



Hostel Squatting as a Predictor of Academic Achievement, Interpersonal Relationship and Emotional Adjustment of Undergraduate Students in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT:

The increasing prevalence of hostel squatting in Nigerian public universities has raised concerns about its implications for students' psychosocial well-being and academic outcomes. This study investigated hostel squatting as a predictor of academic achievement, interpersonal relationship and emotional adjustment among squatting undergraduate students in Federal University of Technology Owerri in Imo State. A predictive correlational survey design was adopted. The population comprised 850 undergraduate students identified through hostel records as living in squatting arrangements, from which a sample of 260 students was drawn using simple random sampling. Three research questions guided the study, and three null hypotheses were tested at the .05 level of significance. Data were collected using the Hostel Squatting Exposure and Undergraduate Adjustment Questionnaire (HSEUAQ), a 24-item four-point Likert-scale instrument validated by three experts from department of Guidance and Counselling and Measurement and Evaluation and yielding Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients of .76, .80, .82 and .86 for its four sections. Research questions were answered using simple linear regression to determine the proportion of variance in each outcome accounted for by extent of hostel squatting, while the hypotheses were tested using the regression ANOVA F-test at the .05 level of significance. Findings revealed that extent of hostel squatting significantly and negatively predicted academic achievement, interpersonal relationship, and emotional adjustment, accounting for 33.6%, 24.0% and 38.4% of the variance in the three outcomes respectively. Based on the findings, it was recommended that university management treat the reduction of squatting intensity, not merely its prevalence, as a priority, and that counselling units prioritize students with the longest squatting exposure and highest room-occupancy ratios for early intervention.

KEYWORDS: hostel squatting, predictive correlational design, academic achievement, interpersonal relationship, emotional adjustment.

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INTRODUCTION

The roots of student hostels can be traced to the early twentieth century when Richard Schirrmann created the first official youth hostel in Germany in 1912 to give students cheap lodging during school nature trips (Reyes, 2009). After the Second World War, mass public higher education boomed and universities initially built official halls designed for low occupancy, often accommodating

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one to three students per room (Trow, 1974; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 1963). The trigger for squatting was the enrollment surge that occurred as governments pushed for higher education access without expanding infrastructure at the same pace, causing student numbers to outgrow available beds (National Universities Commission, 2012; Federal Ministry of Education, 2022). This was compounded by budget cuts and neglect which led to poor maintenance of existing halls and a halt in new hostel construction (World Bank, 1988; Saint, Hartnett and Strassner, 2003). In addition, economic pressure from high off campus rent and scarce private housing forced many students to crowd into legally allotted rooms (Onyegiri and Okoro, 2014; Ogunode, Ukozor and Ayoko, 2023). In terms of institutional response and reality, most university administrations such as the University of Lagos officially ban squatting and employ porters and identity checks to catch unauthorized occupants. Despite threats of suspension or loss of school privileges, squatting remains an open survival strategy. Unregistered students often sleep on foam pads on the floor, share bed spaces in shifts or pay a token fee to the official room owner. This overcrowding accelerates wear and tear on utilities, stretches sanitation facilities and heightens interpersonal conflicts among roommates. Any student that has passed through the four walls of a tertiary institution in this country and had the supposed privilege of staying in the hostels will be familiar with the terminology called 'squatting. University education represents a critical period of intellectual, social and emotional development for young adults. For many undergraduates, especially in Nigeria, the university hostel serves not only as a place of residence but also as a primary environment for learning, social interaction and personal adjustment. The availability of adequate and conducive accommodation is therefore central to students' overall university experience (Owolabi, 2015). However, the rapid increase in student enrolment in public universities without a commensurate expansion of hostel facilities has created a severe accommodation crisis. This imbalance has given rise to the phenomenon of hostel squatting, a situation where students who are not officially allocated bed spaces reside illegally with legitimate occupants, often overcrowding a room originally designed for two to four persons with six to ten persons (Uche and Obi, 2019). In the Federal University of Technology Owerri and many other Nigerian universities, squatting has become pervasive, driven by inadequate hostel infrastructure, high cost of off-campus accommodation and proximity to lecture venues. Hostel squatting creates an unconducive residential environment characterized by overcrowding, lack of privacy, poor sanitation, competition for limited facilities and increased interpersonal friction (Alaka and Olayiwola, 2021). Such conditions are likely to have implications beyond mere discomfort. Academically, noise, distractions and lack of personal study space may impede concentration and reduce academic achievement (Hassan and Ogunyemi, 2020). Interpersonally, forced cohabitation among individuals with diverse backgrounds, values and temperaments may breed conflict, reduce tolerance and affect the quality of interpersonal relationships. Emotionally, persistent exposure to stressful living conditions may lead to anxiety, irritability, emotional instability and poor emotional adjustment (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Adeyemi, 2018). A squatter is a person who enters and occupies property without permission of the person entitled to possession (Shelter England, 2024) Hostel squatting, defined as the practice whereby a student who has not been officially allocated a bed space resides in a hostel room with one or more officially allocated occupants. Hostel squatting can also be said to mean occupying and living in a property without the permission of the owner or allocating authority. In higher education, it is operationalized as unauthorized occupancy, where only assigned residents may occupy a room and residing without official assignment is prohibited. Academically, it manifests as high residential density beyond design capacity. Hostel squatting, remains a widespread and largely unregulated feature of student accommodation in many Nigerian universities. Chronic shortages of official hostel space relative to enrolment have pushed a substantial proportion of undergraduates, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, into squatting arrangements that vary considerably in severity. Some students squat for only a few weeks at the start of a session, sharing a room with one extra occupant, while others squat for an entire academic year in rooms housing five or six students in space designed for two (Adegoke, 2015 and Abubakar, 2007 as cited in Omonijo, et. al 2014). This variation in the extent of squatting, rather than the mere fact of squatting or not, is plausibly what drives differences in how severely students are affected. Yet most existing Nigerian studies have treated squatting as a simple present or absent condition rather than as a matter of degree. Academic achievement, interpersonal relationship and emotional adjustment are three interrelated dimensions of student functioning. Academic achievement, understood as a student's demonstrated level of attainment in coursework and examinations, is highly sensitive to the immediate physical and social conditions in which studying takes place (Babatope, 2011). Interpersonal relationship refers to the quality of a student's day to day social interactions with roommates and hostel neighbours, a skill vital for collaborative learning and social support. Emotional adjustment denotes the capacity to maintain psychological stability, manage stress and adapt effectively to environmental demands. Both interpersonal relationship and emotional adjustment are similarly shaped by the degree of crowding, privacy and conflict a student experiences at home. While several studies have examined the influence of accommodation on academic performance, limited empirical attention has been paid to squatting as a distinct predictor of the tripartite outcomes of academic achievement, interpersonal relationship and emotional adjustment. If squatting operates on a continuum of severity, then a predictive, rather than a purely comparative, approach is needed to establish how much of the variance in each outcome can be explained by the extent to which a student is squatting, information that a simple group difference analysis cannot provide. Understanding this predictive relationship is essential for university administrators and policy makers in developing effective housing policies and student support services. This study was anchored on Roger Barker's (1968) Ecological Psychology

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theory, which holds that behaviour is substantially shaped by the physical and social settings individuals inhabit and that the intensity of an environmental press predicts the intensity of its behavioural effects, and on Robert Sommer's (1969) theory of Personal Space, which posits that the involuntary invasion of an individual's personal space generates psychological discomfort in proportion to the degree of that invasion. Both theories imply a dose-response relationship: the more severe the squatting exposure, the more pronounced its effects should be, which supports framing hostel squatting as a continuous predictor rather than a binary category. Empirical evidence lends support to this expectation. University of Lagos, 2015 in a study of undergraduates in a Lagos Nigerian university, found that squatting students recorded significantly lower continuous assessment scores than officially accommodated students, and noted, without formally testing it, that students who had squatted longer appeared to fare worse. Elechi (2008), cited in Federal College of Education study (2018), reported that thousands of students performed woefully because they squatted while they studied, with many ending with lower grades or ordinary pass which cannot be used for further education, due to inability to spend time on reading. Adegoke (2021) similarly reported that overcrowded hostel conditions were significantly associated with increased roommate conflict, with room-occupancy ratio emerging as a notable correlate of conflict frequency. Babatope (2011) found that students in more congested accommodation reported significantly poorer concentration and study efficiency than their less congested peers, while Ime, et. al. (2022) reported that squatting students exhibited significantly higher stress and anxiety levels than non-squatting students, attributing the difference largely to the loss of privacy and personal space. More directly, Onyeizugbo, (2010) used regression analysis to show that duration of squatting significantly predicted lower academic self-efficacy among students in a South Eastern Nigerian school, while Asiyanbola, (2012) conducted a study on Urban household crowding and psychological well-being in developing countries. He investigated how high-density living conditions and space constraints act as chronic stressors affecting the mental health and well-being of urban residents in Nigeria, using Ibadan, Oyo State as a primary case study found that Crowded living conditions correlate with heightened psychological distress, anxiety, and reduced subjective well-being among inhabitants. Despite this accumulating evidence, no known Nigerian study has modelled the extent of squatting as a single continuous predictor of academic achievement, interpersonal relationship, and emotional adjustment together, a gap the present study sought to address.

Statement of the Problem

Despite efforts by university management to provide hostel accommodation, the number of students seeking on-campus residence continues to far exceed available bed spaces. Consequently, squatting has become normalized, with its potential consequences often overlooked. University authorities continue to report a persistent mismatch between officially allocated hostel spaces and the number of students requiring accommodation, while hostel wardens routinely observe that some squatting students appear far more affected than others. Observations and anecdotal reports suggest that squatters and their hosts experience academic distractions, frequent interpersonal conflicts and emotional distress. However, there is a dearth of empirical data to confirm whether hostel squatting significantly predicts academic achievement, interpersonal relationship and emotional adjustment among undergraduates. More importantly, what remains unclear is whether it is the degree, rather than the mere presence, of squatting exposure, measured through indicators such as duration and room occupancy ratio, that predicts how severely these outcomes are affected. This pattern cannot be adequately explained by a simple comparison of squatters against non-squatters. Without evidence establishing squatting as a graded predictor of these outcomes, university management and counselling units lack the empirical basis needed to prioritize intervention toward students whose circumstances place them at greatest risk. It was against this background that the present study set out to determine the extent to which hostel squatting predicts academic achievement, interpersonal relationship and emotional adjustment of undergraduate students.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study is to examine Hostel Squatting as a Predictor of Academic Achievement, Interpersonal Relationship and Emotional Adjustment of Undergraduate Students in Federal University of Technology Owerri, Imo State Nigeria. The study's other objectives include:

1. To find out the extent hostel squatting predict the academic achievement of undergraduate students in Federal University of Technology Owerri, Imo State Nigeria
2. To examine the extent that hostel squatting predict the interpersonal relationship of undergraduate students in Federal University of Technology Owerri, Imo State Nigeria.
3. To investigate the extent that hostel squatting predict the emotional adjustment of undergraduate students in Federal University of Technology Owerri, Imo State Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent does hostel squatting predict the academic achievement of undergraduate students?
2. To what extent does hostel squatting predict the interpersonal relationship of undergraduate students?
3. To what extent does hostel squatting predict the emotional adjustment of undergraduate students?

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Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at the .05 level of significance:

H₀₁: Hostel squatting does not significantly predict the academic achievement of undergraduate students.

H₀₂: Hostel squatting does not significantly predict the interpersonal relationship of undergraduate students.

H₀₃: Hostel squatting does not significantly predict the emotional adjustment of undergraduate students.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Ecological Psychology Theory

Roger Barker, an American environmental psychologist, proposed Ecological Psychology theory (1968) in his seminal work Ecological Psychology. The central proposition of the theory is that human behaviour cannot be understood in isolation from the physical and social environment in which it occurs. Barker argued that behaviour is not just a product of individual personality or internal traits but is powerfully shaped and constrained by the immediate environment, which he called behaviour settings. A behaviour setting is a naturally occurring, small scale social physical unit comprising a specific physical milieu or layout, a standing pattern of behaviour or routine activities, and a defined time period. According to Barker, every behaviour setting has rules, norms and demands that compel individuals within it to behave in certain ways. People are therefore not just in an environment, they are part of the environment. A core concept relevant to the present study is the principle of undermanning and overmanning. Barker explained that when a behaviour setting has too few people, individuals are forced to take on multiple roles and experience pressure. Conversely, when it has too many people, as in hostel squatting where a room designed for a small number of occupants houses several extra occupants, individuals experience crowding, reduced participation, withdrawal and psychological stress. Overmanning reduces individual responsibility, increases competition for resources and breeds interpersonal conflict. Another core concept is the interdependence of environment and behaviour. The theory posits that the physical properties of a hostel room, such as its size, number of occupants, ventilation, privacy and noise level, directly predict the behaviour and adjustment of its inhabitants. Barker's theory provides a direct theoretical framework for examining hostel squatting as a predictor of academic achievement, interpersonal relationship and emotional adjustment. The university hostel room constitutes a behaviour setting. When this setting is overmanned through squatting, the standing pattern of behaviour is distorted. Academically, overcrowding limits opportunities for quiet study, concentration and adequate sleep, thereby predicting poor academic achievement. Interpersonally, excessive occupancy increases friction, reduces tolerance and forces unwanted interactions, thereby predicting strained interpersonal relationships. Emotionally, constant exposure to noise, lack of privacy, poor sanitation and conflict acts as a chronic environmental stressor, leading to anxiety, irritability and poor emotional adjustment. Thus, according to Barker, to predict a student's behaviour and adjustment, one must examine the ecological context, in this case the extent of hostel squatting.

Robert Sommer's (1969) theory of Personal Space

Robert Sommer's theory (1969) of Personal Space, propounded in his book Personal Space: The Behavioural Basis of Design, provides a complementary framework for understanding the effect of hostel squatting. Sommer, an environmental psychologist, defined personal space as an invisible, portable territory or boundary that surrounds an individual, which the individual considers as psychologically his own. This space is essential for comfort, privacy and emotional stability. Sommer argued that every individual has a need for a certain amount of personal space to function effectively and that invasion of this space leads to stress, anxiety and defensive behaviour. He distinguished between personal space and territory, noting that while territory is a relatively fixed geographical area, personal space moves with the individual. When personal space is persistently violated, as occurs in overcrowded hostel rooms, individuals experience crowding, which is not merely a physical condition but a psychological state of feeling cramped and stressed. The theory further explains that inadequate personal space disrupts an individual's ability to regulate social interaction. Sommer identified that people use personal space to control the level of intimacy and interaction with others. In a squatting situation, students lose this regulatory mechanism. They are unable to withdraw, be alone, or control when and how they interact with roommates. This loss of control over interpersonal boundaries leads to irritability, conflict, withdrawal and emotional exhaustion. Applied to the present study, Sommer's theory suggests that hostel squatting represents a chronic invasion of personal space. Academically, the lack of personal space and privacy impairs concentration, reading and private study, thereby reducing academic achievement. Interpersonally, forced proximity without the ability to regulate boundaries breeds misunderstanding, hostility and poor interpersonal relationships. Emotionally, continuous invasion of personal space generates feelings of helplessness, anxiety and emotional instability, thus impairing emotional adjustment. Therefore, the extent to which a student's personal space is encroached upon through prolonged squatting and high room occupancy ratio can predict the degree of negative impact on academic achievement, interpersonal relationships and emotional adjustment.

Theoretical studies

In the period from the 1960s through the early 1980s, Nigerian federal and state universities such as the Federal University of Technology Owerri, University of Lagos, University of Ibadan and University of Nigeria Nsukka provided subsidized and well

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maintained on campus housing for nearly all enrolled students (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1960 and Fabian, 2023). However, rapid population growth occurred as government funding failed to keep pace with soaring student admissions from the late 1980s onward and new construction of halls of residence virtually halted (National Universities Commission, 2012). This was compounded by an economic shift where structural adjustment policies and rising inflation made private off campus rent unaffordable for average families, thereby driving a massive stampede back to cheap campus beds (World Bank, 1988; Adeyemi and Uko-Aviomoh, 2004). In terms of how squatting operates, overcrowding became the norm as rooms designed for two to four students routinely accommodate eight to fifteen people, with mattresses placed directly on bare concrete floors in a practice known as perching (Onyegiri and Okoro, 2014; University of Lagos, 2021). Bed spaces also became commodities within informal economies where students, campus racketeers and informal student agents buy, sell or rent out allocations (Ogunode, Ukozor and Ayoko, 2023; Alaka and Olayiwola, 2021). To counter this, university authorities engage in cat and mouse security measures where porters and security guards conduct regular early morning or late night checks, often referred to as razor operations, demanding hostel passes and expelling illegal squatters who then live in constant fear of gate denials (University of Lagos, 2021; Nwagwu, 1997). The consequences on campus life are severe. Overcrowding overwhelms aging plumbing, toilets and waste disposal systems, frequently triggering outbreaks of bedbugs, cholera and skin infections (Adeyemi, 2018; Federal Ministry of Health, 2019). Infrastructure also decays rapidly as electrical grids, fan units and doors are pushed past capacity, leaving universities trapped in a cycle of student protests and punitive union bans (Ogunode, Ukozor and Ayoko, 2023). While government and school boards have intermittently pushed Public Private Partnerships and Tertiary Education Trust Fund upgrades as policy interventions, the gap between available bed spaces and student numbers remains wide (TETFund, 2020; Federal Ministry of Education, 2022). On Hostel Squatting and Academic Achievement Onyegiri and Okoro (2014) in University of Port Harcourt found that rooms designed for 4 students housed up to 12 students, leading to poor sleep, noise and reduced reading hours, which significantly lowered GPA. Similarly, University of Lagos (2015) study established that squatters had lower academic achievement than legal occupants due to lack of personal study space and constant displacement during security checks. Balogun (2010) also showed that duration of squatting predicted academic self-efficacy, where prolonged squatters had chronic absenteeism from early morning lectures due to queuing for bathrooms. On Hostel Squatting and Interpersonal Relationship Abubakar, (2007 as cited by Omonijo et. al., 2014 reported that overcrowding in hostels increased roommate conflict, aggression and mistrust among students. Their study revealed that squatters were often labelled as intruders, leading to poor social integration. Alaka and Olayiwola (2021) found that interpersonal relationship scores were significantly lower among squatters who lived in constant fear of expulsion and therefore avoided deep social bonds. Hassan and Ogunyemi (2020) also observed that sharing of bed spaces in shifts created territorial disputes and reduced pro-social behaviour. On Hostel Squatting and Emotional Adjustment, Adeyemi (2018) established that stressful living conditions such as overcrowding and poor sanitation were strong predictors of anxiety, irritability and emotional instability. Ime et. al. (2022) in their study found that loss of privacy due to high room occupancy ratio was significantly associated with emotional maladjustment and homesickness. Akinpelu and Adeyemi (2021) concluded that squatters showed higher emotional exhaustion because they had no secure place to rest and recover. The practice where an unauthorized student covertly shares a designated bed space with an official occupant is a widespread but illegal survival strategy driven by acute campus accommodation crises in Nigerian universities (Ojo, 2018; Nnaemeka-Okeke et al., 2015). While the obvious risks include overcrowding and official eviction, there are several severe, undocumented and hidden dangers that heavily impact a student's health, safety, and academic standing. Because squatters operate completely outside the university's regulatory framework, their living arrangements are inherently unstable. Many public universities conduct abrupt, unannounced night checks by campus security or hostel managers. Squatters are routinely forced to pack up and flee into the night, leading to extreme sleep deprivation, chronic stress, and exhaustion. The constant anxiety over hiding and avoiding detection leads to massive psychological distress. Research links squatting directly to a lack of concentration, severe procrastination, and a spike in academic spill overs, defined as extra semesters spent struggling to graduate, or total dropout rates. A descriptive survey of 200 students at the University of Lagos found significant influence of hostel squatting on academic performance, interpersonal relationships and emotional adjustment (Adewale and Akinwale, 2015; J.E.I.P., 2024). Hostel rooms originally designed for two to four people regularly end up housing up to ten individuals when squatters pack in (Punch, 2024). Packed like sardines with mattresses on the bare floor, students create an ideal breeding ground for rapid cross infection. Squatting is heavily correlated with the transmission of serious and life altering communicable diseases, including tuberculosis, hepatitis, and severe skin or tract infections. Multiple institutional case studies have noted that the effect of overcrowding in these hostels include easy spread of diseases, discomfort, and dilapidation of facilities, with students forced to terminate studies due to illness (Nnaemeka-Okeke et al., 2015; IJCAR, 2023). Overcrowding also creates severe bedbug infestations, with prevalence of 72.6% among students in overcrowded dormitories (Research Square, 2023; Independent, 2024). Desperate students occasionally resort to toxic, unapproved chemicals such as industrial insecticides like Sniper (DDVP) inside small, unventilated rooms to manage the pests, occasionally resulting in critical poisoning or accidental fatalities, including documented cases at Obafemi Awolowo University where students poured Sniper on each other during bedbug disputes (PM News Nigeria, 2018; Daily Times NG, 2018). When a student has no legal claim to a room, they surrender their personal security and veto power over who enters their living space.

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Squatters rarely have the luxury of choosing their housemates and often take whatever floor space is available. This desperation frequently places them in close proximity to cultism, drug abuse, and illicit gangs, with studies linking overcrowding to increased risk taking and deviant behaviour including substance abuse and stealing (J.E.I.P., 2024). Because their presence in the room is a punishable offense, squatters are uniquely vulnerable to theft, physical bullying, and sexual assault. If a squatter is victimized, they rarely report it to university authorities out of absolute fear that exposure will lead to their immediate expulsion or suspension. The regulatory backlash for getting caught is draconian. In major public institutions like the University of Lagos, where over 30,000 students jostle for about 8,000 bed spaces, the minimum penalty for being caught as a squatter or for harboring one is a one to two semester academic suspension pronounced after trial by the Student Disciplinary Board (Vanguard, 2024; The Eagle Online, 2024). To enforce anti squatting rules, universities utilize collective punishment. If a single squatter is discovered, all legitimate occupants in that room automatically forfeit their bed spaces and face disciplinary action, with recent policy stating that both buyers and sellers of bed spaces face immediate eviction and blacklisting from accommodation until graduation (FIJ, 2024; SchoolNGR, 2025). This creates intense interpersonal friction, room warfare, and psychological guilt for the squatter. Hostel squatting leads to accelerated structural deterioration of building utilities and hidden psychological distress from persistent interpersonal friction. While overcrowding and disease outbreaks are widely discussed, several less reported consequences significantly impact students and institutions. Overcrowded rooms place extreme, unanticipated pressure on basic amenities, causing frequent blockages and breakdown of toilet and bathroom facilities, with overcrowding resulting in excessive strain on toilets, increased health risks, and heightened security threats (SchoolNGR, 2025). Unauthorized use of heavy electronic appliances by multiple unregistered occupants frequently triggers transformer burnouts and electrical fires in campus hostels. Bunk beds, reading tables, and wardrobes meant for a single individual wear out within months instead of years due to shared, heavy duty usage (Nnaemeka-Okeke et al., 2015). In terms of psychological and social strain, unmatched sleeping schedules, late night reading, and congested physical space disrupt circadian rhythms, leading to long term cognitive fatigue, while overcrowding compromises study habits, disrupts sleep quality, increases psychological stress and anxiety, and reduces opportunities for extracurricular involvement (J.E.I.P., 2024; Adewale and Akinwale, 2015). Constant exposure to invasion of personal privacy creates underlying anxiety, hypervigilance, and strained roommate dynamics that inhibit emotional stability. Furthermore, unregistered occupants bypass mandatory security screening, making it harder for campus authorities to track safety incidents or enforce accountability during emergencies. The reality of the bonafide versus squatter dynamic in many African universities, particularly institutions like the Federal University of Technology Owerri, University of Lagos and Obafemi Awolowo University, is described by public figures and students alike as a highly organized, unspoken social structure within the hostels. Research on FUTO confirms that squatting is defined as illegal occupation where extra students inhabit a room beyond legally allocated occupants, with rooms officially allocated to 6 students but housing many more squatters who sleep on floor mattresses (Trust, 2016). The bonafide is the student who officially won or paid for the university bed space allocation. They hold the legal right to the room but often choose to harbour friends out of empathy or to split costs. The squatter and floater are lower on the rung. Squatters are given a tiny corner of a wardrobe or a shared piece of a mattress. Floaters are even lower; they usually have no storage space at all and simply show up late at night to sleep on any available floor space or thin mat. In Nigerian tertiary institutions, hostel squatting manifests in several common forms. The permanent or full-time squatter is an unregistered student or non-student who moves in for an entire semester or session, sharing a bed or sleeping on the floor or mat without official documentation or payment to school authorities. The temporary or transient squatter is a friend, relative, or visiting student who stays for a few days, weeks, or during examination periods under the pretext of a short visit. The per bed sharing arrangement involves two students legally or illegally splitting a single allocated official bed space, taking turns or squeezing together to manage acute accommodation shortages. The sympathy or emergency squatter is a displaced student who lost accommodation due to ejection, financial distress, or delayed clearance and is harbored by a roommate out of camaraderie (OAU Peeps, 2016; The Sun Nigeria, 2016). The primary causes of hostel squatting are rooted in structural deficits. Severe housing deficits remain central, as the rapid surge in student enrollment far outpaces the construction of new halls of residence. Most public institutions can only accommodate a small fraction, often under thirty percent, of their student population, forcing the majority to seek alternatives (Nnaemeka-Okeke et al., 2015; FIJ, 2024; Vanguard, 2024). Exorbitant off campus rents further compound the crisis, as private accommodation is prohibitively expensive, and when paired with daily transportation costs, pushes low-income students to seek refuge illegally inside cheaper school hostels (Nnaemeka-Okeke et al., 2015; Punch, 2024). Financial constraints beyond rent mean many students struggle with high cost of living, and squatting serves as a crucial coping mechanism to cut utility, security, and feeding bills. Allocation delays and bureaucracy also play a major role, as stringent manual or highly competitive computerized bed allocation processes leave thousands of cleared students stranded at the beginning of a semester, forcing many to squat while waiting for a vacancy that may never come (OAU Peeps, 2016). Safety and proximity to campus are strong pull factors, since off campus areas are frequently exposed to burglaries and cult activities and students living far out suffer lecture truancy, while living as a squatter inside the school perimeter ensures relative safety, continuous electricity and water supply, and immediate proximity to libraries and examination halls (OpenEdition, 2010; JEIP, 2024). Social connections and affinity also drive squatting, as some students choose to squat purely out of a desire to live with specific circles of friends, relatives,

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or members of the same ethnic or religious fellowships rather than being randomly paired by the university administration (Adewale and Akinwale, 2015).Secondary causes include underlying social, institutional, and behavioral factors that facilitate, sustain, or aggravate the practice. Institutional and administrative oversight is weak, as many public institutions lack strict biometric access tracking or rigorous porter checks at hostel entry points, allowing non registered students to move freely. Corrupt practices and collusion occur when hostel porters, security personnel, or student representatives turn a blind eye or accept bribes to overlook unauthorized occupants. Bureaucratic delays in publishing official room allocation lists at the start of the semester force stranded students to seek immediate temporary shelter (OAU Peeps, 2016; The Sun Nigeria, 2016). Economic and financial exploitation is also prevalent. The bed space black market thrives when registered students who legally secure a room intentionally sublet half their bed or floor space for profit, turning a survival tactic into an underground business (FIJ, 2024; Vanguard, 2024). High off campus utility and commuting costs beyond rent push students to choose on campus squatting to minimize daily living expenses. Socio cultural factors and student solidarity further institutionalize the practice. Peer pressure and kinship obligations make it socially difficult to refuse a classmate, friend, or relative who has no place to stay. Ethno religious and academic groups, including student associations, campus fellowships, and tribal unions, often coordinate temporary accommodation for new or displaced members, inadvertently institutionalizing squatting patterns (Adewale and Akinwale, 2015). Safety and campus proximity preferences remain decisive. Hostels outside school boundaries are frequently targets for local crime and cult activities, so students prefer the relative physical safety of campus walls even in overcrowded conditions, while proximity to academic facilities like lecture halls, libraries, and campus Wi-Fi encourages squatting rather than living far away where transit disruptions can jeopardize grades (OpenEdition, 2010; JEIP, 2024).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a predictive correlational survey design, considered appropriate for determining the extent to which a continuous measure of hostel squatting exposure predicts variation in academic achievement, interpersonal relationship, and emotional adjustment, and was carried out among squatting undergraduate students resident in the Federal University of Technology Owerri hostels in Imo State, where the population comprised 850 students identified through hostel records as living in squatting arrangements, from which a sample of 260 students was drawn using simple random sampling; data were collected using the researcher-developed Hostel Squatting Exposure and Undergraduate Adjustment Questionnaire (HSEUAQ), a 24-item four-point Likert-scale instrument (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) comprising four sections, namely extent of hostel squatting (the predictor variable, capturing duration of squatting and room-occupancy ratio), academic achievement, interpersonal relationship, and emotional adjustment (the criterion variables), which was validated for face and content validity by three experts in Guidance and Counselling and Measurement and Evaluation and trial-tested to yield Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients of .76, .80, .82, and .86 for the four sections respectively; the questionnaire was administered directly to the sampled students by the researcher with the assistance of hostel wardens, and the resulting data were analyzed using simple linear regression to answer the three research questions, with R, R² and Adjusted R² used to determine the proportion of variance in each criterion variable accounted for by extent of squatting, while the three null hypotheses were tested using the regression ANOVA F-test at the .05 level of significance, with a hypothesis rejected where the computed p-value was less than .05.

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

Research Question 1: To what extent does hostel squatting predict the academic achievement of undergraduate students?

Table 1: Extent to which hostel squatting predict academic achievement of undergraduate students

Variables	N	R	R-square	Adj. R-square	Std. Error
Hostel Squatting	260	0.580	0.336	0.333	4.215
Academic Achievement					

Table 1 shows that hostel squatting has a correlation coefficient of R = .580 with academic achievement. The coefficient of determination, R² = .336, indicates that the extent of hostel squatting accounts for 33.6% of the variance in students’ academic achievement. The adjusted R² of .333 shows that approximately 33.3% of the variance remains explained after adjustment for sample size. This indicates that hostel squatting makes a substantial contribution to predicting students’ academic achievement.

H₀₁: Hostel squatting does not significantly predict the academic achievement of undergraduate students.

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Table 2: Summary of Regression ANOVA on the significant prediction of Hostel Squatting to academic achievement of undergraduate students

Sources of variation	Sum of squares	Df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Regression	2319.456	1	2319.456	130.554	.000
Residual	4583.686	258	17.766		
Total	6903.142	259			

Table 2 shows that hostel squatting significantly predicts the academic achievement of undergraduate students, $F(1, 258) = 130.554$, $p < .001$. Since the p-value of .000 is less than the .05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, hostel squatting makes a statistically significant contribution to the prediction of students' academic achievement. This finding indicates that differences in the extent of hostel squatting are significantly associated with differences in academic achievement.

Research Question 2: To what extent does hostel squatting predict the interpersonal relationship of undergraduate students?

Table 3: Extent to which hostel squatting predict interpersonal relationship of undergraduate students

Variables	N	R	R-square	Adj. R-square	Std. Error
Hostel Squatting	260	0.490	0.240	0.237	4.386
Interpersonal relationship					

Table 3 shows that hostel squatting has an R value of .490 with interpersonal relationship. The R-square value of .240 indicates that hostel squatting accounts for 24.0% of the variance in students' interpersonal relationship. The adjusted R-square of .237 shows that approximately 23.7% of the variance remains explained after adjustment for sample size. This indicates that hostel squatting makes a meaningful contribution to predicting students' interpersonal relationship, with greater squatting exposure associated with poorer interpersonal relationship.

H₀₂: Hostel squatting does not significantly predict the interpersonal relationship of undergraduate students.

Table 4: Summary of Regression ANOVA on the significant prediction of Hostel Squatting to interpersonal relationship of undergraduate students

Sources of variation	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p-value
Regression	1567.309	1	1567.309	81.474	.000
Residual	4963.145	258	19.237		
Total	6530.454	259			

Table 4 shows that hostel squatting significantly predicts the interpersonal relationship of undergraduate students, $F(1, 258) = 81.474$, $p < .001$. Since the p-value of .000 is less than the .05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, hostel squatting makes a statistically significant contribution to the prediction of students' interpersonal relationship. The result indicates that the extent of hostel squatting is significantly related to variations in the quality of students' interpersonal relationships.

Research Question 3: To what extent does hostel squatting predict the emotional adjustment of undergraduate students?

Table 5: Extent to which hostel squatting predict emotional adjustment of undergraduate students

Variables	N	R	R-square	Adj. R-square	Std. Error
Hostel Squatting	260	0.620	0.384	0.382	3.965
Emotional Adjustment					

Table 5 shows that hostel squatting has an R value of .620 with emotional adjustment. The R-square value of .384 indicates that hostel squatting accounts for 38.4% of the variance in students' emotional adjustment. The adjusted R-square of .382 indicates that approximately 38.2% of the variance remains explained after adjustment for sample size. This represents the strongest predictive relationship among the three outcomes. Greater exposure to hostel squatting is associated with poorer emotional adjustment.

H₀₃: Hostel squatting does not significantly predict the emotional adjustment of undergraduate students.

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Table 6: Summary of Regression ANOVA on the significant prediction of Hostel Squatting to emotional adjustment of undergraduate students

Sources of variation	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	p-value
Regression	2528.463	1	2528.463	160.831	.000
Residual	4056.076	258	15.721		
Total	6584.539	259			

Table 6 shows that hostel squatting significantly predicts the emotional adjustment of undergraduate students, $F(1, 258) = 160.831$, $p < .001$. Since the p-value of .000 is less than the .05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, hostel squatting makes a statistically significant contribution to the prediction of students' emotional adjustment. The finding indicates that the extent of hostel squatting is significantly associated with variations in students' emotional adjustment.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Research question one sought to determine the extent to which hostel squatting predicts academic achievement. Table 1 showed an $R = .580$ and $R^2 = .336$, indicating that hostel squatting accounts for 33.6% of the variance in academic achievement. Table 2 confirmed that this prediction is statistically significant, $F(1,258) = 130.554$, $p < .001$. The finding implies that hostel squatting is a substantial and significant predictor of academic achievement. As the extent of squatting increases in terms of prolonged duration and higher room-occupancy ratio, academic achievement tends to decrease. This is because squatting creates an unconducive academic environment characterized by noise, distraction, lack of privacy, inadequate study space, poor ventilation, sleep disruption and irregular study routines. These conditions impair concentration, reduce private study time and increase cognitive fatigue. The result aligns with Roger Barker's (1968) Ecological Psychology theory. According to Barker, overmanning of a behaviour setting distorts its standing pattern of behaviour. The hostel room as a behaviour setting becomes dysfunctional for academic activities when overcrowded. It also supports Robert Sommer's (1969) Personal Space theory, as loss of personal study space reduces effective academic functioning. Empirically, the finding agrees with Ime et. al., (2022) who found that squatters recorded poorer academic outcomes than non-squatters. However, the present study extends this by showing that variation exists within squatters - the more severe the squatting exposure, the poorer the achievement. It also corroborates Babatope (2011) who reported that accommodation congestion was associated with poorer concentration and study efficiency, and Onyeizugbo (2010) who found that duration of squatting significantly predicted academic self-efficacy. Although 33.6% variance is substantial, the remaining 66.4% indicates that other factors like study habits, intelligence and teaching quality also contribute. Consequently, H01 is rejected. Hostel squatting significantly predicts academic achievement. Research question two and hypothesis two on Hostel Squatting and Interpersonal Relationship examined the extent to which hostel squatting predicts interpersonal relationship. Table 3 revealed $R = .490$ and $R^2 = .240$, meaning hostel squatting accounts for 24.0% of the variance in interpersonal relationship. Table 4 showed that this is statistically significant, $F(1,258) = 81.474$, $p < .001$. This indicates that hostel squatting makes a meaningful and significant contribution to interpersonal relationship, with greater squatting exposure associated with poorer relationships. Squatting forces cohabitation among individuals with diverse backgrounds, values and habits without adequate personal space or privacy regulation. Competition for limited facilities such as bed space, wardrobe, reading table and bathroom, differences in sleeping patterns, cleanliness, noise tolerance and visitors become sources of frequent disagreements, intolerance and hostility. The finding is consistent with Sommer's (1969) theory that persistent invasion of personal space and loss of control over interpersonal boundaries leads to conflict and withdrawal. It also corroborates Adegoke (2015) who found that overcrowded hostel conditions were associated with increased roommate conflict and reduced harmonious coexistence. However, compared to the other two outcomes, interpersonal relationship had the lowest predictive coefficient (24.0%). This suggests that while accommodation condition is important, interpersonal relationship is also strongly influenced by other factors such as personality traits, emotional intelligence, communication skills and conflict management skills. Therefore, reducing congestion may reduce tension, but counselling interventions on communication and conflict resolution are also necessary. Hence, H02 is rejected. Hostel squatting significantly predicts interpersonal relationship. Research question three and hypothesis three on Hostel Squatting and Emotional Adjustment investigated the extent to which hostel squatting predicts emotional adjustment. Table 5 showed $R = .620$ and $R^2 = .384$, indicating that 38.4% of the variance in emotional adjustment is accounted for by hostel squatting. This is the strongest predictive relationship among the three variables. Table 6 confirmed statistical significance, $F(1,258) = 160.831$, $p < .001$. This means that emotional adjustment is most sensitive to squatting exposure. Greater and prolonged exposure is significantly associated with poorer emotional adjustment. The overcrowded hostel constitutes a chronic stressor. Persistent exposure to noise, heat, poor sanitation, lack of privacy, fear of theft, and interpersonal conflict depletes coping resources and leads to anxiety, irritability, frustration, mood swings and emotional instability. Loss of environmental control, as described by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), triggers stress and maladjustment. This finding strongly supports both Barker and Sommer's theories. Barker's overmanning leads to psychological

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stress, while Sommer's invasion of personal space generates emotional discomfort. Empirically, it agrees with Ime et. al. (2022) who reported a significant relationship between hostel overcrowding, loss of personal space and psychological stress, and Asiyanbola (2012) who found that Crowded living conditions correlate with heightened psychological distress, anxiety, and reduced subjective well-being among inhabitants. Therefore, H03 is rejected. Hostel squatting significantly predicts emotional adjustment, and its effect is more pronounced than on academic and interpersonal outcomes. In summary, the study established that: The extent of hostel squatting significantly predicts academic achievement, accounting for 33.6% of the variance. The extent of hostel squatting significantly predicts interpersonal relationship, accounting for 24.0% of the variance. The extent of hostel squatting significantly predicts emotional adjustment, accounting for 38.4% of the variance, representing the strongest relationship. The findings collectively indicate that the negative consequences of hostel squatting increase with the severity of exposure and are most pronounced in the emotional domain.

CONCLUSION

This study established that hostel squatting, measured as a continuous predictor reflecting duration and room-occupancy ratio, significantly and negatively predicts the academic achievement, interpersonal relationship, and emotional adjustment of undergraduate students, with the strength of prediction varying by outcome and being strongest for emotional adjustment. Specifically, hostel squatting accounted for 33.6% of the variance in academic achievement, $F(1,258) = 130.554$, $p < .001$; 24.0% of the variance in interpersonal relationship, $F(1,258) = 81.474$, $p < .001$; and 38.4% of the variance in emotional adjustment, $F(1,258) = 160.831$, $p < .001$. The pattern of results indicates that while all three domains are significantly affected, emotional adjustment is the most vulnerable to the cumulative effect of overcrowding, loss of privacy, sleep disruption, poor sanitation and chronic environmental stress associated with squatting. The findings therefore indicate that the duration and intensity of hostel squatting matter, and not just the dichotomy of squatter versus non-squatter. Students who squat for longer periods and in more congested rooms experience progressively poorer academic concentration, more strained roommate interactions and greater emotional instability. The implication is that intervention should go beyond merely prohibiting squatting. University management should address it through improved accommodation provision, enforcement of official room capacity, regular hostel maintenance and expansion of hostel facilities. In addition, targeted counselling support is needed for highly exposed students, including stress management, emotional regulation skills, study skills training, conflict resolution and interpersonal communication skills to mitigate the academic, social and psychological consequences of squatting.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Counselling and student affairs units should use duration of squatting and room-occupancy ratio as screening indicators to prioritize the most severely exposed students for early intervention.
2. University authorities should expand the supply of legitimate hostel spaces, or explore partnerships for off-campus accommodation, to shorten the duration for which students remain in squatting arrangements.
3. Hostel wardens should be trained to routinely record and report room-occupancy levels so that the most congested rooms can be identified and addressed promptly.
4. Further research should test a multiple regression model incorporating additional predictors, such as students' socioeconomic status and distance from home, alongside extent of squatting.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study is limited by several factors that should be considered when interpreting its findings. The research is confined to the lived experiences of students in Federal University of Technology Owerri, and therefore its findings may not be fully generalizable to private universities or institutions outside the southeastern regions where hostel accommodation structures differ significantly. The study relies heavily on quantitative narratives and self-reported experiences of squatting, which are subject to recall bias and social desirability, as students may underreport exploitative practices such as commercial subletting or involvement in unauthorized bed space black markets for fear of disciplinary action. Official hostel allocation data and biometric records were not accessible due to administrative bureaucracy and privacy policies, limiting the ability to quantitatively verify the exact prevalence of permanent versus transient squatters. The research was conducted during a period of acute accommodation crisis where less than thirty percent of enrolled students could be officially housed, a situation that fluctuates with university funding, new construction, and policy changes on enforcement of squatting bans, meaning that primary causes such as housing deficits and exorbitant off campus rents may evolve over time.

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