

# Exploring West African Immigrant women's experiences and perceptions about domestic violence and related supports in Alberta, Canada



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## Introduction

Canada is a growing hub for immigration and a destination for many immigrants from diverse race, culture, religion, ethnic background and socio-economic status (1). With the growing number of African immigrants, there is need to research this population to help with understanding their unique needs. African immigrant women have been identified as a unique group needing support. This is owing to the many problems they face, alongside the limited support in the host country and problems of acculturation and adjusting to a new culture different from their country of origin (2). One of the challenges faced by African immigrant women is intimate partner violence (IPV) which is also referred to in the literature as domestic violence (DV). This study will explore the perceptions and experiences of Black African immigrant women residing in Alberta toward domestic violence and Black African Immigrant women living in support services

## Research Question

In what ways is domestic violence perceived and experienced by Black African Immigrant women, including the social context, support services, and barriers to help seeking?

## Methodology

A qualitative interpretive phenomenological design (10) would be utilized for this research study. Using a semi-structured interview guide (11), twenty Black-African immigrant women, aged 18years+, living in Canada for ten-years or less, and resident in Alberta would be recruited through a purposive/convenience sampling method. In person and on-line (zoom) interviews will be recorded verbatim, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic analysis (12).

## Findings

- Conceptually, domestic violence is defined differently across cultures, hence the importance of not homogenizing the experiences of women, especially immigrant women. In furthering this discourse, the authors help us understand why the challenges associated with conceptualizing domestic violence is one of the several reasons why there is differences in how immigrant women experience domestic violence. Given the diversity of the Canadian community, it is imperative to consider cultural diversity as responsible for creating different ideologies, values, behaviors, beliefs, and norms that shapes how immigrant women experience domestic violence (1).
- In Africa and other societies where social alliances are built around families and their broader social extensions, there is a high premium on the male gender because of their access to power and resources, in comparison to the female gender whose worth and status is defined along the lines of gender roles, marriage and procreation (13). This situations captures the significance of patriarchy, especially the role it plays in empowering men with the right to exercise and enforce their power and control over women (14).
- African immigrant women in abusive relationships tends to utilize informal supports like sharing their experiences with their ethnic community, peers, friends and including leaders and religious clergy heads (15) than formal supports. This situation helps us understand why the culture of silence and invisibility is projected around domestic violence (16). This situation brings to light the dilemma aggrieved immigrant women survivors face when they seek formal support from police, law enforcement agency or support agencies. Asides been shamed and the matter trivialized, these women are being ostracized and treated as outcaste by their family and communities (17).
- In summary, it is evident that a survivor's demographic characteristics such as race, gender, and employment influences their decision to seek help and service utilization (18).

**...Women from strong cultural and religious communities are not only fearful of the consequences of leaving their abusive relationship, they are concerned about the shame and humiliation this would bring to them and their family... (Hulley, et.al., 2022**

**.....In my country, it is okay for men to discipline their wives. I told myself this was not abuse, this was 'normal discipline'. Other wives I know said the same thing? "oh yes, my husband hits me too; that's normal", so that is how we believed, and how we all survived... (Ting, 2010, p. 353)**

## Discussions

The literature review findings would be discussed under two sections. The first section would address conceptualization of patriarchy and its role in domestic violence, followed by help-seeking behavior and the role of socio-cultural norms and traditions. Significantly, violence against women is tacitly condoned in societies, which reinforces male superiority and female inferiority. Expectedly, owing to the culturally agreed-upon gender expectations, which allows for male aggression and female submission, patriarchy has empowered men with the right to exercise and enforce their power and control over women, resulting in women's victimization and experience of domestic violence in diverse social contexts (14). Available scholarships on help-seeking behavior have identified several barriers that inhibit Black African immigrant women survivors from seeking help outside of family and community. In their study, the authors (9);(19); (20); (21) (22), describes how the fear of stigma and discrimination, social isolation from family and community, fear or deportation, stigma of divorce, cultural expectation of marriage and family preservation, fear of having children removed from home alongside the cultural insensitivity of service providers prevents these African immigrant women from seeking formal help when in abusive situation. Evidently, these barriers remain major obstacles or hurdles that Black African immigrant women survivors need to navigate if they must access help when in or are at risk of domestic violence. The Canadian government has yet to publish the prevalence of DV in Black African immigrant groups.

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**My father said, "if you divorce, you are dead to me, do not come back home" (Tonsing & Barn, 2017, p. 633).**

**According to the Africanloft.com (2008)...  
...I witnessed a man of God saying "African women will call the police if a man pushes her slightly, that is American thing, stop imitating Oyibo (i.e. Whites), remember we are Africans..."**

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