted. We try to talk things out with my partner as my cohabiting is an ongoing process”. (P3)*

The participants mentioned that living alone is not the same as living with a partner. It is challenging to adapt, and some have expectations. Communication is important regarding what is expected while cohabiting. It is easier when both partners share similar expectations.

*“We set out on how each other should behave and what one is expecting from another. The most challenging thing was adaptation we had to adapt to the fact that I am no longer living alone. There were times where you feel under pressure and financial*

*problem. We both had the same expectations and that made life to be easier on both of us” (P2).*

Some revealed that they remain in a relationship because they do not have any other option. As a result, they are continually subject to abuse and they felt powerless because they have no other place to go to. The participants revealed that the abuse may come in different forms and it can be physical, emotional, or sexual. The victims endure abuse because they are dependent on their partners.

*“There are many, but one is that being abused by your partner and not having power to do anything” (P13).*

*“Sometimes you can be abused but there is nothing you can do about it because you need a place to stay” (P10).*

Others revealed that they felt threatened by their partners who abuse alcohol. These partners become disrespectful and because of being intoxicated they cannot communicate with each other to resolve any issues.

*“There are many, but one is that being abused by your partner and not having power to do anything”. (P13)*

The participants also feel that they are being taken for granted. Some feel under-valued, and this is difficult when they cannot communicate and resolve their issues.

*“Being taken for granted. We try to talk things out with my partner as cohabiting is an on-going process” (P3).*

Sometimes cohabiting can be a waste of time especially if you and your partner have different goals and ambitions.

*“It an individual choice to cohabit. Personally, I wouldn’t cohabit or continue to cohabit. Because cohabiting is not a good thing when you are cohabiting with someone wo thinks differently than you”. (P2)*

#### **4.9 Summary**

This chapter presented the analysis and interpretation of the data that had been collected among young cohabiting couples in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. The chapter began by presenting the

demographic profile of participants, all of whom were cohabiting. Thereafter both negative and positive perspectives of cohabiting were presented. In general, there were a number of factors promoting and inhibiting cohabitation among the study sample. Most of them stated that cohabitation was motivated by changing norms and expectations and finances. Others felt that religion, culture, and family did not promote cohabitation for several reasons. There were a few advantages of cohabiting such as sharing expenses with a partner and ensuring that a child lives in a two-parent household. However, those cohabiting faced a few challenges such as abuse. Some also complained that they felt under-valued and disrespected.

## Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendations

### 5.1 Introduction

Over the past few years, cohabitation has increased in popularity, especially among younger people. More people are choosing to live with their partners before they marry. This chapter is based on a discussion of the findings which emanated from the interviews. The overall aim of this study was to shed insight into cohabitation among young people in Durban. This chapter discusses the findings of the study in relation to the literature. It uses the theoretical framework to better understand the findings of this study. Moreover, the chapter also provides recommendations based on the findings of this study.

### 5.2 Discussion

The systems theory was the theoretical framework that was used in this study. This theory looks at a person in the context of their environment, family, community, and society. These are the factors that shape a human being, in particular their way of life, which influences how a person behaves. According to Luhman (2013), systems theory looks at multiple social systems and levels of the social environments (individual, micro, meso, exo, and macro systems) that impact a person's behaviour and experience. The system theory relates to the findings as the study was done to understand perspectives about cohabitation. The interviews **revealed** that there are a number of factors that influences the decision to cohabit.

The findings of this study indicate that the participants believed that cohabiting is beneficial in many ways. If a couple have a child (or children), they would be able to grow up in the same home as both their parents. According to Makusha and Ritcher (201), a father's involvement in raising a child becomes an advantage in their development, but the presence of the mother is equally important. Parents will share the parental responsibilities in raising their child. It has been widely known that most South African fathers do not take responsibility after they impregnate a woman. Many refuse to acknowledge paternity and this results in children living in households without their father. According to Posel and Rudwick (2013), approximately half of all African children were identified as having fathers who were alive, but not part of the child's household. According to Makusha and Richter (2015), sharing parenting responsibilities in cohabiting relationships demonstrates a move away from traditional practices that determine

parental involvement according to gender. Traditionally, childcare was central to a woman's socially constructed role (Makusha and Richter, 2015). The participants believed that cohabiting allows both parents to bond with their children and form relationships with them. Sharing parenting responsibilities in cohabiting relationships demonstrates a move away from traditional practices that determine parental involvement according to gender (Makusha and Richter, 2015).

In the present study, it was clear that children benefit from cohabitation and it is one of the major reasons why men and women cohabit. Traditionally, childcare was central to a woman's socially constructed role (Makusha and Richter, 2015); however, living with a partner allows the father of the child to also become involved in childrearing activities. The findings had revealed that cohabitation is advantageous when raising a child because it gives the child an opportunity to be raised in an environment where there are both parents. According to Nepomnyaschy and Teitler (2013), children benefit from having a parent present when they contribute economically and emotionally to raising them. Based on a study done by Pizarro and Gaspay-Fernandez (2015), it is suggested that parent's involvement in their children's lives has a positive impact on their emotional state.

The findings of this study indicate that young people have different perspectives and experiences of cohabiting. For some it was an opportunity to learn about their partners while living with them. Cohabitation is part of the learning process and is also an indication for them if they are to proceed with marriage as a life-long commitment. According to Govender (2021), people who are cohabiting use it as means to resolve issues in preparation for marriage, and they are already orienting themselves to cohabitation as a 'testing ground' for future marriage. However, findings from Benjamin et al. (2011) suggests that marriage is not defined by how long a couple has been living together and those that are married may become divorced. Hence, cohabiting prior to marriage does not ensure that a couple's marriage will be successful. The findings have suggested that cohabitation is helpful for some because it reduces their cost of living by sharing expenses with their partners. In addition, Macalino (2012) claims that cohabitation gives couples the opportunity to know each other better before they make the lifetime commitment of getting married. In addition, cohabiting gives couple an opportunity to test their sexual attraction and capability before marriage. According to Zhao He and Han Yu (2019) the experience that cohabiting partners is sometimes positive as couples can even share the internal business environment as well as exchanging skills and knowledge. Cohabiting also builds mutual trust within the couple.

There were several challenges which were identified in this study. For instance, men who were unemployed found it difficult to provide financially. Some of the men in this study reported losing their self-esteem and pride because they felt disrespected by their female partners who were now the breadwinners. Raijas (2011) supports this finding arguing that finances are often an issue in cohabitation relationships. Couples usually face some challenges when it comes to their financial well-being especially when the other partner is not working. For some, cohabiting is a means to save money because they could share expenses with their partners, such as paying for rent. The findings indicate that the lack of finances was a prominent reason for cohabiting among young people. Some women reported that they are living with their partners because they provide for them financially. According to Ashby and Burgoyne (2009), financial matters can eventually become a challenge among cohabiting partners if they do not discuss these issues. Many of the participants reported that they became financially dependent on their partners, and Dew (2011) suggests that financial management is likely to cause relational distress, which in this study has led to several challenges experienced between partners. Thomson and Bernhardt (2010) state that living together enhances the chances of the cohabitators to reduce the cost of living, they do that in a way that they split and combine funds. For some it is difficult to progress to marriage as they may lack the funds to be able to afford to pay for (*lobola*) or bride wealth. As a result, cohabitation may be the only option.

Cohabiting has become widespread and the interviews suggest that young people are adapting to changing norms and expectations. Often expectations and norms in urban areas are different to that which is experienced in rural areas which support more traditional practices. Amoateng (2007) suggests that individuals residing in urban areas are less likely to be married in comparison to individuals residing in rural areas. People from rural areas prefer to get married first rather than to cohabit whereas in urban areas this is not the situation. It has become normal for people to cohabit in urban areas. According to Posel and Rudwick (2014) cohabitation in urban areas is more prevalent and men easily convince their partners to stay with them without even having to pay *lobola*. Young people are likely to cohabit especially in cities where they are renting a place to stay. They usually move from their own home as they are seeking employment opportunities, as indicated from the findings in this study. Bonthuys (2018) suggests that men and women migrate from their rural homes to work in urban areas. It is

within this context that they adapt to new norms and expectations and cohabitation becomes common.

Families play an important role in the decision to cohabit among young people. Families are important in shaping the lives of young people. Some of the participants reported that they chose to cohabit to escape family conflict in their household. It was a means for them to find peace whereas others felt that they did not have privacy and their own space because they lived with their extended family in the home. They felt that cohabiting with a partner is a chance for them to also have their own space and privacy. Thorbrecke (2013) states that it is important to understand that families and households are foundation hubs of economic and social development as well as key to health outcomes. Thus, many participants wanted to escape their home environment to ensure their wellbeing. According to Barbrin and Richter (2013), poverty, inequality, violence, and poor health outcomes are strongly related to families and households. Thus, it is an important reason for many intending to leave their home and cohabit with their partners.

Cohabiting was not an easy decision especially because many religions are against this. In general, religion encourages people to get married. Thus, the participants in this study suggested that they chose to go against their religion and cohabit. According to Semanya (2016) the experience in Black reformed churches has shown them that cohabitation and having children out of wedlock is seen as a public sin. More people keep having children out of wedlock while cohabiting (Preller, 2011). The participants in this study suggested that even though their religion does not allow them to cohabit, they had done so anyway. This is difficult as they are frowned upon in the church and within the religious community. Based on a study done by Semanya (2016) churches have found a way in which they address cohabitation and children born out of wedlock. They have their unique ways of handling these situations.

Cultural norms and expectations are among some of the challenges which were reported by some of the participants. All the participants in this study were of the Zulu ethnic group. There are well known cultural expectations and traditions among Zulu people that are expected to be upheld before a man and woman live together. According to Posel and Rudwick (2013) in a Zulu society cohabitation is an unacceptable union unless lobola has been paid. The findings have shown that even though culturally cohabitation is frowned upon, young people do so

regardless. Posel and Rudwick (2013) stated that the economic status of an African man determines if he will be able to pay lobola. The findings shows that young men tend to delay the payment of lobola or bride-wealth because it is extremely expensive; thus, they eventually choose to cohabit. According to Posel and Rudwick (2013), several economic constrains may delay the process of men getting married because of the high cost of requirements of bride wealth. Emeng (2021) states that different cultures have their own ritual practices and ceremonies that symbolise that the couple is married. Some countries provide for cohabitation agreements (live-in relationship) where partners determine their legal rights and obligations. Although some countries discourage cohabitation, others like France and United States of America look out for those who are cohabiting (Emeng, 2021). According to Popoola and Ayandele (2019) previously most of the African societies used bride wealth as a gesture of appreciation for the family for raising their daughter. Where things have changed, families use the opportunity to demand thousands of rands in the name of bride-wealth.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study there are a few recommendations which should be considered. For instance, it is recommended that society should be educated about the importance of cohabitation relationships. In rural areas, there should also be awareness campaigns to reduce stigmatisation about cohabitation. This awareness should be done in different places where people usually gather such as churches, schools, clinics, community meetings. These are the places where the community can lend an ear for those who may start this awareness. The most influential platform for educating people about cohabitation is through radio. Usually, older people prefer to listen to the radio most of their time and if radio-shows can educate people about cohabitation through broadcasts, the older society may view it in a different manner. In these television show people who are cohabiting could share their experiences of cohabitation. In present time, many people watch television. Therefore, shows or documentaries that teach people about cohabitation this would be another way of raising awareness.

The price of *lobola* should be reduced and families be reasonable in a way as many men could not afford to pay for *lobola*. It is much cheaper to buy livestock than pay large amounts of money. During *lobola* negotiations some families prefer money instead of livestock cattle. The

problem starts when they name the price of each cattle, normally a cow, costs approximately R7000 at the lower rate. But the family would claim a much higher rate for the groom to pay. The solution shall be that if the family wants money instead of cattle, both families should consult a nearby farm to enquire the price and negotiate payment using those prices as a yardstick. In the Zulu culture *lobola* follows *umembeso/izibizo* (gift) where a bride's family will write a list of the gifts they want, and the groom must buy them. Some families will list things that are outrageously expensive, e.g., appliances, and if families can minimise these, it can help most men to begin the marriage process.

Community leaders should find solutions for people that are cohabiting, especially in rural areas where the dominant leaders are also part of the communities. The leaders should firstly be more educated about cohabitation, making it easier for the community to be convinced about cohabitation. There should be some workshops that will be organized by the government or state in order for these people to be educated about cohabitation. Community leaders such as chiefs, and community forums could place an important role in raising awareness. The rules of the churches should be amended to accommodate those who are cohabiting instead of judging them. The rules should take into consideration that times have changed. Some of the rules oppress people, especially those who are cohabiting. The church leaders should also do the same as well as the community leaders of rural areas. Church leaders should also preach without judging or oppressing those who are in cohabitation relationship.

There should be some support groups that will help those people who are cohabiting whenever they face challenges. As most youth are cohabiting in urban areas, support groups could be based within the urban areas. The Department of Social Development and NGOs should open spaces where they could deal with challenges of people who are cohabiting. These two organisations should deal with people's problems as the type of service that they deliver to society. When a cohabiting couple faces a challenge, they would know which platform they should take and where they would not be judged either.

Cohabiting couples should be allowed the same rights as married couples, especially, for example, in the event of the death of one partner, the other should have the right to inherit the assets of the deceased. Cohabiting couples should also be encouraged to draw up a legal Will that will ensure that their assets would be bequeathed to their partners in the event of their death. This will also be useful in situations where assets were jointly purchased.

## **5.4 Conclusion**

This study suggests that young couples of Durban, who are cohabiting, are facing several challenges. These challenges come in different forms. There is also a positive side of cohabitation. By cohabiting, couples learn more about each other. Finances have a positive and negative impact on the relationship of a cohabiting couple. In African societies, culture is dynamic and constantly changing. According to **Amoateng and Heaton (2015)** society is also changing rapidly and some cultural practices like the payment of *lobola* is used by some families to enrich themselves. Families play an important role in shaping the lives of their children; they also have an impact on the behaviour of young people. Sometimes they may demand a high price for *lobola*, and this may drive their children into cohabiting relationships. Religion does not condone cohabitation, however, couples still cohabit even though there are strict rules and procedures that govern them. The study suggests that there are strong attitudes towards cohabitation. However, due to their poor socio-economic status, some young people opt to live together with their partners before marriage.

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## Appendices

### Appendix a: interview guide

#### Section A

<b>1</b>	<b>Participants ID</b>	
<b>2</b>	<b>What is your current age this year?</b>	
<b>3</b>	<b>What is your gender?</b>	
<b>4</b>	<b>What is your Population group?</b>	
<b>5</b>	<b>What is your highest level of education?</b>	
<b>7</b>	<b>How many children do you have?</b>	

#### Section B

- I. Are you cohabiting and how long have you been cohabiting?
- II. Why are you cohabiting? What do you think are the main reasons as to why young people cohabit?
- III. Is cohabiting common in your community? Please explain your answer.
- IV. Is your family (such as your parents) aware that you are cohabiting? How did they react? What did they say? Do they approve/disapprove? Elaborate on your response.
- V. Is your partner's family (such as their parents) aware that you are cohabiting? How did they react? What did they say? Do they approve/disapprove? Why?
- VI. What did other people (such as other family, friends, neighbours, people in the community?) say when you started cohabiting with your partner?
- VII. How do you feel about cohabiting? Do you want to continue cohabiting? Why/ why not?
- VIII. Would you recommend for somebody else to cohabit? Do you think that cohabiting should be encouraged? Why/ why not?

- IX. What do you think the advantages of cohabiting are? Please explain.
- X. What do you think the disadvantages of cohabiting are? Please explain.
- XI. Would you allow your child to cohabit, state the reason of your answer?
- XII. What are some of the challenges that you faced while cohabitating? How did you deal with these challenges?
- XIII. What do you think are some of the factors that promotes cohabitation?
- XIV. What do you think are some of the factors that hinders cohabitation?
- XV. Does your culture allow you to cohabit?
- XVI. What are your religious beliefs say about cohabitation?
- XVII. What is your perspective about cohabitation in the modern world? Is it more embraced? What has changed? What do you think needs to be changed?

## **Appendix B: ethical clearance**



11 May 2021

Miss Nondumiso Xolile Mazibuko (214527379)  
School Of Built Env & Dev Stud  
Howard College

Dear Miss Mazibuko,

**Protocol reference number:** HSSREC/00002125/2020

**Project title:** Cohabitation among young people in Durban, South Africa: Exploring perspective and experiences.

**Degree:** Masters

### Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 08 October 2020 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

**Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.**

This approval is valid until 11 May 2022.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

**All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.**

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

#### Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: [hssrec@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:hssrec@ukzn.ac.za) Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

**INSPIRING GREATNESS**

## Appendix C: Informed consent

### UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

#### APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL For research with human participants

#### INFORMED CONSENT

#### Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

Date:

SIR / Madam

My name is Mazibuko Nondumiso from the School of Built and Environment and Development Studies at University of KwaZulu-Natal.  
Contact details: [smangaxolile@gmail.com](mailto:smangaxolile@gmail.com)  
Cellphone: 061 089 2825

You are being invited to consider participating in a study that involves research about cohabiting. The aim and purpose of this research is to explore the perspectives about cohabitation among young people. The study is expected to enroll twenty participants which will be ten women and ten men as well, the study will be based in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. It will involve conducting a series of questions telephonically, using WhatsApp calls, phone calls, zoom or video calls. The interview is expected to last approximately 20-30 minutes.

The study will not involve any risks and /or discomfort however, it may ask a personal view about cohabitation. We hope that the study will create the following benefits such as getting a more understanding about cohabitation.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number: )

In the event of problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at 0610892825 calls, email address: [smangaxolile@gmail.com](mailto:smangaxolile@gmail.com)  
Or the UKZN Humanities & Social Science Research Ethics committee contact details as follows:

**HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**  
**Research Office, Westville Campus**  
**Govan Mbeki Building**  
PrivateBagX54001  
Durban  
4000  
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA  
Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609  
Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

Participation in this research is voluntary, and that in the event of refusal /withdrawal of participation the participants will not incur penalty or loss of treatment or other benefit to which they are normally entitled.

There will no consequences that a participant will face when withdrawing.

The participant's personal information will not be asked such as their status. Real names will not be used. Data will be stored securely on a password protected file which only myself and my supervisor will have access to.

I ----- have been informed about the study entitled Cohabitation among young people in Durban, South Africa: Exploring perspective and experiences by Mazibuko Nondumiso.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher at calls: 0610892825 WhatsApp number: 0646019034 and email address: [smangaxolile@gmail.com](mailto:smangaxolile@gmail.com)

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

## **HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**

### **Research Office, Westville Campus**

#### **Govan Mbeki Building**

PrivateBagX54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview / focus group discussion YES / NO

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Witness  
(Where applicable)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Translator  
(Where applicable)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**