

The Experience of Domestic Violence Among Nigerian-Canadian Women in Toronto

L. NGOZI NWOSU

Les résultats de cette recherche exploratoire montrent clairement que la violence domestique chez les Canadiennes-Nigériennes est liée à des facteurs systémiques sociaux et culturels qui imprègnent a caractère des individus. L'auteure ajoute qu'en reconnaissant les variables qui structurent et maintiennent les abus, de concert avec les efforts certains pour éliminer le phénomène, on aurait une chance dans certaines situations de permettre aux femmes de se réaliser.

This article presents the findings from a recent study of domestic violence against Nigerian women living in Toronto. In the past few decades, the issue of domestic violence has been a major focus of research and policy; studies have shown that it is a global issue that impacts negatively on the social and health status of individuals and women in particular. A survey of domestic abuse in Canada indicates that 29 per cent of married women have been abused by their partners at least once (Statistics Canada).

Domestic violence, also referred to as domestic abuse in this paper, is conceived in terms of control, domination, and subjugation of women against their will. Domestic violence can take many forms: physical, psychological, emotional, financial, or spiritual abuse. Studies show that a variety of social, cultural, and material factors, such as low social status

of women, patriarchal attitudes, early marriage, alcoholism, education, gender-role socialization, and income disparity are associated with male abuse of women (Dobash and Dobash; Isiugo-Abanihe; Isiugo-Abanihe and Oyediran; Nwokocha).

Knowledge of the diversity of the experiences of domestic violence among women will help in addressing the needs of abused women from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds in meaningful ways.

Although current literature advocates for an understanding of diverse experiences of domestic violence and complex experiences of black immigrant women in Canada (see Cousineau and Rondeau), there is a lack of literature on Nigerian-Canadian¹ women's experiences of domestic violence. This research was motivated by the desire to fill that gap. The study was also aimed at developing appropriate socio-cultural programs to assist Nigerian-Canadian women in abusive relationships, as well as informing social policies that would direct attitudes and behaviour towards a culturally-inclusive society. This study thus provides insights into how programs for abused Nigerian-Canadian women can achieve meaningful results.

Methodology

The primary method employed for

this study was in-depth interviews guided by a qualitative research framework, because of the opportunity it provided for Nigerian-Canadian women to talk about their personal experiences of domestic violence in their own words. The interviews for the study were conducted in July and August of 2005 in Toronto, Canada. Toronto was chosen as the study area for a number of reasons, but particularly because it is home to a very large number of Nigerians. According to a report from Statistics Canada, of the total of 10,425 Nigerian immigrants and non-permanent residents that migrated to Canada between 1961-2001, 56.8 per cent live in Toronto.

The study sample consisted of ten married, first-generation Nigerian-Canadian women from the Yoruba and Igbo ethnic groups of Nigeria, as well as two key informants from the Nigerian-Canadian Association in Toronto, who are very familiar with issues and concerns in the Nigerian community. The respondents' ages range between 35 and 55 years. All of the women are formally educated, with academic backgrounds ranging from high school to tertiary education. Two of the respondents are divorced while ten are still living in their matrimonial homes. The duration of the respondents' marriages ranges from 13 to 24 years. All of the respondents are working, with annual incomes ranging between

\$10,000 and \$100,000. Their occupations include cleaner, social worker, housewife, healthcare professionals, business executive, lawyer, caregiver, and house agent. Their length of stay in Toronto ranges from three to 15 years.

The interview questions were framed in a manner that allowed the respondents to narrate their experi-

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ences freely. In addition to the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, the questions explored the respondents’ history and experiences of migration, family composition and dynamics, experiences of violence in Nigeria and Canada, and their views on the types of intervention that would effectively address abuse of women.

Data Analysis

Since the main aim of studying Nigerian women’s experiences of domestic violence in Canada is to increase understanding of different cultural needs and experiences of women in abusive relationships, data was analyzed using manual content analysis. Content analysis was done by bringing together important components of respondents’ views, information, stories or concerns, which emerged repeatedly or were seen as significant within or across interviews. According to Jodi Aronson, these ideas are meaningless when viewed alone; when pieced together in a spe-

cific context or classified pattern such as relevant literature, it becomes a comprehensive picture of the informants’ collective experience. This method of analysis emphasizes harmonization of both commonalities and differences in interviewees’ experiences in understanding a particular phenomenon. Importantly, pseudonyms were used instead of respondents’ actual names, in line with ethical requirements for human-based studies. Findings were divisible into three principal themes: cultural factors contributing to abuse; systemic factors contributing to abuse; and factors affecting women’s ability to seek services.

Causes of Domestic Violence against Nigerian-Canadian Women

Cultural Factors

The respondents identified a number of cultural factors that may play a part in domestic abuse of Nigerian-Canadian women. These include parenting, patriarchal values particularly as they relate to the home and family life, control of financial resources/wages, income disparity between married couples, popularity of a woman, lack of male progeny, dowry expectations, and culturally-prescribed gender roles.

Differences in parenting approaches lead to conflict between parents on how their children should be raised, especially, for example, when one parent wants to discipline the child in a way the Canadian government deems abusive. In Nigeria, spanking a child is an accepted method of correction, but the same corrective method in Canada may result in the child being taken away from the parents. This ideological clash between traditional upbringing and western values often leads to physical or verbal abuse of a female partner. According to one respondent:

Lack of mutual agreement on child rearing leads to constant argu-

ments and beating of the female partner. For instance, the man may be giving one instruction while the woman is giving another. The man may say to a child, “shut up,” and the woman tries to counter that by telling the child to ignore him, insinuating that he is verbally abusing the kid. Most times such an attitude angers the man and could lead to him being physical to bring mother and child to order, since in Nigerian culture the parents reserve the exclusive right to verbally or otherwise correct their children whenever they think s/he is doing something wrong. (Mrs. Emmanuel²)

Deference traditionally accorded to men is another factor most respondents identified as playing a significant part in domestic violence among Nigerian women resident in Canada. Men in Nigeria are unquestioningly accepted as authority figures, not to be challenged for any reason and migrate to Canada with a traditional mindset, often becoming violently angry at any perceived challenge to their socially constructed male authority (Menjivar and Salcido 916). Authority and control are perceived to be a man’s traditional right and heritage, and women are expected to believe in an innate male superiority. According to one respondent, the ideology is simply this:

You are the woman, I am the man. I am the head; I am in charge. The woman is my slave, and she has to obey my commands as a goat tied on a rope. (Mrs. Ogbonnnna)

When wives of traditional Nigerian men want to exercise the freedom they have as Canadian residents (a freedom they may never have experienced in Nigeria), it can become problematic and lead to abuse. One respondent sums up the issue thus:

Most of the Nigerian men want to check and control any such per-

ceived excesses the women might indulge in. The conflict lies in the fact that when it comes to finances, 50/50, oh! But when it comes to power, it shouldn't be 50/50. It should be 100/0 or 80/20. Any decision has to come from the man clearly because of the cultural belief that a woman is under the authority and control of her husband. The enlightened woman wants a 50/50 power-sharing relationship, while her controlling partner wants it 100 per cent in his favour. As a result, men resort to physical violence in order to maintain the status quo—male dominating attitude. (Mrs. Adebayo)

The high cultural value attached to male superiority is also reflected in attitudes toward women who are childless or have not been able to produce male progeny. Consequently, this makes women, especially those who have not given birth to male children, vulnerable to domestic abuse. A woman with female children is perceived to be the same as a “barren woman,” and she may suffer emotional and verbal abuse as a result.

For example, Mrs. Emmanuel describes her experiences of domestic abuse as a result of her not having male offspring. She recounts:

I married young to a lawyer but my marriage collapsed because of this cultural thing, “girl, girl” thing. I had just two girls, there was no boy and you know having only female children in our culture is like a taboo. For that reason, my husband and his family were all over me, accusing me of witchcraft and lots of rubbish. They believed that girls are other men's property.... No matter how nice you are as a woman, it is only having at least a male child that can legitimize your marriage. Our society needs to accept female offspring as human beings born also to succeed.

The Nigerian way of life empowers men as the culture is based on the recognition of male superiority. Nigerian men are raised to have social dominance over their wives and some men still hang on to that cultural belief. When a woman becomes popular, and is seen and heard, Nigerian men see it as a challenge to their masculinity and often resort to violence to maintain their self-esteem. As Mrs. Ayo explains:

When a woman has more social popularity/acceptance than the husband, she is bound to face a lot of abuse from all the men around her. They feel intimidated and they [the men] might start throwing abusive words at her or start making demeaning statements such as “she is no longer a woman; she has turned to a man.” The higher you go the hotter it becomes.... A lot of women, who have made it socially and not even financially, are faced with the same challenges.

Systemic Factors

As Brownridge Douglas asserts, various cultural forms of patriarchy expose women to different forms of violence, but Nigerian women's experiences of abuse in Canada are multifaceted, and systemic factors also play a part in rendering Nigerian-Canadian women vulnerable to domestic abuse. This study found that a majority of respondents, who came with high hopes of survival and freedom from domestic abuse, that they may have experienced in Nigeria, based on information about Canadian society and culture, were disappointed by their experiences of racism, unemployment, lack of social or immediate family support, maladjustment to the Canadian economy (economic pressures), institutional discrimination, and immigration sponsorship policies. These systemic barriers and the accompanying disappointment have a strong impact on the women's domestic lives, and

can contribute to domestic violence.

Maladjustment to the Canadian economy is one example. In Nigeria, women are not expected to pay taxes or other bills; these expenses are strictly borne by men. In Nigerian society, a man is honoured based on his ability to take care of his wife and children. It is rare to find households where family financial responsibilities are shared equally by husbands and their wives. In Canada however, these responsibilities are, for the most part, necessarily borne by both partners. Since most Nigerian women are not brought up to be equal economic contributors to household expenditures, they may find it hard to adjust in Canada with its entirely different approach to spousal responsibility, and they may find it difficult to complete their household tasks and cope with the demands of paid employment. This is exacerbated by the feeling among Nigerian men that when women contribute substantially to the financial upkeep of the family, the men lose the respect their partners previously accorded them. Therefore, these men may try to suppress women through abuse to main-

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tain their superiority. Mrs. Idowu comments:

A Nigerian man has the mentality that he is the head of the family. He should have the best education and best job, provide for his family and should make the family deci-

sion. That is how you know a “real man,” by judging how well his families are looked after. But when we came to Canada, the situation changed. I started working and earning more than he does and my high income makes him angry. He resorts to beating and lashing out at the slighted offence. My household issues as a woman become misinterpreted as trying to boss

is occasioned more by external pressure from the society than from the internal cultural aspects. Nigerian Canadian women grew up in a society where there are close relationships among members of the community. It takes a village to raise a child, not just the biological parents. Most times the mothers are at home taking care of the kids while the men go out to

Canada. The social assistance and help these women would normally receive from female children and extended families in Nigeria is lacking in Canada. As various scholars such as Kathy Wiebe and Jiwani Yasmin have also suggested, the changes they must make to their culturally-defined gender roles as they become immersed in a new culture often alters the values they held prior to migration, very

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over him and he keeps making such remarks such as: “Is it because you are working and have more money than me and pay bills; is it the reason why you are insulting me? I am the boss, you can’t insult me....”

In Nigeria, a woman’s primary responsibility, irrespective of her level of education or social standing, is to carry out domestic duties—cooking and cleaning—in compliance with her husband’s preferences, and to bear him, and raise, children. Male children in the family are exempted from household duties, but are trained to be the head of the family and to take over the care of the family at the death of the father. Therefore, the Nigerian man does not want to be bothered with any domestic chores, even when his wife is engaged in outside work. Hence, much like wives in other locations and cultures in the world, a Nigerian wife in Canada is expected to be “superwoman”, combining her household duties with paid employment. If, however, she cannot keep up with her household tasks, it leaves her vulnerable to abuse. One respondent comments:

Our [Nigerian-Canadian women’s] experience of domestic abuse

work in order to take care of their families. And as such, there are usually no bills to pay to babysitters to take care of the children. All these create lots of opportunity for parents to have time for their kids and to communicate. In Canada women are faced with many challenges including payment of bills, which force us to work and support our spouses. As such, our culturally expected roles as caregivers are greatly compromised—motherly roles, domestic expectation, and supervisory role over our children are greatly weakened because of time. Spouses more often do not cope with the truth of the situation and so use this as an excuse for an abuse of a woman. It is frustrating going through all this stress especially considering the fact that the system is too individualistic; it is just you, your kids and your husband in your apartment. Nobody helps. (Mrs. Idowu)

Thus, the social-cultural construction of Nigerian-Canadian women’s identity exposes them to significantly higher levels of stress than when they lived in Nigeria and the difficulties they may face in responding to these new challenges can make them more susceptible domestic violence in

often conflicting with their husbands’ traditional expectations, and consequently heightening their vulnerability to domestic abuse.

Nigerian-Canadian women’s experiences of domestic violence, however, derive from complex factors, and racism, state policies on immigration, and institutional discrimination among others, also are important factors that can lead to domestic violence. Many of these factors are seen by the respondents as more debilitating than any abuse from their partners. For example, respondents emphasized the impact of the kind of mistreatment they receive in the workplace because of their skin colour as a black, immigrant women, which they find frustrating and degrading. One respondent states:

How can you go to the office and [work when] someone will tell you that you stink; you cannot speak well. They treat you as if you are not a human being. This verbal maltreatment translates into emotional abuse. It is really painful that after the pains one is enduring in the family... the society also neither welcomes one nor treats a class of people as human beings. To tell the truth, the effect of emotional and verbal abuse is more

tormenting on a woman than a man hitting you with any object. Hitting or slapping can only result in bruises but emotional and verbal abuse is emotionally tormenting and can result in heart attacks or sudden death.... (Mrs. Ezike)

Similarly, another respondent comments on the emotional and psychological abuse she experienced as a result of systemic racism, as well as the lack of recognition of her educational degrees. She explains:

When I came to Canada, I thought I had reached my final bus stop. But do you know what? I was disappointed. Despite the fact that I am a British-trained master's degree holder in business administration, I experienced the so-called Canadian discrimination of not recognizing foreign certificates. I tried so many places to get a job but I was rejected because I don't have Canadian experience.... The non-recognition of my certificate really affected my self-esteem more than the beating and degrading comments I encountered from my husband. (Mrs. Emmanuel)

While the Nigerian-Canadian women's experiences of domestic violence is compounded by racial and institutional discrimination, the respondents maintained that such discrimination also affects Nigerian men and this makes, in Bell Hooks' words, "the domestic environment the center of explosive tension that leads to [domestic] violence against women" (122). Given that most Nigerian men migrate with high hopes of a better life, when a man finds it hard to get a good job due to non-recognition of his certificate or his skin colour, his wife becomes the victim of his discontent. This phenomenon is what hooks terms the "control situation" — a situation where a man unleashes his anger and frustration without fear of retaliation or questioning (122).

One of the key informants explained that Nigerian men's experi-

ence of racial discrimination worsens Nigerian-Canadian women's experience of domestic abuse. She states:

We, Nigerian women, suffer domestic abuse as a result of some of our cultural values, but the isolation and discrimination we suffer from the society at large because of our accent, colour, lack of Canadian education is [also] a form of abuse. For instance, you go for a job appointment and as soon as your surname is mentioned and you don't have an English surname like that of a Canadian, there is discrimination right there. What could be emotionally, psychologically, mentally and physically disturbing like that? There are lots of abused women, who hold PhDs and Masters Degrees who could have made it independently, but they are struggling and suffering double tragedy because they are not recognized in society. On the other hand, some Nigerian men who are graduates and came to Canada with high hopes of survival could not be gainfully employed due to non-recognition of their certificates. They instead have to take up low-paying jobs such as factory work, cleaning, baby-sitting, and cab driving. This situation makes women more vulnerable to abuse resulting from the frustration their partners feel. I know of a man who actually told his wife that as long as he is suffering all this discrimination, a romantic marriage is out of the question for them. We need polices that will be beneficial to both African men and women immigrants who have academic certificates. This will help prevent men from unleashing their anger and frustration on women. (Mrs. Philips)

Reluctance to Seek Social and Judicial Services

While some women prefer to seek formal support, many women, and

especially immigrant women, tend to prefer to talk about their abusive experiences with people who belong to their social networks, rather than with people outside of their social or formal community groups. Studies such as those by Aylin Akpınar and by Maryse Reinfret-Raynor, Ariane Riou, Solange Cantin, Cristine Drouin and Myriam Dubé suggest that for immigrant women, familial, marital values, and communal ties take precedence over individual safety and the fear of being stigmatized as a "failed" woman. Further, any police involvement necessitated by abuse may lead to the isolation of a woman by her family and community.

Although more women are identifying their experiences as abusive, they are still reluctant to seek social services such as going to a shelter or engaging the criminal justice system against their male partners. Nigerian women living in Toronto, however, have various reasons for why they fail to report their abusers and/or seek relevant assistance. While many Nigerian women may be ignorant about the services available in Canada, lack of knowledge is not the main impediment to them accessing these services. Social and cultural factors such as the value they place on children, and marriage, their reverence for family ties, their fear of shame and social ostracism, fear of documentation and of the misinterpretation of facts, as well as the view that domestic abuse is a family issue that should be discussed within the context of the household, all make it difficult for Nigerian-Canadian women to seek help or report their abusive experiences even in situations that necessitate assistance. In the Nigerian cultural context, it is considered an offence and taboo for a woman to report to the police that her husband abuses her. The consequence of a wife reporting her husband to the police or leaving her matrimonial home most often results in blame, ostracism in the society, and negative talk within the community. Therefore, an abused woman is caught in

the dilemma of choosing between her self-interest and facing community censure and ostracism. As one woman comments:

Going to a shelter is not safe for a Nigerian woman. It is not in our culture for a woman to go to a shelter, we call it "running away"—to pack up from your husband's house and to go and live in a shelter. No, no, no, no. I personally will either prefer moving in with a friend, or renting my own apartment if I have enough money than seeking any other services. Besides, apart from cultural disapproval of the issue, most Nigerians are Christian—Catholics, Pentecostals and Methodist—and according to their religious beliefs marriage is for better for worse. A woman leaving her marital relationship is conceived as violation of her religious faith and a sin against God. Given such beliefs, a woman finds it hard to ask for police assistance or seek for separation or divorce. (Mrs. Adebajo)

Cultural beliefs in the sanctity of family ties and religious beliefs thus account for Nigerian-Canadian women's inability to seek formal support for their abusive experiences and hinder them from accessing social services and assistance outside the home.

Child custody issues also create significant barriers for abused Nigerian-Canadian women in seeking services or leaving abusive relationship. According to Nigerian culture, a man has the right to his children, unlike in Canadian³ society where the respondents believe that it is the woman who has an absolute right to her children. When a Nigerian woman decides to leave an abusive family, the man's family would normally take the children away from her, irrespective of their migration from Nigeria. Many women remain in abusive marriages because they do not want their children to be raised by another woman.

The cultural value placed on marriage within Nigerian society is another reason why Nigerian women living in Canada are reluctant to seek social services or leave an abusive relationship. In most Nigerian societies, marriage is viewed as a sacred institution and is a measure of a woman's responsibility. Every "respectable" woman, at a certain age, is expected to be under the custody of a husband. As such, a woman leaving her matrimonial home is seen as bringing shame to her family. According to one of the respondents:

Your mum will even tell you, please, my daughter, don't leave, I don't want people to laugh at me. Don't bring shame to the family, my daughter, please endure the abuse. Whatever may happen just remember that the Lord is in control. Even if the man is killing you, don't leave your husband's house. It will be a disgrace for your family if you leave. Please respect your husband. The man is considered as the crown to the woman and both parties should be morally responsible for the upkeep their children. (Mrs. Adeola)

Divorce is taboo in Nigerian society, and highly frowned upon. A divorcee suffers societal isolation and ridicule among members of her community. A divorced woman is viewed as a failure, and it is assumed that she provoked the abuse and therefore deserved it. A respondent notes:

The traditional Nigerian system has made it in such a way that marriage is a vital duty for a woman to accomplish and both husband and wife have to put their strength together in order to train their children. A divorcee is not welcome and there is no respect for her. Therefore, the extent of a woman's abuse in her husband's house is not considered a genuine reason for a divorce or calling a police or going to a shelter. (Mrs. Olisah)

The value Nigerian-Canadian women place on marriage thus makes them refrain from seeking social assistance or legal services when they are abused. Moreover, these women are of the opinion that separation between spouses has a tremendously negative psychological impact on children. Therefore, they endure the abuse in order to maintain the family and marriage values that they hold in such high esteem.

However, cultural and traditional issues are only a few of many barriers holding back Nigerian-Canadian women from accessing services. Other systemic and economic factors, such as the consequences of reporting spousal abuse to police or social services, must be considered. It was a common belief among the respondents that once a man is reported to the police for spousal abuse, the record is indelible, and that this would create a significant barrier and impede a man from gaining employment opportunities. Respondents felt if the husband cannot be gainfully employed, he would be forced to take menial jobs whose income hardly sustains the family. Consequently the whole family suffers economic hardship because of the wife's report to the police. Most abused women, therefore, decide put up with the abuse because of perceived financial consequences reporting the abuse might have on the entire family in future. Another respondent, Mrs. Olisah, explains:

Documentation of a case is "sort of putting sand in your garri [food]," that is to say, adding more injury to one's pains. One of my friends reported her husband for abuse; this created a bad criminal record for the man which tarnished his image in the society and has resulted in economic hardship for the whole family and emotional abuse of the wife from the husband; because her husband could not secure a job appointment and she alone cannot pay all the bills, the family is suffering.

Discussion

For the most part, Nigerian-Canadian women's experiences of abuse cannot be separated from cultural and socio-environmental factors that render them vulnerable to domestic abuse, and that hinder their access to support services. The fact that Nigerian men, irrespective of their socio-economic status, want to assert control over the affairs of the family is a major contributing factor for abuse. Division of household labour along gender lines burdens women with more responsibilities as a result of combination of domestic activities with formal employment. The majority of the respondents stated that economic pressures have led to women joining the labour force, and most respondents spend a considerable amount of time in paid labour to make ends meet. Despite the fact that paid labour can be physically demanding and mentally challenging, most Nigerian men vehemently demand that domestic work must be undertaken by women. Efforts towards challenging or altering these societal values are unacceptable and consequently lead to abuse.

Contrary to what prevails in Nigeria where women are predominantly housewives and their husbands are breadwinners, the reality of the Canadian society is that women work in order to pay their bills. Several of the respondents earned more money than their husbands, and this often result in rifts as men feel they have lost their financial leadership in the family. Similarly, the belief in male superiority and traditional control of finances results in situations where men want to control their wives' salary and family expenses. The Nigerian-Canadian women who are empowered by their wage-earning, and are becoming uncomfortable with such attitudes and consequently resist this control in pursuit of their rights, are very vulnerable to domestic abuse.

Past studies have linked language barriers experienced by black immi-

grant women with inability to access services, an issue well-documented by Vijay Agnew (1998, 1996) and Jiwani Yisami. It is however important to note that language is not the reason why Nigerian women who are living in Canada do not access services. The responses of the women I interviewed indicate that the average Nigerian is capable of communicating fluently in English, which is Nigeria's national and official language. Fear of misinterpretations, prejudicial attitude of authorities, and the perceived economic consequences of reporting cases of abuse discourage Nigerian-Canadian women from accessing social assistance or social services.

Moreover, at a fundamental level, the concept of abuse in the Canadian society is different from what is perceived as abuse in the Nigerian context. For instance, a woman, irrespective of her socio-economic status, is viewed as a man's property and a man has sexual rights over his wife. The implication is that reporting rape within marriage as sexual abuse is culturally unacceptable. This study suggests the need to take into consideration Nigerian women's acceptance of male dominance in all matters related to the household as a necessary first step to effecting necessary attitudinal and behavioural change to end the abuse of Nigerian-Canadian women.

Conclusion

In an effort to create the awareness for building a culturally-inclusive society, in addition to informing social policy aimed at ending woman abuse, this research has explored Nigerian-Canadian women's experience of domestic abuse. This study has shown that increased recognition of the multifaceted factors that structure women's experiences of abuse can be a positive step toward elimination of domestic violence on one hand, and significant in the establishment of meaningful social services for abused immigrant women on

the other. The findings of this study show clearly that domestic violence against Nigeria-Canadian women is a result of a number of various cultural and systemic factors, such as patriarchal attitudes, marriage values, and culturally-prescribed gender roles that must be taken into account when developing programs aimed at meeting the needs of Canada's diverse communities.

Programs for abused Nigerian-Canadian women must address the fact that as children, Nigerians are socialized to accept their traditional gender roles. This results in the inability of most men to discard some of these learned gender-skewed values, even as adults in a different country where those roles may no longer be appropriate. This research found that a traditional patriarchal ethos gives Nigerian men freedom to engage in behaviours that infringe on the rights of women and renders them vulnerable to abuse; and that Nigerian women's gender-role socialization causes them to accept domestic abuse in order to avoid community isolation, gossip, and admission of failure.

This study provided Nigerian-Canadian women in Toronto with an opportunity to share their complex experiences of domestic violence, and to participate in making recommendations on how best to reduce abusive experience in their community. Such an opportunity is a positive step toward their empowerment and their ability to accept assistance and work for change.

Recommendations and Suggestions

- There is the need for constant advocacy through seminars and workshops to sensitize couples on their rights and responsibilities in marriage. This will improve their understanding about the essence of mutual respect and sensitivity.
- There is a need for the Canadian government to legislate

policy that mandates employers in Canada to accept foreigners with certificates obtained outside the Canadian educational system. In this way, frustrations arising from unemployment, which is a major source of domestic tension, would be taken significantly reduced.

- Equally, a system whereby all racial barriers against people of African descent are eliminated so that women have equal opportunity with other members of the society to realize their inherent potential. This could be achieved through educating other ethnicities about the benefits individuals accrue the nation regardless of race.

- Nigerian women need social workers and services that will understand and respect their cultural diversities. This will help in the delivery of appropriate counseling services that are sensitive to their cultural beliefs and needs.

L. Ngozi Nwosu is an outreach/sexual assault counselor at Women's Resources of Simcoe County, Ontario, Canada. She obtained a Master's degree in Sociology/Women's Studies from Lakehead University in Thunder Bay. She holds a previous degree in sociology from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Her research focus is on the impact of culture and systemic factors in the experience of domestic violence among Nigerian-Canadian women and their family and social reforms. She would like to thank her able supervisors, Dr. Rachel Ariss and Dr. Pam Wakewich for their painstaking reading and guidance throughout the course of this research work. She is also thankful to Dr. Eze and Baaba Otoo for their assistance.

¹In this context, "Nigerian-Canadian" encompasses landed immigrants, refugees and citizens of Nigerian heritage currently residing in Toronto.

²All respondents' names are pseudonyms.

³Canadian laws provide for joint parental custody rights to children. If custody is disputed, the court is to decide custody based on the best interest of the child, which includes factors such as life styles and income level capacity of each parents. The Nigerian legal system does not operate along these lines.

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