

# Analyzing the interpretations and comprehension of domestic violence among West African immigrant women



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## Study Overview

This research explores how West African Immigrant women residing in Alberta conceptualize, interpret and experience domestic violence.

Despite the growing number of the African population in Canada, little is known about their DV experience in Canada (1).

This research study attempts to provide insight into the role culture, religion alongside immigrations specific factors play in exacerbating the already vulnerable positions of West African immigrant women in domestic violence situation.

## Research Question

How is domestic violence perceived and experienced among West African Immigrant women living in Alberta?

## Literature Review

- Domestic violence is a public health issue impacting everyone. However the severity of it is felt more by immigrant women owing to cultural beliefs and norms (2).
- Domestic violence is ingrained in the cultural and religious practices of the African society; resulting in situations where abused individuals normalize the act, claiming it as a sign of love and affection (3,4,5).
- Cultural pressure related to marriage and family preservations coupled with fears of social exclusion, criminalization of spouses, deportation, limited knowledge of support services, social isolation, and language barriers, hinders immigrant women from reporting and seeking help
- Although these findings provide insight into some of the disadvantages racialized women face in many of the developed countries; however, little is known of the DV experiences of African immigrant women in Canada (7).

## Methodology

- Qualitative Study
- Phenomenological design
- Semi Structured Interviews
- Six West African immigrant women residing in Alberta for 5years or less participated in the study
- Purposive sampling method
- Zoom Interviews
- Verbatim transcription
- line-by-line coding and analysis

*...he loves you, that's why he is correcting you and not leaving you for another woman".—*

BumBum research participant, December 2023

Normalization of Domestic violence

## Memorable Quotes

*...Culturally, it is believed that when a woman is married off to her husband, her husband is given the power to act in the capacity of her father, doing what the father can do to his daughter. So, when the father of a woman is handing over that woman to the husband, culturally it is seen as a shift or transfer of power from the father to the husband. As such, it is assumed that the powers that the father of a woman or bride has over the daughter is now being transferred to the husband. So whatever the father can do to discipline the child, that same power is now transferred to the husband who is now entrusted with the power to perform the same kind of role as the father would to a daughter". \_*

Najjagal, research participant, December 2023

African Worldview

## Preliminary Findings

Six West African Immigrant women resident in Alberta for 5years or less from Nigeria and Ghana participated in the qualitative study. The participants provided insights into domestic violence perceptions, experience and African worldviews, leading to the emergence of these major findings

- Findings from the data on DV definition suggests a meaning intrinsic to an African context, grounded in cultural and religious underpinnings. Conceptually, the participants viewed **Domestic violence in the West as distinct from domestic violence within African society**, defining domestic violence as quarrels, fights, miscommunications and conflicts inevitable among married couple. **The participants acknowledged incidence of domestic only in situations when there is immediate danger or an imminent risk of bodily injury harm or death to the woman.**
- Sexual, Emotional, and Financial violence are normalized and not viewed as abuse within the West African community.
- In most of the African cultural and religious settings, **sexual intimacy within marriage is viewed as a man's right rather than a privilege**, leading to situations where a woman is compelled to respond to her husband's sexual demands. This makes it difficult to recognize and address instances of sexual violence in the home
- African immigrant women in domestic violence situations utilize informal support services like family and friends, religious leaders, community elders, due to trust and familiarity.
- The data also suggest a reluctance by the women to report instances of domestic violence due to **strong cultural identity and the fear of potential backlash or criticism from families and communities, social exclusion, stigma and isolation, fear of being judged for going against cultural norms , criminalization of spouses, fear of deportation, possible removal of children from the home, and risk of family dissolution.**
- Despite the existence of laws addressing domestic violence in Canada, data from this study suggests that survivors don't resort to courts due to various challenges. Survivors of domestic violence want to adopt informal approaches to solve their problems rather than go the formal way like the court. **Within the African world views, there are beliefs, that relationships are harder to restore when the court have stepped in. Hence, the process of adjudication is not restorative.** Because once a family member has been criminalized and or jailed, it is more difficult to repair such family ties or relationship.

## Implications

- This study's findings are relevant for interdisciplinary research, especially in fields addressing the broader reduction of domestic violence and exploring people's perception; regardless of their racial, religious and ethnic affiliations.
- In working with people experiencing domestic violence, there is a need for a more multidisciplinary approach, in the sense that survivors of domestic violence often require multiple services , which cannot be offered by a single discipline or professional entity.
- This study significantly impacts the legal professionals, as survivors often require legal assistance; highlighting the necessity for legal professionals to understand the culture and religious values of survivors. Additionally, it's essential to comprehend why survivors may choose to stay in abusive situations rather than explore legal services.
- This study has implications on other disciplines including the sociologists, as it delves into how the families functions, and how dysfunctions within the family can also predisposed people to stay and experience domestic violence
- Survivors of domestic violence need a gamut of services from different professionals; and fundamental to developing more culturally salient interventions, is the robust understanding of survivor's perception, interpretations and help-seeking experiences and behaviors

These women jeopardize their safety to conform with cultural norm, which pressures them to stay married regardless of their experience.....Who's daughter, mother, sister, niece, aunt, will be next ?



*"oh now you have come to Western world or a developed country and you want to grow wings; you want to start acting like the Western women in the western world; you want to follow their laws, you have forgotten where you came from". –*

EkaEka, research participant December 2023

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