'I Will Not Leave Without My Passport': Hostile Environment, Intimate Partner Violence, and Resilience among Migrant Nigerian Women in the UK.

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Impact of Covid-19

The disruption caused by COVID-19 impacted the ability to conduct face-to-face interviews in this study. Social distancing requirements imposed to limit face-to-face contact necessitated a shift to virtual data collection methods. Furthermore, the UK government's mandatory travel restrictions at the time of data collection posed significant challenges to gaining access to participants. As a result, a smaller sample of participants than initially planned were recruited.

However, despite these challenges, while adhering to the lockdown measures at the time, efforts were made to adapt the research design to reflect the new circumstances in order to continue the study. Remote data collection methods were explored and developed to ensure that the research's rigour, quality, and validity remained intact. This adaptation allowed for flexibility in the research design and data collection methods, which will prove valuable in future research.

Declaration of Authorship

I, Yemisi Laura Sloane, declare that except where explicit reference is made to the

contribution of others, this thesis is the result of my work and has not been submitted for any

other degree at the University of Essex or any other institution.

Signature:

Abstract

This thesis provides an intersectional analysis of the gendered impact of the UK migration policy on the experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV) among migrant women from sub-Saharan Africa living in Britain. With a focus on migrant women from Nigeria with spouse visas, it highlights the specificities of their experiences of IPV and examines how their individual positions and interactions, framed through different sociocultural contexts, overlap in complex ways with migrant-specific institutional, legal and social exclusions created by the policy. Qualitative semi-structured interviews revealed that the precarity of their migrant status and the macro-structural barriers that restricted their ability to access welfare services created a multifaceted system of marginalisation that shaped their experiences and responses to IPV. Furthermore, the interaction between the women's perception of the law and legality and the structural inequalities they faced within the social environment in Britain also shaped their legal consciousness and impacted their experiences.

Through the women's narratives, this thesis then explored processes of gendered resistance and resilience identified in the data by way of intentional acts of opposition against IPV in severely subordinated contexts. Findings revealed that co-existing with the violence and structural oppression the women faced were constructions of resistance and their sense of resilience against the disadvantaged spaces they occupied. This study pushes for a more nuanced and gender-sensitive approach by the UK government to cater to the welfare of migrant women without rendering the individual and structural variables that shape their experiences and responses to violence invisible.

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I want to thank my supervisors, Dr. Carlos Gigoux Gramegna and Dr. Johanna Römer, who believed in me when my research was just a proposal. I am grateful for their invaluable guidance and supervision.

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Abbreviations, Terminologies and Explanation of Concepts

IPV – Intimate Partner Violence

NRPF – No Recourse to Public Fund

WHO – World Health Organisation

ILR – Indefinite Leave to Remain

DHS – Demographic and Health Survey

CEDAW – Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

UN – United Nations

UK – United Kingdom

DVR – Domestic Violence Rule

FGM – Female Genital Mutilation

Gra gra – To be in a rush

Naija – Nigeria

Abeg – Please

Abi? – Right?

Spouse Visas – A settlement visa for non-UK residents over 18 years, for 30 months, that allows them to live together with their married partner who is either a British citizen or settled in the UK (Government Digital Service, 2014b).

Precarious Immigration status – The immigration status of anyone in the UK lawfully but who does not hold indefinite leave to remain (Rhuppiah v Secretary of State for the Home Department [2018] UKSC 58, 2018).

No Recourse to Public Fund Rule – A condition attached to spouse visas, as a category of visa subject to immigration control, which gives holders no right to claim welfare benefits in the UK (Home Office, 2021).

Indefinite Leave to Remain – A permanent residence that enables a person to settle in the UK, giving holders the right to live, work, access welfare benefits and study without restrictions. It can also be used to apply for British citizenship ((Government Digital Service, 2014a).

British Citizenship – a type of British nationality that gives a person the right to live and work in the UK without any immigration restrictions, the right to hold a British passport, full civic rights and unrestricted entry and exit access in and out of the UK (Government Digital Service, 2014c).

Migrant - A person who has immigrated to a country different from his country of birth to reside and was born to two foreign parents (Anderson and Blinder, 2017). In this study, the country of origin is Nigeria and the country different from their country of birth is the United Kingdom.

Marriage-Migrant - a specific form of migration to join a spouse in another geographical location within a country or outside a country (Heikkilä and Rauhut, 2015)

Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women – the first international instrument that explicitly addresses gendered violence and provides a framework for UN member states to legislate against violence and improve the well-being of women (United Nations, 1993).

Gender Sensitive Policies – Integrating a gender perspective in the legislative process to achieve gender equality (CPA, 2021).

Although Britain is often used as a loose synonym for the United Kingdom as a whole, consisting of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Island, I use the word 'Britain' to refer to England for this thesis.

As some laws apply only in one, two or three of the devolved nations, I refer to the UK Government when discussing matters and policies that pertain to England and Wales.

Service providers refer to the Metropolitan Police Force and women's organisations.

The following terms are used interchangeably – abuse and violence, spouse and husband, domestic violence and intimate partner violence.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Growing up in Nigeria as one of six girls, I became aware at a very young age that there are different societal expectations and experiences for women and girls compared to men. Despite receiving equal love and kindness from my parents outside of my home, I still constantly had to deal with stereotypical gender expectations from the wider society, which sometimes overshadowed the protection my parents could provide. Even after moving to the UK, this reality persisted. As a result, I have had to navigate systemic inequalities constantly and consciously while balancing multiple identities in order to thrive. Gender inequality is sustained through various structures and systems of power in society that reinforce unequal power dynamics between men and women. How these gendered disparities intersect with the migration process, from the decision to migrate to arriving in the destination country, inspired my interest in gaining a deeper understanding of the unique experiences and challenges that migrant women face, including the role that migration policies play in their everyday lives as women.

Over the past few decades, immigration has been a key political issue in many countries and the subject of contentious debates among policymakers, the media, and other public and private spheres. In the UK, successive governments have regarded immigration as a problem to be tackled to prevent irregular migration into the country and to control its borders. This has led to the introduction and enforcement of strict immigration restrictions to manage the number and types of migrants allowed to enter the country. Such restrictions include caps on skilled workers, work visas, and even tighter restrictions on family reunification. These immigration policies, which are on the face of it gender neutral, have had significant prejudicial effects on women (Bhabia, 2007). Many women, especially those from the global south, are

disproportionately impacted by the migration process regarding gender-based violence (Pickering, 2010; Maher and Segrave, 2018; Reilly et al., 2022; UN Women, 2020).

Research has demonstrated that women are more likely to migrate for family reasons, such as joining a spouse in the host country (Zlotnik, 1995; Clark and Maas, 2013; Boyd, 2003). Disproportionate care responsibilities also make it difficult for many migrant women to take advantage of employment and educational opportunities, leaving them unable to thrive independently in their new communities and creating a patriarchal dependence on their spouses that limits their autonomy. The tightening of immigration laws in the UK also creates immigrant-specific institutional, legal, and social exclusions that further marginalise women and shape their perceptions and interactions with the law. Therefore, the migration process presents a double-edged sword for many women, providing new opportunities and experiences but also reinforcing pre-existing structural inequalities that subjugate women. In this regard, many migrant women are simultaneously confronted with both gender and exclusionism in the migration process, which heightens their risks of experiencing gender-based violence. In this thesis, I focus on this gendered relationship between migration and violence against women and the challenges it brings for migrant women in the UK from sub-Saharan Africa. Specifically, with a focus on Nigerian women, I explore the distinct experiences of documented Nigerian women who have migrated to the UK under the current UK migration policy for family reasons to join their Nigerian spouses and experience intimate partner violence (IPV).

There is much literature in the UK on how migration can exacerbate migrant women's risk of experiencing IPV. Resnik (2007) has argued that the migration decisions created by the sex-gender system, which relies on defined roles for women, significantly restrict their ability to exercise autonomy and limit their opportunities before and after migration. Research has also shown how the current UK migration policy can perpetuate IPV through restrictive barriers

placed on migrants (McIlwaine et al., 2019; Bralo, 2021; Dudley, 2017). Indeed, such research on IPV offers insightful evaluations and analyses of the connection between immigration, the hostile environment policy, and the marginalised experiences of women affected by IPV in the UK. However, there remains a gap in theory and practice regarding the nuances and variations in these experiences of IPV. In various public and private spaces, including the media, abused migrant women are often classified into a Western/non-Western binary with no regard for the diversity within the migrant population in the UK (Połońska-Kimunguyi, 2022; Shore, 1997). This perpetuates the othering of ethnic minority women and reinforces negative stereotypes about their cultures being uncivilised, backward, and dangerous (Razack, 2004; Femi-Ajao, 2018; Shore, 1997). The oversimplification of their experiences of IPV not only ignores the heterogeneity of migrant communities but also ignores the multiple structural factors that overlap to shape their experiences. This raises significant concerns about its implications. Migrant women's experiences of IPV are, however, not homogenous. All migrant women are not the same, and their experiences are framed by their different sociocultural backgrounds, positionalities, and interactions.

The heterogeneity in migrant women's experiences also sparked my interest in exploring the specificities of Nigerian women's experiences of IPV. I realised it was not enough to merely acknowledge the structural factors shaping their experiences as migrant women. It was equally crucial to hear the women's accounts, in their own words, of how their positionalities and interactions overlapped with these intersecting structures, such as their immigrant status in the UK, to shape their experiences. What makes their experiences unique from other migrant groups in the UK, and what are the particularities in their experiences and responses to IPV? How do they interpret the migration policy in their experiences of intimate violence? Furthermore, as Black women who belong to a race with a long history of systemic oppression and discrimination, what spaces do they occupy within the British social structure as migrant

women experiencing abuse? This thesis, therefore, addresses these questions by examining the nuances in Nigerian women's experiences and responses to IPV, their interactions and perceptions of the current migration law, and how they negotiate and renegotiate the multiple identities they balance as women, migrant women, and as Black migrant women.

1.1. The Nigerian People and Immigration

Nigeria is a country located in West Africa, with a diverse population of over 225 million people, making it the most populous country in Africa and the seventh most populous in the world. The country is known for its vibrant cultural scene and heritage, particularly in film, literature, and the arts. It also boasts a diverse linguistic group, with over 500 distinct indigenous languages. Nigeria is rich in natural resources, including oil and gas, a significant reserve of coal and other solid minerals, making resource extraction a vital sector of the economy. Historically, Nigeria came under the British colony in 1900 and was ruled by the British Empire through a system of indirect rule where local chiefs were placed in symbolic leadership positions but supervised by the British. It gained independence from British rule in 1960 and has since been a federal republic.
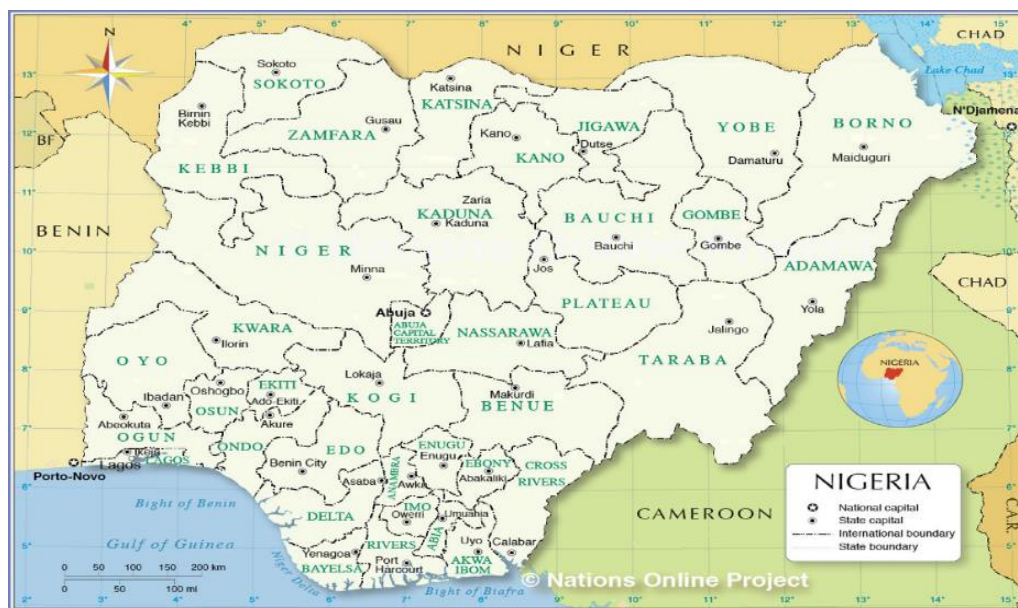
Figure 1: Map of Nigeria. **Source: (UN Geospatial, 2014).**

It has been widely recognised that the control of Nigeria's economic potential has led to many difficulties for its citizens, including a civil war, military coups, police violence, poverty, inequality, corruption, and a poor human rights record. This includes a high rate of gender-based violence, significantly impacting women in the country (Femi-Ajao, 2018). Women in Nigeria face significant inequality and are subjected to sexist biases and patriarchal ideologies institutionalised and reflected in its laws, customary practices, criminal justice system, and other parts of its social structure (Okemgbo et al., 2002; Abayomi and Olabode, 2009; Kalunta-Crumpton, 2016; Chika, 2012). Resistance to the disturbance of its patriarchal structures has been viewed as interference from the West (Eze-Anaba, 2006; Akpoghome, 2016; Oyediran and Isiugo-Abanihe, 2005; Abayomi and Olabode, 2013).

Studies have shown that international migration from Nigeria is mainly a result of the persistent issues of corruption, unemployment, human rights violations, and other challenges (Adhikari et al., 2021; Bakewell and Bonfiglio, 2013). In 1990, approximately 450,000 Nigerians migrated abroad, but by 2021, this number had skyrocketed to 1.4 million (Adhikari et al., 2021). It is important to note that these figures will likely be underestimates, as many Nigerians may have no official records in the host countries (Folayan et al., 2021). In the UK, Nigeria ranks among the top 10 countries of origin for non-European (EU) migrants (ONS, 2021), reaching a peak in 2015 before declining slightly in 2017 but remaining at a significant level (ONS, 2020).

1.2. Intimate Partner Violence and the Nigerian Migrant Women in Britain

The choice of language becomes particularly relevant when studying gender-based violence within immigrant populations, as the terminology used may not entirely align with the culture and way of life of the migrant group. For instance, "domestic violence" or "abuse" is broadly and commonly used to describe a wide range of violent, controlling and coercive behaviours

occurring within a family unit, including extended family members. However, "intimate partner violence" refers explicitly to violent, controlling and coercive behaviours by an intimate partner, excluding extended family members. The distinction aligns with Nigeria's marriage customs, which follow neolocal residence patterns where married couples are expected to reside separately from extended family members and establish their households as a symbol of independence and growth (Smith, 2007, 2014; Muckle and Gonzalez, 2022). Understanding this cultural context is crucial when examining and interpreting the dynamics of family violence within the Nigerian immigrant population. Therefore, for this study, intimate partner violence is used to mean violence solely from a spouse, intimate partner, or ex-partner.

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is defined as domestic violence involving physical, sexual, emotional, or psychological harm inflicted in an intimate relationship (WHO, 2012). It is a widespread global issue that affects individuals across borders, population groups, and multiple socio-cultural factors, with women more likely to experience IPV than men in terms of frequency and severity, due to power imbalances and societal norms that perpetuate gender inequality (WHO, 2012). IPV intersects with other structures of oppression, such as race, class, and immigrant status, and is considered the most common and complex form of violence against women (WHO, 2012). There is, therefore, the need to recognise and highlight IPV as a significant human rights issue that intersects with the social, economic, and political aspects of society in order to develop effective strategies to address the problem. (Barnett, 2000). For the purpose of this thesis, intimate partner violence will be used interchangeably with domestic violence as a type of violence directed toward a woman by her intimate partner.

The World Health Organisation (2017) estimates that one in every seven persons in the world is a migrant, and women account for almost half (48.2%) of all international migrants (WHO, 2017). In the UK, statistics have shown that marriage migration forms the largest single

category of migrant settlement from non-EU countries (The Migration Observatory, 2022). During the year ending June 2021, non-EU migration into the UK was largely driven by family reasons, with migration from sub-Saharan Africa accounting for 44% of family-related migration. This is in contrast to migration from EU countries, where individuals are more likely to move to the UK for employment opportunities, as shown in Figure 2 (The Migration Observatory, 2022).
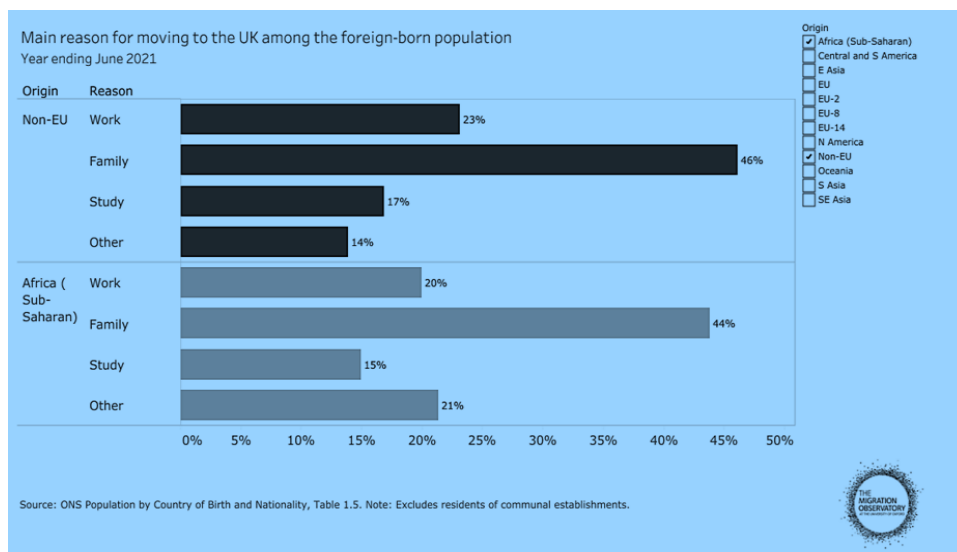
Figure 2: Main reason for moving to the UK among non-EU and Sub-Saharan African populations.

The migration of Nigerian women is significantly patterned by gender. Therefore, many settle in the UK for family reasons, mainly through marriage to a resident Nigerian spouse (Femi-Ajao, 2018; Charlsey et al., 2012). In most cases, the men hold a higher immigration status than their wives, whom the government gives a Spouse Visa to enable them to legally reside in the UK (Charsley et al., 2012). The Spouse Visa, also known as a marriage visa, requires the migrant spouse to depend entirely on the resident spouse for the renewal of their visa and to access welfare resources in the UK (Government Digital Service, 2014b). This gives the husband or sponsoring spouse near total control of their migrant wife's legal status. The legal sanctioning of such precarious immigration status reinforces patriarchal structures, restricts agency, and perpetuates their subjugation (Gill and Sharma, 2007; Raj and Silverman, 2002; Vives-Cases et al., 2010; Erez, 2019). These places them at a high risk of experiencing IPV by

exposing them to unique forms of domination and control due to their insecure immigration status (UN Women, 2020; Erez, 2000; Menjivar and Salcido, 2002; Raj and Silverman, 2002; Sokolof and Dupont, 2005).

The gendered pattern of migration of Nigerian women is also primarily driven by patriarchal norms in neolocal contexts (Rufai et al., 2019). In Nigeria's traditional family system, such marriage residence pattern reinforces the dominance of husbands over their wives, as women are often expected to move away from their immediate environment, and in some cases outside the country, as a sign that they now belong to their husbands (Watts, 1983; Ju and Xie, 2017). This shows that, and as indicated in other studies, migrant women are likely to experience IPV within patriarchal ideologies and practices held in their country of origin (Bazza, 2009; Kalunta-Crumpton, 2016; Ting and Panchanadeswaran, 2009). Other patriarchal ideologies that shape the way Nigerian women migrate are, for example, a long-standing tradition of the preference for male children over female children, the expectation that women must be obedient and subservient to their husbands, the belief in a man's sexual dominance over his wife, and the belief in the chastisement of women who are deemed as less intelligent and in need of the guidance of men (Ting and Panchanadeswaran, 2009). Some parts of Nigeria also practice female genital mutilation (FGM) on girls in 'preparation' for their future husbands (Gbadebo et al., 2021; WHO, 2007). The misinterpretation of religious teachings that subordinate women and the cultural belief that women must give up their rights upon marriage also contribute to IPV (Attoh, 2017). According to Arisi (2011), in Nigerian families, marriage means a woman surrenders complete control of her body and will to her husband, who can do as he pleases with her as she now belongs to him.

Unfortunately, such patriarchal attitudes and beliefs transcend geographical borders, with many men normalising violence against their wives as acceptable, even while living in the UK

(Kalunta-Crumpton, 2015; Donnelly et al., 2005). This does not, however, suggest that patriarchal ideologies are absent in host countries. Sokoloff and Dupont (2005) have also warned that it should not be assumed that non-migrant women are immune from IPV. However, several studies have demonstrated that non-migrant women enjoy a privileged status based on their identity, which gives them an advantage over migrant women regarding their options for safety from IPV and access to welfare services (Erez et al., 2019; Charsley et al., 2012; Davies et al., 2022).

There is also the problem of underreporting in the Nigerian community (Akinsulure-Smith et al., 2013). The normalisation of male violence attaches a cultural stigma to reporting IPV outside the private sphere, and any woman who does so is criticised and shamed (Akinsulure-Smith et al., 2013). As a result, Nigerian migrant women are compelled, especially by their informal familial and social networks, to adopt 'abuse-tolerant perspectives' (Kalunta-Crumpton, 2016: 5; Erez et al., 2009; Fawole et al., 2005).

1.3. Significance of the Study

This research contributes to the existing literature on the relationship between immigration and IPV by exploring the specific experiences of documented Nigerian women in the UK on Spouse Visas experiencing IPV. However, this study distinguishes itself from previous research on IPV by exploring the specific and unique ways these women negotiate their identities in contested spaces, in both domestic and non-domestic settings. Within this context, it examines Nigerian women's experiences of IPV, on the one hand, and their resilience and resistance in severely subordinated contexts while also maintaining their sense of identity and belonging, on the other hand.

A focus on specificity and particularity allows me to move away from totalising accounts of what migrant women experience and what they require to escape IPV. It provides a nuanced

and comprehensive understanding of the complexities of their experiences by capturing the richness and diversities of their narratives. In this way, I am able to highlight their experiences and unique strategies for resistance non-simplistically, accurately, and in greater detail (Schneider, 1992). However, my focus on the specificities and particularities of Nigerian women's experiences does not mean that the broader context of gender inequality is ignored. Instead, I situate the women's experiences within women's subordinate position in society, as IPV exists within this broad societal issue (Porter, 2020; Dobash and Dobash, 1983; Schneider, 2000).

Additionally, this study seeks to understand how gender, cultural and racial stereotypes shape women's experiences and responses to IPV. It is essential not to overlook the stereotypical representations of migrant women in the media and other public and private discourses. The impact of race on Black migrant women's experiences of violence and oppression has saddled them with negative stereotypes about their experiences of intimate violence. In public settings, negative stereotypes of Black women in popular culture portray them as overly aggressive and immune to violence compared to White women, leading to discriminatory treatment from the criminal justice system and service providers (Ammons, 1995; Gondolf, 1998; Harrison and Esqueda, 1999). Research has shown the continued impacts of systematic racial oppression, bias, and unequal treatment of Black women (Williams and Sternthal, 2010). Black women are also portrayed as passive and submissive to violence from their Black male husbands due to their unwavering adherence to their cultures, which presumably justifies such violence (Allard, 2007; Gondolf, 1998; Ammons, 1995). Again, such racialised stereotypes assume that Black women are non-agentic beings and negatively represent their cultures as inferior to Western cultures. Furthermore, in domestic settings, women who challenge gender norms and resist their abusers are portrayed as 'bad wives' or 'witches' within their communities and can result in further oppression by their abusive husbands through extreme physical violence, isolation,

and in severe cases, death (Gondolf, 1998; Allard, 2007). For Nigerian women, as Black women, being subjected to both racialised and gendered can have a profound impact on their experiences of IPV, and many fear the effects of such stereotypes in their everyday lives. This can lead to a fear of being judged or labelled in domestic and non-domestic settings, further exacerbating the violence they face. For example, where Nigerian women challenge racialised stereotypes in non-domestic settings, many still fall into gendered stereotypes in non-domestic settings. This research, therefore, will shed light on the impact of such negative stereotypes on Nigerian migrant women's experiences of IPV and their help-seeking behaviours and highlight the need to disrupt them to provide effective pathways for the safety and well-being of victims.

As I am interested in exploring how Nigerian migrant women balance their multiple marginalised identities and navigate the structural barriers they face, I have adopted an intersectional framework to analyse how these structural barriers, including immigrant-specific institutional, legal and social exclusions created by the current UK migration policy overlap in complex ways (Crenshaw, 1995; Mirza, 1997). In this regard, this research challenges the notion of IPV as a monolithic phenomenon and critiques gender and cultural essentialist approaches that fail to consider the broader framework within which violence against women occurs (Phipps, 2020; Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). Instead, I demonstrate that IPV is manifested as a product of domination and unequal power dynamics that is inextricably bound up with other systems of inequalities that shape Nigerian women's experiences of violence and oppression (Razack, 2008; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005; Russo, 2001). By rejecting the idea of generalising or universalising the IPV experiences of migrant women in the UK, this research will shed light on the nuances of how Nigerian migrant women understand, experience and respond to IPV in the face of relative isolation and very limited options.

This research is guided by an integrated feminist framework, which challenges the notion that women are inherently predisposed to male violence, lack agency, and are helpless in the face of abuse. Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) posit that although feminist research approaches are varied and diverse, they share a common goal of being grounded in women's experiences in unequal gendered relationships. By taking an integrated feminist approach, this research aims to disrupt harmful stereotypes and assumptions about women's experiences of IPV and their agency by allowing the narratives and realities of Nigerian migrant women to be uncovered. By doing so, I aim to use this research to contribute to the broader movement towards gender equality and the elimination of violence against women (Mahoney, 1994).

I also draw on legal consciousness to examine the relationship between the women's perception of law and legality and the structural inequalities and variables they encounter within the social environment in Britain. The UK hostile environment policy, although not intentionally gender-biased, has (re)produced harmful gender norms and immigration-specific forms of control and abuse that disproportionately affect and harm migrant women. In this regard, the legal consciousness of Nigerian women in terms of their interactions with the criminal justice system and their perceptions of the law and legality is examined. This is crucial in understanding the women's insight on actual or perceived barriers to escaping IPV in the UK and why many are reluctant to report the abuse to formal sources of help and interventions, even in extreme cases (Hartsock 1997, Mooney 2000). The concept of legal consciousness refers to an individual's understanding of the law and its role in society, as well as their beliefs and attitudes towards the legal system (Ewick and Silbey, 1998). However, I go beyond standard approaches to legal consciousness in this thesis, which interrogates how specific laws function and are perceived by ordinary people (Silbey, 2005; Porter, 2020). I use legal consciousness to examine the space that law occupies in the experiences and responses of the women to IPV. In doing this, I highlight the law as intended and the law in action in terms of how it can sustain hegemonic

and unequal structures of power while providing a legal pathway to the safety and well-being of Nigerian migrant women experiencing IPV (Ruth et al., 2000). Legal consciousness, therefore, enables me to understand the law as both a victim power resource and challenge the law's assertion that its nature and processes are isolated from intrinsic social inequality or that it occupies a neutral or gender-free space in people's homes, lives and relations (Conaghan, 2013; Porter, 2020; Smart, 2002; Ruth et al., 2000).

Furthermore, I explore the intersection of patriarchal ideologies with colonialism and how this can transcend borders to shape both how IPV is perpetrated and how Nigerian women respond to the abuse. Postcolonial theory provides a critical lens for examining how power and domination are maintained in the postcolonial era and how colonial thinking may continue to shape knowledge and power. In approaching the impact of colonial representation on power relations, I examine how colonial ideologies are internalised and reproduced in the women's lived experiences of IPV. In light of this, how Nigerian migrant women are subjected to colonial manifestations of power in domestic and non-domestic settings will be examined. This includes the normalisation of a racial social order, experiences of discrimination and marginalisation as non-Western women, and the perpetuation of racist and sexist attitudes. I critique such stereotypical representations by challenging the social constructions and meaning given to "modernity", "agency", and "civilisation" as concepts that are exclusively of the West.

In light of the aims and objectives of this study, the key questions addressed are:

1. What is the gendered impact of the UK's hostile environment policy on Nigerian migrant women's experiences of IPV, and how have its structural constraints and institutional exclusions exacerbated the risk of IPV and shaped their experiences and responses to it?

2. How do Nigerian women's unique positionalities and interactional processes at the intersection of various structures of oppression influence their understanding and responses to IPV, including how they seek help?

3. What mechanisms or strategies of resistance and resilience are employed by Nigerian migrant women experiencing IPV, considering their multiple marginalised identities, and how do these mechanisms impact their help-seeking behaviours and perceptions of law and legality?

In this thesis, therefore, I aim to answer the above research questions by providing an integrated feminist analysis of the intersection between immigration and IPV in the UK as a multi-dimensional phenomenon that requires a nuanced and comprehensive framework through regulation, legislation, and community-based effort, so that the unique needs of migrant women can be understood without generalising their experiences (Gill and Sharma, 2007). Using a case study of Nigerian migrant women highlights the issues specific to women from this target population and includes issues that also have wider relevance for all migrant women living in Britain.

1.4. Thesis Outline

This thesis is structured into eleven chapters, including this introduction, which establishes the motivation, the foundation for this research, the significance of the study, and the questions this thesis aims to answer.

Chapter Two delves into the relevant academic literature on the relationship between immigration and IPV, examining and critiquing the hostile environment policy and providing an overview of the prevalence and legislative responses to IPV in England. This chapter also challenges essentialist conceptualisations of IPV by exploring the multiple structures that intersect to shape the experiences of Nigerian migrant women. The chapter aims to broaden

the understanding of the complexities of IPV and to move beyond simplistic, one-dimensional explanations.

In Chapter Three, I outline the theoretical frameworks used in this thesis: the intersectionality framework, legal consciousness, Black feminist theory, socio-ecological framework, and postcolonial theory. These frameworks enable a comprehensive understanding of the multidimensional nature of IPV and the complexity of the experiences and responses of Nigerian migrant women to this form of abuse.

Chapter Four provides a reflexive discussion of the methodology used in this research and discusses my positionality in the research process. This includes a reflection on my thoughts and assumptions as someone who shares the same ethnic origin as the participants in this study. This reflexive analysis enabled me to ensure the objectivity and reliability of the data collection and analysis. Limitations of the research, ethical considerations, and the impact of Covid-19 on the research process are also discussed.

The following chapters examine the findings from the data collected and the themes identified during the data analysis. Chapter Five provides a feminist critical analysis of how the vulnerability of Nigerian women to IPV is constructed and how this shapes their experiences. The aim is to highlight how the attribution of femininity to the notion of vulnerability can lead to the normalisation of male violence against women and shift the focus away from other structural factors that shape Nigerian migrant women's experiences of IPV and the broader framework within which violence against women occurs.

Chapter Six examines the gendered impact of the hostile immigration policy, including the gendered consequences of the NRPF rule. It highlights the unforeseen pitfalls of the policy and provides an analysis of how it interacts with IPV in ways that license the oppression of Nigerian migrant women and reinforce existing gender inequalities that subjugate women.

In Chapter Seven, I examine the legal consciousness of Nigerian migrant women in terms of how they perceive, understand and engage with the law. This chapter highlights the perceptions of law as a fluid and evolving process which is constantly being constructed. It also illustrates the different aspects of legal consciousness and their connection with the women's lived experiences of IPV amidst the challenges they face due to their precarious immigration status.

Nigerian patriarchal cultural norms and their complex interplay with the precarious immigration status of Nigerian women in the UK are examined in Chapter Eight. This chapter argues against stereotypical understandings of how cultural norms are manifested within the Nigerian community and how such norms transcend to intersect with other axes of discrimination. How Nigerian women experience, understand, and engage with these cultural norms as migrant women in the UK experiencing IPV are examined.

Chapter Nine challenges the dominant narrative in mainstream discourse that migrant women from ethnic minority groups are passive and non-agentic sufferers of IPV who have been damaged by the violence they endure. Instead, the chapter highlights the agency of Nigerian migrant women by examining how they actively resist IPV by utilising various strategies of resistance in the face of relative isolation and minimal options.

Chapter Ten explores the help-seeking behaviours of the women, providing an in-depth analysis of the support they turn to and the various structural barriers they face in seeking help from informal and formal sources.

Chapter Eleven is the conclusive chapter. The main conclusions outline the primary findings of this research and point at potential avenues that might inform future research and further enhance the understanding of IPV among Nigerian migrant women in the UK.

The findings of this study can contribute to the larger body of knowledge on IPV and provide crucial insights for policymakers, advocates, and service providers working to support and empower migrant victims of IPV. By highlighting how even seemingly gender-neutral immigration policies can perpetuate pre-existing gender inequalities and power imbalances that negatively impact women, it also offers new perspectives and insights into how nuanced and gender-sensitive policies can be developed. Therefore, this research study can inform the development of a more effective support system for migrant women in the UK facing abusive relationships away from their home countries.

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CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

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2.1. Overview

This chapter provides a comprehensive examination of the current literature on IPV among

migrant women in the UK. It integrates previous studies on gender inequality as the root

cause of gender-based violence and the intersections between immigration and IPV. The

prevalence and legislative responses to IPV in the UK are also analysed, focusing on their

impact on the experiences and responses of migrant women in the UK. This chapter also

critiques one-dimensional explanations of IPV and argues that such conceptualisations do not

consider the broader framework in which violence against women occurs. It also fails to

encapsulate the specificities of migrant women's experiences of abuse.

2.2. Gender Inequality and Violence Against Women

> For as the husband is to answer for his wife's misbehaviour, according to the judgment,
> the law thought it is reasonable to entrust him with this power of restraining her by
> domestic chastisement, in the same moderation that a man is allowed to correct his
> …children. (William Blackstone, 1769)

Violence against women has a long and troubling history and, for centuries, was implicitly and

explicitly condoned by society and even legally sanctioned in some eras. According to the UN

Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993), violence against women is

a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women and is one of

the most common social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position

compared with men. The UN also confirmed that there is no region, country or culture in the

world where women have not occupied a subordinate, oppressed or subservient role (UN

Secretary-General, 2006). Therefore, violence against women is a pervasive problem that exists

in different social and political contexts and is well-recognised as a human rights violation and public health concern (United Nations, 1993).

However, violence against women was not always recognised as a serious problem. It was often perceived as a normal aspect of social life and a function of man's higher position in society. For example, in the 15th century, the burning of witches, sanctioned by both the church and the state, has been critiqued by many feminists as gendered and highly feminised (Hester, 1996; Bever, 2002; Garett, 2013). Also, under the early Roman law, a man was given the absolute marital power to chastise his wife, even to the point of killing her (Stedman, 1917). Under the old common law rule, a husband had the right to chastise or 'moderately correct' his wife (Blackstone, 1979). These laws were enacted to sanction men's authority and position in society and enable them to control and restrain women. Although such overt laws are now obsolete in modern society, the consequence of gender inequality is that violence against women continues to exist in different forms and at varying degrees in different parts of the world. For example, bride burning, a form of dowry death, has been practised in some parts of the world as a form of gendered violence where a woman is set alight and burned by her husband or his family over a dowry dispute (Kumar and Kanth, 2004). Also, during the Second World War, women and girls in occupied countries and territories, known as comfort women or *'ianfu'* in Japanese, were forced into sexual slavery by the Imperial Japanese Army (Norma, 2015; Tanaka, 2003; Gap Min, 2021). In some parts of Africa, the Middle East and Asia, female genital mutilation (FGM) or female circumcision is carried out on young women to control their 'sexuality' and preserve their 'purity' or 'modesty' (UNICEF, 2023). In 2016, UNICEF estimated that 200 million women in 27 African countries, and in Indonesia, Iraqi Kurdistan and Yemen, had been subjected to one or more types of female genital mutilation (UNICEF, 2016). In Nigeria, a recent 2021 cohort analysis of the prevalence of FGM between 2009 and 2018 noted that depending on the region, the practice is usually carried out within a few days

after birth, before marriage or before the birth of the first child (UNICEF, 2016; Alo and Gbadebo, 2011; Daniyan et al., 2018; Gbadebo et al., 2021).

Feminist researchers, criminologists, activists and international organisations have also identified a complex intersection of social and political structures that have implicitly and explicitly exacerbated women's vulnerability to gender-based violence (Russo et al., 1997; Koss et al., 1995; Erez, 1999; Raj and Silverman, 2002). For example, due to the long history of conflict and unrest in the Democratic Republic of Congo, high rates of sexual violence against women and girls have been reported from both sides of the armed conflict, with the armed militia groups as well as UN peacekeepers accused of sexual violence against local women and girls (Human Rights Watch, 2009; Peterman et al., 2011; Fraulin et al., 2021). Some researchers have also critiqued the institution of marriage as one that confers and sanctions the legitimacy of male violence against women and which legally and socially silences women, therefore making their oppression invisible (Straus and Straus, 2017; Finkelhor and Yllo, 1987). For example, until recent times, a woman found it very difficult under law to accuse a husband who repeatedly rapes her (Russell, 1982). This makes domestic violence or intimate partner violence one of the most common forms of violence against women. Traditionally, this form of abuse was mainly associated with physical violence to the exclusion of other forms of violence; however, it has now been broadly defined to include sexual, coercive control, psychological and economic violence (Council of Europe, 2011). Intimate partner violence between a man and a woman is, therefore, deeply rooted in gender inequality, which creates power imbalances that may confer unequal access to power and privilege and elicit marginalisation and oppression, all of which converge to exacerbate a woman's risk of intimate abuse.

Research has shown that the prevalence rates of IPV among women are higher in migrant women than in women from the local populations (Vives-Cases et al., 010). A 2019 study at Kings College, London, found that 78% of migrant women residing in London who have insecure immigration status had experienced IPV since moving to the UK (Mcllwaine et al., 2019). The study also reported that the manipulation of their immigration status by their abusive partners was predominantly present in their experiences. It was used as a tool of control to abuse them psychologically and sexually and to force them to endure the violence. One quarter of these women did not report it for fear of being deported (Mcllwaine et al., 2019). Therefore, it is crucial to understand the intersection of the various structural factors that shape migrant women's experiences, such as gender and migrant status, instead of viewing them separately.

2.3. The Hostile Environment Immigration Policy

The hostile environment policy is a set of immigration rules aimed at reducing the number of irregular migrants in the UK through the structural limitation of their access to employment, housing, healthcare, bank accounts, and other social and welfare benefits. The policy also restricts their rights to appeal against decisions by the Home Office regarding their immigration status (Kirkup and Winnet, 2021). Introduced in 2012, the then Home Secretary announced that the UK faced an influx of migrants who broke immigration rules by staying in the UK illegally. The policy was, therefore, introduced to move immigration enforcement from external borders to everyday spaces within the country to make staying in the UK as difficult as possible for irregular migrants (Kirkup and Winnet, 2021; JCWI et al., 2015; Griffiths and Yeo, 2021). Research has shown that the policy is constantly updated to place increasingly restrictive measures on almost every migration stream in the country (Liberty et al., 2019).

The language used to describe the UK migration policy – "hostile environment" is significant and dates back to before 2012. It was initially used in government advisories for banks,

journalists, and other institutions to tackle organised crime and terrorism within the UK borders (Home Office, 2004; Hansard, 2017; Griffiths and Yeo, 2021). Placing immigration rules within the context of serious crimes, such as warfare and threats to national security, demonstrates the policy's intention to subject irregular migrants to acute punitive and marginalising practices (Yeo, 2020; Goodfellow, 2019). The Immigration Act 2014, later amended as the Immigration Act 2016, co-opts third parties and non-state actors from various sectors of society, such as employers, landlords, healthcare, public servants, and financial institutions, to enforce the hostile environment's immigration restrictions. The immigration rules are so strict that some non-state actors are fined if they fail to fulfil the policy's requirements. For example, employers who knowingly employ irregular migrants or anyone whom they have reasonable cause to believe are not permitted to work in the UK are fined up to £20,000 per employee. Similarly, landlords have a duty to impose the 'right to rent' rule on tenants by confirming their right to reside in the UK. In this regard, they are fined up to £3000 for breaching the law. These measures imply that migrants in the UK are increasingly targeted, marginalised, and required to frequently prove their right to reside in the UK in their everyday lives (Walsh, 2014).

However, since its inception, the policy has been at the centre of contentious debates. It has been widely criticised for encouraging discrimination, marginalisation, and anti-migrant sentiments from both the private and public sectors. It has also been criticised for perpetuating unbelonging and shaping the consciousness of migrant identities as a threat to national identity and security. Research has shown evidence of the institutionalisation of xenophobia and racism against ethnic minority groups in the UK (Travis, 2017; El-Enany, 2020). A poll on landlords' interactions with migrants after the policy was introduced showed that 58% of landlords said that they would not rent to people who 'appear to be migrants,' and who did not hold British passports (Home Office, 2015, 2020; JCWI et al., 2015) This suggests that the policy also

harms lawful documented migrants simply by being members of the ethnic minority community (Grierson, 2018). There has also been evidence of discrimination by the criminal justice system (Luqmani et al., 2014) and educational and financial institutions (Travis, 2017). The criminalisation of migration in the UK, therefore, legitimises the othering of migrants, undermines equality, and creates a subordinated class of people that reflects the colonial system of racial ordering (El-Enany, 2020).

2.4. The Impact of the Hostile Environment Policy on Migrant Women Experiencing IPV in the UK

The impact of the hostile environment policy on migrant women experiencing IPV is significant, with serious issues around underreporting due to the immigration status of victims being too precarious to report the abuse confidently (Femi-Ajao et al., 2018; Roberts, 2022; Davies et al., 2022). The policy's aim to actively reinforce a hostile political and social climate for migrants exacerbates the fear and unwillingness of those experiencing IPV to disclose the abuse. The policy, for example, requires police forces in England and Wales to pass on the immigration status of victims to the home office (Nye, Bloomer and Jeraj, 2018). This consequently deters many migrant women who have suffered from IPV from reporting to the police for fear of immigration repercussions and subsequent deportation. It also means many of the perpetrators of abuse are not discovered and are likely to continue to re-offend. This fear has been used as a tool of coercion by perpetrators of abuse who weaponise the policy to subject their spouses to violence, intimidation, and aggression. Some perpetrators have also used it to hold their wives in domestic servitude, a form of modern-day slavery, where they require obedience without question or are threatened with deportation (Cameron et al., 2021). Southall Black Sisters (2018) have argued that handing over migrant women who are victims of crime to the Home Office by the police undermines the fight against IPV and erodes the safety of the

victims. Therefore, revealing the whereabouts of survivors rather than protecting them continues to place migrant women at greater risk.

Many migrant women are forced to remain in abusive relationships or become homeless due to the problem of accessing accommodation, exacerbated by the 'right to rent scheme' (Feldman, 2020). Research on the impact of the hostile environment on healthcare has shown that many migrant women, including pregnant women, cannot seek healthcare due to concerns about their immigration status. Those who manage to leave abusive relationships also harbour concerns about the high costs of seeking private healthcare if the perpetrators cancel their visas (Feldman, 2020). This suggests that leaving abusive relationships does not guarantee the safety and well-being of migrant women experiencing IPV in the UK (Burman and Chantler, 2005; UNHCR, 2022).

For migrant women on Spouse visas, the legal dependency on their abusive husbands carries certain inherent risk factors that create a peculiar vulnerability to intimate violence (Chiu, 2017). Raj and Silverman (2002) refer to this form of intimate violence between a migrant woman and her spouse as 'immigration-related abuse.' due to the way perpetrators take advantage of the legal status of their wives, structurally made inferior by the existing state immigration policy, to maintain control and power over them (Burman and Chantler, 2005). Such immigration-related abuse may take a variety of forms, which include but are not limited to the following: the threat of deportation, withholding the victim's passports and, in some cases, destroying them so that they have no form of legal identification. Such deliberate acts prevent victims from renewing their immigration status and making them overstay their visas. Coercion, deception, and the financial neglect of the migrant wife and her children are also forms of immigration-related abuse (Raj and Silverman, 2002; Anita, 2008).

Immigration status, therefore, is, to a large extent, a marginalised identity and a marker of exclusion within the social structure in Britain. The fear of migrant women reporting IPV, even in severe cases, also extends to the fear of destitution resulting from their exclusion from welfare resources. Furthermore, as more stringent methods to control the UK border continue to be introduced, the capacity of migrant women to fully utilise a familiar or familial support network is also significantly hindered. This is because the UK's migration policy on spouse visas only provides resident permits for the migrant wife, making it impossible for her to bring other family members into the country. Studies have shown that resident spouses often exploit this isolation to control, oppress and dominate their migrant wives (Erez et al., 2009; Raj and Silverman, 2002). Many migrant women in abusive relationships also lack knowledge of the services available in the UK and where to seek advice, particularly legal advice. Furthermore, they may struggle with the shame of disclosing the abuse in their communities (Wellock, 2010; McCleary-Sills et al., 2015). It is for these reasons that feminist scholars argue that migrant women are at a higher risk of experiencing IPV compared to women from the native population (Erez et al., 2009). It is, therefore, crucial for policymakers to avoid generalising the experiences of women as a result of the intersecting structures of oppression some women face, as the presence of specific factors may increase the likelihood of certain women experiencing IPV compared to others, highlighting the need for nuanced and tailored approaches in addressing the issue (Thiara and Gill, 2012; Menjivar and Salcido, 2002). It is noted, however, that the difficulties created by the hostile environment are indeed what the policy set out to do in the first place. However, evidence has shown that these structural limitations aimed at reducing migrants into the UK have been unsuccessful as net migration continues to rise (Pew Research Centre, 2019; Duvell et al., 2018; Bloch et al., 2014; York, 2018). Implementing the policy has also had considerable financial costs (Casciani, 2013).

Unfortunately, the repercussions of the policy are also borne by documented migrants who bear the brunt of its punitive policies, exclusions, and discrimination. Despite warnings by NGOs and other institutions, including some political leaders, that the policy is discriminatory and has a high chance of leading to racism, dehumanisation, hate crimes and a climate of anti-migrant fear and hostility, the hostile environment policy remains and continues to be justified as a way of discouraging people from coming into the UK, to limit migrant access to social welfare resources and to make the deportation of migrants easier (Travis, 2013). In this sense, the hostile environment policy is an ideological stance of racial social ordering that appeals to notions of national identity and belonging rather than an evidenced-based approach (Sirriyeh, 2015; National Audit Office, 2020; El-Enanay, 2020).

The impact of IPV on migrant women can be devastating, with long-lasting consequences that can result in serious injury, disability, mental health illnesses, homelessness, destitution, or even death. To address the issue of IPV, the UK government introduced the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, which provides a framework for responding to IPV in England and Wales. However, the bill has been criticised for not fully addressing the complexities of IPV and women's ability to leave abusive marriages with the minimal options provided to them by the very same law. It has also been criticised for not acknowledging IPV's gendered and intersectional nature and the devastating impact of the No Recourse to Public Fund Rule (NRPF) (Home Office, 2021). The NRPF is a visa condition that prevents migrants from accessing most state-funded benefits, including healthcare and housing assistance. It is a very significant factor in the ability of migrant women to escape abuse and access potentially lifesaving refuge space and other social benefits (Dudley, 2015).

2.5. Prevalence and Legislative Responses to Intimate Partner Violence in England and Wales

IPV is a significant issue in the UK. The Office for National Statistics (2020) (ONS) revealed that in the year ending March 2020, approximately 1.6 million women and 757,000 men experienced domestic abuse. A staggering 4.0% of this abuse was carried out by a current or former partner, while only 1.9% was committed by a family member (ONS, 2020). Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, estimates were unavailable for the year ending March 2021. However, analysis of police-recorded crime and data from service providers and interventions indicated a 6% increase in police data and a 22% surge in victim support services (ONS, 2021). For the year ending March 2022, an estimated 1.7 million women and 699,000 men experienced domestic abuse. This year saw an increase in police-recorded crime compared to previous years. The CSEW data for 2022 was based on a six-month data collection period from October 2021 to March 2022 due to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This data collection period is shorter than the typical 12-month span (ONS, 2022). Due to the problem of under-reporting, these figures are under-estimates and likely to be higher (Home Office, 2012). This data highlights the significant disparity in the impact of IPV compared to men.

The introduction of the offence of controlling and coercive behaviour in intimate relationships in 2015 under the Serious Crime Act 2015 aimed to criminalise patterns of such behaviour against an intimate partner specifically. It is defined as a persistent pattern of behaviour designed to exert power, control, or coercion over another individual (Home Office, 2015). According to an analysis of Merseyside police data, 95% of the victims of coercive control were women, with 76% of cases happening within an intimate partner relationship (Barlow et al., 2019). The study also found common patterns of coercive control, including the use of phones and other electronic devices for monitoring, sexual coercion, isolation, and threats.

IPV has severe implications for the health and well-being of women (Price et al., 2007; Rose et al., 2011). According to Walby (2004), it is estimated that around 30 women attempt suicide every day as a result of experiencing IPV, and every week, three women take their own lives

(SafeLives, 2022). An Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey report showed that women who have experienced abuse have a higher risk of mental ill health, with 36% attempting suicide (Scott and McManus, 2016). Furthermore, the 2019-2020 Statutory Homelessness Annual Report by the ONS (2021) revealed that about 1 in 11 households in England were homeless or at risk of homelessness due to escaping domestic abuse or IPV. A report by Women's Aid (2021) on the housing crises for women fleeing abuse found that housing concerns are a significant barrier to leaving abusive relationships. The lack of access to funds to cover the cost of a new home and welfare benefits for migrant women exacerbates the problem of under-reporting and forces many women to remain in abusive relationships.

The prevalence of IPV has led to the formulation of legal frameworks to address the issue globally. Despite the challenges associated with under-reporting, progress has been made in estimating the high prevalence of IPV against women through official reports by organisations such as the World Health Organisation and other professional bodies that confirm the high prevalence of IPV against women despite the current data being under-estimates (Krug et al., 2002). In the last decade, legislation criminalising IPV has been enacted in 47 states worldwide (Moore, 2019). According to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (2021), while legislation cannot alone eliminate IPV, it is a vital step in supporting survivors and holding perpetrators accountable.

Since the 1970s, the UK has taken measures to address IPV through various legislative responses. The Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act of 1976 was the first legislation passed in England and Wales to tackle violence between partners by offering an abused spouse or partner to seek an injunction to prevent further violence (Legislation.gov.uk, 2011a). This came about after pressure from women's rights groups and activists, which led the House of Commons to set up a Select Committee to investigate the problem of marriage

violence. In 1977, the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act was passed, allowing IPV victims access to shelter after leaving their abusive partners (The National Archives, 2011c). The Domestic Proceedings and Magistrates' Courts Act of 1978 addressed financial support between spouses (Legislation.gov.uk, 2021b), and Part IV of the Family Law Act was introduced in 1996 to provide non-molestation orders and occupation orders to protect individuals and regulate property occupation (The National Archives, 2021b, S. 62[3], 47[1], 42[a]). In 2010, the Domestic Violence Protection Notices (DVPN) and Orders (DVPO) were introduced to protect IPV victims and provide them with support without interference from the perpetrators (The National Archives, 2010). The police issue the DVPNs, while DVPOs are granted by a Magistrate Court within 48 hours of service and can last for 14 to 28 days.

The Domestic Abuse Act was introduced in 2021, which expanded the definition of domestic abuse to include economic abuse. It also made post-separation abuse, non-fatal strangulation and threat to share intimate images a criminal offence. Although the Act has been praised for protecting victims, it has been criticised for not protecting migrant women entirely due to its rejection of proposals to make public funds accessible to migrant women.

While these legislative efforts have been made to address IPV, they have not effectively addressed the issue among migrant women. This is due to the combined impact of the UK government's strict immigration control, which places very restrictive conditions on migrants, and the complexities involved in leaving an abusive relationship, such as financial dependency on the perpetrator and limited knowledge of available resources and support (Walklate, 2007; Douglas, 2008). Some feminist researchers have, however, argued against the over-reliance on the law in tackling IPV, as it often adopts an individualistic approach that focuses on individual characteristics of victims and offenders rather than addressing the underlying social, legal, and political structures that perpetuate male privilege and expose migrant women to a

multiplicative vulnerability to violence (Miller and Meloy, 2006; Walklate et al., 2017). However, despite these criticisms, it is the position of this study that the law plays a crucial role in preventing and responding to IPV against migrant women (Douglas, 2008; Walklate et al., 2017). Legislative responses must address the real-life socioeconomic and sociocultural factors that condition IPV and expose migrant women to intimate violence (Walklate et al., 2017). This includes considering the impact of migration policies on the ability of migrant women to escape abuse, such as the structural barriers to accessing welfare support and the criminalisation of migration, which places emphasis on deportation (Kyriakakis et al., 2015).

2.6. A Critique of Cultural Essentialist Notions of Intimate Partner Violence among Nigerian Migrant Women in Britain

The notion of cultural essentialism has long been a hindrance to efforts to address IPV among migrant women in the UK effectively (Narayan, 1998). This approach to addressing IPV tends to endorse the colonialist assumption of differences between women's experiences from 'Western' and 'non-Western' cultures (Narayan, 1998). The outcome of this is the portrayal of the culture of migrant women as problematic and 'uncivilised' (Burman et al., 2004; Narayan, 1998; Yoshioka and Choi, 2005; Thiara and Gill, 2012; Volpp, 2000, 2001). This underestimates the complexities of IPV and why it occurs and heightens the visibility and othering of migrant women as women occupying pathologised spaces not occupied by women from Western cultures.

Cultural essentialism refers to the idea that each culture has fixed characteristics that all its members identify with and share the same values, beliefs, and behaviours (Grillo, 2003; Shore, 1997). Femi-Ajao (2018) argues that harmful cultural practices are present in all cultures, with some more severe than others; however, it is essential to avoid essentialist representations of culture as a 'common way of life' for all ethnic minority groups. This can result in the

overgeneralisation and oversimplification of the experiences and identities of individuals within a culture, leading to harmful and inaccurate stereotypical assumptions about different cultural groups. According to Grillo (2003), culture itself is not the problem, but the anxieties between members of the dominant culture and other cultures are where the problem lies. This consequently reflects differences, not in a positive way but in a way that reinforces discrimination. Shore (1997) argued that essentialist notions of culture also mask xenophobia and sanction the structural exclusion and marginalisation of those considered to be from cultures that do not conform to the assumed superior 'Western culture.' This can be traced back to colonialist thinking, where differences between cultures were used to justify the exploitation and subjugation of certain groups. Post-colonial feminists have argued that contemporary constructions of cultural differences reflect historical colonialism, which depended totally on a self-proclaimed civilisational superiority of Western culture (Taguieff, 1990; Orr and Silverman, 2001; Baumann, 1999).

Cultural essentialist notions of why IPV occurs among Nigerian migrant women, therefore, provide a reductionist and static view of the complexities of this form of gender-based violence. It fails to recognise the dynamic nature of IPV and the multiple factors that shape the experiences of victims, such as race, gender, immigration, class, and other dimensions of social inequality. The belief that the Nigerian culture is a breeding ground for IPV creates a social hierarchy set against a backdrop of discrimination that sees their culture as inferior and even dangerous, as opposed to the British Western culture, which is perceived as superior, safer, and progressive (Volpp, 2001). In this regard, the fight against IPV in Britain is placed within an existing system of discrimination. It becomes a colonial selective exercise where the needs of women from minoritised communities are rendered invisible and their exploitation and marginalisation justified. Cultural essentialism also reinforces discrimination against Nigerian migrant women by service providers and the criminal justice system.

The question then is how service providers can move beyond stereotypical, one-dimensional explanations of migrant women's experiences of IPV. IPV among Nigerian migrant women in Britain is complex and cannot be reduced to simple explanations based on culture alone. Going back to the theory of intersectionality, an intersectional understanding of why IPV occurs finds approaches and ideas that focus on the 'complexities rather than the singularity of human experience.' (Dill and Zambrana, 2009, pp.2). The multiple micro and macro-level factors contributing to IPV, including social inequalities, cultural identities, and individual experiences, must be considered. Blaming experiences of IPV on membership in a particular culture blames women from that culture for their victimisation and erases the problem among non-migrants. Day and Gill (2020) posited that when the criminal justice system fails to recognise the role that multiple social inequalities play in shaping the experiences of IPV among migrant women, it can negatively impact how abuse complaints are handled and hinder the ability of survivors to access support and safety.

The failure to consider the overlapping inequalities that shape Nigerian women's experiences of IPV in Britain also obscures the uniqueness of Nigerian women's identities and how they are constructed and reconstructed through everyday social interactions and experiences. The migrant community is not homogenous, and the various socio-cultural factors that shape individual interactions can create axes of differences in their understanding and responses to IPV (Boyle et al., 2009; Lempert, 1996; Yoshihama, 1999). Essentialist notions of culture that depict migrant groups as homogenous are problematic and ignore the heterogeneity of experiences and values within these communities (Narayan, 1998). It is, therefore, pertinent for UK policymakers to understand the heterogeneity of migrant women's experiences of IPV, which must not be reduced to a singular or one-dimensional unit of analysis. The fixed emphasis on culture in Nigerian women's experiences of IPV in Britain dismisses the demand for a nuanced and inclusive migration policy that caters to the welfare of migrant women

without prejudice or discrimination. Instead, it inaccurately normalises IPV as a feature of non-western migrant experiences and fails to challenge the multiple dimensions of discrimination (Ho, 1990; Thiara and Gill, 2012; Day and Gill, 2020; Burman and Chantler, 2005).

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. Overview

This study is underpinned by theoretical approaches that help to conceptualise the relationship between Black women's victimisation and its relationship with race, immigration, gender, power and other structures of inequalities. Previous scholarship on IPV has utilised a range of theoretical frameworks to conceptualise the causes of IPV (Anderson and Saunders, 2004; Lerner and Kennedy, 2000; Lacey, 2010; Kerr and Davies, 2012). Many of these frameworks provide potential advantages over others; however, their underlying inquiry into the nature and aetiology of IPV remains constant (Burelomova et al., 2018).

The aim of this study, however, is to look beyond individualist explanations of IPV and focus on the multiple dimensions of discrimination that contribute to the experiences of migrant women in abusive relationships. This chapter, therefore, discusses four theoretical frameworks adopted for this study – the theory of intersectionality, the framework of legal consciousness, Black feminist theory, socio-ecological theory, and postcolonial theory. Intersectionality will be adopted as the key framework for this study as it provides a deeper understanding of the interconnected complexities of multiple social inequalities and power structures that affect migrant women's experiences of violence. By embracing intersectionality, this research aims to delve deeper into their nuanced experiences of IPV and understand how various systems of oppression intersect to shape their unique perspectives and realities.

3.2. History of Intersectionality

To avoid the generalisation and oversimplification of women's experiences of violence and oppression, feminist research and diversity scholars have been drawn to the idea of

intersectionality over the past three decades. Intersectionality provides a more nuanced and critical understanding of how different structures of oppression interconnect to shape women's experiences of violence and oppression (Crenshaw, 1989). Despite the growing adoption of intersectionality in feminist research, there are still debates over its conceptualisation, significance, and appropriate research application (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016). According to Shaffner et al. (2019), while some scholars argue that intersectionality requires precise definitions and boundaries (Hancock, 2007a), others embrace a more postpositivist perspective by asserting that intersectionality's strength lies in its fluid resistance to a hegemonic, positivist notion of theory (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016). This means that intersectionality as a theoretical and methodological framework is not static but a continuous lens that identifies and engages with various relations of marginality, power, identity and privilege. It is this conceptualisation of intersectionality that this study adopts (Dhamoon, 2011; Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016; Hill Collins, 2000).

Researchers such as Yuval-Davis (2006) have suggested that to make sense of how oppression is produced, it is necessary to focus on how intersectional structures of inequalities are produced from specific historical conditions (Hardy and Phillips, 1999; Shaffner et al., 2019). In light of this, intersectionality's history with power and how it has been structurally produced and reproduced across various social contexts to create a hierarchy of domination will be explored. Before the theory of intersectionality was introduced, and as the departure of gender-based violence from the private to the public sphere began to take shape between the 1960s and the 1980s, gender was seen as the sole cause of violence against women by mainstream feminists (Phipps, 2020; Nixon and Humphreys, 2010; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005). They argued that gender was the singular cause of the discrimination and oppression of women and paid almost no regard to other structures of oppression, such as race, class, and sexuality (Dasgupta, 2005; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005). Although the mainstream feminists' fight for

equality was significant during that period, it was inherently discriminatory and reductive in its scope. It primarily centred on the experiences of white middle-class women and neglected to acknowledge the unique experiences of women outside their social class, such as Black and Asian women, lower-class women and, homosexual women, etc. This resulted in the movement being heavily criticised by other feminists like Kimberle Crenshaw (1989), who argued that multiple forces and systems of oppression intersect and overlap each other to create the multiple and interlocking oppression of women (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991; Erez et al., 2009). Other feminist scholars, such as Hooks (1984), also argued that by failing to acknowledge different ways in which women can be marginalised and oppressed, the mainstream feminist movement acknowledged only the interests of the upper and middle class, therefore rendering invisible other problems that women face.

In centering on how race creates interconnecting systems of oppression for women of colour, Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality to address the marginalisation of Black women (Crenshaw, 1989). She identified and highlighted how the discrimination of Black women is embedded within institutionalised discourses and movements such as the mainstream feminist movement, which upheld existing power dynamics in the way it excluded women outside the upper white middle-class category. As a critique of this movement, Crenshaw also highlighted how feminist discourses of resistance could inadvertently become platforms that sanctioned the marginalisation of Black women. Using the example of Black women in the United States to illustrate her point, she pointed out that Black women are often harmed or subjected to violence not only because of their gender but also because of their race and other social inequalities, making their experiences different from White women. Indeed, the ways Black women were excluded from the mainstream feminist movements and their conventions attests to the fact that the movement was rooted in the ideology that the experiences of the middle-class white women who were part of the movement spoke for all women. This not only

generalised women's experiences from the perspective of a privileged few (Phipps, 2020; Echols, 1989; Sneider, 2022) but also assumed that women of colour and other ethnic minorities are to be blamed for their own experiences of violence (Phipps, 2020; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005). For example, the History of Woman Suffrage, published in six volumes from 1881-1922, which documented the suffrage movement, failed to recognise Black women who also participated in the fight (Harley, 2013). Phipps (2020), in agreeing with Crenshaw and other intersectional feminist scholars, argued that such deliberate exclusions not only pushed for gender equality within the existing system of racial discrimination by privileging gender as the sole cause of violence against women but also evaded the complex relationships between other categories of oppression that overlap to shape the experiences of women.

The theory of intersectionality, despite its root in Black history and activism, has inspired many movements, including those of non-Black women of colour. Crenshaw further expanded this idea in her work in 1991 by adding class and immigration status to the multiple margins of oppression Black women face (Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality has also been used in advocating for a more inclusive and equitable society and in the fight against interlocking systems of power such as heteronormativity, patriarchy, disability, age, and colonialism (Phipps, 2020; Cramer and Plummer, 2009; Browne and Mirsa, 2003; Mackenzie et al., 2014).

3.3. Criticisms of the Theory of Intersectionality

Many critiques of intersectionality have mainly argued from what Crenshaw herself describes from a misunderstood point of view of the concept itself (Coaston, 2019). Intersectionality challenges the status quo of racial and social discrimination, but some have criticised it as a form of identity politics that overgeneralises the experiences of marginalised groups (Shapiro, 2018). Indeed, in a 2018 video released on a platform for conservative educational videos, intersectionality was described as a form of identity politics that places 'the straight white male,

which everybody hates, at the bottom of the totem pole.' (Coaston, 2019; Shapiro, 2018). However, intersectionality is not about determining who benefits or is burdened by it, nor is it about ranking individuals in the social hierarchy. It is also not about comparing vulnerabilities among migrant women in the UK for the sake of it. Crenshaw herself argued that using critics' identities in critiquing intersectionality only reveals concerns about losing their privileged position in the social hierarchy rather than focusing on eliminating inequalities produced by discriminatory social hierarchies (Coaston, 2019).

This study does not aim to simply highlight the different types of inequalities faced by migrant women but to address one form of oppression without excluding others. As Helena (2020) argued, intersectionality is not about counting individual identities, nor is it a fight between who stays at the top and who stays at the bottom. In line with Crenshaw's conceptualisation of intersectionality, it is used in this study to understand how migrant women's identities relate to broader complex and interlocking systems of power that shape their experiences of violence and oppression.

3.4. Intersectionality and Intimate Partner Violence

This study adopts an intersectional framework as a theoretical and methodological tool to analyse the ways the socially constructed identities of Nigerian women create intersecting forms of oppression that shape their experiences and responses to IPV (Zinn and Dill, 1996; Mahalingam and Leu, 2005; Erez et al., 2009; Yuval-Davis, 2016). IPV is not monolithic, as multiple structures of oppression interact with each other in complex ways. Therefore, adopting an intersectional approach in this study means acknowledging the complexities and totality of the lived experiences of Nigerian women experiencing IPV while living in Britain (Elaine Muirhead et al., 2020).

The importance of adopting an intersectional framework in examining the multiple systems of oppression faced by Nigerian migrant women in the UK cannot be overstated. Firstly, this thesis provides a simple and obvious pointer to the heterogeneous nature of society itself. It is impossible to group all societies or communities under one universal category, as they are characterised by differences in their political ideologies, cultures, social structures, and the diverse individuals who make up these societies. Therefore, to group the experiences of women from different socio-cultural backgrounds as similar is adopting a reductionist approach that fails to represent the variety in women's lived experiences.

Secondly, while it can be argued that there are commonalities in women's experiences of IPV based on gender, other structural inequalities can create an extra dimension or intensity to women's experiences (Mirza, 1997; Gill, 2013). The specificities of Nigerian migrant women's experiences of IPV in the UK are, for example, different from the experiences of South Asian migrant women or women from the native population who are not subject to immigration controls. Intersectionality, therefore, acknowledges that broader social, political, and economic contexts can shape the experiences of Nigerian migrant women. For example, just as immigration can systematically marginalise Nigerian migrant women from accessing help-seeking resources and services and significantly influence their options for safety (Southall Black Sisters, 2019; UK Visas and Immigration, 2016), Nigerian cultural norms and practices can also shape how Nigerian women experience and respond to IPV which may be different from the experiences of other migrant women who are not from the Nigerian community. Race is also a significant factor contributing to the multiple forms of oppression faced by Nigerian migrant women in the UK, leading to complex experiences of discrimination, prejudice, and racism not faced by migrant women from other Western European countries (Ogbemudia 2021). It is, therefore, crucial to consider multiple systems of power, privilege and inequalities and their unique impact on the experiences of the diverse group of migrant women in the UK.

Thirdly, an intersectional approach avoids framing the problem of IPV as a personal defect unique to specific groups of women rather than due to interlocking systems of power that affect women. This approach can result in attributing psychological characteristics, such as "battered woman syndrome" or "self-defeating personality disorder," to women and portraying them as the cause of the problem (Howell and British Medical Association, 1998; Caplan and Gans, 1991; Dobash and Dobash, 1992; Burman and Chantler, 2005). This absolves the perpetrators of any responsibility and suggests that the victims have the power to leave violent relationships in the absence of these psychological characteristics (Burman and Chantler, 2005). For Nigerian migrant women, this approach not only pathologises them as possessing unique behavioural and psychological traits that cannot resist IPV but also suggests that their choices to leave or stay in abusive relationships are dependent solely on their predisposition to violence framed by certain factors unique to them such as their culture or religion. This ignores the broader social context in which the relationship and gender-based violence exist (Velonis et al., 2015). Such essentialised views also wholly ignore or render invisible the impact of structural conditions and barriers in the UK's migration and welfare policies on Nigerian women's experiences of IPV, including their help-seeking behaviours. According to Tierney (2019), a lack of an intersectional approach fails to recognise that social conditions can also make people vulnerable despite existing historical trends or triggering events. He argues that people are not born vulnerable but are made vulnerable by social constructs framed within different axes of inequalities that combine and interact to form systems of oppression that define and marginalise them. Like the work of Erez et al. (2009), which generated critical knowledge regarding the structural intersection of immigration and women's experience of violence from their intimate partners, this research analysed how facets of the hostile immigration policy in Britain have entered into the well-being and safety of Nigerian migrant women on spousal visas. It argues that the focus on individual-level variables as a major

determining factor in Nigerian migrant women's experiences of IPV results in an incomplete and reductive analysis of the problem (Velonis et al., 2015). This is because Nigerian migrant women's experiences of IPV span across various social, political, and structural contexts that impact their choices and decisions in the face of abuse.

3.5. Socio-Ecological Framework

The socio-ecological framework has been widely adopted in IPV research to conceptualise the range of factors that influence the experience and perpetration of IPV. The framework identifies the complex interaction of risk factors at the individual, interpersonal, community, and societal levels that shape women's experiences of violence (Little and Kantor, 2002; Bliss et al., 2006; Velonis et al., 2015). In this study, the socio-ecological framework is used to examine how the interaction of various factors at different levels of the social environment influences the responses of Nigerian migrant women to IPV. This acknowledges that these factors are constantly interacting and shaping the experiences of these women (Velonis et al., 2015; Carlson, 1984). However, it is essential to note that this framework does not imply that the responsibility for preventing IPV lies solely with these women.

3.5.1. The Importance of Adopting a Socio-Ecological Framework to this Study

Like the intersectional framework approach, the socio-ecological framework recognises that no single factor can explain why women experience violence (Heise, 1998). As this research examines the personal interactions, positionalities and risk factors of Nigerian migrant women across two distinct social structures, Nigeria and Britain, the socio-ecological approach enables a deeper understanding of the multifaceted interactions between them and their social environments. It shows how multiple levels of influence shape their responses to IPV across the two social structures.

The socio-ecological model is visualised as four concentric circles representing four levels of interactions. This model was used to understand the complex interaction of factors at the micro and macro levels, and the four concentric circles of the model represent four nested levels of the social environment in which Nigerian migrant women are a part of (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998; Heise, 1998; Mamdouh et al., 2012). [See Figure 3]. The model highlights that no single factor can fully explain Nigerian women's experiences of IPV but explains that certain risk factors in their social environment place them at higher risk and shape their responses (Akinsulure-Smith et al., 2013; Heise, 1998).

Figure 3- The Socio-Ecological Model
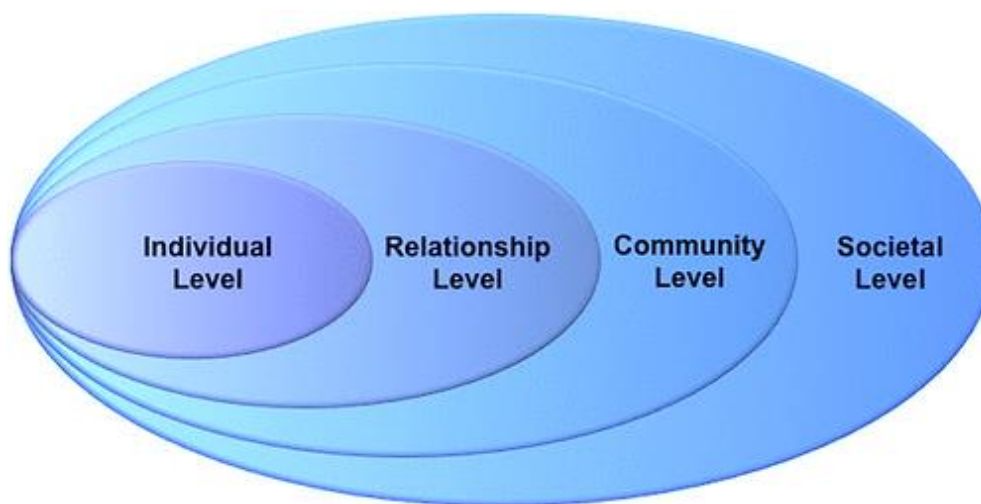
- **The Individual Level** – The individual level looks at the positionalities of Nigerian women regarding IPV. This is regarding their perceptions and understanding of IPV within their immediate environment and in a migration context. It also involves how certain socio-cultural factors, such as religious beliefs, social values, and education, may influence their personal histories, attitudes, and behaviours toward IPV (Oyediran and Isiugo-Abanihe, 2005; Mikton, 2010; Jewekes et al., 2002). For example, marital values in the Nigerian community are associated with power dynamics within the family where the husband is perceived as superior

to the wife, who is conditioned to hold a subordinate status. Such personal values can increase the likelihood of both the experience and perpetration of IPV (Fawole et al., 2005).

- **The Interpersonal/Relationship Level** – This level represents Nigerian migrant women's relationships with others that may contribute to their experiences and response to IPV. Studies have shown that strained relationships or disagreements with family members or spouses regarding gender roles, expectations, financial strains, and responsibilities can fuel IPV (Ackerman and Field, 2011; Stith et al., 2007; Kerman and Betrus, 2018). Relationships can also be used as a coping mechanism for IPV (Kerman and Betrus, 2018). Some women turn to their families for help in dealing with IPV, including the abusive partner's family members, but the support they receive may be mixed. Some family members may intervene to reduce the violence. In contrast, others may reinforce patriarchal ideologies that shame and punish women for deviating from their expected gender roles, forcing them to keep the abuse within the family. According to Kalunta-Crumpton (2016), the tolerance of IPV and the expectation of making the marriage 'work' at all costs is a typical response from family members and friends to Nigerian migrant women experiencing IPV. An additional factor is the desire to remain in the UK and achieve permanent immigration status, which is often used as a point of reference not only to persuade Nigerian migrant women to tolerate the abuse but also as a tool of control by perpetrators.

- **The Community Level** – The community level represents the broader community where Nigerian women experiencing IPV reside. It is a space where cases of IPV can be assessed and, in some instances, scrutinised. This level considers the Nigerian community's social norms and cultural values and how these shape how IPV is perceived and addressed. Nigerian society is highly patriarchal, and women are often disadvantaged in cases of IPV and shamed and criticised. Their behaviour is also more scrutinised than men (Graca, 2017). The existence of a 'community grapevine,' according to Chew-Graham et al. (2002), can further have a negative

impact on Nigerian women experiencing IPV, therefore discouraging them from speaking out and increasing the likelihood of silence about the abuse. Many Nigerian migrant women in Britain do not have extended families and may feel isolated from their support network. Studies have shown that due to this isolation from family networks, many Nigerian women turn to religious organisations within their community in Britain for support (Kalunta-Crumpton, 2016). Community attitudes can play a role in justifying or minimising IPV by placing the blame on the victim or may be supportive and empowering by providing support to victims. It is, therefore, essential to consider community-level interactions in cases of IPV among Nigerian migrant women as it may be used to address the root cause of IPV and for community-based interventions.

- **The Society Level** – This level represents the broad social-political environment that either enables or discourages the occurrence or perpetration of IPV. It refers to the larger societal context's impact on individual IPV experiences. It considers the laws, policies, and attitudes of the wider society towards gender-based violence and gender equality. Factors at this level include the availability and accessibility of support services for victims, including legal protection, the response of the criminal justice system and other interventions, and the role of media in shaping societal attitudes towards IPV among migrant women, including migrant women of colour (Rani et al., 2004; Abeya et al., 2011). This level underscores the need for systemic change and attitudes toward IPV among migrant women in Britain.

3.6. Legal Consciousness Framework

As this study's central aim is to explore the subjective experiences of Nigerian migrant women from their perspectives, the framework of legal consciousness was adopted to explore their perceptions of law and legality as migrant women in Britain experiencing IPV. Legal consciousness in research is a theoretical concept that seeks to understand people's subjective

perceptions of the law and legality in their everyday lives (Cowan, 2004). According to Ewick and Silbey (1998), it is not merely a state of mind but involves how the law is acted upon and understood by ordinary citizens in what they do or say (Hertogh, 2009). Previous research on legal consciousness looked at how it can be influenced by a variety of factors, including the unique social location of individuals (Abrego, 2008; Nielson, 2000; Merry, 2003; Hull, 2003; Marshall, 2003). For example, Merry (2003), in examining the legal consciousness of women who had experienced violence, explored the extent to which their perceptions shaped their likelihood of using the law to escape abuse. Previous research has also shown how legal consciousness can be interpreted differently and within different contexts. For example, while Abrego (2019) used citizenship as a point of analysis to investigate legal consciousness, Graca (2018) used the perceptions of domestic violence as her point of analysis. Guduk and Desmet (2022) argue, however, that despite these different positions, there seems to be a scholarly consensus that legal consciousness is dynamic in that it is shaped by structures in the social environment that impact the everyday lives of people (Merry 1990; 2012; Hertogh, 2018; Ewick and Silbey, 1992). Blackstone et al. (2009) also state that legal consciousness is a dynamic process that involves people's experience, what they make of the law and how they respond to it. In this thesis, however, citizenship and Nigerian women's perceptions of IPV and resistance against it will be used as a point of analysis to explore their legal consciousness. This will enable an understanding of their subjective perceptions of the hostile environment policy at the intersection of their immigration status, gender, class and race and how it impacts their willingness and ability to use the law to meet their specific needs.

3.6.1. The Importance of Adopting the Legal Consciousness Framework to this Study

UK immigration laws have a considerable impact on the everyday lives of migrant women, from applying for their spouse visas before arriving in Britain to the rules they are required to

live by on arrival in Britain. For migrant women on spouse visas, the no recourse to public funds rule presents additional structural and institutional restrictions on their ability to access services. This condition is not usually faced by women from the dominant culture (De Hart and Besselsen, 2020). In this regard, studying the legal consciousness of Nigerian migrant women experiencing IPV helps to gain insight into their subjective interpretation, perceptions, and utilisation of the law. It also helps to analyse how much their legal consciousness differs from that of non-migrant women and their abusive spouses (Guduk and Desmet, 2022). Guduk and Desmet (2022) posit that the legal consciousness of migrant women may also be informed by legal pluralism, where their perceptions and actions may be impacted by both the rules of the host country and their country of origin. Therefore, the combined experience of law, legality, decisions about compliance and how it is often negotiated in the everyday lives of migrant women will be analysed (Silbey, 2005, pp. 337-338).

3.7. Black Feminist Theory

Black Feminist theory is a framework that recognises that Black women bear the burdens of biases, stereotypes and prejudices due to their race, which overlaps with other axes of discrimination to shape their everyday lives (Collins 2020; 2022). Individually and collectively, Black women are very often marginalised at the intersection of the identity markers of race and gender, which cannot be untangled from each other (Patterson et al., 2016; Crenshaw, 1991; Few, 2007). Although these two intersection points do not marginalise the impact of other structures of oppression, the overlap of racism and sexism shape their experiences of violence, their positionalities and realities, which many feminist scholars have argued differ from those of white women and those of Black men (Mdami, 2009). This means that the experiences of Black women, which I discuss later in this study, are not gender neutral as they cannot be disconnected from the oppression that comes with gender inequality (Mdami,

2009; Few, 2007). Therefore, research on Black women's lived experiences of violence and oppression must centre their voices and realities as Black women.

Black feminist theory is grounded in intersectionality as a response to the mainstream feminists' approaches that focused on feminism without race. According to Christian (1984), the sociohistorical context of feminism has been unfortunately insufficient to capture Black women's experiences of living, thriving and resisting multiple forms of oppression (Walker, 1983: Patterson et al., 2016). She contends that this creates an unresolved semantic and ideological baggage around mainstream feminist movements that focuses only on specific groups and class of women to the exclusion of others (Crenshaw, 1991). Black feminist thought in qualitative research provides a lens through which the experiences of Black women can be seen and understood (Patterson et al., 2016). It challenges the rigidity of feminist theoretical frameworks that recognise race in Black women's experiences but pay too little attention to gender or that recognise gender but pay too little attention to race (Collins, 2000). King (1997) argues that this is problematic as one structure of oppression must not cancel or minimise the other but must consider all the intersecting forms of oppression that cumulatively affect the multiple marginalised identity markers that shape the lives of Black women. A theoretical understanding of Black women's experiences of violence and oppression must, therefore, not forget that Black women also face gender inequality and the various social and political contexts in which it is manifested in their everyday lives through class, immigrant status and other structures of oppression.

3.7.1. The Importance of Adopting a Black Feminist Framework to this Study

A Black feminist framework enabled me to analyse the experiences Nigerian women share through narrative, as Black women experiencing IPV under the current UK hostile environment policy. Their racial position in the gender hierarchy presents additional barriers that impact

their experiences and ability to access services. Anchored by qualitative interviews, adopting a Black feminist lens provided an insight into their perspectives and their realities of IPV, the UK migration policy and help-seeking experiences. This enabled the exploration of all aspects of their intersecting identities and highlighted the complexities of the Black female experience of IPV in the UK.

3.8. Postcolonial Feminist Theory

Based on the concepts of otherness and resistance, postcolonial theory examines the ongoing legacy of colonialism on previously colonised countries and their peoples (Barker et al., 1996; Said, 1982, 2000; Bose and Gandhi, 2000). It argues that the relationship between the colonised and the colonisers, on the one hand, and in some cases, between colonised groups of people, on the other hand, cannot be understood outside of the historical, political, and social impact of colonial rule. Postcolonial theory emerged as a response to Western perspectives and representation of colonised people and as a resistance to attempts to impose notions of inferiority on non-Western people as a form of social ordering or control (Young, 2020). In the context of postcolonial analysis, one of the implications of colonial power is the decision to examine other societies and cultures at will but from a biased point of view. The implication is that values, beliefs and modes of representation that do not formally or ideologically align with Western norms and ideologies may be pulled aside and placed in a marginalised or, at worst, a dehumanised space (William and Chrisman, 2015). Therefore, postcolonial theory challenges such discriminatory power dynamics and the production of knowledge about other individuals and groups classed as non-western (Spivak and Young, 1991).

Postcolonial feminist thought emerged from postcolonial theory as a critique of the dominant and oppressive way women from the global south are represented in Western discourse (Jones, 2011; Riyal, 2019). Like Black feminist theory, it also looks at the simultaneous or double

oppression of women, which, in this context, is caused by both colonialism and patriarchy (Peterson and Rutherford, 1986). Central to postcolonial feminist theory is the stereotypical representations of women from the global south as homogenous, including their perceived weakness, status and lack of agency compared to women from the West. Secondly, it presents itself as a critique of mainstream postcolonial discourses that are 'gender-blind'(Mohanty, 2004). Postcolonial feminist theory, therefore, looks at the gendered history and impact of colonial legacies in how women experience violence and oppression.

3.8.1. The Importance of Adopting a Postcolonial Feminist Framework to this Study

In this study, I use a postcolonial feminist lens to examine the impact of colonial legacies on Nigerian women experiencing IPV. Race, class and gender are key issues in postcolonial feminist thought, making the theory closely affiliated with Black feminist theory (Lorde, 1984). This is because it aims to bring the intersection of racial, gender and class ordering of women into feminist discourse. Through the narratives of Nigerian migrant women experiencing IPV, postcolonial feminist theory would enable examining how colonial power reinforces patriarchal ideologies. It provides a theoretical understanding of how the women's experiences of IPV are shaped by both patriarchy and the colonial power dynamic in their country of origin and the UK (Mohanty, 2004). Women's experiences of oppression in this context were referred to by Peterson and Rutherford (1986) as 'double colonisation', which refers to the double subjugation of women by colonialism and patriarchy. This framework also provides a critical lens that challenges essentialist notions of Nigerian women's agency, where they are perceived as non-agentic and victims of uncivilised patriarchal cultures (Bhabha, 1994; Smith, 2021; Appiah, 2004). This extends to the complex effects of colonial legacies on enforcing gender constructions (Minh-ha and Parmar, 1990).

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODS

4.1. Overview

This chapter discusses the theoretical and methodological approach adopted in this study and the rationale behind choosing qualitative methodology as the approach best suited for studying IPV among Nigerian migrant women in Britain. It begins with a discussion of the research design followed by an outline of the approaches to data collection, analysis, ethical considerations, and study limitations.

4.2. Research Design

This research is designed as a case study on Nigerian migrant women who have migrated to Britain based on a heterosexual marriage with a British resident spouse and have experienced IPV. Within this context, their spouses or ex-spouses have a higher immigration status than them as residents in Britain and are responsible for sponsoring their Spouse visas. The various ways this unique legal position of resident spouses leads to structural violence against their migrant wives were critically examined. According to Dubois and Gadde (2002), case studies are useful approaches in providing a detailed analysis of the topic or area to be researched as they narrow it down from a broad area to a specific research area or focus. Simon (2009) also described a case study as an in-depth exploration of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular subject, policy or phenomenon.

This research is informed by feminist methodology as it places a central focus on the social contexts and diversities of women's experiences of violence and oppression (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002; Fonow and Cook, 2005). According to Fonow and Cook (2005), there are varied approaches to feminist research, and no single theory explains the impact of power and

social relationships on women's experiences. However, despite the different positions adopted by various feminist researchers, one common feature, according to Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002), is that feminist research is mainly about women and their unique experiences of oppression and unequal power relationships (Fonow and Cook, 2005; Aliverti, 2005; Mirza, 2017).

Therefore, as the main aim of this thesis was to gain insight into the unique perspectives and personal constructions of the meaning Nigerian migrant women give to their experiences of IPV while living in Britain, a constructivist approach was adopted. As an epistemological approach to research, a constructivist standpoint explores how participants actively construct their own subjective meanings, realities and interpretations of their experiences. This enabled the recognition of their unique and nuanced viewpoints and subjective realities rather than imposing a single objective reality or truth about the phenomenon being studied. Arends (1998) noted that a constructivist standpoint recognises and acknowledges that people's active and personal constructions of meaning and reality are shaped by their life experiences and sense of the world around them. Burr (2003) also describes the constructivist approach to research as that which seeks to understand how the participants in a research study interpret their circumstances at any given time. Therefore, adopting a constructivist standpoint in this study considered the unique and diverse perspectives of Nigerian migrant women.

A pilot study was also incorporated into this study to check for unanticipated problems with language and terminologies. The pilot study was conducted with two Nigerian women who did not wish to participate in the entire research but did not mind taking part in the pilot. The women had experienced IPV and, in line with the eligibility criteria for participating in this research, were no longer in their abusive marriages. The women confirmed that the questions and the wording were appropriate. However, based upon their suggestion, slight modifications

were made to using the term intimate partner violence. For the study participants' ease of understanding, intimate partner violence was, therefore, replaced with domestic violence during the data collection process.

4.3 Qualitative Research Method

This research adopted a qualitative method of inquiry involving in-depth semi-structured interviews with Nigerian migrant women on spouse visas resident in England who have experienced IPV from their resident spouses or ex-spouses. The use of a qualitative method in this research enabled the avoidance of the generalisation of migrant women's experiences and the error of overlooking the specific experiences of Nigerian women. According to Mirza (2017), the lack of inclusion of women's experiences of abuse from their perspectives can result in a lack of reflection in policy documents on some specific mechanisms of abuse that women in abusive relationships from different migrant backgrounds experience (Raj and Silverman, 2002). Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p.3) also noted that a qualitative research method involves "an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world" that attempts to make sense of a phenomenon according to the meanings people bring to it. Therefore, in-depth interviews enabled participants to tell their stories in their own words and from their points of view. This allowed the participants to be actively involved in constructing data about their lives and experiences (Reinharz, 1992; Hammersley, 1989; Kvale, 1996). Lewis and Maruna (1999) also noted that gaining access to how individuals understand their own lives puts the researcher in a better position to explain why, when, and how various policies can become effective across different populations. However, as qualitative methods place responsibility on the researcher to analyse the data collected, researchers must be objective and reflexive throughout the research process. In this thesis, adopting a reflexive approach in using a qualitative method enabled me to evaluate the influence of self within the very act of knowing or acquiring knowledge and understanding (Popoveniuc, 2014).

4.4. Rationale for the Use of a Qualitative Research Method

The qualitative method adopted allowed access to unfiltered accounts of the lived experiences of IPV in the participants' own words (Gill et al., 2008; Corbin and Strauss, 2015). This was in line with the aim of this study to get a first-hand subjective understanding of the meaning they give to their experiences, which cannot be obtained from survey sampling. The semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to reveal how their individual positions and interactions significantly influenced how they understood, experienced, and responded to IPV as Nigerian migrant women in Britain (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). It also helped to analyse how IPV often manifests in the diversity within their different socio-cultural backgrounds. Most importantly, it avoided focusing on the experiences of African migrant women in general as a unit of analysis, particularly as Africa is not homogenous and each of its countries is very diverse.

The qualitative method used in this study also facilitated the collection of rich and detailed data and generated in-depth insights into the complexities of human behaviours and their interactions with their social environment. This means that there is the benefit of capturing deeper and more comprehensive perspectives directly from real people rather than abstracts. According to Creswell, 2013, this allows participants to participate in the research process, which can also lead to a sense of empowerment for them.

Therefore, the strength of this study lies in showing the diversities and complexities in the experiences of IPV among migrant women living in the UK, mainly how their immigration status interacts with their unique individual positionalities in ways that shape their experiences, responses and outcomes. Furthermore, the qualitative research method used in this study enabled me to collect data cyclically and flexibly rather than in a fixed step-by-step manner. This involved going back and forth several times to create room for any adaptations to the

needs of potential participants and to ensure responsivity to context as the research progressed (Busetto et al., 2020; Fossey et al., 2002). For example, last-minute adaptations needed to be made regarding recruitment due to the impact of Covid-19. This resulted in the sampling method being expanded to enable the utilisation of more flexible recruitment methods. Also, adaptations were made regarding the conduction of the interviews due to the lockdown restrictions, which prevented face-to-face meetings, and to ensure that participants could safely participate in the discussions.

4.5. Criticisms of the Qualitative Research Method

Common criticisms of qualitative research are its dependence on small samples, which may not be enough to reach a conclusion for a larger population, and that the researcher's biases or interpretations can easily influence the data analysis (Busetto et al., 2020). Busetto et al. (2020), however, argue that if qualitative research is carried out correctly without compromising the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, it can be credible, rigorous and unbiased.

On reflecting on this, I considered whether data gathered from the 14 Nigerian migrant women who participated in the study were enough for readers to understand the phenomenon being researched, including its specificity amongst the target population. According to Myers (2000), researchers must stay focused on the goals and aims of the research they are carrying out, and where the purpose of the study is to analyse a particular phenomenon, the sample size may have little relevance as long as the study can enable both the researcher and the readers gain a personal understanding of the phenomenon being researched. Of significant importance to the research in this regard is that the data gathered is based on the personal experiences of the participants, which can be powerful and compelling and help to gain an unfiltered insight into the lived experiences of IPV among women from the target population, Nigeria. This is not to produce universalised conclusions on the experiences of IPV among all women but to highlight

how IPV can unfold under different social-cultural contexts, which can put some women at more risk than others.

In light of this, a reflexive approach was adopted throughout the study to enable transparency and rigour so that the results can contribute valuable knowledge to the target community and the entire research community.

4.6. Research Participants and Access

The participants in this research are 14 Nigerian-born migrant women who are domiciled in England based on a heterosexual marriage to a Nigerian man already legally resident in the UK. Specifically, the focus was on those who experienced IPV in their marriages while holding a Spouse Visa under the current UK hostile environment policy. All participants were over 18 and ranged between ages 28 to 42 years.

Figure 4 – Participants' Demographics

No	Name (Pseudonyms)	Age	Children	Nature of Abuse
1	Omotola	28	1	Verbal, coercive control, sexual, emotional
2	Ade	29	0	Physical, Verbal, coercive control, sexual, emotional
3	Bimpe	34	3	Physical, Verbal, coercive control, sexual, emotional
4	Irene	36	1	Physical, Verbal, coercive control, sexual, emotional
5	Joy	38	2	Physical, Verbal, coercive control, sexual, emotional
6	Esosa	38	1	Physical, Verbal, coercive control, sexual, emotional

7	Tope	42	2	Verbal, coercive control, sexual, emotional
8	Kenny	33	0	Physical, Verbal, coercive control, sexual, emotional
9	Ehis	33	2	Physical, Verbal, coercive control, sexual, emotional
10	Nkechi	42	3	Physical, Verbal, coercive control, sexual, emotional
11	Eniola	32	2	Physical, Verbal, coercive control, sexual, emotional
12	Ivie	28	1	Physical, Verbal, coercive control, sexual, emotional
13	Lati	39	3	Physical, Verbal, coercive control, sexual, emotional
14	Mary-Jane	40	1	Physical, Verbal, coercive control, sexual, emotional

The participants were all based in London, England. According to data from the Office for National Statistics (2021), London is the most ethnically diverse region in the UK, with people who identify as Black making up 49.3% of the London population. For ethical and safety reasons, it was mandatory that all the participants selected for the semi-structured interviews were no longer in an abusive relationship at the time of the interview. The participants consisted of women who could escape the abuse on their own, those whose abuse came to the attention of the criminal justice system due to the gravity of the abuse, those who accessed services and those who did not. The legal status of the selected participants at the time of the abuse, their exit from the abusive relationship and the structural barriers created by hostile environment policy constituted a primary focal point of the interviews to show how structural inequalities can feed into gender inequality and oppression in a micro and macro setting. Ethical approval

for conducting research with human participants was obtained from the University of Essex Research Ethics Committee (ETH2021-0941).

To overcome the anxieties that resulted from this, last-minute modifications of the sampling methods were carried out to gain access to participants without breaching lockdown rules. In the end, although the original aim of this study was to recruit twenty Nigerian migrant women, I was able to successfully recruit and interview the fourteen Nigerian migrant women who participated in this study using the following methods:

a. Recruitment Poster - I created a visually appealing poster explaining the research study and inviting Nigerian women who had migrated to the UK as marriage migrants and were willing to participate in a research study on intimate partner violence. The poster contained the required eligibility criteria, such as nationality, those with spouse visas only, and only women who were no longer in abusive marriages. I also included my email address and a mobile contact number, which was for research purposes only. A recruitment poster ensured I could distribute it in a picture format that could be easily copied and pasted.

b. Digital Platforms: By identifying key locations where Nigerian women often virtually gather, I aimed to increase the visibility of the study and attract potential participants. I utilised various digital platforms to engage with potential participants to achieve this. I created temporary online accounts on Facebook and Instagram specifically for the research study. These accounts were separate from my personal accounts and maintained a professional and secure image. Through these platforms, I shared the poster I had created and encouraged interested participants to contact me by privately messaging me on the platform in the first instance or through text message on the number provided. To ensure confidentiality, I turned off the comment section so that all responses will be directed through private messaging only. I also actively engaged with the Nigerian community through WhatsApp group chats to

maximise visibility. Additionally, I asked colleagues who were members of the Nigerian community to distribute the poster within their social networks, fostering a snowballing effect and increasing my chances of reaching eligible participants. This further helped me to overcome recruitment challenges due to the pandemic and gain access to Nigerian women who may not be easily reached through social media for various reasons.

4.7. Sampling Methods

Flexibility in sampling methods is beneficial as it can help to cover a wide range of study participants. Ellard-Gray et al. (2015) noted that trying several sampling methods could best broaden the knowledge or experience needed to answer the research inquiry. As earlier mentioned, participants were recruited using a combination of sampling methods due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, purposive and snowballing sampling methods were used to recruit participants.

Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method involving conscious and deliberate identification and selection of only participants with the knowledge or experience required for a research study (Palinkas et al., 2013). This sampling method enabled me to narrow down the target population and focus specifically on marriage migrants experiencing IPV as opposed to Nigerian women who moved to the UK for other reasons such as education or work. Additionally, as the United Kingdom comprises England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, with different legal systems and jurisdictions, the purposive sampling method enabled me to further narrow the target population to Nigerian migrant women living in England. This ensured that the collected data and the participants' experiences were directly relevant to the questions this thesis aims to address. This sampling method, however, had to be adjusted to include a second sampling method.

The second sampling method used was the snowballing method, which involves asking already selected participants or interested parties to refer other potential participants who might be interested in participating in the study (Rubin and Babbie, 2014). According to Rubin and Barbie (2014), the snowball sampling method is also helpful in accessing members of a vulnerable or marginalised group who may otherwise be difficult to locate. This method was useful in identifying Nigerian migrant women who are not often easily accessible due to the fear of immigration repercussions. In light of the use of the combined sampling methods, I created clear inclusion and exclusion criteria during the recruitment process, which are summarised below:

a)   All participants must be Nigerian migrant women who had migrated to the UK based on marriage to a Nigerian man already resident in the UK.

b)   All participants must be living in England.

c)   All participants must have had Spouse visas directly linked to their resident spouse and experienced IPV.

d)   Interested participants were to respond to me in the first instance via text message or private message on social media, expressing their interest in participating in the study and informing me of a convenient time they could be reached for a phone call.

e)   Women currently in abusive relationships were excluded for ethical reasons and to minimise any potential harm that may arise in participating in this research.

f)   Participants experiencing severe mental health problems and were at risk of self-harm and suicide were excluded.

4.8 Data Collection

Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic at the time of data collection, the University of Essex Research Ethics Committee required that the interviews be conducted remotely to

protect the health and safety of both the researchers and the participants and in line with the Government's mandatory strict social distancing rules in force at the time. This allowed for the continuity of the study amidst the pandemic (Saltzman et al., 2021). Despite the difficulties in recruiting participants due to the pandemic, I made efforts to accommodate numerous last-minute cancellations from potential participants for various reasons, further exacerbated by the ongoing pandemic. Additionally, I encountered challenges with women's organisations (gatekeepers), who were overwhelmed by increased workloads and limited funding resulting from a rise in cases of IPV during the lockdown (Riddell and Haighton, 2022).

After successfully recruiting the 14 participants who were willing to participate in the study voluntarily, my initial contact was made via mobile phone to introduce myself to the participants. This was an essential part of the interview process as it helped mitigate any discomfort that may arise due to the topic's sensitive nature, the women's immigrant status at the time, and the uncertainties brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. I had already anticipated that the research topic's sensitive nature could bring challenges, such as trust between myself and the participants. However, the unexpected occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic made establishing trust even more challenging than initially anticipated. In this regard, trust and confidentiality were paramount considerations, especially due to the remote nature of the data collection process. I recognised the need for flexibility and a multifaceted approach to accommodate the participants' needs and concerns while maintaining professionalism and the ethical standards of the research process. To this end, I realised that developing what I considered a 'professional friendship' with the participants was necessary. This means that to cultivate trust, I had to communicate with the participants numerous times before the actual date of the interviews. According to Cresswell (2018), becoming familiar with participants before data collection through chatting or informal impromptu interactions that

promote familiarisation between the researcher and participants effectively establishes trust and can lead to feelings of connectedness. I allowed the participants to ask me questions and clarify any concerns they had about my purpose for the research. WhatsApp messaging proved very effective in this context. I communicated back and forth several times with each participant on a platform they were familiar with to alleviate any uncertainties. Sabri et al. (2020) study on the effect of the pandemic on the safety of women experiencing IPV revealed that safe telephone text messages were very effective methods used by service providers in connecting with survivors during the pandemic. Similarly, in this study, WhatsApp messaging proved very effective in building trust with the women and ensuring that I, as the researcher, was accessible to the participants and responsive to their questions. This conveyed a sense of reliability and commitment to the participants.

An interesting reflection on the difficulties arising from the COVID-19 pandemic on the research process was that there were notable gaps in successfully recruiting interested participants. Paradoxically, this helped create enough time for the participants to be comfortable with the research process amidst the ongoing lockdown restrictions. I equally took it as an opportunity to dedicate ample time to cultivate trust with each participant. I had comprehensive discussions on the purpose of the research, ensuring that the women understood that participation was optional and voluntary and also to help build their confidence in remote research, which was new to all of them. This generated in-depth exchanges between us and continuously shifted the power imbalance between us. A study by Dodds and Hess (2021) on investigating remote interviews with vulnerable populations revealed that the participants could interact more equally and reported feeling comfortable in their environment. The study also revealed that participants reported feeling less inhibited, leading to a willingness to share personal thoughts or details about their experiences (Tremblay et al., 2021). I kept an open mind and went beyond merely addressing logistical questions such as the time and date of the

interviews. The participants were inquisitive about me and the research process. They asked me some personal questions such as when I migrated to the UK, my category of residence in the UK, my age, marital status and the particular ethnic group I come from in Nigeria. We also had conversations about the ongoing pandemic and other topics relating to our shared identities, like our afro hairstyles, food preferences and other news about Nigeria. Additionally, I made sure a picture of me was visible on my WhatsApp profile to give the participants confidence and a sense of my physical appearance. These ongoing dialogues with participants created a sense of stability, understanding and reliability, which are crucial elements in trust-building. I realised that by offering glimpses into my own experiences and identity, especially as we shared common characteristics in terms of gender and nationality, I created a sense of connection, which ultimately facilitated a trusting relationship. Upon reflection, I wondered whether data collection on a sensitive topic like IPV would have been more challenging, given the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, had I belonged to a different nationality or gender. However, while recognising the importance of such connection and transparency with the participants, I remained conscious of the boundaries between my role as a researcher and my personal life. I answered personal questions honestly and sensitively while maintaining professional boundaries (Tremblay et al., 2021). For example, I responded to their questions using formal language and refrained from late-night or weekend interactions. This approach was especially crucial due to our shared characteristics as Nigerian women and to avoid unintentionally fostering a sense of over-familiarity or a therapist-like relationship before the interviews. While such connections could foster trust, they could also compromise the transparency and objectivity of the research process. Therefore, I recognised that although it was crucial to create a friendly and relaxing virtual environment where participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences, it was equally necessary that I preserve the researcher-participant dynamic so that participants could also trust the professional context of our

engagement. This also demonstrated my commitment to ethical research practices despite the impact of the pandemic. Another essential part of the data collection process that helped me navigate trust and the issues and concerns around remote data collection was that I remained adaptable and open to participant feedback. I encouraged each participant to give me suggestions on how I could ensure their comfort and confident engagement with the interviews. This made them feel included and valued, their voices were heard, and their preferences were respected.

When it was time for the interviews, participants indicated a preference for oral consent. According to some participants, they had no access to printers and could not leave their homes to print, sign and scan the forms to be sent back due to the lockdown restrictions. Others revealed that they were more comfortable with oral consent. However, I ensured that consent received for this study was provided voluntarily and with complete information on the study's aims and requirements through a participant information sheet. Participants were given the liberty to choose which virtual communication method they were most comfortable with. All the participants except one chose audio calls. I believe this was mainly due to our already-established relationship through this method of communication. Although audio calls can help create a more relaxed and comfortable environment for the participants, which can encourage them to share more insights into their experiences, it may also create insecurities for some due to not being able to read non-verbal cues and body language (Weller, 2017; Tremblay et al., 2021). The participant who did not choose an audio call conducted their interview via video call but with a request that her camera be turned off even though mine remained available. A similar method was carried out in Saltzman et al. (2021) study during the pandemic, where participants were given the option to turn their video function off and use audio only despite using Zoom or typing their responses in the chat. On reflection, although I initially thought this particular participant's choice might be due to a possible lack of trust in me despite my efforts,

it could also mean it was just her preference to use this method for various reasons, such as her physical appearance at the time of the interview, the appearance of her home or to read my body language and non-verbal expressions while she told her story. I, however, ensured that all participants were informed that they should only take the call if they were in a safe and comfortable environment.

The interviews lasted for two hours on average. As this research aims to allow the participants to tell their own stories and describe the unique meanings they each gave to their experiences, open-ended questions were used for the semi-structured interviews. Except for two participants, all other participants did not wish to be recorded for various reasons. While some stated that they did not feel comfortable being recorded, others indicated that their insecure immigration status made them worried about being identified by any means, including their voices. This further highlights the multiple ways the COVID-19 pandemic overlapped with structural factors and continued to present challenges in establishing trust on multiple fronts with participants. While I dedicated much time and effort to building rapport and fostering openness, the complex interplay of these factors still added layers of complexity to the trust-building process.

The preference to not be recorded prompted me to include notetaking as an integral part of the data collection process, where the participants' experiences were written down verbatim, in the first person, as they spoke, without paraphrasing. At first, I was very anxious about this, especially as technological advancements made recording interviews easier. However, considering how hard it was to recruit participants, I was ready to adjust for fear of losing participants, which had been very difficult to recruit. I understood that although it would be time-consuming and tedious, it was not impossible. I would also like to think that my background as a solicitor before moving to the UK helped me navigate this process as I had

already been trained to take client's briefing by long or shorthand. Furthermore, my experience as a transcriber also helped make the task less daunting. However, I thoroughly prepared myself for the process. I did some research and developed a note-taking system for research purposes that worked for me. According to Roller (2017), note-taking creates a heightened focused attention and internalisation in real time that can significantly contribute to the conceptual understanding of the phenomenon being investigated. Roller further stated that it can also foster highly reflective behaviour and prevent a mindless transcription of data previously recorded. Similarly, in a study by Mueller and Oppenheimer (2014), note-taking was seen as a way to learn more about a subject and forces the brain to engage in high-level mental learning in a way that fosters comprehension and retention. These research findings made me feel more at ease about the task at hand, and I adopted some methods from my previous experiences that supported the process. For example, I used a shorthand system for certain words, and while aiming for verbatim notes, I avoided rewriting repetitions of words and phrases. I also made sure I paused at intervals to read out what I had written to the participants to ensure transparency and that they were fully involved in the process. As I had already developed a 'professional friendship' with the participants, they supported the process by pausing when asked to enable me to write. Although this made the interviews tedious, I ensured that participants took breaks in between. The entire process was very collaborative and mitigated the power imbalance between myself and the participants, with most of the participants thanking me for accommodating their requests. Also, it enabled me to creatively navigate the potential disruptions to this study that could have been brought about by COVID-19 and forced me to revisit methods that were already gradually being phased out of academia before the pandemic due to technological advancements.

All the interviews were completed in one session. As English is the official language in Nigeria, and all participants understood English, the interviews were conducted in English. Some

participants responded in broken English; however, they had previously indicated that although they understood English when it was spoken to them, they felt better expressing themselves in broken English as one of the languages also spoken in Nigeria. As I could also understand broken English perfectly, there was no need for an interpreter. All participants were informed and continuously reminded that all the written data collected would be stored safely and securely and that I alone would have access to this information as stated in the participant information sheet. This would safeguard the data from unauthorised access. They were also informed that their real names and other personal information would not be included in the written data and would be destroyed once the research was completed, as indicated in my ethics approval application. I believe this reassurance was necessary for the participants, considering the multiple vulnerabilities they faced as women who had experienced IPV and had potential immigration concerns or controls after leaving their abusive marriages covered by the spouse visa.

4.9. Data Analysis

A combination of two data analysis methods was adopted in this study. The initial goal was to use thematic analysis to analyse the interview data. However, the data revealed some new concepts that I did not initially anticipate, such as some racialised experiences in domestic settings and the meaning the participants each gave to citizenship as a legal pathway to safety and empowerment. Although some of these new concepts overlapped with already identified themes, they nonetheless had some nuances that I decided to highlight in this study, hence the adoption of the two analysis methods.

Thematic analysis involves systematically coding qualitative data to identify themes, patterns, or concepts relevant to the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In this study, the data was thematically analysed by reading the data to get a sense of the unique experiences of each

participant and paying attention to the initial patterns that emerged. I then generated initial codes by documenting or labelling parts of the data that related to the research questions. Next, I organised related or similar codes into meaningful themes that captured the participants' experiences. I refined the themes by merging, splitting and giving the themes concise and descriptive names that captured the participants' viewpoints and accurately represented the data. Finally, I supported the themes with evidence by using quotes from the data that supported the interpretation of each theme in line with the research questions. This also included analysing the implications of each quote or excerpt and drawing connections from existing literature that corroborates or refutes the findings. The process was iterative as I continued to read and revisit the interview transcript several times, ensuring that the themes were grounded in the data and that new insights previously missed were captured.

Grounded theory was used as an inductive research method to analyse the new concepts that emerged from the women's narratives. Grounded theory aims to develop theories, concepts or explanations grounded in data (Glaer and Strauss, 1967). For example, the data revealed how the perpetrators, despite sharing the same racial background as the participants, embedded racialised representations of the women's agency within patriarchal values. This phenomenon, which I identified as a form of internalised colonialism, emerged as a new concept outside of the initial research questions. That racial discrimination in the women's lived experiences was not gender-neutral encouraged me to revisit the literature on racialised experiences of marginalised women in transnational spaces at the micro level. This led to introducing a postcolonial framework for this study (Mgadmi, 2009). Therefore, while thematic analysis enabled me to focus on identifying and describing patterns or themes within the data that answered the research question, grounded theory enabled me to expand on new concepts derived from the data.

As this study was conducted over three years, there was also a frequent review of the broader literature and current policies on immigration and IPV to capture new changes to the law, which may directly impact this study over the course of that period. I also ensured that I adopted a reflexive approach where my positioning in the research process was constantly reflected upon. This enabled the identification and examination of my feelings, values, biases, pre-conceived knowledge, and perspectives to become a continuous exercise rather than fixed. The advantage of this is that I was able to identify my positionality in the research process with each participant, which enabled me to consciously adopt a neutral stance by focusing on the task at hand with curiosity and an open mind (D'Cruz, Gillingham and Melendez, 2007; Mason, 2002).

4.10. Reflexivity, Positionality and Power Relations.

Reflexivity is an awareness of the subjectivity of human perception (Hooks, 1990). It is an integral part of the research process as it involves a process of self-examination that allows researchers to continuously consider how their values, beliefs, biases, perceptions and understanding of the social world can impact how they carry out and analyse their research (Probst and Berenson, 2014). Arditti et al. (2010) described it as a process that helps researchers identify their standpoints in the research process.

Reflexivity underpins feminist research and aims to understand women's encounters with knowledge and their realities (Hooks, 2000). Researchers do not represent the participants' lives, and it is vital, as the researcher collects data, that the researcher's subjective interpretation does not influence such data. Self-reflection in qualitative research, therefore, aims to prevent the misinterpretation of participants' voices. Hooks (2000) highlighted the dangers of misinterpreting or influencing data by positing that a lack of reflexivity may lead researchers to marginalise the participants, particularly in research involving cultural differences, making

it vital that the subjectivities of the researcher in the interpretation and production of knowledge are recognised.

Throughout the research process, reflexivity played a vital role in establishing a successful relationship between me and the participants. It was important for me to identify and interrogate my positionality, ideas and values throughout the research process, particularly as I also share the same national background with the participants. Hsiung (2008) noted that skill and discipline may be needed to confront the self, which may be more complex than is often thought. Hsiung further stated that it could be daunting for researchers as they may sometimes feel uncomfortable confronting their positionalities when conducting research. Therefore, I made a note of several factors that were likely to impact the relationship between me and the participants, which I have detailed below:

i. **Power Imbalances**: I noted the power imbalance between me and the participants and how my position in the research process can influence the interviews (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). Being a migrant woman, I was mindful of potential feelings of vulnerability and sensitivities towards my immigration status, age, education and marital status and how these factors can impact the participants' responses. Chew-Graham et al. (2002) noted that while shared common characteristics between the researcher and the researched, such as language, gender or profession, can make participants less cautious and guarded, resulting in more genuine data, it may also raise feelings of intimidation and powerlessness. Therefore, to enable a more equitable relationship, I ensured that I adopted a collaborative approach during the interviews by openly answering any questions. I also ensured that I did not cross the boundaries of researcher professionalism by practising self-regulation in my thinking, answers and actions (Rubin and Rubin, 1995).

ii.   Researcher Standpoint: I ensured that I did not adopt an 'expert' position throughout the data collection process and analysis. I allowed the participants to tell their stories and ensured that I understood and analysed their experiences from their standpoints or points of view (Charmaz, 2006). I also ensured that my cultural knowledge of the research population did not result in biases and subjective views to capture their stories accurately and fairly. Very importantly, as a migrant woman researching the UK migration policy, I made sure that I did not portray myself to the participants as an expert on the UK immigration laws. This meant that I constantly clarified myself as a researcher and not a person to advise on any immigration concerns that the participants may have.

iii.   Awareness of the Risk of Harm and Re-Victimisation: Research on intimate violence is complex because of the sensitivity of the topic, which may result in ethical implications (Kelly, 1990; Agnew, 1998). During the recruitment process, part of the inclusion criteria was that participants must no longer be in an abusive relationship for safety and ethical reasons. Therefore, I was mindful that the participants would recount painful experiences from a relationship they were no longer in (Kidd and Atkinson, 2006). I was sensitive to the risks this may pose to the participants and myself in the form of 'compassion stress' (Malacrida, 2007). Hewitt (2007) stated that researchers must ensure that participants are not emotionally exploited to tell their stories, especially where the research involves stories of great emotional intensity. To avoid this, I developed several safety protocols to prevent harm and re-victimisation by taking some formal training on how not to be overly intrusive when speaking with vulnerable participants before conducting the interviews and how to look out for signs of distress. Therefore, during the interviews, I asked participants to take regular breaks when needed and reminded them that they could stop the interview at any time and withdraw their participation. I also ensured that I clearly explained my role as a researcher to the participants so that the lines between my position and that of a therapist were not blurred. In light of this, I

provided information about counselling services should they need additional support to all participants (Appendix Three).

iv.   Respecting the Right to Privacy and Self-determination: Throughout the research process, I was mindful of the human rights element of the data collection process. This was to ensure that the rights of the participants, such as their right to self-determination and private life, were protected and not infringed upon at any stage (Preston-Shoot, 1995). Therefore, I ensured that the participants had informed consent. Informed consent is a voluntary agreement where the party required to give consent is given full information, including what is needed from them. I ensured that I provided full disclosure about all research details, including the information that it is voluntary. I also ensured they were informed about confidentiality and that their personal information would not be published or stored. This enabled the participants to participate in this research freely, voluntarily, and of their own will. More on this is discussed later in this chapter.

v.   Following Social Distancing Guidelines and Recognising the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Although I had anticipated some difficulties in recruitment due to the extremely sensitive nature of IPV, I was unprepared for the COVID-19 pandemic, which took the world by surprise. The nationwide lockdown and social distancing measures put in place by the government presented significant obstacles during the recruitment and data collection process. The uncertainties posed by the pandemic also profoundly affected my research. However, I constantly wrote down my challenges and noted how I could navigate those challenges. For example, I began working on other parts of my research while I waited for the recruitment process, which had been halted, to resume. I also regularly communicated virtually with my supervisors, updating them on my progress and challenges. Eventually, recruitment resumed after restrictions were lifted; however, I continued to ensure that I followed strict

safety procedures so participants would not be at risk of COVID-19 by changing the data collection process from face-to-face contact to virtual contact only.

4.11 Insider/Outsider Dilemma

The insider/outsider dilemma has been the topic of scholarly debates for decades and revolves around how a researcher's positionality is negotiated throughout the research process (Garfinkel, 1984; Raheim et al., 2016; Pollner and Emerson, 2001;). Raheim et al. (2016) argued that it is common in qualitative research for shifts in insider-outsider positions between the researcher and the researched. This shift in positionalities frequently occurred during my data collection process, particularly in the interviews. Despite our shared characteristics, I noticed a connection and disconnection between aspects of my identity and the identities of the research participants. I decided to document these shifts in my positionality so that I could reflect on them to ensure that they do not impact the transparency of the research process. How I experienced both a connect and disconnect between aspects of my own identity and the identities of the research participants are summarised below:

1.   I assumed my shared gender and cultural identity would place me in an 'insider' position and help me gain easy access to the trust and cooperation of the participants. However, this did not occur as anticipated. For example, despite informing all participants of complete confidentiality and anonymity, one potential participant informed me that she was withdrawing her consent to be interviewed because she had been warned that our shared nationality could mean I might know her ex-husband's social circle in the UK. She informed me that it was a risk that she was too frightened to undertake for her safety and peace of mind. In this context, I was placed as an outsider.

2.   On the other hand, my role as a researcher with shared characteristics with the participants encouraged some participants to contribute to this research. Indeed, our common

gender and country of origin resulted in some of them trusting me and the research process and becoming less cautious and guarded. In this context, I was placed as an insider.

3.   The power dynamic between me and the participants resulted in an implicit social hierarchy, where the participants placed me in the position of someone with a superior social status than themselves. This overlapped with our shared characteristics to create an inferiority complex that may have intimidated some participants. For example, a participant commented that I was lucky to be in my position as a researcher and did not share her experiences. In this context, I was placed as an outsider. This raised some ethical concerns. I explored this perception with the participant, answered her questions honestly and ensured that I clarified my position and purpose of the research with the participant in clear terms.

4.   Finally, I experienced a situation where I was perceived as a Black researcher who could conduct research in a society the participants found very difficult to integrate into. A participant stated that as a Black woman, she also wished to be a researcher studying in Britain and asking questions just like I was. In this situation, I was once again placed in a superior position as someone who, although possibly experiencing marginalisation due to her blackness, was also enjoying some privileges vis a vis my status as a researcher in a predominantly white society. Harris (1990) referred to this notion of intersecting identities as "multiple consciousness", where a person is perceived as experiencing privileges and marginalisation simultaneously. Although qualitative research can be unpredictable, I was genuinely taken aback by the participant's perceptions as I had not imagined my positionality in the research process within this context. I realised that I had occupied both an insider and outsider position in the mind of the participant, both as a woman who occupied the social position as a marginalised black woman from the same country of origin as hers but who was also enjoying some 'privileges' in the British society which she had no access to. Again, this raised some ethical concerns, and I was concerned about the implications of this power dynamic and took

steps to address it with the participant. I ensured that I openly communicated with the participant to ensure my positionality did not negatively impact her participation. Unfortunately, the participant withdrew her consent to participate in the study.

Difficult ethical choices are also a feature of qualitative interviews, and it is paramount for researchers to have a high level of ethical awareness and openness with study participants (Oakley, 1981). For example, although I strived to give the participants room to voice their lived experiences of IPV within the context of the research inquiry, there were times when I lost control of the power to interrupt some of the participants when they told their stories, even when out of context, as they had seized the opportunity to voice out the pain and agony of the abuse they had experienced. This made some of the sessions occupy more time than was initially planned. In such situations, I was faced with the dilemma of whether to interrupt or allow participants to tell their stories to someone whom they trusted was ready to listen to them, which could have been their motivation for participating in the study in the first place (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009). These conflicted feelings about whether interrupting a participant may affect the interview atmosphere and whether I should allow the participant to continue the conversation made me feel vulnerable. However, I allowed myself to be guided by my respect for the participants' courage to tell their stories and the ethical guidelines of qualitative research. This helped me sensitively redirect the conversation when it was moving away from the key focus of the study.

4.12. Negotiating the Reflexivity Dilemma.

Although I had done much preparation on reflexivity and its importance in qualitative research before the interviews, I was aware that no matter how much reflexive practice I engaged in, there was always the possibility of some unconscious biases influencing my research. Throughout the research process, I was faced with the question of whether it was possible to

remain entirely objective and unbiased given that (1) I was a part of the social world in which I was researching and (2) reality in itself and how people make sense of it is multiple, bias, diverse and value-laden. As qualitative research involves exploring the lived experiences of social actors in a social world in which they are also a part of, I realised that researchers cannot be entirely free of subjectivity as it is very likely that some affective aspects can sub-consciously be introduced into the research.

To solve this dilemma, I acknowledged that positionality in the research process is flexible and can change from time to time. It was, therefore, necessary for me to engage in a flowing reflexive movement throughout the data collection process with each participant. A flowing reflexive movement enabled me to revisit my position, opinions and ideas and consciously adopt a neutral stance with an open mind (Raheim et al., 2016). In this way, I could differentiate between my views and those of the participants and consciously focus on the participants' stories. Bourke (2014) noted that sometimes, there is a risk of the researcher adopting a judgmental stance, which may have a biased impact on how participants' lived experiences are interpreted (Smith, 1999). In this situation, the interpretation becomes that of the researcher rather than one derived from the voices or narratives of the participants, which defeats the purpose of the research. To avoid this, I was mindful of my stance as a feminist researcher who regularly explored the inequalities that placed women in disadvantaged positions in society. This enabled me to focus on how each woman uniquely creates meaning in light of their lived experiences (Jootun et al., 2009). This is consonance with Rubin and Rubin's (2011) stance of reflexivity, where it was stated that as a researcher, it is essential not to forget the agenda or purpose of the research, to show empathy, and always remember that it is not their story. I also ensured that the participants had complete control over their participation in the research. Acknowledging the voices, perceptions, and meanings the participants gave to their experiences of IPV was a valuable addition to this study.

4.13 Ethical Considerations: A Feminist Perspective

Feminist research is committed to the ethical management of the research process so as not to cause harm to the research participants, especially where they are vulnerable women (Sultana, 2007). Elshtain (1991, p. 126) argues that "feminism without ethics is inconceivable", and according to Andolsen et al. (1985), promoting ethical thought and action from a feminist perspective means promoting equality and empowerment through a collaborative process of communication and interaction between the researcher and the researched. In this thesis, it was important that I considered the implication of recounting harrowing emotional experiences as the participants, in narrating their experiences of IPV, had to confront distressing issues in detail. To manage the ethical issues that may arise, I wrote down issues that may arise and need to be addressed. Guided by the ESRC's Research Ethics Framework (2005, p. 20), I now discuss the ethical considerations adopted in this study.

Informed consent is more than just a signature or oral agreement. It involves giving sufficient and appropriate information about a research project to allow potential participants to make a meaningful choice of their own free will as to whether to participate. There must be no coercion, explicitly or implicitly, and information given to the participants must be clear and in a manner they can understand. In this study, I ensured that participants fully understood their involvement in the research before obtaining consent. This was to ensure the integrity and quality of the data and the entire research process. I confirmed there was no undue influence on the participants' choices, and they were allowed enough time to think about the research. I also ensured they understood that their consent would cover the long-term use of their data, which could be shared for research purposes only, and any information given would be handled with a high level of confidentiality and anonymity. I informed the participants that they had the freedom to withdraw at any stage before or after the interviews had been conducted. (Campbell and Groundwater-Smith, 2007). Furthermore, due to the unexpected COVID-19

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pandemic, I ensured that they considered the pandemic's impact on their lives and provided more time to think about this before deciding whether to sign the consent forms. While most consents are often obtained in written form, oral consent was ethically preferred and approved due to the sudden impact of the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions at the time of data collection (Fonte, 2004). All participants were also assured that their names and other private details would not be presented in the study. However, in line with the requirements of the British Sociological Association Code of Ethics (Kimmel, 1990), I informed them that confidentiality would be legally breached for their protection only when they are seen to be in significant danger, and their details would only be accessed by parties empowered to act on the disclosed information.

When researching a sensitive topic like IPV, Sullivan and Cain (2004) stated that the safety and protection of the research participants before, during and after the interview process must be carefully considered. In line with this ethical principle, participants in this study were constantly reminded that although the interviews could not be conducted face-to-face due to the COVID-19 restrictions, it was essential that they were in an environment where they felt safe enough to participate in the audio or video interview. I also considered the risk of mental harm to the women. I ensured that the women were provided with details of a counselling service should they need further support or want to discuss some of the issues raised during the interview with a professional. This is important as it has the added advantage of ensuring that the participants do not place me in the space of a counsellor or therapist, and my role as a researcher rather than a therapist or expert was clarified (Lee and Stanko, 2003). I also ensured that my emotional well-being formed a part of the ethical considerations of this thesis. This is important as it ensures that I maintain objective expectations in analysing and interpreting the findings and that no psychological harm was caused to me by conducting this research (Ellsberg et al., 2001; ESRC, 2005: 21).

4.14 Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this research mainly relate to methodological considerations and the scope of this research. Due to the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic and the lockdown restrictions at the time of data collection, recruitment was less extensive than anticipated. I also aimed to recruit service providers as part of this research study; however, due to the impact of the pandemic on the workload of various service providers around the country, specifically police officers and women's organisations, my requests were politely declined. Additionally, the topic's sensitive nature on multiple levels regarding women's experiences of IPV and the insecurities that come with immigration controls in the UK may have also contributed to this limitation. Another limitation of this study was that most participants believed in the Christian faith, with only two women declaring they were non-religious. There were no women from other religious faiths, such as practising Muslim women, for a comparative analysis to be made. This was mainly due to the COVID-19 pandemic restricting the participant recruitment process.

<center>**CHAPTER FIVE**</center>

<center>**GENDERED VULNERABILITY AND VICTIMISATION**</center>

<center>"…The response I got from his father was, 'If he wants to sleep with you, so
what? Are you not his wife? Are you not a woman?"</center>

5.1. Introduction

Multiple social processes, influenced by unequal power relations, overlap to shape the
experiences of IPV among migrant women and prevent them from exercising their autonomy.
In line with this point of view, this chapter provides an intersectional analysis of how the
precarious immigration status of Nigerian migrant women intersects with conventional
constructions of gender that assume that women are innately predisposed to male violence.
Using excerpts from the semi-structured interviews, this chapter explores the perceptions and
experiences of the inequalities created by Nigerian migrant women's assumed vulnerability to
violence from their husbands and how it overlaps with the current UK immigration policy to
intensify their experiences of IPV. This study argues that attributing their vulnerability to IPV
to a fixed categorical social condition reinforces patriarchal ideologies on a structural level that
trivialises violence against women. It also sanctions negative gendered stereotypes and
overlooks the broader context within which IPV occurs. The interviews revealed that the
gendering of their vulnerability to IPV shifted the focus away from the multiple structural
inequalities that marginalised and sanctioned their oppression and created an excuse or
justification for the IPV they experienced.

5.2. Gendered Vulnerability and Physical Violence

While the recognition by international law of violence against women is seen as a significant
accomplishment that criminalises gender-based violence and recognises it as a consequence of
gender inequality, the connotation of women as innately vulnerable and susceptible to harm

due to their femininity creates an unintended consequence that reinforces their oppression and domination (Erez and Adelman 2009; Peroni, 2016; Cunniff-Gilson, 2016; Goldscheid 2014). Cunniff-Gilson (2016) argued that perceptions that weakness and powerlessness are fixed, and immutable conditions of women trivialise male violence against women and shift the focus away from the perpetrators. In this study, the participants' experiences revealed the shortcomings of defining their vulnerability to IPV as a natural element of their femininity rather than emerging from unequal power relations and structural barriers that restrict their access to equal opportunities, rights and resources (McCurn 2018). Findings revealed that such gender stereotypes denying women's agency played a role in the understanding and perpetration of the abuse against them. It also shifted the focus away from their abusive husbands as perpetrators and normalised the violence they experienced as a natural and unchanging part of the social environment they were a part of (Griffin 1986). One of the participants, Eniola, described her frustrations at the way the violence she experienced was often normalised:

> After an incident where he pushed me, and I fell backwards, hitting my head on the bedside table, I tried to talk to his mother about what happened. She rudely told me not to exaggerate the incident as he only pushed me slightly because he was angry, and I fell because I am petite and did not have enough strength. She then scolded me, saying... 'did I not tell you not to talk back?' 'Do you think you have the strength to fight a man?' This was frustrating because the abuse was always tied to him being a man and me being a woman. The verbal abuse and control or the fact that he threatened to set me up with social services as a bad mother and send me back to Nigeria without my children if I don't 'behave' was not even considered relevant. (Eniola, 32)

Eniola believed that the gendered expectation that she acknowledged her assumed 'frailty' and 'weakness' as a woman resulted in her getting blamed for not preventing her 'own' physical assault. This suggests that the emphasis on her femininity as an immutable condition of helpless vulnerability to physical violence from her husband enabled her oppression (Cunniff-Gilson, 2016). The phrase 'What did you expect?' from her mother-in-law also suggests that she was

pressured into internalising her subjugation and oppression as part of the natural gender order. It also suggests that by failing to adopt gendered 'IPV-prevention measures', she was blamed for any acts of violence resulting from her husband's actions. Almost all the participants commonly experienced such gendered advisories from informal networks, where they are often accused of provoking their husbands and causing violence. When asked if these expected 'IPV-prevention measures' worked, another participant, Ade, stated:

> It did not work at all, at all. Even when I stopped challenging him, he still abused me. It depended on his mood. I felt like his world revolved around his control over me. Like him controlling me was one of his life accomplishments. It was that important to him. There was no difference between the way he treated me and the way he treated our dog. We were both expected to obey when he said, 'sit!' I remember he always told me that he would cut my wings. (Ade, 29)

Ade's account suggests that IPV is positioned as an act of violence that Nigerian women can prevent if they are docile and passive and show unquestionable obedience to their husbands. It also highlights how power and control shaped the dynamics in her marriage. Ade believed her husband was determined to both gain control and make her lose her sense of control. Therefore, as Wagers et al. (2021) stated, the complex roles of power and control are central to understanding and conceptualising IPV.

Findings from this study also revealed that one of the ways in which the participants' experiences of IPV were gendered was the expectation that they must respect the physical strength of their husbands. The participants reported being faced with situations where they were expected to acknowledge their husbands not only as invulnerably physically strong as men, but their strength was also as part of the 'hazard' or 'risk' that they must deal with in their everyday lives and never challenge as they were the 'weaker sex' (Anderson and Doherty 2008). Such emphasis on the acknowledgement and reverence of the physical strength of men by women serves as a tool to instil fear and ensure total submission. This was revealed in the following account by Joy:

> My husband would say things like… I did not hit you very hard. You are no match for me…I will crush your bones if I really want to beat you. Also, saying no to sex meant nothing to him…he would say, 'you know you cannot fight me, so just be a good wife and perform your duties.' His parents blamed me for always provoking their son and physically challenging a man. They said I do so boldly because I have hidden witchcraft power and I was an evil witch sent to destroy their son in London... I was confused… did they not see my bruises, the blood, and my depression? (Joy, 38)

Here, physical strength served as a tool of dominance by Joy's husband over her, including sexual dominance. Portraying the physical violence she experienced as a consequence of challenging her husband's physical strength trivialises male violence and detaches the perpetrator from the violence (Pain 1991). This suggests that Nigerian women experiencing IPV are often placed in a paradoxical position as visible violence instigators but invisible victims of abuse who wilfully go against gender norms that require the total submission of women to men (Jiwani and Young, 2006). Hooks (2000) posited that in such situations, the perpetrator is constantly concerned with the notion of masculinity he has been socialised to believe and his ability to live up to that notion. Therefore, when his idea of masculinity is challenged, the abusive husband compensates for it by oppressing the woman through violence and blame to return his perceived position to the status quo. Joy's account illustrates McCurn's (2017) argument that the gendering of the vulnerability of women to violence blames women for causing violence or harm to themselves due to failing to acknowledge their subjective positionalities as women. Foucault described such acts of domination as an unequal power relationship where power manifests as an oppressive, one-sided act against another (Munro, 2003).

5.3. Gendered Vulnerability and Sexual Violence

In highly patriarchal societies, harmful gender roles, heterosexuality, and the sexual dominance of men over women are often seen as the norm. Findings revealed that notions of vulnerability that perceive women as violable and more likely to be sexually violated than men position the

female body as a site for violence (Hollander, 2001). The participants reported that the perpetrators used such gendering of their vulnerability to sexual violence due to their femininity to justify the sexual violence. This was seen in the excerpt below from Omotola's account of her experiences:

> They called me ungrateful for the UK life my husband had given me. When I tried to explain how he continually physically and sexually abuses me, the response I got from his father was…'…if he wants to sleep with you, so what? Are you not his wife? Are you not a woman? Is he supposed to sleep with a man? Do you want him to go to other women? (Omotola, 28)

Omotola's account indicates that the gendering of her vulnerability to sexual violence manifested in two contexts – as a woman and as a wife. As a woman, she was treated as what Cunniff-Gilson (2016) called a 'breakable and 'takeable' being with a natural violability to male sexual violence. On the other hand, as a wife, her vulnerability to sexual violence was also gendered because there was the belief by her husband and his extended family that consent had been overridden by marriage, and she had a duty to be sexually available to her husband at any point in time. Findings revealed that such gendered norms that sanction the sexual dominance of husbands over their wives were prevalent in the Nigerian community, where it is used not only as a way of trivialising sexual violence but also to blame women for the consequences of not adhering to such norms. Omotola's failed attempt to receive help and support from her husband's family highlights the difficulty in challenging this gendered status quo, including the assumption that being a wife legitimises rape from a husband despite changes in the law that criminalises this. This was also highlighted in the excerpt below by another participant, Ehis, who reported that she was subjected to sexual violence from her husband, who would often chastise her for challenging him as a man and failing to perform her duties as a wife:

> My husband said I was beautiful and would take videos of me without my consent when I was not properly dressed or whenever he sexually abused me. Whenever I confronted him, he said I was being too sensitive and only wanted to show his friends how attractive his Nigerian wife looked so they could go to Nigeria to find a wife to marry instead of marrying white women. He would

get very angry whenever I refused and not speak with me for days. He would call me uncivilised and a bad wife who neglects her husband's needs. He said modern wives these days make sex tapes with their husbands, and I was backward. Many times, he threatened to send me back to Nigeria so he could marry another beautiful Nigerian woman who was more civilised and obedient. I knew he was manipulating me. Acceptance meant I would do things I hated, and refusal meant I would be sent back to Nigeria with nothing and without my children. (Ehis, 33)

Ehis's account suggests that her husband believed that being a man, a husband and key to her legal status in the UK, meant that he could exercise sexual dominance over her. It also describes a distinct form of racialised hyper-sexualisation of Nigerian women as Black women, where the portrayal of Black women as highly sexual bodies (Collins, 1991) is also internalised by men from the same racial group. Previous research has shown that due to racial stereotypes of Black women that were borne out of slavery, proponents of Western exceptionalism and white supremacy have described Black women as highly sexually desirable beings who are inevitably pre-disposed to sexual violence and cannot be regarded as victims of sexual abuse due to their unnaturally sexually deviant behaviour that 'entraps' men (Lykke, 2016; Chmielewiski et al., 2017). Collins (1991) noted that although such racialised hyper-sexualisation has roots in racial discrimination against Black women, it could also be internalised and carried out by men from the same racial group. Ehis's account of her experience within this context indicated that sexual abuse was disguised and presented both as a central element of her femininity and the subordination of her Black womanhood as a beautiful, black, uncivilised, deviant and highly sexually desirable Nigerian woman. This suggests that black women's experiences of sexual abuse occur within a broader spectrum beyond their racial locations in the social hierarchy and are deeply rooted in the power imbalances between men and women. This was demonstrated in the following excerpt:

> The first time my husband raped me was after my son's naming ceremony. He asked for forgiveness afterwards, saying he was sorry, and he could not help it, as I was a very beautiful woman who looked even more beautiful that night. …As if that made it okay. He did it again a few days later but said it

> was his right as my husband [sighs]. Does that even make sense? My people will say it is my duty as a woman. I could not tell anyone what was happening. I was trapped. I just had a son. He needed to be cared for, and I had no money, nothing to survive on my own. I did not even have my passport; it was with my husband. (Esosa, 38)

Here, not only was Esosa's femininity and 'beauty' blamed for the abuse, but she was also unable to reveal the sexual abuse to anyone. She was also unable to report the abuse and felt trapped due to the sentiments in the Nigerian community around sexual abuse and the structural constraints she faced due to her precarious immigration status. These two barriers on the micro and macro levels overlapped to shape her experience. These findings highlight what has been found in previous studies on sexual violence among Nigerian women about the disquiet around sexual abuse, which has led to cases of sexual abuse being highly underreported (Folami, 2013; Nwabunike and Tenkorang, 2015; Tenkorang et al., 2016). The excerpt below highlights this:

> When you report, they want proof. Proof means you have to start describing how it happened and where. People would hear it, my parents, everyone, the police. I don't want that. It is too embarrassing. Besides, they always blame the woman for letting it happen. Men would even crack jokes about it among themselves, call my husband a 'sharp man,' and praise him for his sexual prowess. So, I had to pick my battles. (Ivie, 28)

Ivie's account suggests that Nigerian women's social positioning is central to understanding how sexual abuse is tolerated and reported. It indicates that for many Nigerian women, there is the fear of not being likely to be believed, in addition to the embarrassment they face due to the intimate nature of the abuse. Ivie's account also highlights how the gendering of Nigerian women's vulnerability to sexual violence overlaps with notions of sexual dominance as an extension of masculinity (Smith et al., 2015). Such patriarchal notions of masculinity normalise sexual violence as a gender power play between men and women where women are not allowed to talk about sex, but men can. It also highlights the difference in perceptions of sexual violence, where it is only perceived and believed to be such by women. On the other hand, it is perceived not as violence but as sexual prowess or sexual domination by men. For this

reason, Nigerian women are very reluctant to report sexual violence, particularly if their husbands have perpetrated it. As another participant, Nkechi revealed in her account below, women are likely to be blamed due to the gendered sentiments around this particular form of abuse:

> The first time I talk about it to our people in Naija (Nigeria), the first thing they tell me was…why did I let him drink too much? They said I am not making him happy in London as his woman, which is why he is always drinking outside. They say if I make my husband drink, because he is not happy, then it will happen because a man's body is not like wood, and he must react when see a woman near him. Nobody ask me something like… 'are you okay? (Nkechi, 42)

Nkechi was not only blamed for failing to fulfil her role as a wife but also for any sexual violence resulting from being female. The phrase '…a man's body is not like wood, and he must react when he sees a woman near him' illustrates the gendering of women's vulnerability to sexual abuse where being violated is regarded as a central element of their femininity. Findings also revealed that the perpetrators took advantage of the sentiments around sexual violence to get away with it. This was seen in the excerpt below:

> Whenever I threatened to report him, he would laugh. He knew that I wouldn't; I was too embarrassed … and that gave him more power on top of the one he had over me because of my visa. (Bimpe, 34)

Here, Bimpe and her husband understood the unequal power play in the relationship, although from different perspectives. Her husband used the disquiet over sexual violence as a tool of control, which overlapped with the fear of deportation he knew his wife had due to the legal dependency of her visa on him. Bimpe understood that not only was sexual abuse gendered, but the impact of the immigration policy on her experiences of IPV was also gendered, as her fear of deportation forced her to remain silent and yield to his control. However, findings showed that silence in this context was used as a strategic act of resistance against the abuse. The participants' accounts around the use of the fear of deportation as a tool of control by the perpetrators and the gendering of their vulnerability to sexual violence revealed some

variations in its impact. Some participants indicated that, although they found revealing sexual abuse to their informal networks too embarrassing, they might have considered reporting it to the British police if the fear of deportation was not a factor. This was highlighted in another excerpt from Nkechi's account of her experience of sexual abuse from her husband:

> Since my people were blaming me that I make my husband to drink, and since they are calling me a wicked woman because, according to them, I am saying bad things about my husband, I wanted to tell police, but I am afraid to that too because of my visa. So, I just did not bother again to tell people or the police because, at the end of the day the police or people in Naija (Nigeria) will not give me my papers. So, I keep quiet. (Nkechi, 42)

Nkechi's account suggests the perception among Nigerian migrant women that the police represent a more professional help-seeking resource who are likely to follow the law on such issues rather than judge them based on prejudiced sentiments rooted in patriarchal ideologies (Bui and Morash, 1999; Raj and Silverman, 2002). However, the precariousness of their immigration status and their institutional exclusions from accessing welfare services significantly influenced their reluctance to report the abuse.

Dominant constructions of gendered vulnerability to sexual violence keep women in subordinate positions. They expect them to constrain their agency by 'getting into character' to avoid challenging their husbands and provoking other men to commit sexual violence. The participants revealed that although they were expected to accept sexual abuse from their husbands, they also experienced violence for failing to manage their violability to sexual abuse from other men. In other words, as part of the expected gendered role to accept the sexual dominance of their husbands over them, they were punished for failing to prevent themselves from being admired by other men. This can be regarded as a form of sexual dominance where men blame their wives for actual or perceived threats to their power and authority over their wives' bodies. The excerpt below shows how one of the participants, Kenny, experienced violence for failing to prevent other men from admiring her:

> Once my husband hit me for wearing shorts while opening the door to collect a parcel from the postman. It was hot as there was a heatwave, and when I tried to explain this, he slapped me across the face for seducing men and trying to dress like British women… and forgetting my African roots that expected women to dress respectfully. He told me he would rather send me back to Nigeria than do what I want in his house. I did not want to return to Nigeria until I got my permanent residency, so I never wore shorts again. (Kenny, 33)

Kenny's account demonstrates the expectation of Nigerian women to perform, as earlier mentioned, IPV prevention measures or risk being blamed for her oppression. It suggests that Nigerian women are expected to adopt measures to reduce their exposure to sexual violence from other men but not from their husbands. Failure to do so resulted in severe consequences. The indication is the expectation that Nigerian women exercise agency within the larger context of patriarchy and unequal power relations between a husband and a wife. In another excerpt, the participant revealed that her husband saddled her with the responsibility of managing her perceived vulnerability to attention from other men. Still, whichever way she looked at it, it was centred around power and control over her:

> He would accuse me of seducing everyone, the postman, the pizza delivery man, even his brother. So, I started wearing big clothes and very long dresses. He then began complaining that I looked like a man and was so unattractive that he was embarrassed to show me to his friends. Eventually, I figured it was about power. Not what I did or did not do, but the fact that he is a man, and I am a woman. (Irene, 36)

Power acts as an affirmation of the position of men in society, as those that occupy a higher position in the social hierarchy and which women must protect themselves against while also depending on them for their safety (Pain, 1991). The expected adherence to these contradictory expectations lies at the root of the complex overlap of unequal power structures, which bring both sanctions and rewards for Nigerian migrant women experiencing IPV. The rewards, however, are short-term reliefs that continue to reinforce a system of oppression in the long run. For example, in the excerpt below, the participant's account of her experiences suggests

that her oppression was implicitly presented to her as a choice to stay or leave, both of which limited her agency and placed her in a disadvantaged position regardless:

> He renewed my visa every time it was due, which was very important to me and my family and friends back home, who thought me a lucky woman. But I wondered if it was worth it because of the violence I was experiencing at the time. He said I had a choice to leave or stay. If I left, I would have nothing, no money and no legal right to work. If I stayed, I would have my visa. Although the visa felt like a reward, it also felt like I was giving him my sanity, freedom and entire being in exchange for the visa. I knew this, but what could I do? I had to make him happy to get something in return. What kept me going was that I needed to gain something at least in the face of all the madness I had gotten myself into. (Mary-Jane, 40)

Here, the context within which these so-called choices were presented to Mary-Jane suggested that she was caught in a negative double bind. Her visa would continue to be renewed if she conformed to her husband's demands and control. If she chooses not to conform, the consequences can be severe on her immigration status and her well-being due to the restrictions on her spouse visa that prevents her from accessing resources that can enable her to escape the abuse.

Nigerian migrant women are, therefore, faced daily with the reality that they need to bargain with patriarchal standards of behaviour from their abusive husbands to shield themselves from the consequences of not conforming to the conventional notions of gendered vulnerability.

5.4. Conclusion

This chapter looked at gendered vulnerability from an intersectional feminist perspective within the context of migration. It highlighted the need for a broader and more critical understanding of migrant women's vulnerability by considering pre-existing conditions that marginalise and oppress them. The focus on the specificities of Nigerian migrant women's experiences of IPV highlights the need for an intersectional approach that recognises the heterogeneity in women's experiences of violence and abuse. The participants' lived experiences showed the intersections of gender and immigration within various social, cultural

and institutional contexts. The gendering of vulnerability to violence pathologises women's bodies by associating it with deviance, weakness and as a perpetual site for male physical and sexual violence. Such gendered stereotypes also create patterns of discrimination and marginalisation that create unequal conditions in intimate relationships (Sweet, 2019). The women's accounts disproved gendered constructions of their femininity and vulnerability to male violence and revealed that it creates an excuse to naturalise IPV and trivialise male violence. It also shifts the focus away from their capacity to exercise agency and autonomy. This calls for an intersectional understanding of how gender is mobilised in the processes and distribution of power on the micro and institutional levels (Acker, 1992; Henrickson, 2017). Therefore, policymakers and IPV interventions must account for gender-based stereotypes and intersecting forms of structural inequalities that sanction migrant women's oppression and victimisation.

CHAPTER SIX

HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

My immigration status showed up in everything and was everywhere like
air…. but not in a good way. I could not do anything without his
permission, first as a man and then as someone I had to depend on for my
visa. (Esosa, 38)

6.1. Introduction

Deportation and the lack of legal rights are a constant threat to many Nigerian women
experiencing IPV in the UK. Although the documented status of some enables them to enjoy
somewhat greater privileges than undocumented migrant women, the structure of the UK's
migration policy nonetheless heightens their vulnerability to IPV. This chapter examines the
gendered impact of the hostile environment policy on the participants' experiences of IPV and
highlights the specific challenges they face under the policy. It explores how they understand
and navigate the immigrant-specific structural constraints imposed by the policy that
perpetuates their oppression as migrant women on Spouse visas in the UK. In this context, the
immigration system becomes a feature of IPV for many Nigerian women when their resident
spouses exploit the legal precariousness of their immigration status to control, manipulate and
trap them in abusive relationships. This intersection between immigration and IPV is
multifaceted, and the structural and institutional exclusions created by the policy provide a
hostile environment on multiple fronts, including the inability to access services to help them
escape their violent and abusive marriages.

6.2. Immigrant Status and Intimate Partner Violence

The interviews showed that the precarious immigration status of the participants and the often-
disadvantaged characteristics that defined them reinforced patriarchal ideologies that
sanctioned their oppression. As a result, the impact of the hostile immigration environment

policy on their experiences was gendered (Yuval-Davis et al., 2017; Farmer, 2017). The excerpt below shows how immigration status intensified the experiences of IPV for one of the participants:

> My immigration status showed up in everything and was everywhere like air…. but not in a good way. I could not do anything without his permission, first as a man and then as someone I had to depend on for my visa. I wanted to work, but he would not let me. I wanted to start a business… he would not let me. He was rude to any friend I tried to make. I could not also access any services without my ID, which was, by the way…with my husband. I felt like I was in a dark room, and two strong men blocked the door; that was the only way out. (Esosa, 38)

Esosa's account reveals how her husband used her precarious immigration status as a primary control tool. Her use of the phrase 'two strong men' as a metaphor suggests that she believed she was oppressed not only by her husband but also by the law. This shows the overlap of unequal power structures regarding the women's relationship with their husbands and the state (Munroe, 2003). Within their marriages, the women experienced both privileges and oppression in what Erez et al. (2009) described as intersecting forms of domination where they experience social and legal benefits from or through their husbands and violence and oppression due to their lower or precarious immigration status. On a macro-structural level, they experienced marginalisation from accessing social and welfare services due to the no recourse to public funds clause embedded in their visas. This was reflected in the account of another participant, Omotola, who revealed that being a migrant woman made her feel powerless in the face of the abuse, and she believed that she was silenced not only by her husband but also by the immigration law:

> Then I was 23 years old…. I dropped out of Uni (university) and moved to England to live with him. That was my mistake because he started slapping me whenever he got angry after I left everything behind and moved to England to be with him. I tried to continue my education but needed my husband's passport to access funds. The law says I cannot do anything in this country without his passport…. When I fell pregnant with my first child, I was told by my husband and his family not to say anything to the midwife. They told me British people do not like foreigners. Whether this is true did

not matter at the time because when the law says the renewal of your visa is in the hands of one person, you will do anything that person says. So, I always pretended I was a very shy woman. I am not; I just had no say in anything. (Omotola, 28)

While Omotola positions herself as a highly agentive person who understood that she was being abused and prevented from making her own decisions, the structural marginalisation she was embedded in due to her immigration status shaped and constrained her autonomy. Her account also shows the interconnectedness of various structures of oppression that shaped her experiences of IPV as a migrant woman, such as gender, cultural norms and the impact of her dependent immigration status. This highlights how one-dimensional interpretations of why IPV occurs among Nigerian migrant women distort the nature and extent of the IPV they experience. It also reproduces their oppression rather than recognises their resistance in the face of it (Peroni, 2016). This was highlighted in the excerpt below:

I have learn a lot since I come to this country. A lot of people look at me, and they see African woman, Black woman, African culture. Even police think it was our culture that make me stay that long. But this visa they give us is really not the best, true. How can they give all that power to only one person. Even a good man will turn to bad man with that kind of power. If my husband cancel the visa, even to rent my own house, I cannot. Even if I have the money, I still cannot rent house because landlord ask for visa too. So where is the African culture here? As a woman in my situation, you have to think of a lot of things because many things stop me leaving my husband, and not only one. (Lati, 39)

Lati's account suggests that she was aware of the intersecting oppressive factors that shaped her experience of IPV and help-seeking behaviour. She also recognises how African women's experiences of IPV in Britain are sometimes situated within racialised social contexts, which may further stigmatise and marginalise them (Beauchamp 2019). Similarly, in Nkechi's account of her own experience of IPV, she also revealed that she understood the overlapping complexities of her marginalisation as a migrant woman living in Britain:

You see, I have no choice in this matter from the beginning. Our culture say our husband should control us; their law also say our husband should control

us. They gave him all the power and leave none for us women. […] You know I have been asking my friend some question about this their law…if I leave that man, how I can apply for a new visa? She say I have to wait for six mons (months) for the result. With covid, it can long pass six mons (take longer than six months). What will happen to me... and my children then? I cannot get benefits. So, you see, I am sure a man wrote their law because it does not show what happen in real life. They don't understand, or they understand but don't care. (Nkechi, 42)

Nkechi's account indicates how the feeling of being trapped in an abusive relationship due to the limitations of her visa and the no recourse to public fund rule created a subculture of tolerance as a coping mechanism until she found a safe and secure way to leave the abusive marriage. She understood the barriers she faced in her marriage and society and how they compounded the severity of the IPV she experienced. A more nuanced and intersectional understanding of IPV must consider the social or structural conditions that marginalise specific individuals in terms of impacts and outcomes (Tierney, 2019).

6.3. Coercive Control, Gaslighting and Isolation

Findings showed that control tactics or strategies that draw on the participants' institutional exclusions due to their precarious immigration status were used to isolate and manipulate them. Stark (2007) introduces the concept of coercive control, which extends beyond traditional assessments of domestic violence to encompass nonphysical injuries and broader impacts. This perspective offers a framework to comprehend how everyday control and coercion can turn individuals into compliant victims of domestic violence. Immigration-specific manipulative tactics were often used to play on the participants' minds to increase their fear of deportation and prevent them from accessing resources to help them escape the abuse. Such deliberate acts of manipulation, where abusers intentionally distort the realities of their victims to gain power and control over them, are referred to as gaslighting (Sweet, 2019; Warshaw et al., 2014; Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Richie, 2012). Sweet (2109) argued that gaslighting in cases of IPV sees abusers mobilising structural inequalities and other axes of discrimination that shape

women's lives, such as gender, class, racial inequalities and migrant status, to alter their sense of reality, identity and autonomy deliberately. Interactions with the participants in this study revealed that their abusive husbands regularly made them believe that the immigration authorities were watching them or that the police were an extremely racist and discriminatory institution that would oppress the victims because of their racial identity. For example, one participant revealed that her husband deliberately manipulated her into believing that there was a ban on Nigerian migrant women entering the UK and that the authorities could come after her anytime. This made her live in fear and prevented her from trusting anyone or service provider to help her escape the abuse:

> My husband always made things up and tell me that it was announced in the news that the government was trying to reduce the number of Nigerians who entered the country. I asked him why and he said it was because they were racist and that there are too many Nigerians in the UK. At first, I didn't believe him, but he was very … ehm consistent. He used to tell me stories of home office raids and told me not to trust anyone and stop acting crazy and speaking to neighbours… to people so I don't get noticed and then deported. I know now that he did these things to isolate me from everyone and make me depend on him…. and not tell anyone about the abuse in our home. (Ivie, 28)

Ivie's account suggests that abusive spouses may deliberately create a surreal and hostile social environment outside the home to isolate Nigerian migrant women from the outside world and dissuade them from reporting the abuse (Richie, 2012). The reference to the 'crazy' also reflects traditional gender ideologies that label women as behaviourally deviant and emotionally unstable (Anderson, 2009; Enanda, 2009; Sweet, 2019). This gendered ideology is a historical patriarchal form of manipulation that is rooted in gender inequality, whereby femininity itself is portrayed as deviant or lacking in reason and rationality and used to justify the oppression of women and to isolate or control them (Sweet, 2019; Schur, 1984). Ivie's account also reveals how her husband tried to manipulate her trust in formal help-seeking sources. Findings from this study showed that perpetrators often regarded women's domestic

violence organisations, service providers, and other intervention services as a threat to their power and control over their wives. Therefore, to prevent women from trusting and accessing any form of institutional support, abusers often use the very institutions set up to help women in abusive relationships to oppress and restrain them from exercising their agency and asking for help. This was illustrated in the excerpt below:

> He actually made his friend visit me at home and introduce himself as a police officer at our local police station. My husband would later tell me to stop acting stupid, so I don't get noticed by the local police. He told me that his police officer friend would delete any call I make from the police database, so I should not bother trying. Sometimes, I suspected it was a lie and a set-up, but I did not grow up here… so what do I know? If I can report to the police in Nigeria… then why can I not report to the police in London…. You know…this question was always going on in my mind, but I did not know what to believe anymore. When I eventually spoke to a real police officer after our neighbour called one night … I found out that his police officer friend never worked at any police station. He was a cleaner. (Eniola, 32)

Eniola's ex-husband manipulated her into believing that his best friend worked at the local police to alter her confidence in police officers and discourage her from reporting the abuse. Sweet (2019) posited that this deliberate act of abusive mental manipulation, although initially theorised by psychologists, is also a sociological phenomenon due to perpetrators' use of existing social inequalities and unequal power relations in its execution (Stark, 2007; American Psychological Association, 2022). In the findings from this study, macro-level social inequalities related to the participants' immigration status, gender, race, culture and class were mobilised into micro-level strategies of abuse (Sweet, 2019; Stark, 2010; Ferraro, 2006; Warsaw et al., 2014). This made the participants in this study question the reality of the IPV they were experiencing, their mobility, perceptions and judgements of the UK policy and the criminal justice system and their sense of self. According to Tope's account below, she stated that her husband would make up stories to convince everyone, including herself, that she was making up the abuse:

>My husband would insult me for many days so that I would feel really sad and cry. When I cried, he would record me while speaking in a fake concerned voice, saying, 'Darling, what is wrong? Are you depressed? Are you struggling to take care of the children? I know you want to return to Nigeria but be patient, and please don't try to take your life again'. This was a set-up because I had never tried to take my own life. My family and his family believed I tried to commit suicide, but that never happened…ever. It is one thing to try and convince one person that he was lying … but to convince our entire extended families…. That was the toughest part. It broke my heart, and it was really a difficult time for me. (Tope, 42)

This excerpt suggests that for Nigerian women, manipulation and isolation tactics are gendered as it is often tied to gender norms that describe women as weak, irrational, and illogical compared to men. Tope's ex-husband used this to control the narrative and divert the attention away from him as the abuser. This suggests that for many Nigerian migrant women experiencing IPV, such manipulative strategies may distort the degree and type of violence experienced, as it may lead them to start questioning their intuition. Another participant reported that her ex-husband used the fact that she was born and raised in Nigeria and not the UK to manipulate, control and isolate her:

>When I was pregnant, my husband told me not to trust anyone at the hospital, especially the midwives or speak to them about us. He said there were mostly white and racists. When we went for hospital appointments, I would feel him watching me and pretending to protect me from evil midwives. He would send me articles about medical negligence in some NHS hospitals or racist attacks against Black people…. but my midwife was a lovely woman. I really wanted to open up to her, but I had so much anxiety. The irony was that I saw a lot of Black nurses at the hospital and was confused. But when you are in the abuse, you don't think clearly sometimes and believe anything because your husband is the closest to you at that time. (Irene, 36)

Irene's account demonstrates how perpetrators isolate migrants' wives who may not know the UK as well as their abusive husbands. This further isolate them and makes them utterly dependent on their abusers to protect them. The made-up stories about the abundance of 'evil, racist midwives' in UK hospitals illustrate what Ferraro (2006:73) describes as "surreality" where abusers "spin tales" or invent stories to isolate, confuse, humiliate and micro-regulate

the everyday lives of women (Hardesty et al., 2015; Williamson, 2010). This reinforces patriarchal ideologies of male power and female weakness and vulnerability. Her account also demonstrates how perpetrators of IPV can manipulate stereotypes that mark the social positioning of Black women to increase their control, ensure dependence and isolate their victims (McCloskey et al., 2007). This was seen in the account of another participant who stated that her ex-husband used her femineity and dominant racialised stereotypes about Black women to manipulate and isolate her:

> Once, he called his parents in Nigeria and cried, saying that he was scared for his life as I was too aggressive and uncivilised. He had just beaten me, so who was the aggressive one? He also said I was dangerous, especially during my period. I knew he was lying, but hearing it regularly made me wonder if I was really too aggressive. I did not want to be called an aggressive Black woman. It took me some years to realise that he was manipulating the whole thing as a way to deny ever abusing me. (Ade, 29)

Ade's account shows evidence of psychological and emotional abuse through patterns of control that make women doubt their sanity, identities and the reality of the abusive situations they face. The association of femininity with irrationality (Williamson, 2010) intensified Ade's experiences of IPV by creating confusion and self-doubt in her mind through racialised stereotypes and patterns of discrimination and exclusion that undermine Black women (Davis, 2012). Dalessandro and Wilkins (2017) argued that gender ideologies such as this that regulate women's emotions within patriarchal ideologies are mostly upheld in intimate relationships where women are constructed by their intimate partners as emotionally unstable and irrational to informal and formal networks. Participants in this study reported that these forms of manipulation and control resulted in specific conditions of isolation that restricted their autonomies, the opportunity to socialise with friends and even next-door neighbours or, in extreme cases, complete isolation from their own families in Nigeria (Bui and Morash, 1999). According to Bimpe, in the account below, she revealed that she was so isolated by her situation

and from her family that she subconsciously started to doubt the validity and reality of her experiences of abuse:

> My ex-husband would not let me speak to my family and demanded to be present when he allowed me to do so. He also took the TV away from the living room and would only bring it out when he knew we were having guests, who, by the way, were his friends. When they were present, he would pretend that all was fine and would pay me a lot of compliments. He constantly told me that women these days lie about domestic violence and frame their husbands. He said it so often that I started thinking that I did not want to be the woman who lied about domestic violence even though my reality was I was actually experiencing it. (Bimpe, 34)

Bimpe's account suggests that perpetrators often controlled the narratives of the abusive situations that some women might begin to get confused and disoriented. Bimpe's feelings of near-total isolation were exacerbated by the manipulation and control of her ex-husband. The data from this study suggests that an unintended consequence of the neolocal form of residence, as the post-martial residence commonly practised in the Nigerian community, is that Nigerian migrant women experiencing IPV are often almost totally cut off from their support networks. Perpetrators use this to exercise dominance over their wives and force them to be totally dependent on them. This was described in the excerpt below by Ehis:

> I had no one with me. Everybody we knew was back in Nigeria, and we all know how difficult it is even to get a visit visa. His mother was not happy with her son's behaviour, but he would tell her not to interfere in our marriage. He locks me in the house and goes to work with the keys. (Ehis, 33)

Mary-Jane, another participant, believed that if she had her friends around her, they would have made her see that her husband was deliberately manipulating her and that she was not crazy as he pushed her to believe:

> I believe women support other women. If I had my best friend or sister with me, I would have left him long ago and not believed his lies about my mental health. But it was just him and me. For years, my husband said I used to sleepwalk…and go to the kitchen to pick up a knife so I could use it to cut myself. Of course, he said he always stopped me, and I was ungrateful to him for constantly saving my life. I stayed with him for years because I believed

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he would at least stop me whenever it happened, and I wanted to show gratitude. When I found out it was a lie, I was so angry and oh so sad… and wanted to get out of that house as quickly as possible. (Kenny, 33)

Kenny's account shows how perpetrators may go as far as interfering in the health and well-being of their wives as a form of control. Research has shown that abusers may regulate birth control, abortion and their victims' mental health, such as forcing them to take anti-depressant pills to perpetuate their dependence on them (McCloskey et al., 2007). Such power utilisation to exercise control and dominance and ensure the near-total dependence of victims on abusers resonates with Stark's (2013) coercive control model, which shows how some people may control others by regulating their behaviours and those of the victims through exaggerated lies and manipulative tactics.

6.4. Conclusion

This chapter examined how the dynamics of gender and sexual violence against women draw on the precarious immigration status of Nigerian migrant women to exacerbate their experiences of violence and oppression. It showed how institutional inequalities and exclusions embedded in their spouse visas and sanctioned by the current UK immigration policy intensified their experiences and curtailed their ability to leave abusive relationships. Due to the gendered nature of Nigerian women's migration to the UK, this chapter argued that although the current UK immigration policy is not intentionally gender biased, it nonetheless disproportionately affects Nigerian migrant women due to existing power unequal structures present in society. Gill and Sharma (2007) argued that while the UK government has made efforts to assist migrant women experiencing abuse, there remains a massive gap in its implementation and effectiveness due to the conflict between the need to protect migrant women experiencing abuse and the need to prevent illegal immigration and secure the UK borders by tightening immigration laws. As a result, migrant-specific structural barriers

embedded in facets of the spouse visas of Nigerian migrant women heightened their risks of experiencing IPV. The women's narratives revealed that the perpetrators continually used the immigration system as a control tool to reinforce patriarchal ideologies that oppressed and victimised them. The threat of deportation or living illegally in Britain was a powerful tool used to ensure that they maintained the conditions of the abuse and forced them to remain in the relationships (Erez and Hartley, 2003; Gill and Sharma, 2007). It is imperative that a comprehensive approach that considers the intersecting complexities of migrant women's experiences of IPV in the UK must be adopted by policymakers and service providers.

<div align="center">**CHAPTER SEVEN**</div>

<div align="center">**HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT, INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AND LEGAL**</div>

<div align="center">**CONSCIOUSNESS**</div>

> The Home Office is not playing you know…They are very strict. You have your papers, tick. If you don't, you have to get out. (Ade, 29)

7.1. Introduction

Immigration laws significantly impact the lives of migrant women as they determine conditions of legal residence and interactions with the various institutions in the host country. Previous research on legal consciousness focused on specific fields of law as an entry point for their analysis of the 'legal' in legal consciousness (Engel, 1998; Güdük and Desmet, 2022; Namukasa, 2017). Within this context, this chapter uses citizenship as an entry point to examine the legal consciousness of Nigerian migrant women in the UK in terms of their perceptions and reactions to the UK's migration policy and their constructions of citizenship as both a control mechanism that trapped them in abusive marriages and as an empowerment tool used to create a pathway to safety (Güdük and Desmet, 2022; Namukasa, 2017). This chapter echoes Chua and Engel's (2019) argument that it is essential to conceptualise legal consciousness as comprising both cognition and behaviour due to how people understand and engage with the law. Legal consciousness, in this context, is therefore dynamic as it goes beyond a 'disembodied mental state' to what Nielson (2000) describes as the combined experience of law, legal norms, decisions about compliance and the way it is often negotiated in the everyday lives of ordinary people (Silbey, 2005, pp. 337-338). In line with this, this chapter will draw on Gleeson's (2010) interpretative approach to analyse the meaning the participants attached to their perceptions and social actions within the power and complexity of the UK migration law in their overall experiences of IPV.

7.2. Crimmigration and Legal Consciousness

International migration is a key policy issue in the UK, and successive UK governments have emphasised the need for punitive immigration laws to control illegal migration into the UK. This is mainly done by removing undocumented migrants through criminal law and enforcing strict limitations on their access to essential welfare services (Menjivar and Kanstroom, 2013). The interviews revealed that the policy of criminalising the breaching of immigration rules and the growing public anti-migrant discourse had a significant impact on the legal consciousness of the participants. Participants revealed that as already documented migrants, they feared that leaving the abusive marriage would make them undocumented, and the strict immigration restrictions already in place in British society would prevent them from accessing services and, worse, be deported. This suggests that there is a trepidation of breaking immigration laws among the women, and they all felt that it was better to follow the law than live illegally in Britain. This was described in Ivie's account below, where she stated that she feared that living in the UK illegally would make life very difficult for her and her son and force her into destitution:

> I wanted to leave the marriage so badly, but I had to think about us. I mean me and my son. How would I have provided for him? My husband already said he would not look after us and that he could easily have another baby with another woman. Even with my papers, I was already feeling trapped with no money except what my husband provided for us. Imagine if I did not have my papers. No money from my husband and no money from the government to help us. My little boy is innocent in all this and did not ask for any of this drama…I cannot let him suffer like me. So, I decided to stay in the marriage, you know.… until I got my British passport. It was very important to me. (Ivie, 28)

Ivie's account of her experiences highlights her awareness of the social and legal inequalities of her migrant identity. She understood how her current structural limitations could worsen if she left the marriage and her visa was cancelled. This shaped how she engaged with the law

and legality by deciding not to compromise her documented status, even in the face of intimate violence. Within this context, Irene's account refutes the dominant public discourse that migrant groups often breach immigration laws by choosing to remain in the UK as undocumented and illegal migrants (Ewick and Silbey, 1998). This homogenises the experiences of all migrants in the UK and fails to consider the multiple interlocking structures that create and define the unique power dynamic that shapes the experiences of migrant women (Gill and Sharma, 2007; Güdük and Desmet, 2022). On the contrary, the women's account revealed that they attached a high significance to the legality of their visas and were fearful of breaching immigration rules. This aligns with Abrego's (2008) findings on the legal consciousness of undocumented migrant students, where it was revealed that rather than being against the law, they 'stayed with the law so that they could claim new rights to benefits to empower themselves (Ewick and Silbey, 1999). Ade's account below also reflected her desire to remain legal and believed that living illegally in the UK would double her oppression:

> The Home Office is not playing you know…They are very strict…I see them as robots. You have your papers, tick. If you don't, you have to get out. You cannot hide because these days, it is not only immigration officers that check, but everyone can also now check your visa, even landlords. So, it will be very difficult for me if I leave without my papers... and I did not want to complicate my situation by being illegal…then it becomes two problems instead of one. The abuse and my visa. The abuse is enough. When I come out, I want to be free. So, to be a citizen was important to me. It is a better way of living in this country. (Ade, 29)

Ade understood the privileges of living legally in Britain and the over-policing of those without legal status. As a documented migrant, she also understood the immigration law as an exclusionary form of social control that trapped her in the abusive marriage and an empowerment tool that she could use to feel safe and guarantee her independence from her abusive husband (Namukasa, 2017). Her legal consciousness was, therefore, shaped by weighing the liminal period between her current legal status and achieving citizenship and the condition of illegality and deportability that come with being undocumented in the UK. This

suggests that although her current documented legal status excluded her from accessing resources, rights and protection, she chose to remain legal as a way of mitigating the impact of the UK hostile immigration climate on her experiences and resistance to IPV (Abrego, 2019; Menjivar and Kanstroom, 2013). This indicates that Ade's legal consciousness was also shaped by resistance. This was a common theme in the narratives of all the participants. Despite their eroded autonomy, they were willing to continue having the legal right to remain in the UK. Doing so gave them a more legitimate status to resist the abuse and break the victimisation and dependence that came with their current spouse visas. This suggests that Nigerian migrant women experiencing IPV develop what Abrego (2019, pp. 644) referred to as a 'legal consciousness of resistance', where they resist the exclusion and subjectivities of their precarious legal status through the attainment of citizenship as a way out of the violence (Chacón, 2018; Abrams, 2014).

The way the criminalisation of migration also impacted the legal consciousness of the participants was also highlighted in their understanding and perception of the criminal justice system. While women from the dominant culture may use the criminal justice system to address IPV unreservedly, the situation is more complicated for Nigerian women due to the precarity of their immigration status. This was seen in the account below, where Tope stated that she desperately wanted the law to play a central role in her abusive marriage but could not do so for fear of being deported:

> I desperately wanted to report him to the police… but I was afraid of them. I was hoping for a miracle where one of them could see the whole thing from my point of view, not my visa but as a woman and a mother in a very difficult situation in need of their help. To be honest, I was very sure they could help me… you know, arrest my husband and all that. But they also have to obey the law, right? So, it is not personal if they can't help me. Everyone has to obey the law. (Tope, 42)

Tope's account illustrates the problem of what Gill and Sharma (2017) referred to as the tension between the government's desire to tackle intimate violence among migrant women and the

conflicting need to be tough on immigration. This consequently shaped their legal consciousness concerning the actual or perceived structural barriers they may face. Like Tope's case, it has resulted in the failure of many migrant women to use existing support mechanisms put in place by the government that might provide them with some degree of support. For example, in the last few years, the UK government has committed to reducing the prevalence of IPV and supporting victims by creating some intervention options in England and Wales, both criminal and civil, to help victims of IPV. This includes launching the 'Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan on 30th March, 2022, which outlines the government's approach to limiting the prevalence of domestic abuse and homicide by prioritising prevention, supporting victims, pursuing perpetrators, and building a more robust system (Home Office, 2022). Also, the Domestic Violence Concession rule is another Home Office policy for migrant survivors of IPV, which enables them to access public funds for a limited time as a first step to escaping IPV (Ali, 2020). However, despite these efforts to develop potentially innovative approaches to tackling IPV in Britain, Gressel et al. (2020) have argued that they only result in short-term successes. The interviews revealed that while some participants were aware of the rule, many found it impracticable, as was seen in Mary-Jane's account below:

> I read what would happen to my visa if my marriage ended. So, I stayed. I know there is help for domestic violence, but it seems they don't understand how difficult it is to escape the abuse when it ties your very existence to your abuser in the first place. They are not even enough shelter. My visa does not entitle me to council house so where can I go to safely apply for the domestic violence visa? Knowing this made it worse for me, and it made me afraid to break the marriage and the immigration law. I just had to wait and be patient. (Mary-Jane,40)

 With the continued presence of the 'no recourse to public funds' condition embedded in spouse visas and the requirement of data-sharing between statutory services for immigration purposes, Nigerian migrant women will understandably be reluctant to report the abuse, making them feel powerless in the face of the abuse and the law. Therefore, the ways the Nigerian migrant

women in this study made sense of the UK immigration laws, and the systemic process between their legal status and their lived experiences of IPV shaped their legal consciousness (Hernandez, 2010).

7.3. Relational Legal Consciousness.

The interviews revealed that the legal consciousness of the participants did not occur in a vacuum and were socially and relationally developed. Merry (1990, 2012) posited that legal consciousness is not purely individualistic as it is developed through an individual's shared understanding of social structures and the social relationships in which they are embedded. The participants' narratives highlighted the relational aspect of their legal consciousness in how the experiences of family members and loved ones shaped how they interacted with the law (Chua and Engel, 2019; Flores et al., 2019). In the excerpt below, Eniola understood what both the legality and illegality of her migrant status meant to not just her well-being but also that of her children:

> Because of my husband's violence, I did not want him near our children. This made me even more determined to leave but I could not afford to be illegal because I would be unable to provide for my children without access to benefits, even for a short time, until I got settled and found a job. So, I stayed but tried my best not to expose them to what was happening between me and their dad by not provoking my husband and doing everything he wanted. This was sad for me, but it was okay too, because I had a plan. I figured acquiring my British citizenship was the most secure way out for all of us. (Eniola, 32)

Eniola's legal consciousness was influenced by the impact of her legal status on her children's well-being as their primary caregiver. Her narrative reveals a heightened awareness of the forms of exclusions that marked her current legal status and how it could potentially prevent her from achieving a reasonable level of care for her children after leaving her abusive marriage. Therefore, her legal consciousness was shaped by her willingness to protect her children by ensuring her legal status remained anchored in law and policy to claim the rights and privileges that come with British citizenship. This highlights the meaning that migrant

women give to citizenship in different spaces. Their legal consciousness regarding citizenship, in this context, goes beyond a mere legal status distinction between members of a society to include a collectively lived sense of wellbeing, where legal entitlement to all resources becomes a collective experience that extends to the safety and wellbeing of other family members (Rocco, 2014, pp. xiii). This was also illustrated in Omotola's narrative below:

> It was not easy you know. Life is different when you have a child because you no longer think about yourself. I always felt guilty…you know, like a bad mum…exposing my son to all that but I would not have been able to care for him if I left my husband. My son was a baby, still breastfeeding. I could never leave him behind. So, I felt guilty and wished I had him when I was a citizen so that I have better rights in this country…. But you know it is better not to be on the bad side of the Home Office if you want something from them. I wanted something from the law and my husband for the sake of my son. So, I obeyed both (Omotola, 28)

Despite Omotola's marginalised legal position, her engagement with the law involved strategic plans to resist the violence in the safest way for her and her son. As Merry (1990, p. 37) notes, legal consciousness answers the question of where the 'categories of law' intersect in the everyday lived experiences of migrant women. For the Nigerian migrant women who participated in this study, their perception of the law in their everyday lives was a developing process alongside their experiences of IPV. Legal consciousness in this regard, therefore, is fluid, produced through the interaction between the immigration law, structural inequalities and Nigerian migrant women's lived experiences of IPV. The social anxieties regarding the structural exclusions that marked their everyday lives had a direct or indirect impact on their close relatives or loved ones, and it is this shared experience of impacts and outcomes that created and shaped their relative legal consciousness.

7.4. The Interaction of Gender and Legal Consciousness

The hierarchical social context that structures gender inequality at the micro and macro levels also shaped the participants' legal consciousness and mobilisation. The interviews highlighted

the shortcomings of the UK's immigration law's claim to neutral legitimacy. On the contrary, the women's narratives revealed that the law did not occupy a gender-free space in their experiences of IPV and was not isolated from the unequal power dynamic that marked their social position in society. Therefore, the UK immigration policy had a gendered impact on their legal consciousness and shaped how they interacted with the law and legality. In the excerpt below, Nkechi describes her perception of the policy and her belief in how it enabled her husband to control her:

> Here, the law don't give me any power. It give all the power to my husband. The Home Office say I must depend on my husband because he bring me to the UK. They say I can leave, but how can I leave when I cannot do anything with the visa that they give me. Even to rent my own house, I cannot do so. I swear, in my heart, I believe both my husband and the law abuse me because every time I want to leave him, he laugh and tell me say I am his property and my visa is his property too. But this is true because it is not the same experience for a man who come to this country. So, just as I have to obey my husband because of our culture, I have to obey him too because of my visa. Is the same thing. Let us talk the truth as it is. It is the same experience. So, it is the law and my husband that abuse me… and I cannot separate them in my mind. (Nkechi, 42)

Nkechi's account illustrates how migration policies interact with the social and private contexts that condition violence against women. Her perception that the law was a part of the abuse that she experienced, highlights the disproportionate impact the UK migration policy has had on migrant Nigerian women regarding how it reinforces power imbalances within their marriages and sustains cultural norms that subordinate women. This suggests that the role of the law in maintaining the systemic domination and subordination of women impacted the participants' consciousness and mobilisation of the law. In this context, the law's patriarchal inheritance in its hegemony, institutional power, practice and action becomes visible as it interacts with pre-existing social contexts in which women's experiences are often situated (Porter, 2020; Henderson et al., 1991). This interconnectedness between gender and the legal consciousness of the participants was highlighted in Joy's account below:

My husband never helped me with the children. He says it is my job and would always criticise me for being a bad mother, but when the children cried, he would leave the house and sit in the car. He used to get very angry if I had not cooked dinner before he came back from work. He would call me a bad wife who did not know how to care for her husband. He told me that since I did not know my place as a woman and respect him as the head of the house, he would send me back to Nigeria. What baffles me is how can the Home Office not understand all this … (sighs)… that it is not the same when you are a woman who is a migrant. The same law cannot apply to all of us because they call us properties as well as wives and mothers. Can they not be gentle with us? …. But the law is like a rock. When it is thrown at you, you can either dodge it or let it hit you. I chose not to let it hit me for my own good and for the sake of my children. (Joy, 38)

Joy's account tells of her frustration and perceived powerlessness in the face of the law despite its hegemony. She perceived the law as either ignorant or dismissive of its gendered impact on women's experiences of violence and oppression. Yet, she chose to identify with the same law and use it as a mechanism for resistance. This suggests that although Nigerian migrant women may perceive the law as rigid and impenetrable, they may still choose to mould it to suit their interests. Therefore, their legal consciousness was created by navigating the role of the law within the multiple and interconnected layers of disadvantage that marked their experiences. In this context, their reverence for the law is not out of a moral obligation or duty but for its facilities to meet desired and specific goals (Porter, 2020). In line with this analysis, Nielson (2000) described the law as porous and often utilised, manoeuvred and manipulated by social actors to serve their interests, and it is at the point where the law intersects with their everyday lives that their engagement with the law and legality is often created. For example, Ivie's perception and understanding of the law involved what the law could do for her despite her legal status:

I realised that it was up to me to prove the abuse. My husband would never admit to anything. So, I started to gather evidence. I secretly recorded him whenever he was shouting at me and calling me all sorts of names. Whenever he grabbed me and left a bruise, I made sure I took pictures. I wrote down dates and times of incidents. It was therapeutic in a way because I was writing down my feelings. I hid the notebook outside our flat. And when it was time,

> I took everything I had to the police, the social workers, and all those that I knew could help me. (Ivie, 28)

Here, Ivie silently engaged the law for her interest by gathering evidence she knew would be helpful to mobilise the law to her advantage. She recognised that the same law that marginalised her could be manoeuvred for her benefit and, in this way, gave the law a new meaning that gave her a sense of empowerment and resilience. To this extent, she did not consider herself entirely powerless in the face of the abuse and navigated the law to her advantage rather than avoiding it (Kulk and de Hart, 2013). This suggests that despite the considerable structural barriers that the women faced, they strategically turned to the same law that marginalised them to mitigate the impact of the other marginalised identities that shaped their experiences of IPV. Therefore, their legal consciousness also shaped how they exercised agency (Silbey, 2008).

The interviews also revealed that negative encounters with the law or its institutions shaped the women's perceptions and engagement with the law. The negative encounters or experiences were not always personal experiences but stories from other people who shared the same social identity. This was highlighted in Esosa's account below:

> I know a lot of marriages like my own that have failed, and I hear all these stories about someone that was deported because her husband cancelled her visa or someone that left her home but could not survive on her own and things got really bad for her. I heard these stories even before I moved to this country, and I believe they are true, and I try to learn from their mistakes. I already know how our society treat women, so the key is to protect that visa. It is not a very good visa because it ties me to my husband, but at least it is something. When I let my visa go, the problem becomes double. If the visa is secure, then the problem is minus one. I looked into all these problems when I was trying to leave my husband. A Black woman in a foreign country with no power at all? Ah! I had to be sharp oh! I had to hold on to something, at least. (Esosa, 38)

Here, gendered narratives of failed marriages, oppression, and victimisation across a transnational social space shaped Esosa's perception and engagement with the law (Kulk and de Hart, 2013). Esosa's understanding of the immigration law was primarily influenced by the specific social context that marked her everyday lived experience not just as a migrant woman but also as a Black migrant woman in Britain (Kulk and de Hart, 2013; Flores et al., 2019; Nielson, 2000). However, her legal consciousness was not formed individually but influenced by the larger social environment. Her experience and other women's experiences created a shared understanding of the legal and social problems emerging from their social and legal statuses in the UK and how best to deal with those issues.

7.5. Conclusion

This chapter looked at the concept of legal consciousness as a fluid process where legality is constantly being constructed, and different meanings are given to how the law interacts with Nigerian migrant women's lived experiences of IPV. The interviews revealed that the women's relationship with the laws in the UK and the meanings they give to the legal process of extracting themselves from abusive situations was a significant part of their experiences and responses to the abuse (Serban, 2014). It also revealed the diversities in how they perceived and understood the law and how it was used to further their goals and interests. It also highlighted how their legal consciousness was influenced by their experiences of discrimination, oppression, marginalisation, and understanding of the law. This chapter also examined the relational aspect of legal consciousness and how it can shape the help-seeking behaviours of the women in this study. It shows how their perceptions of the law can extend beyond individualistic factors to include the law's impact on their family and social networks. This relational aspect of migrant women's understanding and interaction with the law is important in discourses about how legal consciousness shapes their decisions in the face of abuse (Chua and Engel, 2019).

Finally, how the hostile environment policy shaped the women's legal consciousness was also examined, where findings showed that the women's precarious immigration status and inability to access social welfare resources also informed their perception of the law (Gehring, 2013; Abrego, 2008; 2011).

CHAPTER EIGHT

NIGERIAN CULTURAL NORMS AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

My husband said he respected tradition, but I refused to do my part and be a submissive wife. He called me a disgrace to all Nigerian women (Kenny, 33)

8.1. Introduction

Cultural values, beliefs, ideas, practices, and social behaviours shared by members of the Nigerian community shape the manifestations of IPV among Nigerian migrant women. These cultural values, however, do not exist in a vacuum but are embedded in a complex set of social processes that define their lived experiences. For many Nigerian women, therefore, embedding cultural norms and immigration controls in their everyday lives as marriage migrants means an increased risk of exploitation, control, and violence.

Unique cultural practices within the Nigerian community attest to conventional constructions of gender that assume that women are naturally inferior to men. However, to better understand Nigerian women's experiences of IPV within a cultural context, it is imperative to acknowledge culture's total dimension or framework and its interactions with systems of power and inequalities. Therefore, this chapter explores the cultural norms and social attitudes that cut across social and geographical borders to devalue Nigerian women's agency and sanction their oppression (Kalunta-Crumpton, 2015). Drawing upon a feminist intersectional framework, it examines the intersection of culture with the structural constraints imposed by the hostile environment policy in the women's experiences of IPV. It also uses the women's narratives to argue against essentialist notions of culture and show that as women from ethnic minority groups, their experiences and help-seeking behaviour are not shaped by cultural factors alone.

This chapter pushes for intervention strategies that account for different cultures' unique perspectives to adopt principles that show cultural awareness, competence and empowerment.

8.2. Nigerian Cultural Norms and IPV

In many sub-Saharan African countries like Nigeria, the position of women in the social structure is related to the belief system that regards women as inferior to men. This invariably gives men the right to assert their power and dominance over women, particularly their wives, who are believed to be part of their property. Such attitudes toward the subordination of women consider violence an acceptable form of chastisement or discipline and a sign that a man is performing his role and duty as a husband. This makes IPV the most common form of violence against women in the Nigerian community (Odimegwu, 2001). The participants openly discussed how such patriarchal cultural norms overlapped with immigration controls to intensify their experiences of IPV. In the excerpt below, Omotola gave an insight into the unique way cultural gender norms from Nigeria shaped the abuse she experienced from her husband while living in Britain:

> Whenever my husband was upset, he would say that I did not know my place in the world and that he would never renew my visa because I was trying to be a feminist, which my ancestors never did. His parents blamed me and blamed my parents for trying to be a 'feminist' and provoking my husband. They said my marriage was in trouble because I talked too much and did not know how to be a wife and a woman (Omotola, 28)

Omotola's account suggests that any attempt to show agentive behaviour was seen as a threat to what was believed to be the natural custom of the Nigerian people and the natural social order of male superiority and female inferiority. It also indicates that any deviation from this cultural norm is disapproved and frowned upon, and there was the belief that Nigerian women should continue to uphold the Nigerian culture despite living in Britain. Her narrative also indicates that in many Nigerian family settings, a husband's family might, by extension, hold a more dominant position than the wife's family, who may adopt a more passive role.

Participants described this as a relatively common practice, where the wife is expected to revere her husband and his family. In the excerpt below, Esosa revealed that her family was often afraid of offending her husband's family:

> Whenever there was an argument, he would call my parents in Nigeria. His parents would also call my parents and tell them they were disappointed with my behaviour and how I was disrespectful to their son in the UK. My parents would then contact me, scold me, and tell me to behave and be submissive. They were afraid of offending his family. I felt very alone and isolated, with no one to talk to about what was happening in my home (Esosa, 38)

Like this participant, many women may struggle to relate the abuse to their families. Framed through culture, the manifestation of unequal power relationships also extends to their extended families, which can significantly impact a woman's help-seeking experience. This intensifies their experiences, particularly as there is already the fear of reporting the abuse to formal sources due to the fear of deportation created by their precarious immigration status. Therefore, for many Nigerian migrant women, their responses to IPV may be carried out in a relational context where there is an overlap between their personal decisions or choices and those of their extended families (Adjei, 2018). In the excerpt below, Joy demonstrates how women's agency may co-exist with the normative expectations of the extended family:

> My mother and brother hated what was happening to me, but they would still visit my husband's family in Lagos and personally apologise because they were afraid that I was alone here in London. When I got my permanent residence, I wanted to report the abuse, but they told me not to do so. They said I should leave the marriage quietly and not embarrass his family, and they did not want him to have a bad record in the UK…as, after all, he was the father of my children. So, I left the marriage but never reported it to the police. As far as the UK was concerned, my marriage was sweet, and I did not suffer any abuse before getting my papers (Joy, 38).

Here, Joy had to negotiate her intentions with her family to arrive at a decision. This suggests that in some cases, where Nigerian women's agency in an abusive marriage becomes negotiated with wider extended family members, the extended family may prevail (Adjei,

2017). In another except below, Ehis worked together with her family in a coordinated fashion to ensure her safety and security in the UK:

> My family were very worried for me. My sister tried many times to get a visa to visit me in the UK, but she was always denied. Whenever they tried to talk with my husband, he would get angry and claim to be the victim. He would also become more aggressive to me for reporting him to my family. So, I was told by my parents that since they couldn't get visas to be with me and protect me from him, I must obey him completely so he could continue renewing my visa. They were saving money to get me out of that house, but they said I couldn't leave just yet because my daughter was too young, and I won't be able to work and provide for her myself. When she was old enough and I could apply for benefits on my own, I left him, moved in with my sister's friend in another city and then we called the police. (Ehis, 33)

For Ehis, her intention and the intention of her family corresponded. They agreed to adopt a passive rather than a resistant strategy to ensure her safety and as a coping mechanism to protect her from grievous harm until she could secure her migrant status and safely leave the abusive marriage. For another participant, Ivie, her family members back in Nigeria were so worried for her that they worked with her to secure her safety at all costs regardless of the cultural impact of her leaving the marriage:

> My father was upset and tried to talk to his family, but they said it was his fault for not bringing me up as a woman should be. 'Don't talk back to him; he will not hit you. How can you threaten a man?', …they said. Although I wanted to stay until I got my papers, my father was very worried that I was in physical danger. He told me to be silent and not talk back to him but to leave the marriage quietly and hide from the police and home office until he figured something out. So, I left one day he did not expect. I stayed with a friend, and after some time, my father sold his land in Nigeria and sent me the money so I could pay a solicitor to help me get my papers. (Ivie, 28)

In Ivie's case, her father worked with her to enable her agency by encouraging her to adopt a passive role until he could secure her safety and immigration status through a solicitor. As mentioned earlier, her account also indicates that the women's decisions were influenced by other factors that may not necessarily be tied to traditional cultural values and norms (Tonsing, 2015). However, such negotiated agencies varied between participants and for some, it yielded

the opposite effect, where they were forbidden to leave the abusive marriage by their extended families. This was seen in Ade's narrative below:

> All my uncles and aunties said to me during my traditional wedding that although my husband is not supposed to beat me, if he does, I must still forgive him and pray and fight for my marriage (kisses her teeth in disapproval) …. I stayed because of my visa and did not want to offend my family. I also know my mother tolerated my father….so I tried to be strong like her. (Ade, 29)

A similar experience was also described by another participant, Irene, who told how her father threatened to disown her if she left her marriage:

> My father said I was influenced by the Western culture and threatened to disown me if I walked out of my husband's house. He said if I did, I would be the first in the family to do so and embarrass the family. The problem was that my father is an Igwe (chief) in the village and did not want to be embarrassed. So, I had to think of his feelings too. (Irene, 33)

These accounts indicate that in addition to the broader structural processes that shape the help-seeking behaviour of Nigerian migrant women, family structures also play an influential role in the women's decision-making processes. However, as seen from their accounts, their experiences and responses to IPV cannot be viewed using a singular lens. Their accounts reveal how the intersection of various factors influenced their experiences. As migrant women, such patriarchal cultural norms overlapped with the precarity of their migrant status to shape their reactions and actions to the violence they experienced. Again, this indicates that conformity to cultural standards did not singularly influence their experiences. Tope stated in her narrative below:

> I thought moving to London was a dream come true, but no. It was hostile on all fronts. My people blamed me. They blamed me for failing in my role as a woman to keep a man and failing in my role as a wife whose bride price was paid by my husband. The UK also did not accept me because I had no citizenship. My stay here depended on my husband. I was on my own. So, I had to think twice before taking any steps to leave. If I am illegal, it will be worse for me. I thought about that and not culture. (Tope, 42)

As a migrant woman, although Tope's experiences with gendered cultural norms also overlapped with the constraints of her precarious immigration status, her decision was based on the impact leaving the marriage would have on her legal right to remain in the UK. That she felt isolated and marginalised by her community, as well as the UK migration policy, also illustrates the complexities of their experiences and the overlapping tensions between these different structural factors in Nigerian women's experiences of IPV.

Understanding these complexities is essential for developing more tailored responses to the problem of IPV among migrant women living in Britain. However, even though historically produced constructions of gender may influence agency, the women's narratives revealed that they continued to act assertively even in a subjugated position, although the impact and outcomes of such acts varied (Semaan, 2004; Adjei, 2018).

8.3. Justifying Wife Abuse

This study's findings support existing literature that revealed that as a cultural reality in Nigeria, a husband might take corrective actions to correct a non-submissive wife (Sunmola et al., 2019). Although such punitive acts can take various forms of abuse, including emotional abuse and coercive control, physical abuse is most practised. Within this context, a Nigerian woman may be disciplined by her husband physically as a punitive measure when she deviates from her expected gender role (Adegbenga et al., 2019; Sunmola et al., 2019). According to Kenny, her husband punished her for being too talkative as a woman:

> People blamed me for the abuse. They said it was because I always run my mouth (slang for talking too much), and I could never stay married because another man would also beat me. My husband would always say, 'you want to be the man of the house, abi? (right?) I will teach you a lesson'... and then the punching and slapping starts. (Kenny, 36)

This excerpt suggests that women who participate in decision-making or voice their opinions are perceived as unrestrained, talkative, and a threat to the gender social order, which may

result in her being 'disciplined'. Such punitive measures often justify violence against Nigerian migrant women by their husbands. However, Nigeria is not a homogenous society, and the belief that a husband may correct his wife using physical violence as a punitive measure varies in intensity from one ethnic region to another (Okemgbo et al., 2002). For example, in the North-Central part of Nigeria, among the Tiv ethnic group, there is the cultural practice of 'wife beating', interpreted as a sign of love and affection and an inevitable part of marital life (Odimegwu, 2001). Although this is mainly practised in remote regions, Mary-Jane stated that her experiences of physical violence from her husband while living in Britain reflected this practice:

> He always reminded me before hitting me that although he lived in London, he was still a Tiv man… and even though I wasn't a Tiv woman, I must respect his culture since I agreed to marry him. His family accused me of disrespecting their tradition and would always make me apologise to him. In their eyes, a man can do no wrong. I had to apologise for my beating. (Kisses her teeth). I could have left him then, but I believed that the home office would come after me if I did. (Mary-Jane,40)

In this excerpt, Mary-Jane's husband considers himself a custodian of his tradition despite living in Britain. He continued to enforce the culture of wife battering to exercise his power over her. It also indicates how perceptions about women's gendered roles are learned and shared within cultural contexts through generations (Nwabunike and Tenkorang, 2015; Adegbenga et al., 2019). While the heterogeneity of the various ethnic groups or regions in Nigeria to which the participants belonged showed that not all sub-cultures practised wife-beating as a cultural norm, findings from all the participants' accounts nonetheless indicated that the norm of using disciplinary measures on a wife, whether physical or non-physical, remained consistent across all sub-cultures. Findings also revealed that as a highly patriarchal community, a significant portion of the Nigerian community perceives that a husband has been naturally pre-ordained as the 'head' of the home and his wife. This suggests that patriarchal beliefs that justify male dominance over women have social intentionality in terms of the way

the intentional behaviour of men in marital relationships to assert dominance and control over their wives is a shared belief and has a collective acceptance (Adjei, 2018). This was highlighted in Bimpe's account:

> Most people in my community said it was because I did not respect my husband, that was why he hits me, and that was why the marriage broke. His family, some members of my family, and even my church members all said it was my fault, and I needed to submit to a man to have a happy marriage. It is like slavery, you know. It still exists…but it is like for only women this time. (Bimpe, 34)

Bimpe's narrative suggests that the collective acceptance that a woman must submit to her husband's authority, failure of which her husband would be justified for using punitive measures over her, makes it very difficult for many Nigerian migrant women to leave their abusive marriages. As Bimpe further stated:

> What is the point of asking other Nigerians for help when everyone says the same thing? They blame you first for not submitting to your husband.

This indicates that the intersection of culture and other structural factors that frame IPV, including the women's migrant status, created both oppressive and gendered experiences. This traps Nigerian women in abusive relationships, making them reluctant to report the abuse informally due to culturally gendered norms that justify the abuse and also formally due to the structural barriers they face as migrant women under the hostile environment policy.

8.4. Bride Price Payment and IPV

Bride price is an established traditional custom widely practised in many sub-Saharan African countries and most parts of Nigeria. It is an obligatory payment made by a groom to the family of the woman he wishes to marry (Falana, 2019). This practice is a widespread rite of passage and a compulsory requirement for traditional marriages, even among Nigerians in the diaspora. All the participants in the current study revealed that their husbands paid their bride price before making an application for a spouse visa for them to reside in Britain. This practice, however, has attracted criticism from feminist researchers, media, women's rights groups and in political

discourses where it has been argued that it is a form of romanticised misogyny and is being used as an excuse to reinforce gender inequality and justify IPV (Falana, 2019; Hudson and Matfess, 2017; Chika, 2012). According to Eniola:

> I wish he did not pay my bride price…because all I heard was 'after I married you properly in Nigeria, you think you can come to London and do what you like.' He said I was not free to go anywhere or do anything without his permission. He did not let me open a bank account. He controlled everything and isolated me from everyone, even my family. I was like a bought car (Eniola, 32).

Eniola's account suggests that whereas bride price is a long-standing customary practice in Nigeria, it may spiral into IPV as some men may use it as an excuse to establish dominance and control over their wives due to its transactional nature (Kaye et al., 2005; Ezeifeaka, 2016; Chika, 2012). In some other sub-Saharan African cultures, the practice extends to a return of the bride price by the woman's family should the woman wish to leave the marriage, with some researchers arguing that this further trapped women in abusive marriages (United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research, 2018; Nwogugu and Nwatu, 2019). However, in the Nigerian community, the bride's family may not be required to return the payment if the marriage breaks down. Still, according to the participants, this did not stop them from experiencing IPV or feeling trapped in abusive marriages. Participants stated that the fact that there was a bride price payment in the first place sanctioned their subordinate status and encouraged their husbands to exercise control and dominance over them. In the excerpt below, the participant described how her husband expected gratitude and subservience from her for paying her bride price and used it to control her:

> My husband said he did his part and respected tradition, but I refused to do my part and be a submissive wife. He called me and my family ungrateful and a disgrace to all Nigerian women. We were called thieves, gold diggers…and all sorts of rude names. He asked me to leave him so he could bring another wife from Nigeria, who wouldn't talk back, but I refused. Why?...well I wasn't leaving without my children. I also wasn't leaving without a British passport, as I believed that at least that was compensation

for bearing him children and living under his control all these years. (Kenny,33)

Although there is the belief that payment of bride price promotes gender inequality and may spiral into IPV, such views were not universal among the participants. This showed the heterogeneity of the Nigerian cultural society, which may impact the experiences of Nigerian women. Some participants revealed that they wouldn't have it any other way as the payment of their bride price was proof that they were from proper Nigerian homes and a symbolic gesture of appreciation to their parents for allowing them to marry their daughter. This was described in the excerpt below:

> The day my husband brought my bride price payment up and said something like he paid this and that, and I should obey him. I said …well he didn't pick me up from the forest. I came from a good home, and he paid my bride price… so why was he acting like he donated to the Red Cross… or that he was Mr Bill Gates with so much money? (kisses teeth) Anyway, I think the visa thing gave him more power and trapped me in the marriage. If he did not pay my bride price, people in my community would look down on me and my family… and I would not agree to marry him. (Ivie, 28)

The participant's account echoes Adams and Mburugu's (1994) argument that the practice symbolises the validity of a marriage and not to 'buy' a wife. Oboko and Ifeanyichukwu (2021), in agreement, posited that the payment of bride price is an established marriage right and respected Nigerian tradition that symbolises commitment from the groom to the bride and is in no way an extension of dominance and control over a woman. They argued that the terminology used in describing the practice was the reason it was being misconstrued as transactional. This view was illustrated in the account of another participant who similarly expressed happiness, despite the abuse she faced, that her marriage was valid and carried out according to custom and tradition:

> I happy that he pay my bride price. People will say that I marry well. I no believe the bride price cause the abuse. I believe the kind of visa that they give me is the problem. See, I like my culture. I am happy that I am a Nigerian woman. It is only the bad part of our culture that I don't like. (Nkechi, 42)

Although this participant acknowledged that her lower immigration status meant that the power dynamics in her marriage did not tilt in her favour, she believed that the reverence for the customary practice of bride price payment was necessary. Findings revealed, however, that despite these varied views of the participants regarding the customary practice of bride price payment, they all acknowledged that as women from a highly patriarchal society like Nigeria, power was at play in their lived experiences of IPV, which placed them in a subordinated position and exacerbated their risks of experiencing IPV (Anderson, 2005). One participant stated that she believed it made no difference to the abuse she experienced whether her husband paid her bride price or not:

> Power is sweet, I know that. I sometimes imagine what it would be like if I had the power my husband had as a man and as a husband in the UK. Would I have done the same and maltreated the weak? Things got better when I started to understand how power makes people change…that way, I don't blame myself or God. I just figure a way out. (Joy, 38)

This study argues that whether the practice of bride price is a bane to the fight for gender equality or a respected custom and symbol of appreciation, many Nigerian migrant women have had to overcome tremendous barriers to escape IPV or report the abuse (Nwoke, 2009; Oboko et al., 2021). These interconnecting barriers are embedded in the power imbalance between men and women and, as revealed in the participants' accounts, manifest regardless of location. It is suggested that policymakers, service providers and the criminal justice system must have an increased understanding of the diverse power structures that may shape migrant women's experiences of violence and oppression and hinder them from seeking the help they need. All the women in this study described the interference of patriarchal cultural ideologies on the power dynamics in their marriage, and although at varying degrees of intensity, they were able to identify the way such cultural tenets overlapped with the other structural barriers they faced while living in Britain as marriage-migrants with Spouse Visas. Magnussen et al. (2011) noted that to provide efficient pathways that can enable migrant women to escape abuse,

it is crucial to understand that culture is an integral part of the overlapping contexts in which they function, but it must not be seen as the only factor that shapes their experiences. This aligns with the findings of many feminist researchers, activists and criminologists who have argued that power imbalances in the social environment interplay to shape violence against women and are not tied to an isolated structure of oppression. Intersectionality, therefore, explains how these power relations within multiple social identities interact (Crenshaw, 1991; Narayan, 1998). It also enables us to keep an open mind about other dimensions that can shape the experiences of IPV and consider the expressions of different domains of power impacting the lived experiences of victims (Conti and O'Neil, 2007)

8.5. Conclusion

The themes explored in this article uncovered the dynamics of IPV as it plays and unfolds within different cultural contexts within the Nigerian community (Adegoke and Oladeji, 2008; Akinsulure-Smith et al., 2013). Some unique cultural aspects emerged that shaped the women's experiences despite living outside the geographical boundaries of their country of origin. However, these cultural values and norms did not occur in isolation but intersected with other structures of oppression to shape women's experiences. The interviews revealed that the cultural patriarchal ideologies that shaped the dynamics of their marriages were further exacerbated by their precarious immigration status, barriers in accessing resources and services, stereotypes and prejudices from the media and other service providers, and economic barriers. These intersections highlight IPV's complex and multidimensional nature, which goes beyond one-dimensional conceptualisations of why it occurs and how it is experienced. It also refutes essentialist stereotypes and assumptions that violence is inherent to non-Western cultures or that all migrant women from ethnic minority groups experience IPV the same way. A lack of cultural sensitivity among service providers may make it challenging to understand Nigerian women's needs and make them reluctant to ask for help, even in extreme cases (Moe,

2007). This highlights the need for service providers, professionals, and policymakers to acknowledge the cultural diversity among migrant groups. Presenting information and advocating for involvement in prevention strategies that are safe, culturally knowledgeable, and sensitive, and which do not judge or isolate migrant women as a result of the cultural contexts in which they are a part of, is needed to improve the safety and welfare of those who seek help from the IPV (Magnussen et al., 2011).

CHAPTER NINE

'I WAS THINKING AND PLANNING': RESILIENCE AND RESISTANCE

From day one, I never thought it was okay… and even when it looked like I was
not doing anything about it, I was. I was thinking and planning because my options
were very limited. (Bimpe, 34)

9.1. Introduction

This chapter challenges widely held gender, cultural and racial stereotypical beliefs regarding Nigerian women's experiences of IPV as Black migrant women. It disrupts the dominant discourse of IPV among women from ethnic minority groups, describing them as passive recipients of intimate violence and as women who have also been damaged by it. On the contrary, the women's accounts of their experiences of violence from their husbands repeatedly challenge the notion that they cannot respond to IPV in agentic ways due to gendered cultural norms prevalent in their community (Irving and Liu, 2016).

One of the main concerns that emerged in this study was the overwhelming focus in the media and government policies on the negative impacts of IPV on migrant women's lives, without any reference to their capacity for building a resilient sense of self that resists violence in the face of multiple overlapping barriers. Nigerian migrant women balance at least three identities that are especially important for this study: as women, as migrant women, and as women of colour. Findings showed that they could strategically navigate these oppressive contexts to challenge and end the violence they faced. Yet, as Black migrant women, such agentive capabilities and resilience in severely subordinated contexts are often overlooked. Instead, they continue to be placed by the media in a unique space of compulsory victimhood and helplessness where only their pain and suffering become hyper-visible and sensitised for public consumption (Chouliaraki and Banet-Wiser, 2021). Such indefensible perceptions, which unfortunately shape government policies and interventions, create a 'false consciousness'

where it is perceived that Black migrant women need to be saved from their so-called misogynistic, backward, and violent cultures (Phillips, 2010, p.11). This chapter, therefore, argues that while acknowledging the gender-based violence that many Nigerian migrant women face, equal focus on their lived and contextualised capacity for resilience and resistance against IPV must be made. This chapter, therefore, reflects on how the women in this study showed agency and resilience against IPV and how their strategic act of resistance challenges the image of a 'typical non-agentic victim' often portrayed in the media and other public and private discourses. It, however, does not minimise their need for support, nor does it claim that Nigerian migrant women easily navigate the oppressive contexts within which they are embedded (Agarwal 1997; Mahmood 2001; Abraham 2007, pp. 253-271).

The chapter's theme of resistance and resilience will draw on Black feminist theory in its analysis. Nigerian women's location in the social hierarchy as Black women of colour impacted their help-seeking behaviours and their attitudes and perceptions toward formal resources that could help them escape the abuse. Therefore, their acts of resistance cannot be dissociated from the socio-structural oppression they face as migrant women of colour.

9.2. Safely Resisting Violence

Resistance and resilience run throughout the women's account of their experiences of IPV. They recognised the structural constraints that impacted their ability to report and escape the abuse and how these constraints overlapped in ways that influenced their decisions. With that recognition, findings revealed that the women adopted various strategies for coping and resisting the violence perpetrated against them and could provide articulate accounts of those acts of resistance. Strategies of resistance varied from one woman to another and were heavily determined by the type of abuse they faced and their perceptions of danger. From the women's narratives, safely resisting the violence meant engaging in false compliance, as overt acts of

resistance may be difficult to carry out in conditions of severe oppression and may exacerbate the violence against them (Cavanagh 2003). For example, in the excerpt below, Ade describes how she felt she would be at risk of serious harm if she openly challenged her husband and, therefore, resisted the abuse using a strategy that did not put her in more physical danger:

> The way my husband abused me was very physical. He was also very paranoid. I knew I would be in danger if I challenged him openly. Only a stupid person will face an angry bear alone. I always thought… 'What if he kills me one day? I am alone with this man, and my family and friends are not here with me in London.' So, I had to take care of the physical side of things first by not talking back or challenging him. With time, He became less angry and suspicious of me trying to leave him. So, with that calmness in the home, I was able to think clearly about how to leave the marriage. He used to still insult me all the time, but at least my teeth were intact [laughs]. I want to be alive to gather my evidence. (Ade, 29)

Ade's account suggests that acts of resistance do not necessarily mean physical resistance. She tactically used docility to protect herself from immediate physical harm and gain her husband's trust to deflect his attention from her plans to escape the violence. Her account also suggests that Nigerian migrant women may often need to weigh the pros and cons of their acts of resistance, constantly evaluating their options and limitations. Her strategy of assuming a passive or docile role may seem like she had given in to the violence; however, it was an act of resistance that enabled her to reduce the likelihood of being seriously harmed. Therefore, it may be common for many Nigerian migrant women to use acts of resistance against IPV that are not physical or confrontational due to concerns that a more aggressive strategy might exacerbate the abuse. This aligns with Agarwal's (1997:25) argument that the absence of overt protests by women against violence and oppression does not mean the 'absence of a questioning of inequality.' Lempert (1996) also argues that many women experiencing violence from their partners adopt various strategies to resist the violence, which may be a continuous empowerment process to help them regain their autonomy or sense of self. It is imperative that government policies and service providers not insist on physical acts of resistance as markers of agentive behaviour in women experiencing IPV (Phillips 2010). The

non-physical acts of resistance used by the women in this study refute Walker's (1979) theory on 'Battered Woman Syndrome,' which uses the notion of 'learned helplessness' to argue that abused women may seek self-defence only through violence against their abusers as a final resort for their survival and self-preservation. Dutton (1993) criticised this theory by stating that it places a stereotyped image of pathology on women who experience intimate violence, where they are positioned as so damaged from the abuse that they can only show strength and resistance through violence against their abusers. On the contrary, the Nigerian women in this study deployed various non-confrontational strategies continuously to leave their abusive marriages safely.

To safely resist IPV, findings also revealed that the women created physical and mental spaces where they had control and the ability to build a resilient sense of self. Giddens (1982:197) referred to these safe spaces as 'spaces of control,' and the women utilised them to resist the abuse safely even though they appeared seemingly powerless. For Joy, the fact that she never stopped thinking about a better, violence-free life gave her strength and made a significantly positive impact on her self-confidence:

> Everyone kept looking at me like I was crazy, but since none of them were coming out to help me, I had to help myself. My mind was my first weapon, and that weapon was to never stop thinking about a better life and how to get out of the situation I was in. Thinking like this gave me strength and hope to see how I could get help. All this time, he thought he could easily make me get deported… but that was also my second weapon. To let him think that I was stupid while I made plans that would free me without getting deported. (Joy, 38)

Here, Joy created a space in her mind where she felt she was in control of her life and believed she could navigate the hostile conditions of her marriage and her precarious immigration status. This had a knock-on effect on how she saw herself, as a soon-to-be free woman rather than as a damaged or helpless victim despite still living in the same home with her abusive husband. She identified the power asymmetries that shaped her experience of IPV as a migrant woman

and challenged how they conditioned her oppressive experience (Kasturirangan et al., 2004). This suggests that for many Nigerian migrant women in abusive relationships, although their homes may become a site where power is asserted and violence is normalised, it is also a site of resistance and resilience. Despite their relative isolation and structural constraints due to their precarious immigration status, many Nigerian women still develop micro-mechanisms to exercise their agency and resist violence and oppression.

9.3. Challenging Racialised Representations

In this study, an intersectional analysis of how race and gender shaped the experiences and responses of the women is necessary to attend to how Nigerian migrant women constantly challenge demeaning stereotypes as Black African women (Allard, 2005; Mgadmi, 2009). Mgadmi (2009), in her study on the racialised identities of Black women, posited that being part of a race that has been historically considered inferior meant that Black women constantly have to navigate and challenge discriminatory representations of Black womanhood, rooted in not only racism but also sexism (Mgadmi, 2009; Watson et al., 2012). Drawing on the participants' narratives, this study illustrates how Nigerian migrant women navigate stereotypical and metonymic representations of their identities to end the violence perpetrated against them. Findings revealed that the perpetrators, despite sharing the same racial and ethnic background with the participants, often pathologised their Black African cultural background or heritage, framing it as inferior to the Western culture and as symbols of primitiveness, uncivilisation, and non-conformity with white mainstream norms and values. From the women's point of view, the resort to such demeaning negative and racialised stereotypes is to exercise dominance and control over them. This study argues that in such contexts, derogatory negative stereotypes about Black womanhood are placed within patriarchal values in a way that doubles their oppression to obtain the maximum level of obedience and subservience from the oppressed party (Mgadmi, 2009). However, as evinced in the excerpt below, the women

were able to remodel such discriminatory representations to their benefit and use it as a starting point to exercise agency and show resistance against the abuse:

> He would not allow me to go anywhere alone. He didn't like it when I talked in public. He demanded that I let him do everything for me. He always used to say he was afraid I would spoil his image in the UK and embarrass him with my Nigerian accent. I thought he was foolish because, as far I could see, he had a Nigerian accent, but you know…whatever. I would hear him speaking on the phone with his friends, and they would laugh at me and mimic how I talked. I used to think to myself…then why did he not complain about how I talked, looked, or dressed when we were dating in Nigeria? But I knew he wanted me to feel like I needed him for everything, and I knew that I did not. (Mary-Jane, 40)

Mary-Jane's account of her experience shows how her husband was able to use racialised stereotypes in a gendered way to force his wife into subservience. Her account also highlights the impact of the Western/ non-Western binary on the identities of Black Africans, which for centuries have been framed within the colonial assumptions of a superior British Western culture and an inferior non-Western black culture (Taguieff, 1990; Baumann, 1999) The perpetrator, in this case, although also subject to the same racialised representations of 'blackness' and non-Western culture, however, taps into the unequal power dynamics present in such discriminatory conceptualisations and assumes the position of the superior identity or power for the sole purpose of establishing and maintaining dominance and control. Mannell (2022) argues that although a history of colonialism cannot be said to be the only driver of violence against women, its hierarchical system of exclusion and marginalisation of groups of people according to specific characteristics unique to them, such as gender, race, and ethnicity sanctioned unequal power structures that are often the root of heightened violence against women (Brown et al., 2022). Findings from this study showed that the internalisation of such colonial representations of inferiority and inequality serves gender and sexual violence. However, the women in this study recognised and challenged such positioning that assumed a discriminatory stance of power and as an excuse for coercive control. As seen in the excerpt

below, Ehis was able to perform individual and intentional acts she believed challenged negative stereotypes about her:

> He liked to embarrass me in front of his friends. When he is angry, and we argue, he says that he regrets marrying an African woman…that I was stupid and clueless. He gets very violent when I talk back and says I talk too much and too loudly like a man. He would say anything to make me feel like a nobody. He liked to call me 'bush woman' or 'she-goat' or 'imbecile' even in front of the children. These words hurt me and made me cry many times. At first, I thought talking back would help, but it didn't, so I told myself that I would no longer listen to or talk to him. I became very quiet and only spoke when necessary. Instead, I decided to speak to someone else who could help me get out of that hell. The anger at what he was doing to me gave me the courage I needed. And this was how I was finally able to speak to someone about the abuse at home. He told his family he had tamed me because I was now very quiet. What a joke! (Ehis, 33)

Ehis's account suggests that rather than attempting to alter the inequitable power dynamics in her marriage shaped by cultural racism and sexism, she used it as a base for her acts of resistance. This act of resistance demonstrates how silence became a significant part of her experience of oppression and resistance. Roberts (2000), in exploring this paradoxical nature of silence, argued that when silence is used to decentralise and destabilise power and privilege, it becomes an anti-subordination tool and a means of resisting oppression. Ehis used her silence of not talking back to her abusive husband but instead to someone who might help her to actively challenge the violence and abuse she was experiencing. Her experience highlights how many Nigerian migrant women may falsely comply with docility and submit to the exaggerated negative emphasis on their cultural identities as a protective cloak. One interesting aspect of using demeaning stereotypes to oppress women found in this study was that it could go both ways. In other words, while some men rejected the idea that their wives were what they believed to be 'uncivilised', others wanted their wives to be precisely that way as they believed they would be easier to control and manipulate. This was evidenced in the excerpt below from Esosa's account of her experience, where she stated that the identity of an uneducated and 'primitive' woman was precisely what her husband wanted and expected of her. She stated that

she noticed that her husband's source of frustration was that she was not behaving as an obedient migrant wife who was docile and unknowledgeable about the Western world. She stated that exercising agency became a catalyst for the violence she experienced:

> He told me he did not marry a white woman because white women called everything sexual abuse and domestic violence these days. He said that was why he purposely went back to Nigeria to marry a wife. Did he think I would not do that also? (Esosa, 38)

The realisation that her husband expected her not to be as agentive as other white women in Britain brought on a strategic way of thinking of keeping herself safe and creating the 'spaces of control' she needed to leave the abusive marriage. Her husband's desire that she adopt the exact stereotypical image of Black womanhood demonstrates how IPV and all other oppression against women are deeply rooted in power and control. Such discriminatory representations of Black migrant women underestimate their strengths and capacity for resistance and agency. In Esosa's case, the expectation that she embodies the image of a clueless African Black woman reflects a power struggle between Black men and Black women on the one hand, and the comparison with White women reflects a further power struggle between Black men and White women on the other hand. In such situations, the end goal for the perpetrator is finding the easiest possible way to be in control and ensuring complete and absolute obedience and subservience without resistance (Griffin, 2000). This highlights the shortcomings in conceptualising Black people's experiences of oppression as gender-neutral (Mgadmi, 2009; Collins, 2000), where the gendered experiences of Black women are blurred out or rendered invisible. Nigerian women's experiences of IPV and their resistance against it exist within multiple structures of oppression that overlap, and these structures of oppression do not exist in isolation. Black feminist researchers have called for an intersectional feminist analysis of gendered violence where all aspects of their identities are considered (Crenshaw 1991). Therefore, the experiences of the Nigerian women who participated in this study needed to be analysed based on the overlap of the multiple identities that shaped their experiences and acts

of resistance. Within this context, the women's ability to navigate racism, patriarchy, classicism, and the precariousness of their immigration status and adopt ways to strategically challenge the multiple unequal 'power play' in their daily lives as Black migrant women demonstrate remarkable resilience and exercise of their agency.

 Behavioural flexibility and adjustments also became a coping mechanism against the violence and oppression the women experienced. This adaptive coping method enables Nigerian migrant women to find a safe space physically and mentally to resist the abuse. This was demonstrated in Ivie's account below, where she believed that by adjusting her approach and adapting to the demands of her abusive husband, she was able to know precisely how to challenge it:

> He wanted me to be quiet and clueless so that he could control everything. I used to fight this, but then I decided to give him exactly what he wanted so that I could move his focus away from me. My mother told me not to annoy a hungry dog but to give him food so I could escape while he had eaten his fill and fallen asleep. My sister… in this situation, you have to be smart. Doing 'gra gra' (*rushing into things*) will not help because if my visa is cancelled, what leg will I stand on? If he knew I wanted to leave, he would report me to immigration and cancel my visa, so I had to be smart. (Ivie, 28)

This excerpt shows how women in abusive marriages can change their approach and be flexible when resisting violence. Her account shows an agentive thought process requiring her to use silence to secure her safety and legal immigration status. This excerpt also demonstrates how perpetrators often take women's ability to exercise their agency and make their own decisions for granted. Like Ivie, many Nigerian migrant women use such gendered assumptions and expectations of unwavering subservience and obedience to resist abuse. From Ivie's account, she did this by placating her abusive husband and doing what he wanted so that his attention could be diverted away from her.

Strategic silence continued to be used by the women in creative ways. Some participants believed that even when their husbands did not overtly stop them from going out or isolating them, silence about their plans to leave the abusive marriage was a way to resist the abuse. For

example, in Lati's statement below, she stated that although she revealed the abuse to her husband's family, she never announced her plans to escape the abuse as she believed that doing so would make them stop her from escaping the marriage:

> I know my husband, if he suspect that I want to leave, he will stop me by taking money, the internet and everything from me. He use to boast about knowing everything about London. He have already take my passport and use it to threaten me every day… that he will call the home office to deport me. So, I know what he can do. So, I seal my tongue but make up my mind to find a way to leave him. I let him think he is a god, and I was a wife fresh from Africa with no brain. I did everything for him. I let him abuse me, let him call me bad names. I let him focus on that while I focus on my plan. My dear… it is not everything you face like a bull. (Lati, 39)

Here, it was an essential part of the participant's strategy that her husband and his family knew nothing about her plans to leave the violent relationship by continuing to let them think about her in a subordinate way. She believed that doing otherwise would enable her husband to develop his own plans to stop her. This indicates that the threat of deportation as a tool for control and the physical, verbal and emotional violence often used by perpetrators of IPV are deliberate manifestations of the need to exercise power and dominance over them. In Lati's case, the fact that her husband could make plans to stop her from resisting the abuse and leaving his control indicates that perpetrators are often deliberate in their actions.

The women's narratives show that the belief that women must occupy a submissive and passive role in the face of abuse, sustained through culture and sometimes religion, is reductive and misleading in so many ways. Such reductive conceptualisation of women's agency has unfortunately been adopted not only by perpetrators of IPV but also by the criminal justice system and the media, where non-western women are implicitly or explicitly cast as the non-agentic 'other' and represented in a less favourable light compared to women from the dominant culture (Irving and Liu 2016). On the contrary, the women in this study demonstrated a high level of awareness about the cultural and structural constraints they faced in escaping the abuse, all of which they recognised as disempowering. Their understanding of, and

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resistance to these constraints at the micro and macro levels enabled them to strategically resist not only their abusers but also the marginalised spaces they occupied within the British social structure.

9.4. Redefining Relationships

The women interviewed actively performed intentional actions that minimised their exposure to the violence perpetrated against them. They were able to redefine their relationships with their husbands by adopting avoidance strategies to escape the abuse (Wood, Glass and Decker, 2019). For example, in the excerpt below, Tope stated that she began to picture her husband as a danger or risk she needed to avoid and overcome rather than as a safe, loving and caring partner:

> I avoided him whenever I could. I would try always to look busy. I told myself that he wouldn't say I had said something wrong and hit me if we had nothing to discuss. In my head, I stopped accepting him as my husband; he was no longer the person I fell in love with. I told myself I had to fight for my family, which was my son and me. I did this so that when it was time to report the abuse, I would not hold back because if I still cared for him, I knew I would. So, I stopped caring to avoid second thoughts about reporting and leaving the marriage. (Tope, 42)

From Tope's point of view, she had made a firm decision not only about physical space through avoidance but also drew a boundary line around whom she considered a part of her family or safety network. She focused on strategies that minimised her internal stress and risks of being harmed by rediscovering herself and her priorities and externally through seeking support (Ungar, 2015; López-Fuentes and Calvete, 2015). This indicates that by redefining her sense of family in a way that excluded the source of the violence she was experiencing (her husband), she forged a new sense of self that wanted to be strong enough to report the violence (Callaghan and Alexander, 2015; Korkmaz and Överlien, 2019). This gave her a new feeling of self-worth and enabled her to feel more in control of her life in ways that were protective for her and her son and to move forward from the abuse. This strategy of redefining relationships physically

and mentally was also demonstrated in the excerpt below by another participant, Kenny, who believed that by using the avoidance strategy, having accessed the risk involved, she would be able to escape the marriage:

> I heard that in this country, you must not make yourself homeless intentionally. I was worried that if I walked away myself, I would be unable to prove domestic abuse and get shelter. I had no one and no advice. So, I started avoiding him. I would not sleep in the same room. I knew that my husband was a traditional man and that having a son was important to him and his family, so I secretly took medicine to stop me from getting pregnant. At first, he would beat me and say all sorts of things when I refused to sleep with him, but I did not care. I treated him like a disease and would not go to church with him or anywhere else. I wanted him to throw me out. His family said all sorts of things. Eventually, he threw me out, and I used the evidence I had to apply for the domestic violence visa. I get annoyed when people think we allow the abuse because we are from Africa. I put my life in danger to escape that man. (Kenny, 33)

Having accessed the risk involved and with knowledge of her husband's temperament and personality, Kenny believed using a combination of cultural tenets and the avoidance strategy was enough to force her husband to throw her out of the house. In a situation of relative isolation and minimal viable options, she believed the avoidance strategy would help her escape the abuse and prove the violence she experienced. Although this method is a silent but confrontational strategy that even the participant believed placed her in danger, and understandably so, her account demonstrates how Nigerian women may go to great lengths to resist violence and oppression. By stating that she treated her husband like a disease she needed to be away from, she redefined her relationship with him in a way that meant she had the power within her to challenge him and not yield to his control. (Lyubomirsky, 2001; Merritt-Gray and Wuest, 1995). This account sadly brings to light the risky measures, which could cost lives, that migrant women adopt to escape IPV. Migrant women must be equipped with knowledge on how they can safely escape abuse without putting their lives in danger.

Findings from this study also revealed how Nigerian migrant women redefine their relationships with their abusive husbands by mentally flipping the 'coin' of control and

positioning themselves in the place of power occupied by their husbands. In Nkechi's account below, she stated that she started to see her husband as feeble, weak, and unintelligent. According to her, this gave her courage, and she was able to stop fearing him:

> I use to fear him. My husband control me and abuse me because he knew I was afraid of him. I knew that I have to overcome my fear of him, and I started thinking that I will see him the way he see me. So, when he call me bad names, I will also call him those bad name in my mind. After some time, I start to notice that I was not too much afraid of him anymore. I start to look at him like a fool and a coward. It is a woman body that he have power. I start to think that he will not have the boldness to insult a man the way he insult me. All these thoughts make me no longer afraid of him. I think it started to show on my face. I also start to think that he is not all that …you know. I become bold than I was before, and I notice that he too start to fear me somehow because he did not know what was on my mind, and I was looking stronger every day. (Nkechi, 42)

Here, Nkechi demonstrated a high level of agency in making a clear and determined decision to redefine her relationship with her husband, which made her feel more in control of the situation. In this way, she positioned herself as immensely powerful and as someone with a more confident sense of self. She drew strength from this positioning to resist the oppressed and subordinate space she had occupied in the marriage.

The women who had children reported that by positioning themselves as protectors of their children, they could fight back against the abuse. Eniola, a mother of two, stated that she could resist the violence by carrying on the sole responsibility of protecting her children's emotional and physical well-being.

> People think that children don't know anything. They know and understand that their mummy and daddy are fighting. I did not want this for my children, so I decided that I would be the one to protect them. I no longer thought of my husband as the one to protect our family. He was no longer important to me. I made sure I purposely changed the location to the bedroom when I noticed a quarrel was about to start so that the children would not watch. I sometimes send them to their room in a strict way so that they won't experience what is about to happen. They knew their dad was about to hit me, yell, or do something crazy, but I did not want them to see it. That was the best I could do in that situation. (Eniola, 32)

In this extract, Eniola's behaviour was an act of resistance where she positioned her children as active observers and herself as their protector. She believed that children were more aware of violence than they were given credit for and decided to mitigate the violence's impact on her children (Callaghan and Alexander, 2015). By moving her children away from spaces of conflict to spaces of relative safety, she was able to take on the responsibility of protecting the children and meeting their physical and emotional needs. In this way, she redefined the relationship with her husband by refusing to accept him as a father who could protect his children's welfare. In a similar situation, another participant, Omotola, a mother of one, described how she would manage her emotions so that her son would not think that the violence was normal and that she was a weak and passive recipient of such violence:

> I could not imagine letting my son grow up with his violent father. He would think it was normal to insult, yell or hit a woman. Thinking of these and the fear it would bring me if that happened gave me strength until I could leave the marriage. Sometimes I would cry, but if my son came into the room, I would pretend that something was in my eye. I never wanted him to see me cry so he won't feel scared or think I was weak. I figured that the best way to protect him was to ensure I did not make my husband angry. I did what made him happy, even if I hated it, so that there would not be violence that my son would witness. This way, I am protecting myself, protecting my son and buying time to figure out a way to leave his father. I was also ensuring I protect my son's future perception of women and how to treat them. (Omotola, 28)

Here, Omotola could secure a sense of power by controlling what her son experienced in the home, what she experienced, and how to ensure her son's emotional well-being in the present and future. This suggests that acts of resistance against violence and oppression can be for immediate or future gains (Abraham, 2007). It also indicates that Nigerian women who experience IPV deploy creative strategies to resist the abuse in ways that secure the safety of their children (Hollander, 2002).

9.5. Citizenship as a Resistance Strategy

Unlike the strategies of resistance that are geared towards ensuring protection from immediate harm in the face of violence, the women in this study also showed acts of resistance by changing the disadvantaged spaces they occupied both in terms of leaving their abusive marriages and keeping their legal immigration status (Erez et al., 2009; Kalunta-Crumpton, 2015; 2016). Findings showed that the women understood that their experiences differed from those of native-born women and could identify how the structural constraints posed by their precarious immigration status overlapped with other factors to shape their experiences of IPV and their resistance against it (Crenshaw, 1991). In the excerpt below, Ivie revealed that escaping the violence was not complete if she was unable to change her precarious immigration status:

> My husband was always threatening me with deportation. I knew I could not live like this, but I also knew it would be worse if I left because my visa was tied to him. So, I secretly started planning with my friend, who was helping me do research on how I could leave. She was able to help me get some money through donations from her church members… and I gave my passport and my daughter's passport to her to keep for me. One day, I left like I was going to buy milk and never returned. He started calling me to threaten me and said he would call social services to help collect his daughter from me. I told him I had already contacted them, and they were helping me apply for a new visa under the domestic violence law. I could feel his shock. (Ivie, 28)

For many Nigerian women like Ivie, their experiences of IPV as migrant women are located at the intersection of their insecure immigration status, which, along with other structures of oppression, impacts when and how they wish to leave the abusive relationship (Kalunta-Crumpton, 2015; Erez et al., 2009). Ivie resisted and challenged her oppressive status in her marriage and relationship with the state. This was done by making strategic plans to minimise the impact of her escape on a micro and macro level rather than leaving abruptly with no legal means to live in the UK. Ivie's experience not only indicates how adequate information about support for victims of IPV can empower women to confront IPV, but it also shows how patriarchy or how male power is manifested in their marriages did not solely shape the women's

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resistance to IPV (Crenshaw, 1991; Anitha, 2008). All the participants in this study confronted not only male supremacy and the power dynamics that went with it but also a cluster of overlapping constraints framed by the impact of their precarious immigration status. In light of this, findings from this study revealed that as a way of resisting IPV, the participants attached a very high significance to acquiring British citizenship, which was seen as a legal pathway to their well-being and safety. For example, in the excerpt below, Esosa revealed that acquiring her British citizenship was a way of securing her future after she escaped the abuse, and she did not leave her abusive husband until she had secured it:

> I did not stay because of culture…culture my foot. I stayed because I needed to have a plan. I knew I needed to protect myself after I left. It will be worse for me if I leave…where would I live? What if I need the hospital? I did not even have a bank account then because he did not let me open one. I heard there are not enough accommodation for women who run away from abuse. I knew to survive meant I had to get my permanent visa and citizenship, or I would have no choice but to go back to him. (Esosa, 38)

For Esosa, renewing her visa and obtaining her citizenship was essential to her escape plan. She recognised the precariousness of her current immigration status and how it could not protect her or provide her with the security she needed. This highlights the need to understand issues specific to migrant women that can significantly shape their experiences. This includes how their immigration status exposes them to multiplicative risks of experiencing abuse and the impact of institutional exclusions from social welfare on their help-seeking behaviours (Vatnar and Bjørkly, 2009; Ting and Panchanadeswaran, 2009). Another participant, Nkechi, revealed that waiting till she acquired her British citizenship was her only weapon in guaranteeing her well-being and safety and preventing her from becoming destitute (Bassel and Khan, 2021):

> My sister, I have thought about it well. In this country, if you no get passport, you cannot do anything. I notice that it is normal in this country to ask for your passport or visa every time. They see this first before they see you. Because of this, I feel like the violence was second, and my visa was first. So, to just leave like that was like jumping from fry pan to fire. That was why I said I will get this passport, or I will not go anywhere … so that I can be safe

and so that I can work and provide for myself…or else I will have no choice and go back to my husband. I know because it have happen before. I go back to my husband after two weeks because it was too hard. This time I tell myself that I will not leave without my passport… and to be a married woman to my husband, even though he abuse me all the time, was the cheapest way for me. (Nkechi, 42)

This excerpt highlights the bias in Britain's social and legal structure against migrants and how the increasing attention given to the issue of migration forces many Nigerian migrant women experiencing IPV to remain in the relationship (Magnusson et al., 2020; Katherine and Spijkerboer, 2007; Femi-Ajao, 2018). Immigration is increasingly being criminalised, and the migration of people into the UK is now seen as a 'problem' that needs to be fixed. This disproportionately affects marriage migrants like the participant, where escaping IPV can become seriously complicated for them as the approval of their legal status is dependent on collaboration with their abusers (Gill and Sharma, 2007). Gill and Sharma (2007) noted that a particular problem for migrant women leaving abusive relationships or marriages is the threat of poverty or destitution. This can be seen in Nkechi's reluctance to leave the marriage and may have been why she returned to her unsafe home after two weeks.

Although the significance attached to acquiring permanent residency or citizenship in the UK existed in a spectrum for the participants in the study and varied from one participant to another, findings revealed that it mainly centred around the opportunity to exercise their agency not only as women but also as migrant women. This means they agentively engaged with their social and personal positionalities in their decisions to leave or remain in abusive relationships (Adjei, 2018). In this context, acquiring citizenship in the face of abuse also becomes a form of gendered resistance encompassing the women's belief in their potential to change their situation and create a positive sense of self (Glenn, 2011; Abrego, 2019). In Ehis's account below, for example, she believed that acquiring British citizenship was the only way she could empower herself within and outside the UK:

I was not afraid of my husband coming after me after I left the house. He is a proud man. He will not do that… he uses his power on me only when I am under his roof. But I feared that poverty could come after me. I have nothing, even in Nigeria. For a woman like me, life is not easy. If I go back to Nigeria without anything… I will have no choice but to depend on another man for help, who may also abuse me, because that is just how the world works. That was why I stayed…so that I could get my passport and work, save and return home properly. Then, I can look any man in the eye. This power that they have, I want that power too. (Ehis, 33)

Her account suggests that citizenship for her was more about financial freedom. She wanted to escape her lower economic class and the vulnerabilities that came with it when she returned to Nigeria. For many migrant women, leaving a marital home, even an abusive one, often means cutting themselves off from the support structure provided by their husbands and sometimes their extended family. The inability to obtain social benefits due to the no recourse to public funds (NRPF) limitations on their visas may force them to remain, return or never leave (Anitha, 2008). Research has shown that IPV is associated with economic disadvantage, and economic or financial dependence has been identified as one of the primary difficulties or barriers for women experiencing IPV (Fawole, 2008; Adams et al., 2008; Erez, 2000). Therefore, for this participant, her decision to endure the abuse was to empower and create a legal and economic pathway out of her current and future situation. Her account also highlights common misconceptions about migrant women, that they never wish to return to their countries of origin. Such assumptions are sometimes couched in discriminatory and racialised stereotypical assumptions about the intentions of non-Western women, where it is assumed that they wish to stay in the Western 'civilised' world at all costs. Although many migrant women often indicate that they wish to remain in England, findings from this study revealed that their reasons sometimes depended on achieving specific goals before returning to their country of origin. This suggests that care should be taken in generalising the decisions of migrant women to leave or stay in their abusive marriages or the UK. In the excerpt below, Ade revealed that she misses her family and would love to leave the UK and return to Nigeria,

but that she first needed to achieve certain goals to empower herself and support her family

back in Nigeria:

> I needed that visa to protect my family and me from shame. A permanent visa
> would improve my status, and I could find good work to provide for myself
> and my extended family. People will also not talk much if I don't return as
> poor as when I left. (Ade, 29)

Like the previous participant, Ehis, Ade's personal and social positioning shaped her

experience and her acts of resistance (Adjei, 2018). She could agentively position herself in a

space where she could control her financial well-being and that of her family. Her account also

brings to light the notion of shame in the women's experiences of IPV and how it intersects

with their acts of resistance against IPV (Lansky, 1987; Tonsing and Barn, 2016). The

internalised feelings of bringing shame to themselves and their families overlapped with the

shame of not acquiring permanent residency or citizenship, especially as they were already

living in the UK. The shame of not acquiring permanent residence or citizenship, therefore,

had a tremendous impact on the stay or leave decisions of the participants (Beck et al., 2011).

This was highlighted in the account of Bimpe below:

> I am the first to travel out of Nigeria in my family. Everyone looks up to me.
> It would be a total disgrace for my family and me if, after all these years, I go
> back to Nigeria empty-handed, without a husband … Okay, they may
> understand that he was beating me and I had to leave… but without a British
> passport …that would be a failure on my part because becoming a British
> citizen would save me from many troubles. So, I had to think of this and
> stayed in the marriage until I was ready to leave. (Bimpe, 34)

This account suggests shame is a powerful emotion for Nigerian migrant women experiencing

IPV and pushes them to hide the abuse from others or ask for help until they feel ready to do

so (Beck et al., 2011). For Bimpe, overcoming the shame of leaving her marriage and not

having the ability to provide for herself and her family became a part of her resistance against

the IPV she experienced. Tangney et al. (2013) argue that shame evokes a negative sense of

self in terms of personal aspirations and the perceived expectations of others. This was evident

in Bimpe's perception of the shame of destitution on an individual and societal level. Findings

showed that participants' perceptions of shame highlight Scheff's (2003) study on how shame can be co-constructed through the interaction of different social contexts. Chase and Walker (2012) expand on this by arguing that when such context is poverty, particularly in a society or community where socioeconomic power is seen as a marker for success, shame can have a derisive and negative impact on people's lives. Therefore, the intersection between shame and poverty has been a point of analysis in numerous research (Chase and Walker, 2012; Tangney and Fisher, 1995; Tomlinson et al., 2008). These overlapping contexts of shame and poverty were highlighted in Irene's account below:

> People will say… 'That woman went to London, and now look at her; she cannot even take care of her parents'. This was why I wanted to make a name for myself so that I would not bring shame to my family. It is not about divorce; these days, who cares about that? But people will talk if I cannot send money home. Yes, they will talk about the fact that I left my husband and blame me for it, but they will talk more if I have nothing afterwards. I needed to change my visa to a permanent one to ensure that it would never happen, and if it meant I had to tolerate my husband and endure, I was ready to do it. It was very difficult, you know, allowing yourself to go through it, but they say no pain, no gain, right? (Irene, 36)

Irene's experience of shame was exacerbated by the fact that she had travelled to the West, which was believed to be a 'land of opportunities.' Her account also suggests an overlap between the shame of poverty or destitution and the shame of divorce, with divorce losing its significance if a woman is financially empowered. Therefore, she believed that the only way to avoid or mitigate the multiple arenas that shame could manifest in her overall lived experience of IPV was to retain respect by escaping the sense of disempowerment that comes with poverty by acquiring her British citizenship. Her account also indicates that family honour flowed from the personal success of Nigerian women rather than just the idea of being married. This means that shame was perceived more personally before flowing into a relational context. The women's acts of resistance also extended to the shame of being deported. The interviews showed that the fear of deportation was a powerful factor influencing the women's experiences of IPV and their resistance to it. It was mainly used as a primary tool of control by the

perpetrators. This overlapped with the other contexts within which shame emerged in the women's experiences. In the excerpt below, Mary-Jane revealed that her fear of deportation contributed to her resolve to challenge the abuse and ensure that she did not leave her marriage until she acquired a secure migrant status:

> Nigeria has changed. It is a modern country. There are a lot of single mothers in Lagos…so it was not only about being a married woman for me. You see, my father never wanted me to marry my husband. Imagine telling him I was being abused, deported and poor after marrying him and living in the UK. I could not bear that to happen. When I finally told my father everything, he still blamed me for marrying my husband, but at least he was happy that people would hear that I was now working in London and earning my own money. So, can you see how I was more interested in getting my passport? I needed it to save me from deportation, poverty and everything else that comes with it." (Mary-Jane, 40)

This account suggests that for some Nigerian migrant women, shame involves both a shrinking of self in relation to ideals about family life and also with regard to their social status or positioning (Adjei, 2018). It also demonstrates how shame is a social force that could make Nigerian migrant women feel stigmatised in society (Tonsing and Barn, 2017; Thaggard and Montayre, 2019). Acquiring British citizenship for Nigerian migrant women, even in the face of abuse, becomes a form of gendered resistance that they use to guarantee their well-being and elevate themselves in society. Interestingly, some participants believed that acquiring British citizenship also represented compensation for being abused and enduring the abuse. For example, in the excerpt below, Kenny stated that part of her resistance to the violence she experienced included getting something of benefit to her out of the marriage:

> He treated me so bad and yet threatened me with deportation...saying if I did not behave, I would go home with nothing. I made sure that did not happen. I told myself that after everything I had gone through with my husband, the lies, control, manipulation… I was not going to give him the satisfaction of seeing me with nothing to my name. People back home would not understand. I couldn't bring shame like that to my family and not be able to support them as their daughter living abroad, whether still married or not. So, I endured, and as soon as I got my papers, I went straight to the police with all the evidence I had gathered over the years. (Kenny, 33)

Kenny's account suggests that citizenship is perceived as a privilege and responsibility for many Nigerian women. For Kenny and many Nigerian migrant women like her, attaining British citizenship becomes more than a formality. The very high value placed on the attainment of British citizenship also represented a psychological pathway to safety and a source of security for the women, where their psychological need for safety, well-being and security is satisfied by the contextual event that is the source of their frustration (Chen et al. 2014; Chirkov et al., 2003). This was demonstrated in the excerpt below:

> It was not easy. I was depressed for many years, but I could not keep living like that. It would be a disgrace to my family if I left my husband and return to Nigeria empty-handed. So, I started thinking that at least if I waited to have my British passport, I would have gained something, and I could then leave. If I leave with a British passport, I can work on my own and can help my family when they need money. When they see I am not suffering, they will not be too angry and will forgive me for sure. (Bimpe, 34)

Bimpe believed that although her marriage was a source of her frustration, it was also how she could attain her pathway to safety. Her account shows that although remaining in the abusive marriage was not the safest option for her, the intersecting complexities of the structural factors that shaped her experience meant she had very limited options. It is crucial, therefore, that the broader framework within which IPV occurs must be understood to avoid reductive conceptualisations of the experiences of migrant women and the reasons why many do not leave. Many overlapping factors shape their help-seeking behaviour, and like this participant, many implicitly enter into a patriarchal bargain to trade silence about the abuse for the acquisition of their British citizenship. According to Kandiyotti (1988), who coined the term 'patriarchal bargain,' women may employ different strategies and coping mechanisms in the face of oppression or abuse to maximise their security and optimise their life options. Optimising their life options was a major act of resistance for the women who participated in the study. In the excerpt below, Irene also revealed that the need to exercise her agency freely

and guarantee her economic freedom surpassed her pain. She revealed how she received

encouragement from her friend to endure the abuse at all costs until she gained her citizenship:

> My best friend in Nigeria told me to try and endure it and not to make any 'yeye' (rash) decisions as it would then be me against the law, in addition to my husband. She told me it was better for me to be able to work legally and support myself, or else I would be worse off in the UK and in Nigeria with no money. I thought about it; I had nothing to my name, and my parents did not have enough money. I endured the abuse until I could escape when I got a better visa (indefinite leave to remain). I was very sweet and submissive and did not report it. (Irene, 36)

Here, silence was once again used as an act of resistance, but this time, it went beyond securing

her immediate safety to gaining the benefits she believed she would attain from acquiring her

British citizenship. This suggests that the perception of citizenship by migrant women is a fluid,

continual process in terms of how it incorporates the totality of migrant women's social, cultural

and political interactions (Jackson, 2015; Ho, 2009). For the women in this study, citizenship

involved a sense of belonging but in a much more dynamic context than mere geographical

and political boundaries (Jackson, 2015; Frosh, 2001; Isin, 2002). Citizenship as a resistant

strategy and safety net involved a consideration of their individual situatedness and the

subjective interconnected meanings they each gave to their social realities.

Overall, the women's narratives reveal that although Nigerian women may be hindered by

constraints on the micro and macro level created by the intersection of cultural and structural

inequalities and understand the difficulty in challenging the gendered status quo, they continue

to construct new resistant ideas that challenge the conventional.

9.6. Conclusion

This chapter explored Nigerian women's acts of resilience and the voices they each give to

their own experiences of resisting IPV. It highlighted how the women's experiences of IPV

intertwined with their resistance strategies and sense of resilience. Contrary to popular

stereotypical assumptions about migrant women's ability to exercise agency, they can make

sense of the violence and the structural constraints that overlap to shape their experiences. This chapter has argued that it is crucial that adequate attention be given to African migrant women's capacity to make meaning of their IPV experiences and have a sense of agency and resistance to it rather than continuously placing them in a space of compulsory victimhood. This by no means underestimates their experiences and the impact of IPV on their well-being; however, limiting their experiences to oppression and violence alone underestimates their strength and ability to find ways to cope even in the face of relative isolation and very limited options.

The general consciousness that African migrants are embedded within a culture that is primitive, uncivilised, and non-Western is the assumption that many Nigerian migrant women cannot resist the abuse (Narayan, 1997). The women's account of their resistance refutes such racialised assumptions set against a backdrop of discrimination that overlooks how IPV is inextricably bound up with other systems of inequalities that marginalise women in society (Razack, 2008). Therefore, Nigerian women's responses to IPV are mediated through inequitable power structures and systems of inequality that intersect in complex ways (Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005). The view that, as women from a non-western culture, they are non-agentic victims and uphold unwavering adherence to cultural patriarchal ideologies that require their silence and submissiveness in the face of oppression was, therefore, challenged. (Abraham, 2002; Thiara and Gill, 2012). Considering these issues created by the interconnectedness of the multiplicative identities of the women allows a more in-depth understanding of how it shapes their experiences of IPV and resistance to it.

<div align="center">**CHAPTER TEN**</div>

<div align="center">**BARRIERS TO HELP-SEEKING**</div>

> If I can have healthcare, shelter and other services after leaving my husband, even
> if it is temporary until I find my feet … I will have the confidence to report him. If
> only they can pity us and do that for us, it will make a lot of difference (Tope, 42)

10.1. Introduction

This chapter examines the help-seeking behaviours of Nigerian migrant women, the overlapping tensions between the barriers they face, and the structural constraints created by the current UK immigration and welfare policy. Research has shown that the help-seeking process involves both the cognitive process of deciding whether or not to seek help from IPV, as well as the actual ability to gain access to and benefit from the help they require (Hyman et al., 2009; Satyen et al., 2018; Liang et al., 2005). This is shaped by multiple structural factors, including precarious immigration status, knowledge of their rights, economic barriers, and the availability of inclusive and culturally competent help (Bhuyan and Senturia, 2005). Using an intersectional lens, this chapter analyses how these multiple overlapping factors impacted the help-seeking behaviour of the Nigerian migrant women who participated in this study (Crenshaw, 1991; Pierce and Elisme, 1997). In doing so, it draws on Liang et al. (2005) three-stage classification to conceptualise the help-seeking behaviour of the participants. These are recognising and defining the violence, deciding to seek help and selecting the help-seeking resource or provider. This three-stage process is by no means fixed, as the help-seeking behaviours of Nigerian migrant women are uniquely diverse (Barrios et al., 2020).

10.2. Recognising and Defining the Violence

i. **Type of Abuse**

The findings from the interviews revealed that the type of abuse experienced influenced the nature of the women's help-seeking. This is in line with results from a 2016 study using data from the 2013 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey, which revealed that the type of violence experienced by Nigerian women is a significant predictor of how they seek help from abuse (Tenkorang, Sedziafa and Owusu, 2016). In a cultural context, Folami (2013) noted that within the Nigerian community, certain forms of abuse, such as sexual and verbal abuse, are normalised as a manifestation of a man's dominance over his wife. As a result, many women are reluctant to report such abuse for fear of being criticised for speaking against a widely accepted cultural norm. The consequence of this, according to Nwabunike and Tenkorang, is that physical violence is the one almost ever reported compared to other forms of gendered violence, but this did not, however, mean that it was not recognised as abuse (Bhuyan and Senturia, 2005).

In this study, most participants did not seek help for the non-physical form of abuse but only reached out for help from informal sources when it became physical. They, however, revealed that they did not report some of the violence they experienced, mainly due to constantly weighing the outcome of such decisions with the vulnerabilities that came with their precarious immigration status. This was highlighted in Eniola's narrative:

> Of course, I knew I was being abused, but I had to pick my battles. 'If I report this, what will come out of it?' This was the question I used to always ask myself at that time. To me, 'out there' was not attractive because of my spouse visa and the no access to the benefits thing. So, would it be better for me and my children if I delayed leaving a little bit? Just for a while until my papers changed. After the abuse, and I am free, what next? Can I manage on my own with two children? What about childcare? I had to think like this and manage the situation. It was like writing an exam and trying to figure out the right answer to the difficult questions. (Eniola, 34)

Eniola's account reveals how individual, relational and welfare concerns could prevent migrant women from leaving abusive relationships despite understanding the abusive situation. Her

narrative indicates that recognising the abuse did not necessarily mean migrant women could leave immediately, mainly due to specific constraints or concerns that hindered them. This draws attention to how factors other than the violence experienced may also play a powerful role in migrant women's decision to seek help, such as concerns about the mental well-being of their children (Liang et al., 2005). This indicates that the multidimensionality of the help-seeking process flows from the equally multidimensional nature of IPV (Logan et al., 2006; Flicker et al., 2011). Of note in Eniola's narrative was that she made no mention of the cultural context of reporting or not reporting certain types of abuse, as mentioned earlier. Her desire to change her legal status by acquiring her 'papers' through permanent residency or citizenship seemed to supersede any fear of criticism from the Nigerian community. In this case, help-seeking also adopts legal pathways as a way out of the abuse. This indicates that despite a plethora of research finding cultural norms as a definite barrier to the help-seeking behaviours of Nigerian migrant women, researchers must approach this with an open mind, as the influence of cultural factors on behavioural intention is fluid and constantly evolving and could overlap with other factors such as their legal consciousness, as was seen in Eniola's case (Arisi and Oromareghake, 2011; Bhuyan and Senturia, 2005; Tominson, 2020; Igbolekwu et al., 2021). However, despite a clear legal strategy, culture also played an intertwined role as a form of control in the women's experiences. For example, due to the disquiet around sexual abuse in the Nigerian community, the shame and embarrassment over the details of sexual abuse and the belief that victims would be blamed made the participants reluctant to report the abuse (Folami, 2013; Flicker et al., 2011). This was seen in Ade's narrative below:

> My ex-husband told me that marriage meant he had a right over my body. He even went as far as saying he had double rights since we had both traditional and court weddings. I had never heard such nonsense before!... But everyone in my community believes that your husband is the head of your home and your body. And sexual abuse… it is very personal. I feel ashamed even thinking about it, not to talk of telling someone else. … and they always blame the woman anyway, so why bother? You cannot even say some words out loud, they will call you an ashawo (prostitute). I would rather keep quiet

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> than tell another person what he was doing to me in the bedroom. So, I decided to count it as my loss and my secret… and reported the other abuse when it was time. (Ade, 29)

Ade's account of her experience reveals how gender norms and patriarchal ideologies condition sexual violence and women's perception of sexual violence, which may influence their decisions on whether to seek help. Ade's relationship with sexual abuse was shaped by the cultural context within which it was embedded. Her narrative reveals that although she understood and disagreed with the defined gendered expectations regarding sexual relations in a marriage in the Nigerian community, where a husband is granted complete rights and control over his wife's body, and it is culturally acceptable and expected for a wife never to refuse her husband sex, she nonetheless decided not to report it. Mahoney (1999) argued that within this context, women who experience sexual abuse from their husbands are significantly less likely to seek help than women who experience such abuse from strangers. Ade's decision to remain quiet regarding the sexual abuse she experienced from her husband suggests that the level of disquiet around this form of abuse and the likely consequence of women being blamed or the community showing indifference to it due to its cultural acceptability influenced her decision not to seek help for the abuse within her community (Tekorang, 2013; Folami, 2013; Nwabunike and Tenkorang 2015; Tenkorang et al., 2016).

ii. **Marital Residence**

In all societies, there are norms about the residence patterns of marital relationships, which vary from society to society. Muckle and Gonzalez (2022) stated that these family arrangements, based on marriage or descent, form the foundation of how organisations are organised. Due to its colonial past, neolocal marital residence patterns or family arrangements are widely practised in the Nigerian community, where a man and a woman establish their residence away from family members (Smith, 2007, 2001; Okonjo, 1992). Unlike patrilocality practised in other cultural groups, where a married couple can reside with or near the husband's

family or parents, in the Nigerian culture, this is often looked down upon and is interpreted as a man's failure to become independent of his parents or family members (Smith, 2014). The emphasis is on the primacy of the individual couple as opposed to kinship and community. However, women or wives are often expected to reside with their husbands anywhere they choose. In most cases, they are excluded from making any contributions or decision-making in this regard. Such patriarchal norms that govern neolocal patterns of marital residence shaped the help-seeking behaviour of the participants in various ways. For example, the isolation from moving away from entire family members and the support network of friends determined the women's ability to seek help. It shaped how they responded to the abuse. It also shaped their sense of safety and the strategies they adopted in coping with the abuse, as they were often alone with their husbands. Mary-Jane described her experience in this regard:

> The loneliness was terrible. At first, I thought that maybe it was this country… and that they did not really relate with one another like we do back home …you know where everyone shares food and know the other person's business. But I later started to realise that it was not that but the fact that it was just me and my husband in the home. And I was at his mercy. So many times, I used to fear that if he killed me, no one would know where I was. So, I could not easily report it because that would make him angrier. It was also easier for him to lie to our folks back home because how would they confirm whether it is true or not? In fact, he used the lies to his advantage because really…he knew the Home Office would not give them visas as family members … unless they applied as visitors. So, this made the abuse worse…I was really alone and shut off from the world, and since there was no way our families could verify the actual truth, I stopped talking about the abuse with them. (Mary-Jane, 40)

Here, Mary-Jane described how her family unit was the only sense of community she had in the UK, which intensified her experience of IPV and prevented her from accessing support from her family and friends. Her precarious immigration status also overlapped with her social isolation, as her visas did not entitle her to bring any other family members into the UK. This confirms Hussain's (2019) findings on the impact of social isolation in migrant women's experiences of intimate violence, where it was argued that social isolation due to gendered family structures not only makes victims unable to access their family networks but also makes

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it difficult for them to create new ones after migrating. In the context of Mary-Jane's experience, her social isolation was linked to her marital family arrangement or residence, which sanctioned the power dynamic that placed her husband in a position of uninterrupted control over her autonomy and enabled him to easily perpetrate the IPV she experienced (De Munck et al., 2022). This limited her help-seeking options from informal sources, and the structural barriers she faced due to her immigration status further complicated her help-seeking experience from the state. Another participant, Kenny, also revealed how she recognised the way the nature of her marital residence enabled the violence she experienced and prevented her from seeking help:

> He was suffocating and watched my every move. It was like it was only me and him in the entire world. He controlled what I wore, who I spoke to and many other things. His mantra was I must not embarrass him in front of others. He would get very angry if I told our families our problems. He said I was trying to make him look less than a man. He said he would kill me if I embarrassed him or make people think he had no control over his household. What could I do, everyone was far away from us, so I had to obey. This head of the family thing is a status thing. It has nothing to do with love. It is to show off to other men, to your family and to the world. (Kenny, 33)

Kenny's account also demonstrates how the neolocal residence structure that defined her marriage enabled the uninterrupted perpetration of violence against her. From her account, an apparent disparity in power between her and her husband, which flowed from the meaning attached to their marital arrangement, was evident. On a micro level, this placed her husband in an emboldened position of power that is too often refreshed by the structural inequalities Nigerian migrant women face due to their precarious immigration status on the macro level. This suggests that while Nigerian men continue to be empowered by the multiple overlapping structures that enable them to oppress their wives, the women, on the other hand, are also disempowered by the same multiple power structures. Therefore, the women's ability to report the IPV they were experiencing was hindered in multiple ways, making it extremely difficult to leave the abusive marriage.

The interviews also revealed that as the neolocal residence pattern was tied to a status symbol of independence and dominance for the men, the women were often shamed and blamed by their informal networks and the Nigerian community if they disrupted the process. In such cases, when women report their husband's behaviours, it is seen as threatening his status as the head of the home. Again, this was seen as a cultural pressure to be silent by the participants and formed a barrier to help-seeking. This was revealed in the excerpt below by Ivie:

> His family blamed me. They said I wanted to break the home and shame my husband because I refused to let him be the head of the family. My father-in-law told me that there could only be one head in the family, and it could never be me. He said this was how nature made it and our ancestors blessed it. They blamed me for wanting to embarrass him in front of his friends by making him cook and clean for himself at his age. No one talked about me at all…. or referred to my swollen lip….and I really hate that ancestor argument. There is always an excuse for the way they treat us women. They should just stop…what ancestors? [kisses teeth]. (Ivie, 28)

Ivie's account demonstrates how the neolocal pattern of marital residence may force women to submit to the established gender order. In Ivie's case, disclosing the abuse to her informal source was considered a betrayal of her husband. This means that Ivie was expected to embrace her subjugated position in the home by managing the family unit as well as her husband's status in society. This objectifies women as properties of their husbands and normalises the IPV perpetrated against them. Furthermore, like in Ivie's narrative, the insistence that women must not embarrass their husbands by not reporting their behaviour and supposedly undermining their position as the head of the home suggests the prioritisation of a man's wellbeing over that of his wife (Natarajan, 304; Hussain, 2019). This consequently creates the problem of underreporting among Nigerian migrant women, and according to Ayyub (2000), it also normalises gender inequality and forces women to embrace their subordination at the cost of their own needs and well-being.

10.3. Making the Decision to Seek Help

i. Legislative Disadvantages

Since the hostile environment immigration policy was introduced in 2012, migrant women entering the UK have been exposed to stricter immigration controls and institutional exclusions. This created a culture of violence against them in which they remained trapped (Raj and Silverman, 2002). Marriage migration constitutes one of the largest categories of migrant settlement in the UK. For migrant women in this category, their dependent visa status means they bear the gendered impact of the post-migration process. For migrant women under the Spouse visa category, their spouses have complete control over their legal status upon entry into the UK and in the subsequent renewal process of their visas. This exposes them to IPV and shapes their lived experiences within the UK's social structure. Calvo (1997) compares this legal dependency to the doctrine of coverture, which gives a husband total control over his wife and her children, including her property, and prevents her from entering into an agreement with her husband or others. Like the doctrine of coverture, for Nigerian migrant women, the legal and economic dependency placed on their sponsoring spouses to guarantee the legality of their residency in Britain reproduces gender inequality and sanctions immigration-specific ways men can oppress and control their wives (Erez, 2000; Salcido and Adelman, 2004; Raj and Silverman, 2002). In the narrative below, Ehis described how her frustration with the requirements of her Spouse visa prevented her from seeking help from the IPV she experienced:

> His favourite words were… 'All I need is a phone call to the Home Office, and it is all over for you'. The sad thing was that this was totally true. It would really be all over for me; I would not be able to get help to rent, eat and so on, and I would be deported. Even though what he was doing to me was wrong, it was still true that my visa gave my husband total control over me…and over my sanity too, and the worst part was that it felt like my visa made it legal in a way. It is a terrible way to live. I wanted to just go back home, but it is complicated when you have children. (Ehis, 33)

The threat of deportation continues to be an ever-present tool of control used by abusive men against their wives (Hass et al., 2000). Ehis's account indicates that she understood the precarity of her migrant status in terms of how it prevented her from accessing services and reinforced patriarchal ideologies that enabled her oppression and victimisation. Her account also suggests that the threat of deportation also significantly impacts documented migrant women's experiences and responses to IPV due to the precarity of their temporary visa status (WHO, 2012; Reina et al., 2013). Ehis's account highlights how her visa created a feeling of powerlessness for her, which, combined with the difficulties in navigating other influences and barriers, discouraged her from seeking help. This suggests that the policy has failed to consider the reality of migrant women's experiences against multiple intersecting axes of oppression that prevent them from easily leaving abusive relationships. Lati's account further illustrates this:

> This name that we have… immigrant…it is very shameful and very harsh. Before I was thinking it mean foreigner, but now I know that it mean another thing. It is very bad because it mark you everywhere you go. Is like saying… 'You are nothin' or 'we don't care'. Like another way to say, 'shoo or go away'. It give everybody power over you. Even strangers too. Landlord, bank, everybody ask for visa first before anything. So, no point reporting my husband to them. It is waste of time and will expose you even more as the person that have no power in their country. For a woman, this is very bad. (Lati, 39)

Like the account of the previous participant, Lati's narrative demonstrates a deep awareness of the precarious position that defined her legal status in the UK. She identified the macro-level factors that shaped her experiences of IPV and described how her help-seeking behaviour depended not only on her individual decision-making abilities but was a complex matrix of restrictive social options shaped by the UK's immigration policy (Bhabia, 2012). The impact of cultural anxieties and anti-immigration sentiments on the help-seeking behaviours of migrant women was also highlighted, which Lati acknowledged without isolating its gendered implications. This correlates with Bhabia's (2012) argument that restrictive border controls

aimed at 'protecting' the border are not gender neutral but, in fact, exacerbate gendered migrant abuse and complicate their abilities to escape IPV (Wertheimer, 1987). For this reason, many Nigerian migrant women fear formal help-seeking sources of help and interference due to their fragile social negotiating positions. They also fear risking responses from the state that are at best considered retaliatory for breaching the immigration rules on spouse visas without acknowledging how such visas and the No Recourse to Public Fund (NRPF) rule disproportionately affect them (Voolma, 2018).

All the participants revealed that they were aware of the NRPF rule either by reading about it from formal sources, e.g., the internet or books, or from informal sources of information within the Nigerian community. Some participants revealed that despite other structural factors such as culture, gender and race, they would feel more confident reporting the abuse if the NRPF rule was not present in their visas. Tope revealed:

> If I can have healthcare, shelter and other services after leaving my husband, even if it is temporary until I find my feet, … and even if my current spouse visa is tied to him or what my culture says, I will have the confidence to report him. I will be bold to do so. It will be like a chance to survive on my own without leaning on my husband. If only they can pity us and do that for us, it will make a lot of difference (Tope, 42)

Tope's narrative highlights how the UK's migration policy forces migrant women into a multiple state of dependency on their abusive husbands. For example, in addition to the legal dependence of women on their abusive spouses, many are also faced with socio-economic dependence on their husbands regardless of their skill set (Kiamanesh and Hague, 2019). According to Omotola, this negatively impacts their sense of dignity and respect:

> I could not believe I was in that position, reduced to nothing but a body…like just flesh and bones, because I was not even allowed to speak my mind. I am educated and have a law degree from the University of Lagos, but there I was, at the beck and call of another human in London…like a dog or a slave… trapped. My husband would not even allow me to work. It was very sad and tiring. Whenever I raised it up with my husband… you know… that I was feeling ashamed because I could not do anything with my degree, or I had no

say in the home. He would raise his hand up and say he was innocent, and it was my visa's fault, and I was trying to frame him as a bad person. But to me, they were both ruining my life. So, reporting my husband was like reporting a child to his beloved mother. We all know whose side she would take. (Omotola, 28)

Research has shown how a majority of migrant women are unable to work despite their Spouse visas allowing them to or despite having the skill set to do so (Kiamanesh and Hague, 2019). Like in the case of Omotola above, this is often tied to the control and manipulation of their abusive husbands, who may or may not allow them to gain employment (Ayuub, 2000). Furthermore, Kiamanesh and Hague (2019) have argued that those who can work are often employed in very low-paid jobs, sometimes compounded by racial and gender discrimination. Therefore, the women's narratives show how the NRPF rule creates a legal precariousness that prevents them from accessing services and exercising their autonomy in ways that can enable them to escape abuse.

ii. **Racial Stereotypes and Discrimination**

Previous research has explored the impact of structural racism on the help-seeking behaviour of Black migrant women experiencing IPV (Femi-Ajao et al., 2018; Satyen et al., 2019; Hulley et al., 2022). Panchanadeswaran (2009) noted that Black and ethnic minority women face additional barriers due to racial discrimination. As migrant women from sub-Saharan Africa, all the participants revealed that they worried about racial discrimination and insensitive and discriminatory treatment from the police and service providers if they reported the abuse. They added that their fear and distrust of the police and other formal sources of help was two-fold and stemmed from racism on one part and the duty of police officers to report the legal status of victims of IPV to the Home Office on the other. Bimpe explained:

A migrant, and a black one at that… who is making too much noise? (sigh). It is like asking for trouble. That was how I saw it. As Black people, we say don't bother them, and they don't bother us. I hear all the stories, and I believe them. These days, racism is done gently, but it is still there. Look, I am not saying all white people are racist. I just did not want to meet the one who was,

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especially in the situation I was in and in my state of mind. I did not want to risk it because racism is painful, and what is the point anyway if you know that they may treat you differently? What is the point if you know that your visa will be an issue? I just felt it was better not to go there, abeg (please). (Bimpe, 34)

Bimpe's narrative suggests that calling the police meant that she was likely to face discrimination based on her race. Her narrative highlights how racism interacts with Black migrant women's willingness to seek help in a society with a majority white population (Few, 2005). According to Alexander (2010), the sentiments and distrust about the police by members of the Black community are mainly due to the historical discriminatory treatment of Black people by the police and other institutional authorities. This consequently deterred Bimpe and the other women in this study from seeking police assistance for the IPV they experienced, and according to Monterrosa (2019), it also results in many Black women only calling the police in very life-threatening situations where it might be too late. Of note in Bimpe's narrative was that she did not state that she had a personal experience of racial discrimination from police officers or service providers as a victim of IPV. Yet, she had a heightened awareness of the impact of structural racism on Black migrant women's lives. This highlights the extent to which the anxieties and trauma associated with racism directly and indirectly impact Black migrant women's sense of belonging, including their help-seeking behaviours. Monterrrosa (2019) noted that such anxieties stem from a past and present history of slavery, colonisation and discrimination against Black communities, resulting in a deep distrust that prevents Black women from seeking help from formal sources. For example, in the excerpt below, Irene describes how her distrust of the police and service providers resulted in her relying on informal sources of help as an alternative to the police:

This police matter is complicated. I had to think about it well. If they come, they would arrest my husband because, you know, they think he is a big, bad Black guy, and then they treat me funny because I am the Black migrant who may not even understand English or not have her papers. You know, these things hang in the air, waiting to drop on any Black person. But I was not

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protecting my husband from getting arrested for the abuse. I was protecting him from getting arrested because of racism. They are two different things. No need to complicate what is already going on in my life. So, it was better to speak to my friend in Nigeria. Even though she could not come to the UK, she helped me and gave me strength. I am forever grateful to her. (Irene, 36)

Irene's narrative illustrates a shared understanding of the impact of racial stereotypes in the lives of not just Black women but Black people all over. Irene's comment about her husband being perceived as the big, bad, Black guy reveals that despite her grievances against her husband, she was still willing to protect him from the institutional racism Black men often experience (Monterrosa, 2019). Irene's account also reveals how she chose her informal source over the police and other formal sources of help. Studies have shown that Black women in abusive relationships often prefer to seek support from other Black women, with some going on to live in Black neighbourhoods after the abuse (Few, 2005; Taylor, 2005; Monterrosa, 2019; Hulley et al., 2022). In the same light, this study's participants revealed that they sought emotional support from other Black women whenever possible. According to them, this was an alternative to going to the police or other services, including mental health services and services that offer migration advice, as they were concerned that they might also act based on racial and cultural assumptions. Kenny explained:

He did not let me go out, but whenever I had the chance, I would speak to my church members who were also going through the same situation. As Black women, we must support another in this country. We are far from home. It is not the time to be acting funny because of irrelevant things. We had to help each other overcome this problem of immigration and the abuse. This really helped me a lot, and we gave each other strength. I remember when I was down…like really depressed…they helped me a lot. The success of one of us to be able to escape the abuse was a success for us all. It was nice. This was enough for me until I left the marriage. I did not have to worry about any new problem like discrimination and all that. It is just additional stress. (Kenny, 33)

When asked if she would have considered speaking to a white woman, she responded:

No. I honestly don't have anything against them; after all, we are all women, but we are also different. At that time, we were desperate, and it was just better to be with your kind because we experienced the same thing.

> Like …racism and all. I think that if a white woman was in our group, she would feel left out or awkward because of the things we talk about.

Kenny's narrative shows how a shared understanding of the social discrimination Black women regularly experience can shape their help-seeking behaviours. Monteressa (2019) explained that this is because when Black women connect emotionally with other Black women who share the same oppression, it allows them to be vulnerable amongst one another without judgement and empower one another. Few (2005) elaborated on this by stating that forming close kinship ties and support was seen by Black women as a coping mechanism and a way of resisting abuse. From the women's narratives, this was particularly important for them as it gave them a sense of belonging and resilience despite the social exclusion and racial prejudice they faced. Therefore, their help-seeking behaviours were intricately linked to how Black minorities are regarded and treated in Britain.

The interviews also revealed that stigmatising stereotypical representations of Black womanhood influenced their responses from institutional sources. Research has shown that negative stereotypes about Black women are either based on personal biases or as an ideological tool of oppression that justifies domination and control over others (Gelman and Taylor, 2000; Mahalingham, 2003). This affected how the women accessed and trusted service providers, including domestic violence organisations. According to Joy:

> When I started talking to social workers, the way they talked was like our Nigerian culture made me stay in the marriage even though my husband was violent. Even when I try to explain myself, the lady will say something like, I should calm down. I wasn't even doing anything or shouting. This was after I left the marriage and was trying to get help. Can you see why I did not bother contacting them when I was in the marriage? They will not believe me or take me seriously. See, what a Black woman like me understands is different from what a white woman understands. So, I had to be careful. (Joy, 38)

Joy's narrative indicates that Black women are often saddled with negative dual stereotypes that portray them as generally overly aggressive or domineering compared to white women on

the one hand, but passive, submissive and allowing violence from their Black male partners due to their culture, on the hand (Gondolf, 1998; Ammons, 1995). Joy's narrative revealed that she was caught between such dual-racialised stereotypes, making her uncomfortable dealing with and trusting the social workers. This suggests that discrimination from service providers and the criminal justice system may compromise the help-seeking opportunities and decisions of Nigerian migrant women.

iii. **Linguistic Discrimination and Accent Prejudice.**

Some participants revealed that even though English is the official language in Nigeria, they worried about being discriminated against based on their non-British accents. This was tied with the actual or perceived fear of discrimination based on their race or culture. It is well established in the literature on IPV that language barriers result in seeking help for abuse, a daunting prospect for migrant women (Burman et al., 2004). However, migrant women in Britain are not homogenous, and their experiences with IPV are diverse. Within this context, language may not be a barrier for some migrant women. However, they may still face barriers to help-seeking, especially from service providers, due to how they speak English. This can take the form of providing sub-standard service or being dismissive or hostile towards victims and failing to provide equal and inclusive service to those who approach them for help. This form of non-western accent bias or discrimination has been defined by Robert et al. (2014) as the linguistic aspect of racial discrimination. For migrant women from non-Western cultures escaping abuse, this may make them less likely to report the abuse and intensify the feeling of being trapped in a hostile system that perpetuates the cycle of abuse. Again, Joy's account of her experiences with help-seeking demonstrates this:

> I hated every single moment the police and social workers were involved in my marriage. I should trust them, but they always treated me different. You can feel it even though they don't say it out loud. Even the police asked if I wanted an interpreter. How could I when I was speaking to them in English? The discrimination was so thick that I could cut it with a knife. If my husband

had stripped me of my confidence, they finished the job. I wished I had left without involving them. My culture, accent and colour were at the front, and my feelings and everything else was pushed to the back…. But because they were helping me somehow, I kept quiet and only preferred to email or text than to speak. Because of this, I also did not have the confidence to tell them everything that happened in the marriage. (Joy, 38)

Due to the impact of globalisation, the migration process has become more diverse, thus making English a universal and dominant language and one that is constantly evolving. Joy's narrative shows how service providers may not have embraced the linguistic diversity in the English language and may negatively treat migrants who may speak English differently from what is considered the British 'standard'. This discrimination based on accent, even when language is not a barrier, led to Joy underreporting and providing an incomplete account of her experience. Also, that Joy was asked if she wanted an interpreter despite interacting in English highlights the problem of the universalisation of migrant women's experiences of IPV by service providers, where it is assumed that all migrant women's experiences of violence and abuse are the same and thus interventions must equally be the same. The participants in this study, for example, were from a country formally under the British colony. Therefore, there was minimal, and in most cases, no language barrier between them and service providers. However, the differences in accent and speech patterns fed into racial and negative stereotypes about people from certain races or nationalities and shaped their willingness to engage with the service providers they contacted. Such overemphasis on linguistic and cultural differences not only disempowers victims, as seen in Joy's account but also overlooks other structural factors that may impact migrant women's access to help (Crenshaw, 1991; Hulley et al., 2022). In the excerpt below, Nkechi describes how her accent and manner of speaking English impacted her help-seeking experiences:

The first time, I did not know the gist of this visa well that I cannot get any benefit. So, I leave the marriage just like that… but I go back after two weeks. I go back because I cannot get help anywhere. I try to go to Council so that they can help me, but the person at the reception talk to me very rude and like

I am a child. Her face look like she was not patient. She always interrupt me many times and say that she cannot understand my English. Is there two type of English? I know my English is not like their own. I did not finish school, but I understand them well, and I know they can understand me too. In Nigeria, it is English and pidgin English everybody speak, plus our own native language. In some Europe country, they don't speak English but they don't experience what I experience when I speak. So, this add to my decision to just stay quiet and wait for my passport. (Nkechi, 42)

Nkechi's account emphasises the demoralising effect of discrimination based on linguistic varieties or accents. She was perceived as speaking unintelligently and immediately denied the opportunity to express herself. Nkechi further revealed that she was so upset about the encounter that she walked out of the building without getting the help she hoped to receive. Her experience made her lose confidence in reporting the abuse again after returning to the abusive home two weeks later. This suggests that the linguistic aspect of racial discrimination can take a psychological toll on Nigerian migrant women experiencing IPV and prevent them from having the confidence to report the abuse confidently. It also suggests that English spoken in multilingual countries like Nigeria or India, outside wealthy, majority white countries like the UK and US are often subjected to what Dovchin (2020) described as 'linguistic stereotyping'. Dovchin (2020) described linguistic stereotyping as prejudice against other English speakers from ethnic minority groups and argued that they face discrimination based on their race, ethnicity or nationality rather than their communication skills. Nkechi referred to this in her narrative, stating that non-English-speaking Europeans do not experience the same bias she experienced. Dovchin's (2020) study validates this claim by stating that when English is spoken in, for example, French or German-accented English, they may be considered stylish. Still, the perception is different when Asians, Africans, or Middle Easterners speak English. She adds that it may be viewed as challenging or unsophisticated even in cases where migrants have actual high levels of English proficiency (Scherr and Lason, 2010). This was exemplified

in Omotola's account below, where she revealed that despite being highly educated, she always felt a sense of unbelonging when she encountered formal sources of help:

> My husband used to always refer to my Nigerian accent and call me bush and all that. Remember, I said at first that he used to say he did not want me to embarrass him in public with my Nigerian accent. Well, I didn't believe him because I knew that it was just an excuse to control me. But when I eventually spoke to the police after I had gotten my papers… you know to report the abuse and all… I felt it. I don't think that the policeman did not understand me, instead, it felt like, 'Oh, she is not from England, I need to be ready to understand her.' He spoke slowly like he was trying his best to communicate with me on a lower level …you know, so that I can understand him or that he can understand me. It was strange because I spoke clearly to him in English. These things put you off. Because you are already afraid, and you start to doubt if you can trust that person. Good thing I did not report to the police when I was still in the marriage. My husband would have said, I told you so. (Mary-Jane, 40)

Omotola's account of her experiences showed that linguistic racism or discrimination may be unintentional, yet the effects of it, regardless of intentionality, are often demoralising. At worst, victims' stories about their experiences of IPV may be misinterpreted by the service provider, leading to the deprivation or exclusion from all the services they might usually be entitled to as victims of abuse. It is, therefore, essential for service providers and interventions to be aware and trained on linguistic discrimination and to ensure they engage in inclusive and equal treatment of all migrants who approach them for help regardless of their language or accents.

10.4. Selecting the Help-Seeking Resource or Provider

Migrant women experiencing IPV may reach out to either informal support such as family, friends, religious leaders and acquaintances or formal support services such as the police, doctors, mental health professionals, solicitors, and social workers. Since migrant groups are not homogenous, their help-seeking behaviours vary across their different cultural backgrounds. An understanding of how the unique cultural and sociodemographic characteristics of Nigerian migrant women may influence their help-seeking behaviour was, therefore, fundamental to this study. A common theme identified from the nuanced accounts

of the participants about help-seeking was that they preferred to utilise informal help-seeking resources instead of formal ones. However, to avoid essentialised conceptualisations as to why there is a preference for informal help-seeking resources among Nigerian migrant women, the multiple intersecting inequalities that create a labyrinth of individual and structural barriers that prevent migrant women from ethnic minority groups in Britain from seeking help for IPV must be considered. One such structural barrier is the impact of their precarious immigration status on their willingness or ability to seek help. Research has shown that due to how immigration conditions IPV, reporting rates to formal sources are significantly lower among migrant women, resulting in the gravitation towards informal help-seeking resources (Dutton et al., 2000; Ahmad et al., 2009). The threat of deportation continues to present an omnipresent fear for migrant women in Britain. Brittain et al. (2005) noted that inadequacies in service providers' responses could also significantly impact the willingness of migrant women to report abuse. I now discuss the informal and formal help-seeking resources that shape Nigerian migrant women's pathways out of their abusive marriages while living in Britain.

i. **Informal Support**

Informal support refers to the practical and emotional support of friends, family, and community members. It can take the form of providing a safe place to stay temporarily, helping with childcare, providing emotional support, and providing advice or assistance regarding access to resources such as legal or mental health advice. The interviews revealed that the women disclosed the IPV they experienced and their willingness to leave their abusive marriages to at least one informal support, most of whom were in Nigeria, with varying degrees of success (Ogunsiji et al., 2011). While some eventually moved from informal to formal support, some did not explore any formal avenues at all and preferred to stick with their informal sources throughout their experiences of IPV (Liang et al., 2005; Ogunsiji et al., 2011). The interview revealed that for some participants, their informal support provided them with

emotional and practical assistance that empowered and encouraged them to leave the abusive

relationship. In contrast, for others, their informal support was less willing to assist or support

mainly due to their preference in maintaining the victims' conventional gendered roles in their

marriages. This resulted in the women being shamed and blamed or experiencing a show of

indifference to the abuse by their informal support (Klein, 2012). For the participants who

received support, they reported feeling comforted and encouraged. For example, in Irene's

account below, she revealed that her best friend was very helpful even though she lived in

Nigeria:

> My best friend in Nigeria was my biggest help. If not for her, it would have
> been too difficult. She gave me a lot of advice on the best way to leave my
> ex-husband. She is very gentle but very smart. We had our secret call time
> when my husband was not at home. I think she is even smarter than me
> (laughs). Even when I called her one time, crying and saying I could not take
> it anymore, she calmed me down. She has more education than me, so she
> would read about the law on the UK website and explain it to me. I love her
> so much. (Irene, 36)

Irene's narrative reveals how trust and familiarity can influence migrant women's decision to

seek help from informal sources. Many Nigerian women in Irene's position may have difficulty

trusting strangers or formal service providers due to the fear of deportation. They may,

therefore, feel more comfortable seeking help from someone they know or trust. Also, a

familiar friend, like in Irene's case, or family member(s) may make victims feel more at ease.

Furthermore, Irene's narrative about having a 'secret call time' with her friend shows agentive

behaviour where she feels more in control of the situation. This suggests that deciding whom

to turn to for help and when to seek it may make migrant women feel more empowered and in

control of the process despite being isolated and with limited options. However, as earlier

mentioned, not all informal help-seeking sources were helpful to the participants. Sedziafa et

al. (2016) argued that although family and friends can be an immediate source of help for many

victims of IPV from sub-Saharan Africa, this channel does not always de-escalate the abuse or

support the victim in escaping the abuse. The interviews revealed that this was mainly due to cultural and religious beliefs that emphasised togetherness, family unity and the performance of gendered roles at all costs. In Esosa's account below, she illustrates how cultural gender norms resulted in her aunt's refusal to support her decision to leave the abusive marriage:

> My aunty told me that she always knew I was too stubborn to stay married. She said I was not the only married woman in London, and I should behave myself, be a dutiful wife who does not talk back to her husband, and respect him as the head of my home so he would stop getting angry at me. She said, 'I did it, your mother did it, so why can't you? Why are you different? Why can't you be like other normal women? Do you think you are better than the rest of us who endured?' Listen, when my own family tell me things like this, it makes the whole thing worse for me. I remember feeling depressed for a long time. I did not speak to her about it again but still eventually left my husband. I told myself that it was my marriage, not her own. I am the with the temporary visa, not her. They say blood is thicker than water, right? She is family… she will get over my disobedience and forgive me eventually. I told myself exactly this. (Esosa, 38)

Esosa's account suggests that informal sources may be unable to provide the level of support that victims may require, mainly out of concern that moving away from expected gendered norms that require the subservience of women to their husbands may result in dire consequences. The interaction between Esosa and her aunt reveals how inter-generational attitudes towards IPV have evolved. In recent decades, although most societies have yet to achieve full gender equality, there has been a growing awareness and recognition of gender-based violence in private and public discourses and changes in attitudes toward gender equality. This suggests that while older generations are more likely to hold on to traditional patriarchal ideologies that subordinate women and normalise IPV, younger generations are more likely to resist (Fine et al., 2000). Also, like all the other participants, immigration played a significant role in shaping Esosa's help-seeking behaviour. Previous research has shown that when informal help-seeking sources are unsupportive and unhelpful, it may lead victims of IPV to seek help and assistance from formal sources (Ragusa, 2012; Kaukinen et al., 2013). However, the participants revealed that the fear of deportation and the knowledge that they would be

unable to access services prevented them from utilising formal resources. The interviews also revealed that despite previous studies that show that many migrant women do not leave their abusive relationships due to cultural norms and beliefs (Alaggia et al., 2009), the willingness of the participants to secure a permanent legal immigration status was prioritised over adherence to gendered cultural norms. This was despite opposition from their family members or friends. Kenny's account below illustrates this:

> When I told my family about the abuse, at first, they told me to be a good wife and behave myself. My friends also told me to be grateful that I found a man who brought me to a land of opportunity and that I should endure it. I understood what they were trying to say, and I stayed in the marriage, but it was not because of their advice. After everything I went through in that marriage, I did not want stress again or be in a desperate situation after I leave because, you see, these abusers look for weak women. So, I had to take control of my life by breaking away from my husband's visa. There is a proverb in my tribe that says that when you have been in a dark room for a very long time and you see light, you must never let that light go off. You must use the light to find your way out of that dark room. I was already in the UK, so why don't I finish the process? It was not about benefits or free money, but I needed to get my own papers, my own life so that I can work and earn my own money without permission from any man. So, I did not listen to them and waited for my papers, and after I got it, I left. (Kenny, 33)

Kenny's narrative suggests that having been trapped in a patriarchal social and legal system that limits women's agency and autonomy, a more secure legal status was perceived as a way to overcome her sense of powerlessness and the marginalised space she occupied in her marriage and society. Despite opposition from her informal help-seeking resource, she recognised the interplay between her agency and the structural and systemic factors that shaped her opportunities and constraints. This made her resolute in her conviction that citizenship would allow her to exercise her individual and collective autonomy and provide her with a sense of security and belonging. Therefore, the participants' desire to break down gender-based power imbalances that marginalise them and limit their agency in their country of origin and host country interrupted cultural and gendered norms and shaped their help-seeking behaviour.

Another informal source of help for the participants was their religious leaders (Wang et al., 2009; Ting and Panchanadeswaran, 2016). Research has shown that the practice of religion is an important cultural component in Black communities, and compared to White women, Black women experiencing IPV use religion and prayer as a coping mechanism and as sources of support and assistance (Short et al., 2000; Horne, 2003; Cole and Guy-Shetfall, 2003). Twelve out of the fourteen participants reported the abuse to their religious leaders with the hope that a highly respected spiritual leader may convince the perpetrator to have a change of heart and desist from his abusive behaviour. They, however, reported that it was not successful in helping them escape the abuse. In the excerpt below, Bimpe narrated her experience:

> Since my husband goes to church every Sunday, I felt that maybe our pastor might help. He was a Nigerian pastor, and I thought that being Nigerian, he would understand the situation better. But then I was not sure anymore. I noticed that our pastor did not want to take sides. Instead, he recommended marriage counselling and extra prayers. Of course, my husband denied everything and even cried in front of our pastor, acting like he was the victim. But the pastor said we should pray and receive marriage counselling. He did not want to say much. Things got worse at home, and I knew next time I would never go to our pastor again. I still prayed, but I was a bit disappointed. So, my mind started thinking of other ways. (Bimpe, 34)

Bimpe's account shows the tensions that may exist between faith leaders and attitudes toward IPV (Troung et al., 2022). Troung et al. (2022) posited that due to diverse religious contexts and the highly influential role faith leaders occupy in most faith-based communities, there is the potential to either promote respect and equality that protect against IPV or misinterpret religious tenets in ways that drive violence (Adjei and Mpiani, 2020; Holmes, 2012). In Bimpe's case, however, it was interesting that the pastor tried to stay neutral regarding the abuse and suggested marriage counselling and prayers instead. One explanation for this might be situated in Potter's (2017) findings on the reliance on a higher power by some faith leaders, where it was stated that prayers, sacred texts and other religious practices are often prioritised over safety in situations of IPV. Another possible explanation may be that the faith leader's neutral stance indicated the reluctance to divide a family unit or contribute to the breakdown

of a marriage. According to Horne and Levitt (2003), it is sometimes common for faith leaders to advise their followers to remain in the relationship and 'work things out' rather than directly interfering or taking sides in the relationship (Horton et al., 1988; Potter, 2007). Another way in which religion shaped the help-seeking behaviours of the participants was seen in Ade's account below:

> Two things shocked me when I told my pastor. The first was he kept talking to just me about forgiveness, acceptance and humility…. saying they are Christian virtues. I know this, but should I forgive and forget every time he beats me? And acceptance of what? He said, accepting my husband. I felt like I was being blamed somehow, and he was saying like…as the wife, I can manage the abuse and prevent it from happening. I know he actually told my husband to stop hitting me physically but said nothing about the other things like the insults and control. When I tried to mention the control, he said I needed to be humble and respectful to my husband and should not see it like he was controlling me. He started giving me advice on how to please my husband. I was angry. The one that finally did it for me was when he asked me to 'sow a seed' by giving the church money for special prayers so that my husband will love me more and there will be no problems in my marriage anymore. (Ade, 29)

Ade's narrative indicates how patriarchal views are sometimes embedded within religious practices. This raises concerns for many migrant women that the IPV they are experiencing is not being taken seriously. While Ade's husband was advised to desist from the violence, other parts of the violence she experienced were ignored, trivialised, and normalised as part of a man's role in the home. This suggests that some religious traditions may reinforce gender-based inequality and sanction unequal power dynamics that condition IPV. However, this study noted that not all faith-based organisations encourage male dominance, and many religious organisations have taken steps to prevent and eliminate the problem of IPV against women. The nuance of ways religion impacts Nigerian migrant women's help-seeking behaviour suggests that the intersection between religion and IPV is complex and can vary depending on the cultural context and the interpretation of religious teachings. The remaining two participants who did not utilise religion to escape IPV reported being non-religious and not attending faith-based organisations. As previously mentioned, a limitation of this study was

the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the opportunity to recruit a more diverse range of Nigerian women.

ii. **Formal Support**

Formal help-seeking support refers to the assistance provided by institutions and other formal interventions to victims of IPV. This could be support from government or non-governmental organisations such as mental health services, the police, domestic violence helplines, shelters, legal services or aid and medical care. The interviews revealed that the participants only turned to formal support at a later stage when they were at the point of securing their legal immigration status or when a third party reported the violence. Previous studies have also revealed that contact with formal sources may also occur at a later stage when the abuse has escalated to very high levels and has become so unbearable that victims have no other choice but to seek medical attention or contact the police as a last resort to secure their safety (Goodman et al., 2003; Duterte et al., 2008). Most of the participants, however, only reported at a later stage, mainly due to the structural barriers embedded in their Spouse visas and the intersection of other factors that shaped their decisions. For Lati, she feared losing custody of her children:

> I hear say the law go always protect the children, and since it is their father
> that have the money and the house, the visa and everytin else, I think about it
> well and realise that they can keep my children with their father and ask me
> to leave the country. This make me very much afraid and also make me not
> talk about it. (Lati, 39)

Lati's account reveals how the fear of losing custody of children can prevent Nigerian migrant women from contacting formal help-seeking resources because they believe that child protection services or the courts may separate them from their children. Perpetrators may also exacerbate this fear in several ways. In some cases, perpetrators may use it to control their victims and force them to accede to their wishes and in other cases, a lack of understanding of how child protection services and the family court work may prevent victims from seeking help

from formal sources (Rhodes et al., 2010). Rhodes et al. (2010) stated that for victims of IPV who are mothers, the impact on their children presents a significant concern that can influence their decision-making in the face of abuse. This suggests that for Nigerian migrant women, their intersectional identities as mothers and migrant women may result in considering specific help-seeking strategies over others to cater to what Barrios et al. (2020, pp.12611) termed 'mothering-related factors'. This includes the children's age, their developmental needs or the gendered ideology that focuses on mothers as the ones who should be solely devoted to the care of children.

Economic dependence was also a factor that impacted the participants' help-seeking behaviour from formal sources. The participants revealed that their abusive husbands often used threats such as withholding financial support to control and abuse them, making it difficult for them to leave. Kenny revealed that depending on her abusive husband financially prevented her from seeking help from formal sources even when she desperately needed to:

> Many times, I wanted to say something to the police, especially since my family were not helping, but I couldn't. I heard one Nigerian woman saved enough money and left her husband, but it was different for me because I needed his permission to work. He did not let me work even though we had no children. I did not even have a bank card. When we needed to shop at Tesco for food, he would give me one of his cards, which he had blocked and ask me to call him when I was ready to pay for the food shopping. He would then unlock the card and, after I had paid for the food, block it back immediately. He demanded a receipt, too. I couldn't do anything because it was his money, and I did not have much. This was in the marriage…it would be worse outside the marriage if I did not get help.

Kenny's narrative describes how perpetrators of IPV can use financial dependence as a form of personal and social control. For Kenny, not only did her abusive husband make it impossible for her to access funds while in the marriage, but his refusal to give her permission to work even when she had no caring responsibilities was also a form of social control that prevented her from having any work experience, personal funds or possible marketable skills in the UK,

thereby diminishing her ability to have any financial worth or prospects for future earnings. Erez (2009) noted that most migrant women initially arrive in the host countries without personal funds or a lower economic disadvantage. Their additional economic isolation may prevent them from reporting the abuse due to the fear of financial insecurity. Ayyub (2000) further noted that the possibility of migrant women in abusive marriages working is often subject to the control and approval of their husbands. This suggests that economic or financial dependence is a multifaceted issue that involves the complex interplay of factors that impede women's ability to leave abusive relationships. Social norms that expect women to be responsible for caring for the home and the power imbalances within relationships that place husbands as the head of the household and in control of finances combine to make seeking help from formal sources a complex and complicated issue for Nigerian migrant women.

10.5. Conclusion

This chapter examined the complexities of Nigerian migrant women's responses to IPV. Migrant women experience the most adverse barriers to help-seeking from IPV. The intersection of multiple factors, such as culture, religion, and precarious immigration status, influence their willingness to disclose IPV and reach out to both formal and informal sources of help. The interviews revealed that the women's help-seeking behaviours were multi-determined, created against a backdrop of multiple overlapping social and structural barriers (Bhuyan and Senturia, 2005). This chapter delved into those barriers and examined how the women's responses to IPV in this regard were uniquely formed. The women's narratives also revealed that their help-seeking behaviour was mainly determined from a problem-focused point of view, defined by Schoenmakers et al. (2015) as the active effort not only to manage stressful situations but also to alter the stressful environment by modifying or eliminating the source of the stress through unique individual behaviours. Within this context, the women

discussed leaving their abusive marriages as a stage-based process of coping and resistance that prevented the abuse from escalating while agentively working to escape the marginalised spaces they occupied (Enander and Holmberg, 2008; Campbell et al., 1998). This shaped their decision-making process regarding how and when they chose to take further action about the IPV they were experiencing.

As Black women, the participants also experienced additional barriers with racial or discriminatory consequences that exacerbated feelings of entrapment and frustration. The barriers discussed had a double-bind impact on the participants as it not only disempowered them and negatively influenced their help-seeking practices but also empowered their abusive husbands, who used them to control and manipulate them (Hulley et al., 2022). It is, therefore, vital that the structural factors that influence the decisions of migrant women and their ability to seek help from abuse are not conceptualised as a unitary process (Barrios et al., 2020; Anderson, 2009). This is because the actual process of actualising help from IPV as Nigerian migrant women living in Britain is multi-layered and includes confronting and overcoming barriers that overlap on an individual and macrostructural level (Voolma, 2018). Unfortunately, the no recourse to public fund rule (NRPF) forces migrant women to choose between IPV and other forms of marginalisation, none of which protects their right to live free from oppression and discrimination. The women's narratives showed that despite being documented, their Spouse visas and the temporary legal status it provided nonetheless exposed them to multiplicative forms of social control internally and externally reinforced in ways that failed to guarantee their protection. Efforts must, therefore, be made to improve the help-seeking pathways of African women seeking help from abuse in Britain. The diversity of their experiences and variations in their help-seeking behaviours by ethnicity and race must be considered to provide constructive and culturally competent interventions against IPV.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

CONCLUSION

11.1. Introduction

This thesis has been situated within the literature on intimate partner violence, immigration, and gender. I have explored the structural dynamics of Nigerian women's experiences of IPV and the specific challenges they face within the context of the current UK hostile environment migration policy. Using an integrated feminist analysis, I explored the gendered impact of the policy on their lived experiences and how they understood and navigated the immigrant-specific structural constraints imposed by the policy that perpetuates their oppression as migrant women on Spouse Visas in the UK. In doing so, I examined how the policy interacts with different social processes that shape women's lives, such as conventional constructions of gender that assume that they are innately predisposed to male violence. I also examined how, as documented migrants, women experience both privileges and oppression as intersecting forms of domination, where they experience both legal benefits and precariousness from their lower immigration status (Erez et al., 2009). Nigerian women's perceptions of the law and their actions in relation to it were also explored (Ewick and Silbey, 1998; Merry, 1990; Chua and Engel, 2019), and the way they navigated the tensions between cultural norms, their agency and immigration controls in their everyday lives was also critically examined. Finally, I discussed how the women's experiences of IPV intertwined with their resistance strategies and their sense of resilience and challenged, through the women's narratives, racialised and essentialist notions that Nigerian women are non-agentic non-western women with unwavering adherence to cultural patriarchal ideologies that require their silence and submissiveness in the face of IPV (Abraham, 2002; Thiara and Gill, 2012). This led to an analysis of the multi-layered complexities that shape Nigerian women's help-seeking from IPV, including the impact of

their multiple identities on their ability to receive help from both formal and informal sources (Hyman et al., 2009).

This concluding chapter will revisit the research questions used in this study, including an overall summary of the main points raised in this thesis from the interview findings. This will be followed by a discussion of this study's contribution to the existing literature on intimate partner violence and suggestions for future research.

11.2. Summary of Findings

The questions this thesis aimed to address were grouped into three categories in line with the title of this thesis, in terms of Nigerian women's experiences of IPV and their resistance and resilience to it under the current UK's hostile environment policy. My inquiry centred on whether the policy had a gendered impact on documented Nigerian women's experiences of IPV and how their unique positionalities and interactional processes at the intersection of multiple structures of oppression influenced their experiences. Additionally, I sought to explore the women's coping mechanisms and strategies of resistance, how they impacted their help-seeking behaviours and their perceptions of law and legality in escaping IPV. By addressing these research questions, I have highlighted the nuances in Nigerian women's experiences of IPV in the UK, including their unique help-seeking behaviours in severely subjugated conditions and circumstances, which I summarise below.

11.3. Recognising the Specificities

IPV is not a new phenomenon in the UK. It is deeply rooted in the social structure of all societies through structural processes that directly or indirectly sanction men's domination and subjugation of women. However, delving into the intricacies of IPV within the Nigerian community allowed me to examine what goes on behind the scenes from the women themselves rather than what is generally perceived or what I think. As this thesis focused on

Nigerian women who are marriage migrants in the UK based on a heterosexual marriage to a Nigerian man, I explored the unique mechanisms of oppression employed by perpetrators of IPV within the same community, often used to subject their victims to violence and coercive control.

The women's narratives revealed how the gendering of their vulnerability to IPV by the perpetrators and by the Nigerian community intensified their experiences. I explored the victims' and perpetrators' relationship with power in this context. Drawing on Foucault's conceptualisation of power as socially constructed and reinforced through institutional practices that produce hierarchical relations between men and women, I explored how perpetrators conform to dominant relations of power while placing women in a position of subjugation and subordination (Foucault et al., 1977; Foucault, 2009; Bartky, 1988; Munroe, 2003). The interviews revealed that the women's abusive husbands depicted them as emotionally unstable, weak and innately pre-disposed to male violence. This led to the normalisation of male physical and sexual violence against them as a natural outcome of their position in the gender hierarchy and played a role in their abusive husbands' understanding and perpetration of the abuse against them. They were often 'chastised' or 'disciplined' for failing to recognise their husbands as the head of the home whom they were to depend on for both validation and protection. The participants also revealed that they were often blamed for 'provoking' their husbands to violence by challenging not only their status in the gender hierarchy but also their natural physical strength, thereby causing their victimisation. This suggests that for Nigerian women experiencing IPV, gender and masculinity are intricately interwoven.

How perpetrators of IPV often exploit Nigerian migrant women's legal precariousness to subject them to violence and oppression was also examined. The interviews revealed that the

hostile environment policy was often used as a control tool to reinforce patriarchal ideologies that oppressed and victimised the participants. The legal dependency on their abusive husbands, who were citizens or permanent residents, created a power imbalance in their marriages. This enabled their husbands to hold a significant amount of control over their legal right to reside in Britain. Therefore, the threat of deportation or illegal residency in Britain maintained conditions of IPV for the women and forced them to remain in the relationships (Erez and Hartley, 2003; Gill and Sharma, 2007). I also explored the women's hesitation in seeking assistance from the criminal justice system and other interventions for fear of immigration repercussions. Restrictive policies related to their immigration status also prevented them from accessing welfare resources such as healthcare and housing. I argued that although the hostile immigration environment is what the UK immigration system indeed set out to do, to control the migration of people into the country, the repercussions of the policy are unfortunately disproportionately borne by migrant women due to existing gender inequalities.

Following from this, Nigerian migrant women's perceptions of the law, their decisions about compliance and the way they are often negotiated in their lived experiences of IPV were explored (Nielson, 2000). The interviews revealed a trepidation of non-compliance with the policy, which flowed from the women's desire to be documented rather than undocumented. This aligns with Abrego's (2008) findings that migrants may choose to 'stay with the law' rather than against it to claim new rights to benefits not previously enjoyed and empower themselves (Ewick and Silbey, 1999). To this end, the participants understood the hostile environment policy as an exclusionary form of social control that trapped them in their abusive marriages and an empowerment tool that guaranteed their safety, independence, and security (Namukasa, 2017). Their legal consciousness was, therefore, shaped by the benefits of

achieving citizenship and the consequences of illegality and the deportability that comes with it.

Unique cultural practices within the Nigerian community also attest to gender norms that position women as naturally inferior to men. These cultural norms reinforce harmful gender stereotypes and expectations through social practices such as bride price payment and the expectation that women prioritise the well-being of their husbands over their well-being and safety. Through the women's narratives, I explored the complexities of embedding these cultural norms with immigration controls and challenged the racialised dichotomy that often frames discussions about Western and non-Western cultures. Unfortunately, that IPV is a human rights and equality problem has, more often than not, been replaced with IPV mostly happens to women from non-Western cultures and is equally often perpetrated by men from those cultures. Does this then suggest that the Nigerian women who participated in this study who were married to, and abused by Nigerian men while living in Britain could not have also been abused by British men or non-Black men? It is worth considering that IPV is a complex issue transcending one-dimensional explanations or analyses about its occurrence or prevalence. The fact that the participants' narratives belie the assumption that they experienced IPV solely due to cultural beliefs reveals that ethnocentrism, xenophobia, racism, imperialism, and colonialism may be at the root of culture blaming (Almeida, 1994). Razack (1998) argued that IPV manifests as a product of male domination that is inextricably bound up with other inequalities that marginalise women in society. It is not a cultural tenet unique to specific groups of people but a historical custom of domination and supremacy practised and accepted for centuries (Almeida, 1994). According to Dasgupta (1998), every culture worldwide has tenets rooted in power that disenfranchise women, and we should scrutinise why such power-unequal structures are recognised as the 'culture' of the 'others.' I argued that regardless of the weapon, IPV is caused by multiple intersecting inequalities or power structures that cut across

a labyrinth of individual and structural barriers that place women in marginalised positions (Crenshaw,1991; Williams, 1997; Russo, 2001; Narayan, 1997). Therefore, IPV among Nigerian migrant women is not tied to an isolated structure of oppression (Mahalingham and Leu, 2005).

The interviews revealed that Nigerian migrant women balance at least three identities as women, as migrant women and as women of colour. They were able to strategically navigate these oppressive contexts to challenge and end the violence they faced. Historically, the media has depicted migrant communities as engaging in backward and misogynistic practices against women (Dasgupta, 2005). The general consciousness that migrant women are primitive and illiterate, even though many are literate, is the assumption that many tolerate and even justify IPV. For Black migrant women, Sharpe (2012) argued that in such cases, interest moves away from the structural causes of their oppression, and emphasis is placed on how they suffer or experience pain. On the contrary, the interviews revealed that the women showed agency and resilience against IPV, challenging the image of a 'typical non-agentic victim' often portrayed in the media and other public and private discourses. Their experiences of IPV intertwined with resistance strategies, and the women could make sense of not only the violence they experienced but also the structural constraints that overlapped to shape their experiences. Yet, stereotypical assumptions about their responses to IPV continue to shape narratives about Nigerian women's experiences (Gelman and Taylor, 2000; Mahalingham, 2003). I have argued that while acknowledging the multifaceted impact of IPV on the lives of Nigerian women, it is crucial to avoid limiting their experiences to oppression and violence alone. By doing so, we risk undermining and underestimating their strength, resistance against IPV, and capacity for resilience in highly oppressive conditions.

Nigerian women's identities as Black migrant women also shaped their help-seeking from the abuse. To conceptualise the help-seeking behaviours of the participants, I drew on Liang et al. (2005) three-stage classification of recognising and defining the violence, deciding to seek help and selecting the help-seeking resource or provider. In examining the participants' recognition and understanding of the violence they experienced, I explored why most of them did not seek help for the non-physical form of abuse but only reached out for help from informal sources when it became physical. The women's narratives revealed that although that was the case, it did not mean that they did not understand non-physical aspects of IPV, nor did it mean that they tolerated it. On the contrary, they did not report some of the violence due to the sentiments and cultural stigma attached to certain types of abuse, particularly sexual violence, and due to constantly weighing the outcome of such decisions with the vulnerabilities that came with their immigration status. The precarity of their immigration status and the legislative or structural disadvantages that came with it also shaped their decisions to seek help from the abuse. Racialised stereotypes that assume that Black women's experiences of violence differ from those of white women also impacted how the women trusted and accessed services and the criminal justice system. The women's narratives revealed that as migrant women from sub-Saharan Africa, they worried about racial and insensitive treatment from service providers if they reported the abuse. Research has also shown that negative stereotypical images of Black women may seriously affect their access to fair and equitable legal and social services (Allard, 2005; Ammons, 1995; Gondolf, 1998). This led to the participants' preference for utilising informal help-seeking resources instead of formal ones. Narayan (2000) suggests that the history of how such stereotypes came to exist must be traced, and what and whose purpose such biases or stereotypes aim to serve. Only then can we address biases, discriminatory practices, and responses impacting migrant women's help-seeking behaviours. However, the interviews revealed that the women's fear of racial discrimination was not an isolated factor

that shaped their selection of help-seeking source or provider. Like other structures of oppression, it overlapped with the impact of their precarious immigration status. Therefore, the intersection of multiple factors, such as culture, religion, and immigration status, influenced the participants' willingness to reach out for help from the IPV they experienced.

In analysing the above themes that created unique experiences for Nigerian migrant women experiencing IPV in the UK, intersectionality created an understanding of the interaction of power relations within these multiple social contexts. It also enabled me to keep an open mind about other dimensions that can shape the experiences of IPV among Nigerian women, including those not discussed in this thesis. For example, although IPV is committed primarily against women by men, it is not exclusive as men also experience IPV, as do those in same-sex relationships. However, IPV must be understood from the point of view of who holds the power and the impact on the everyday lives of other people. I argue that until an intersectional understanding of interlocking systems of oppression and the meaning that Nigerian migrant women give to their experiences and responses to IPV is recognised and acknowledged, we cannot develop effective intervention services for victims. This is true not only for the migrant group represented in this study but all women in general.

11.4. **Contribution to Academic Research**

i. **Hostile Environment and IPV**

In policy and practice, the curtailment of migrant rights to enforce strict border controls to secure the UK borders and reduce migration has unevenly affected women by exacerbating their risks of violence and oppression. This means that migrant women bear the gendered effects of the policy as they encounter and live through IPV as marriage migrants under the current UK hostile environment policy. However, migrant women in the UK do not experience intimate violence equally, and it is pertinent to acknowledge both the specificities and

similarities of their experiences. This leaves much to explore about the distinct experiences of women from diverse ethnic minority groups that go beyond the narrow focus on culture and religion as the sole drivers of migrant women's experiences of violence and oppression in the UK.

My research contributes to the limited ethnographic studies on the experiences of IPV among women from sub-Saharan Africa who are part of the growing migrant community in the UK. Specifically, my focus on the experiences of migrant women from Nigeria identifies the unique intersectional experiences of this group of migrants. I examined the impact of certain intersecting variables, such as unique cultural norms, linguistic racism, religion and marriage residency patterns, amongst others, on how they experience IPV. This allowed me to highlight the diversities and differentiations of the gendered experiences of women within the broader migrant community in the UK by providing a more nuanced understanding of their experiences of IPV.

Therefore, a critical point of this thesis was examining the construction and intersection of gender across the migration process for Nigerian migrant women experiencing IPV. The complex intersection of the structural barriers they faced before and as a result of migration shaped how they made sense of their overall experiences of IPV. However, to recognise and examine the variations in Nigerian women's experiences and the factors that compound these experiences, it was essential to make their voices a central focus of the analysis to gain insight into their subjective experiences from their perspectives and positionalities. This ensures that their lived experiences are not pre-defined and stereotypical assumptions about their responses are not made, particularly by those who do not fall within the socially defined categories of oppression that shape the women's experiences.

This thesis acknowledges that the participants' accounts may not necessarily speak for all Nigerian migrant women who are experiencing or have experienced IPV. However, their stories offer an in-depth insight into the diverse and multifaceted nature and experiences of IPV, highlighting the dangers of making generalisations about all migrant women's experiences of violence and oppression. As such, this thesis significantly contributes to advancing an intersectional understanding of the different social-cultural factors that define the experiences of IPV among ethnic minority migrant women in the UK.

Feminist researchers and activists have criticised the UK Government's preoccupation with controlling the borders rather than protecting vulnerable women (Gill and Sharma, 2017; Raj and Silverman, 2002). Although efforts have been made to make social policy changes and improve the criminal justice system's response to IPV among migrant women, there continue to be cracks in the system, which continue to make many migrant women face considerable structural barriers to their safety (Raj and Silverman, 2002; Bui and Morash, 1999). In other words, there is a gap between theory and practice. The interviews showed that such cracks in the system result from a disregard for the complexities and nuances of the dynamics of IPV. For example, many Nigerian women may face multi-layered challenges accessing support services available to them due to the unique nature of their isolation that stems from their abusers' manipulative tactics and other patriarchal exclusions. While some are unaware of the support services available, others hesitate to seek help due to established concerns about racial discrimination and prejudices against Black women. Additionally, the legal consciousness of maintaining the legality of their residence status in the UK by not breaking immigration rules can also impact their decision to contact and access support services. All of these complexities highlight the subordinated and marginalised contexts in which Nigerian women's experiences of IPV are situated, and these complexities must not be disregarded by policymakers and other service interventions (Dasgupta, 2005).

For the Nigerian migrant women in this study, their immigrant status was a visual marker of unbelonging and exclusion when they arrived in Britain as marriage migrants. It continued to remain so during their experiences of IPV and, for some, after the violence. Therefore, as long as border controls and strict immigration policies continue to be used as a tool of unbelonging without acknowledging the intersection of gender inequality with immigration and other forms of exclusions, there will continue to be a reductive and simplistic approach to IPV in the UK. This may further complicate Nigerian women's responses to services and policy-based interventions.

ii. **Resilience and Agency**

In this thesis, I argued that while it was necessary to acknowledge the intersecting challenges that shape Nigerian women's experiences of IPV, equal attention must be paid to their resistance against the abuse. This thesis contributes to existing research on the reconceptualisation of the agency of migrant women, specifically Black African migrant women who experience IPV. I highlight the importance of a shift from viewing Nigerian women as non-agentic victims who are tolerant of abuse and refuse to leave abusive relationships to thinking of their agency as one in which they can strategically navigate through multiple structural constraints to escape the violence perpetrated against them, despite limited resources and options (Wendt et al., 2019; Ghafournia and Easteal, 2019). However, my contribution to research, in this regard, does not romanticise or paint a rosy image of migrant women's agency, nor does it claim that they easily navigate oppressive contexts (Mirza, 2007). Instead, I draw attention to the need for a nuanced understanding and recognition of the agentic behaviours of African migrant women under very structurally oppressive and marginalised circumstances. I argue that implicitly or explicitly insisting on overt acts as a marker of the agentive behaviour of African migrant women overlooks how such overt acts can put them in more danger and, in the worst cases, pose a threat to their lives.

As previously mentioned, introducing the hostile environment policy has exposed Nigerian migrant women to strict institutional exclusions and multiple intersecting inequalities, resulting in a culture of violence against them (Erez, 2000, 2002; Raj and Silverman, 2002). However, their experiences embedding the hostile environment in their everyday lives since its inception also reflect years of resilience and resistance in the face of such immigration controls. The interviews revealed that the women's exercise of their agency, in this regard, could be conceptualised as both a process and an outcome, as they utilised their strength and the limited resources available to them to create safety strategies and plan their escape. Therefore, the question of why abused Nigerian women cannot just get up and leave is problematic as it oversimplifies their experiences and responses to IPV (Phillips, 2007).

I argue that Nigerian migrant women's resistance against IPV extends beyond binary narratives of leave or stay or of passive and active, agentic or non-agentic. On the contrary, many engage in both compliant and resistant agency through creative and subtle tactics, which are modified and adjusted to keep themselves and their children safe and attain a legal pathway to safety through citizenship. For many Nigerian women, exercising compliant agency does not mean tolerating the abuse, but instead may be a survival strategy where overt resistance may be dangerous. In such cases, they adopt strategies that comply with existing oppressive power structures to maintain some level of security and safety.

The findings of this study also offer new insights into existing research on the impact of shame on Nigerian women's experiences of IPV. Again, the focus on the specificities of their experiences highlighted the context in which shame and honour are perceived among Nigerian women in the UK. The interviews revealed that shame takes a more personal role and is perceived by them as having a more personal context that flows into a relational context. In other words, the shame of being deported 'empty-handed' without acquiring a permanent

residence or citizenship for their benefit tremendously impacts these women, even more so than the shame a divorce would bring to their families. This implies that their shame was tied to personal destitution, and their narratives revealed that only in this way can they bring shame to their families. Therefore, this thesis highlights how achieving personal success and empowerment through citizenship is seen as a resistance strategy that signifies privilege, empowerment and responsibility.

iii. **Empirical and Theoretical Contributions to Existing Research**

Centring the voices of Nigerian women's lived experiences of IPV in Britain as documented migrants under the spouse visa and exploring their narratives on how they understand and navigate overlapping tensions with migration controls provides empirical insights into existing research on IPV among Black migrant women in Britain. The focus on the complexities and specificities within this particular population group enriches the scholarship on the intersection between IPV and immigration, thereby providing valuable insights for addressing the specific challenges faced by these women.

The study's theoretical contributions lie in its application of relevant established theoretical frameworks to support the empirical findings. By anchoring the research in intersectionality, a comprehensive understanding of the multiple overlapping factors influencing IPV experiences among Nigerian migrant women was explored. The legal consciousness framework helped analyse how Nigerian migrant women perceived the hostile environment policy and their situatedness around compliance, legality and citizenship. The challenge of stereotypical conceptualisations of Nigerian women's agencies and culture blaming, which is at the root of the institutionalised discrimination faced by the study participants, was supported with a Black feminist framework. Postcolonial theory provided an understanding of how such reductive conceptualisations reflect a colonial system of racial ordering and victimisation. These

theoretical contributions allowed the identification of patterns, themes and causal relationships that answered the research questions and helped highlight the multidimensional dynamics of IPV.

11.5. **Implications for Policy and Practice**

This research demonstrates clear evidence that IPV is not a unitary or singular phenomenon and highlights the need for a dynamic approach in policy and practice to address it effectively. Interventions need to be informed by empirical research to understand the complex interplay between race, gender, immigration status and other structures of oppression from those with lived experiences instead of relying on assumptions. Understanding how these factors intersect and overlap is crucial in understanding Black and minoritised women's experiences of IPV and their help-seeking practices. Research has shown that systemic and institutional racism creates unique challenges for Black migrant women as they embody the traumatising effects of the structural marginalisation created by the hostile environment policy and structural violence resulting from gendered and racial inequalities and injustices (Carney and Buttel, 2006; Lacey et al., 2021; Brown 2012). They also confront gendered cultural norms that silence them from speaking up about their experiences of violence, especially from their husbands (Femi-Ajao, 2018; Stockman et al., 2014). In addition to these challenges, their experiences are further compounded by stereotypical narratives about their agency, behaviours and ways of being. This includes the hyper-sexualisation of Black women and the hypervisibility of their suffering, with little or no regard for the structural causes of their oppression (Hernandez, 2020; Mgadmi, 2009; Sharpe, 2012). This prevents them from being considered credible victims of IPV and significantly impacts their access to equitable welfare and legal support (Brown, 2012; Harrison and Esqueda, 1999). According to Bent-Goodley (2001), the implication is that Black women's reluctance to report IPV becomes a learned behaviour of self-survival, as they often feel left out of the formal system. The criminalisation of migration further disempowers and

isolates them from the system and complicates their willingness to seek formal support (Erez et al., 1999). Given that the hostile environment policy has resulted in gendered consequences for migrant women, the UK government must move beyond criminalising migrant women who have faced violence and abuse from their intimate partners or ex-partners. Collaborative and coordinated efforts must be made between policymakers and service providers from multiple agencies, including the criminal justice system, to develop and implement interventions that address the distinct needs of Black migrant women (Sabri and Gielen, 2019). Such a coordinated approach must also be co-produced with Black migrant women with lived experiences to ensure that appropriate support and resources are provided to meet the specific challenges faced by this community.

It is not enough that there is awareness of the multiple factors that shape Black migrant women's experiences and responses to IPV. Appropriate training must be provided to service providers to be well-equipped to support migrant women in the UK (Duhaney, 2021). These trainings must offer insights into the systemic barriers that exacerbate experiences of IPV and equip service providers with the knowledge and skills to support Black migrant women, enabling them to break free from abusive relationships. This would empower victims and make them feel less compelled to make an implicit patriarchal bargain with their abusers, where they trade their silence for the opportunity to secure citizenship status as a pathway to safety.

From the empirical findings of this study, practical suggestions for policies that can better protect vulnerable migrant women can be drawn out. This study argues that the hostile environment policy on Spouse visas can be restructured to reduce the near-total legal dependency on the sponsoring spouse. One of the ways to do this is by granting migrant women the right to renew their Spouse visas independently of their spouses and supporting them in maintaining their documented status in the UK even when the relationship is no longer

subsisting. Findings from this study suggest that economic marginality exacerbates Nigerian women's experiences of IPV. This is supported by previous research that identifies an overlap between poverty, destitution and oppression and how these factors cumulatively intensify the experiences of Black women experiencing IPV (Richie, 2018; Sokolof, 2008). Therefore, policymakers must examine the interconnections between economic marginality and IPV for migrant women escaping abuse and extend the protection of welfare services to these women, as they are currently exempted from such support.

11.6. **Suggestions for Future Research**

This thesis serves as a starting point for future research areas on gender-based violence among migrant women in the UK. First, future research could explore the experiences of IPV among Nigerian migrant women who are already domiciled in the UK but remain subject to immigration controls. This would enable a comparative analysis between these groups of migrants and the experiences of marriage migrants, which the current study represents. In doing so, the similarities and differences in the challenges they face and their resistance strategies will be explored and highlighted.

Second, while feminist research has traditionally focused on women's experiences of violence and oppression, future research could consider a complementary feminist approach. The focus could be on Nigerian migrant men with precarious immigration statuses depending on their wives as legal sponsors. This approach would enable a valuable comparative analysis of the role of gender in such contexts and explore whether Nigerian women, despite the reverse power dynamics, remain in subordinated positions.

Third, a comparative study of IPV among migrant women from different Sub-Saharan African countries would provide valuable insights into the broader context of IPV in the region, specifically in terms of the impact of the different cultural environments on women's

experiences of IPV, their coping and resistance strategies, and help-seeking behaviours. A comparative approach could help to identify similarities and differences in the experiences of IPV among migrant women in the UK from different sub-Saharan African countries, leading to a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of IPV among migrant women from the region. Also, the legal consciousness of migrant women from other sub-Saharan African countries, in terms of how they perceive and navigate the UK's immigration law and the criminal justice system in the UK, would benefit from more research. Such research could contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the dynamic factors that shape their experience of the hostile environment policy, compliance decisions, and how citizenship is being negotiated in their everyday lives (Silbey, 2005). Additionally, it could contribute to an intersectional understanding of the complex factors that shape the actual and perceived barriers to accessing legal protections and services.

Fourth, it is also important to explore the role of technology in addressing IPV. Examining the potential benefits and challenges of utilising digital platforms and tools to enhance prevention, raise awareness, and provide support to survivors would enable the identification of innovative strategies that can bridge gaps in migrant women's access to resources and assistance. An example is exploring the use of social media campaigns and mobile applications in raising awareness and promoting support services among migrant groups. This includes examining how perpetrators can also use it as a monitoring and surveillance tool. A comprehensive approach to how to leverage technology to provide support for migrant women experiencing IPV can help in the identification and development of the most effective and innovative technology-based interventions.

Lastly, IPV among migrant women from sub-Saharan Africa in the context of Covid 19 could be an interesting area to explore. A study on how the COVID-19 pandemic intersects with race,

immigrant status, gender and class could contribute to a deeper understanding of the severity, prevalence and experiences of IPV among sub-Saharan African women. This includes investigating the impact of COVID-19 policies and lockdown measures on the experiences of IPV among women from this population group. Furthermore, given the unique challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, it would be beneficial to explore the effectiveness of different types of interventions used during the pandemic, such as remote counselling or virtual support groups, whether these interventions worked, and how they can be improved to meet the unique challenges facing Black women.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

A. APPENDIX ONE: Ethical Approval

B. APPENDIX TWO: Participant Information Sheet

D. APPENDIX THREE B: Oral Consent Form

E. APPENDIX FOUR: Interview Schedule

APPENDIX ONE

Ethical Approval

12/05/2021

Yemisi Laura Sloane

Sociology

University of Essex

Dear Yemisi Laura,

Ethics Committee Decision

Application: ETH2021-0941

I am writing to advise you that your research proposal has been reviewed by the Ethics Sub Committee 2.

The Committee is content to give a favourable ethical opinion of the research. I am pleased, therefore, to tell you that your application has been granted ethical approval by the Committee.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any further information or have any queries.

Yours sincerely,

Laurie James-Hawkin

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Participant Information Sheet

Project title:

'I will not leave without my passport': Hostile Environment, Intimate Partner Violence, and Resilience among Migrant Nigerian Women in the UK.

Researcher Details:

Yemisi Laura Sloane, PhD student in Sociology, University of Essex.

Participant Invitation:

You are invited to take part in a research study on the connection between immigration and intimate partner violence. This is a type of domestic violence carried out specifically by a spouse or intimate partner. For ease of understanding, the term domestic violence will be used in this information sheet. The researcher is working towards a better understanding of domestic violence among African migrant women living in Britain and how our immigration laws can better protect them.

What is the purpose of the research?

The purpose of this research is to explore domestic violence among the African migrant community in Britain. It focuses on women with spousal visas and looks at how the immigration laws make them vulnerable to control and abuse due to the requirement that the validity of their visas be linked to their sponsoring spouse. It will be examining how a combination of the background of African migrant women and the strict requirements of UK spousal visas puts them at risk of violence from their spouses. **This research acknowledges that domestic violence occurs in all communities and by no means assumes that it is more prevalent in the African community.**

The project will run for 4 months and will involve the use of interviews and questionnaires with survivors of domestic violence. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

Why have I been invited to participate?

You have been invited to participate as part of the African community in Britain and as a woman who moved to the UK on the basis of marriage to a UK resident and have experienced

domestic abuse. Please note that in the interest of the safety of all participants, only women who are **no longer** in the abusive relationship and are **no longer** living with their abusive partner are eligible to participate in this study. If you meet the eligibility requirement stated above, you will be one of 14 women from Nigeria living in Britain who would be interviewed. Your participation would:

1.   Enable the researcher to understand the connection between your domestic violence experience and your migration to Britain from your perspective as a Nigerian woman in the UK and through your unique words and stories.

2.   Enable the researcher to understand if there are any specific differences due to historical and cultural background in your own country, in your perceptions and experiences of domestic violence and if it differs from the experiences of women from other migrant communities in Britain.

Do I have to take part?

This research study is entirely voluntary, and it is up to you to decide whether you wish to participate. You will be asked to provide written consent if you choose to participate. If you prefer giving consent orally, there is a provision to obtain oral consent. Please ensure you completely understand your participation in this research project before consent. You have the absolute freedom to refuse to answer any question(s). You also have the right to withdraw for any reason and without explanation or penalty.

If you wish to withdraw at any time during the interview process, please contact the researcher at ys20243@essex.ac.uk, and your participation will be stopped immediately.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you choose to participate, you will be invited to attend an online or phone interview. We anticipate that this interview will take about an hour. This interview will only take place via phone or video call, and according to your preference, you are free to choose which of the two methods you are most comfortable with. Please note that this research takes the government guidelines on social distancing due to the COVID-19 pandemic very seriously. You will not be required to compromise your safety. The interview will be recorded in an audio format and will be mainly about your personal experiences with domestic violence as the spouse of a UK resident. The interview questions will be very clear and easy to understand and will provide you with the time and space to talk about your thoughts and any abuse and difficulties you faced as a migrant woman on a spousal visa. This will be followed by questions on the options you had and strategies you adopted in escaping the abuse. In other words, you will be asked whether the restrictions put in place by the current immigration law in Britain may have affected and shaped your experience. This interview

allows you to share your experiences in a safe and confidential environment without being judged, and you have the right to change your mind and terminate the interview at any stage.

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What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

It is likely that recounting your personal experiences may upset you, and discussing the challenges you faced in escaping the abuse may bring discomfort. Please remember that you have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) and to terminate the interview at any time. Your privacy will be respected and upheld during and after the project. Information on support services and counselling will be offered to all participants. See below.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Taking part could help inform policy-making decisions on how immigration laws can be amended or changed to be more gender-sensitive and flexible to protect migrant women better.

What information will be collected?

Your experiences will be audio-recorded, which will then be transcribed. Notes will be taken in a confidential and safe environment accessible only to the researcher.

Will my information be kept confidential?

Your identity and contact details used in this research will remain confidential. No personal information (e.g., name, location) will be published. The data collected will be anonymised. This means that your real name will be changed, no personal information that may be traceable to you will be published, and your privacy will be respected and upheld in all written documents resulting from the research.

The data collected from your interview will be kept in a private, secure laptop, which is only accessible to the researcher. The laptop device is password protected, and data files will be encrypted. The interview transcript will be wiped clean and destroyed after collecting all the data. The published data will not be linked or traceable to you. Please note that confidentiality will only be legally breached, and appropriate action will need to be taken to ensure safety where there is information relating to child abuse, suicide or the intention to harm others.

Consent and Data Controller

Your consent will be required initially and before any data is collected. The consent must be freely given, specific and clear, without external pressure or influence. Your consent should be a clear affirmative action, and remember you are free to withdraw this consent at any time and stage of the research process without any questions or penalty.

The Data Controller for this research is the University of Essex, and the contact details are as follows:

University Information Assurance Manager
Email: dpo@essex.ac.uk

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What should I do if I want to take part?

If you are interested in taking part in this research, please get in touch with Yemisi Laura Sloane at ys20243@essex.ac.uk or +44 0754 231 3289.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The data collected will be used and mentioned in the researcher's final PhD thesis, which will be submitted to the University of Essex in electronic format. It could also be used as evidence to inform policy in the British government after the project is completed, as a conference paper or presentation and may be published in the public domain as a journal article in academic journals. As guaranteed earlier, your personal information will not be traceable or linked to you, and fictitious names will always be used.

If you wish to have a copy of the study's findings after the research has been completed, details about how this can be done will be communicated to you in due course.

Concerns, Complaints and Additional Contacts

If you have any concerns about any aspect of the study or you have a complaint, in the first instance, please get in touch with the principal investigator of the project, Yemisi Laura Sloane, using the contact details below. If you are still concerned, you think your complaint has not been addressed to your satisfaction, or you feel that you cannot approach the principal investigator, please get in touch with any of the following contacts:

- Researcher

Yemisi Laura Sloane
PhD Research Student, Department of Sociology
University of Essex
Email: ys20243@essex.ac.uk
+44 0754 231 3289. (*research phone number and not the researcher's personal number*)

- Director of Research, Sociology Department

Dr Neli Demireva
University of Essex
Email: nvdem@essex.ac.uk

- Research Governance and Planning Manager

Sarah Manning-Press
University of Essex
sarahm@essex.ac.uk

- Research and Enterprise Office (SMP)

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Jacqui Taylor Roberts
REO Secretary, University of Essex
jtaylorr@essex.ac.uk
+44 1206872922

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WOMAN'S TRUST

Free, confidential counselling and therapeutic services for women affected by domestic abuse.

Woman's Trust offers a range of confidential and specialist services designed specifically to support women who have experienced domestic abuse. They offer a programme of up to 18 free, weekly counselling sessions with the same counsellor where you can explore how you are feeling and discuss your experiences in a safe, confidential and non-judgemental environment.

Benefits:

1. One-to-one counselling helping you to explore, understand, and move on. Up to 18 sessions at times suitable to you.
2. Weekly therapeutic sessions of up to 10 women. Learn from and with other women as you help each other build self-esteem and confidence.
3. Day workshops

You can contact them at:

Phone: 020 7034 0303 | **Email**: office@womanstrust.org.uk | **Website**: www.womanstrust.org.uk

Postal Address: Woman's Trust, PO Box 70420 London. NW1W 7QL.

Twitter: @womanstrust

Facebook: Woman's Trust

Instagram: @womanstrust

All counselling sessions are being offered remotely by telephone.

*Support groups are being run via Zoom.

Oral Consent Form

Title of the Project: 'I will not leave without my passport': Hostile Environment, Intimate Partner Violence, and Resilience among Migrant Nigerian Women in the UK.

Research Team: Yemisi Laura Sloane

- **Introduction***:* Hello, my name is Yemisi Laura Sloane. I am researching domestic violence among migrant women, and I wondered if you'd be interested in being involved. I am currently doing my PhD degree at the University of Essex in Sociology. Can I tell you more about the study? *[will await confirmation].*

- **Project details and aims***:* In my study, I want to investigate the relationship between immigration and domestic violence. I am interested in women from Nigeria who moved to the UK on the basis of marriage and experienced domestic violence from their spouses. I am interested in how their migrant status (spouse visa) played a role in how they experienced and escaped the abuse.

- **Eligibility:** For participant's safety, only those who are **no longer** in abusive relationships and are not currently living with the abusive partner are eligible to participate in this research. If you qualify and choose to be a part of this project, here is what will happen:

- **Interview:** I will have a conversation with you for 1 hour where I will ask a range of questions about your experience. The answers or information you give me will form the basis of my PhD research. It will be fully confidential.

- **Data confidentiality and storage:** I will store your information/data safely and confidentially by making sure you cannot be identified, and your real name will never be used. Any information given will be kept in a secure and encrypted electronic device accessible only to myself and it will be destroyed immediately after use. I would like to be able to use your data in future studies, and to share this information/data with other researchers. No information shared will be traceable to you. In any publications a fake name will be used, and other identifying details such as your address and any data that can identify you will never be published.

- **Risks**: There is the risk that you may find aspects of this interview distressing as I will be asking for your experiences while you were being abused by your ex-partner and your opinions about the immigration law here in Britain. In order to reduce any potential risks, you have the right to stop at any time during the interview with no questions asked. If you decide to finish the interview, you can take as many breaks as you want. This interview is completely voluntary, and you are under no obligation to take part or finish the interview. I will also be giving you information of counselling services available to you in your area which you can contact at any time should you wish to talk about your feelings. *Please note that this counselling services are in no way connected to the University of Essex*.

- **Rights:** You do not have to agree to take part; you can ask me any questions you want before or throughout; you can also withdraw at any stage without giving a reason.
You can also withdraw your information/data before it is published.
- **Audio recording /notes/ contact details:** With your permission, I would like to make an audio recording of our discussion to make sure I am getting an accurate record of your thoughts. You can turn your camera off throughout the interview. I may also take notes in my notebook and may want to re-contact you to clarify information you gave me in your interview.
- **Publication plans***:* The project may be published in an academic journal/ academic book / academic website/university research archive.
- **Complaints/concerns procedure:** If you have any complaints or concerns please feel free to contact me in the first instance. My number is 0745 231 3289. (research mobile phone). You can also reach me at ys20243@essex.ac.uk.
- **Ethics review details:** This research project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Essex ethics committee. If, after contacting me with any concern, you are still unhappy and wish to make a formal complaint, please contact the Director of Research Dr Neli Demireva in the Sociology Department, University of Essex on nvdem@essex.ac.uk. If you are still unsatisfied, please contact the University's Research Governance and Planning Manager, Sarah Manning-Press at sarahm@essex.ac.uk.
- **Questions/concerns:** Do you have any questions?

2.   Oral consent seeking stage, after the participant has had sufficient time to think about whether she wants to take part

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have understood the Information read to me and dated _____ for the above study. I have had an opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these questions answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without giving any reason and without penalty. I understand that any data collected up to the point of my withdrawal e.g., will be destroyed; cannot be withdrawn because it cannot be identified.

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3. I understand that, due to the nature of the interventions used in this research, those who are currently still in an abusive relationship and living with the abusive partner may not be suitable as participants for safety reasons. I confirm that, to the best of my knowledge, I am no longer in the abusive marriage.

4. I understand that the identifiable data provided will be securely stored and accessible only to Yemisi Laura Sloane as the researcher directly involved in the project, and that confidentiality will be maintained.

5. I understand that my fully anonymized data will be used for the PhD thesis of the researcher, and for other research conferences/presentations and research publications in in a public domain.

6. I understand that the data collected will be used to support other research in the future and may be shared anonymously with other researchers.

7. I give permission for the fully anonymized data gathered from the audio/video recordings that I provide to be made available for future research and learning activities by other individuals.

8. I agree to take part in the above study.

Participant Initials   Date

_____ _____

Researcher Name   Date   Researcher Signature

_____ _____   _____

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APPENDIX FOUR

Interview Schedule

Interview Guide

Interview Questions	Discussion Areas/Probe
Personal Information: I would like to start off by getting some background information about yourself: • What would you like me to refer you as? • How old are you and what is your occupation? • Where were you born? • What year did you move to Britain? • What is your educational background?	Reiterate that her real name will not be used. How old was she when she migrated to Britain? How long has she been or how long was she married?
Perceptions and Experiences of Domestic Violence	
1. Why did you move to the UK?	What type of visa was required to come to the UK?
2. What were the main challenges you faced when you arrived in Britain?	Visa status, relocating away from family members, isolation, language barriers, socialization?
3. Did moving to Britain have an impact on your marriage? If so how?	How did it make you feel?
4. What have been your own personal experiences in your relationship with your ex-husband since moving to Britain?	Was the conflict you experienced with your husband in Britain more or less than if you were living with him in your home country? Why do you think this is the case?
5. Do you think your ex-husband was behaving unfairly/badly? In what way?	How did it make you feel? In your opinion, do you think any of his behaviour was acceptable? If yes, what and why? Do religious or cultural norms come into play here?

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6. To what extent do you think that the conflicts you have experienced with your ex-husband while in Britain are a result of being a migrant woman? Why do you think so?	

Responding to Domestic Violence	
7. How did you deal with the behaviour you experienced from your ex-husband?	Behavioural responses – fight back, stay quiet, fear? If you belong to any social groups or organisations, what is the nature and purpose of these groups or organisations? Did you make use of these groups or organisations to deal with the abuse you were experiencing with your ex-husband?
8. Which factors influenced the way you responded to the abuse? If yes, what and how?	
9. Did you speak to anybody about your experiences? If yes or no, why?	Why that person and not others? When did you approach that person? If no, why?
10. What was the reaction of the person(s) you spoke to?	Were they supportive/dismissive/wanted to help?
11. How did these reactions impact your own response?	

Service Provision	
12. Did you contact any service provider? By service provider, I mean voluntary and statutory bodies such as the police, NHS, church, mosque and women's organisations. If yes, how and why?	Is there any service provider you would you never access? Why?
13. Did you face any difficulties in accessing or attempting to access service providers?	For example, trust issues, access, previous bad experience, lack of information, nervousness or anxiety.
14. Can you tell me about your experience with the service provider?	What was their reaction to you as a migrant woman? Did you get the advice/support you were looking for?

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15. What knowledge did you have on the law concerning domestic abuse in the UK and the consequences of your migration status as a marriage migrant?	Is there something that you needed and did not have or that would have been helpful to you in this process?
16. How do you think the British government can improve service provision to better support migrant women in abusive relationships	For example, training for service providers, more information for migrant women, removal of the NRPF rule.

If you have any questions about these questions, please contact Yemisi Sloane at

ys20243@essex.ac.uk

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