INTERSECTIONS OF IMMIGRATION AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN RELATIONSHIPS: A CASE STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF WEST AFRICAN IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

by

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Abstract

This research is for the researcher's graduate thesis, as a requirement to obtain a Master of Social Work degree. The thesis research was conducted via distance (using telephone and password-protected audio conferencing) with four immigrant women. Using a case study approach and framed by socialist feminist intersectional theories and transformative framework, this thesis examines the intersections of immigration and violence against women in relationships (VAWIR) on multiple axis including gender, race, class, immigrant, and economic status to better understand factors that shape the experiences of visible minority immigrant women dealing with domestic violence and abuse. The findings of this thesis would contribute to different viewpoints on the experiences of VAWIR among immigrant women and bring more understanding to a variety of ways immigrant women respond to and cope with violence in their relationships as well as shape future policies and practices to more effectively service immigrant women of African descent.

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Acknowledgements

I am like a clay pot in the hands of a potter. I am still a work in progress molded by many hands. Some familial; many not. Many I know; some I don't. Today, when I look in the mirror, I can see the different fingerprints. As my journey progresses, I realize that I have also become a potter for lives I know and many I don't. I hope I am as true to others as those hands that worked (and are still working) on me.

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A special thanks goes to the brave women who dared to share their stories with me. Your experiences shared empower me and others. I salute your strength and courage and I hope that I have brought a true representation of your story to the world. I am also so very thankful for family and true friends who have become family. You have all added to the woman I am becoming.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Canada and many countries in the world have been shaped by different waves of immigration starting from the arrival of the first colonists through to the present day. Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2009) acknowledge that in the 21st century, cities welcome a growing number of diverse immigrants and they now account for more than one-quarter of the population of many cities globally. In 2015, the number of migrants worldwide grew to 244 million persons (Matthias et al., 2018). For many individuals, the excitement of moving to a new country is soon doused by the reality of the challenges they face adjusting to a new culture, language barriers and the dynamics of gender roles and family structure that may be different in their home country (Akinsulure-Smith et al., 2013; Fazel et al. 2005).

According to Chaze et al. (2020), there is little research about the prevalence of intimate partner violence against racialized immigrant and refugee women specifically. It should be acknowledged that racialized immigrant women may be more vulnerable to violence against women in relationships (VAWIR) due to varying factors like economic dependence, language barriers and lack of knowledge about community. The already challenging experience of settling into a new country and culture is exacerbated by VAWIR experienced by some immigrants. Abraham and Tastsoglou (2016) identify violence against woman (VAW) as one of the major stressors for immigrants that poses a concern due to the negative physical and emotional consequences it can have on both parents and children.

Research has shown that immigrant women are at increased risk of domestic violence, victimization, or of abuse after their move to a new country (Erez et al., 2009; Erez & Harper, 2018; Raj & Silverman, 2002; Sokoloff, 2008). The intersection of VAWIR and immigration is one that is worthy of examination. Sokoloff (2008) argues that an intersectional framework

within which to study VAW in immigrant communities is needed. Race, class, gender, and sexuality are interdependent in women's stories of violence and intertwine and intersect with each other to create unique experiences of VAWIR (Tam et al., 2015).

Location of Self in Research

I am a woman of color, a mother, sister, friend, social worker, catalyst for change, motivator, advocate, and a firm believer in egalitarian relationships. Immigration and VAWIR are topics that I am very passionate about because I am an immigrant and because I have had personal experiences of VAWIR. Moving to Canada has been one of the best decisions my family ever made. It has been an exciting, challenging and rewarding experience for us as we settle in this beautiful country. Many Canadians we have met have shown us kindness, compassion, and warmth as we try to find a balance while constantly vacillating between two cultures and two realities. The settlement and integration of immigrants is complex and multifaceted because everyone has their own unique experience of bias, prejudice, discrimination, and triumph.

As a young girl growing up in Nigeria, I witnessed so much injustice against women which contributed to incidents of VAWIR. At an early age, I began to question the unequal distribution of resources and power between men and women that results in gender inequality, culturally prescribed gender norms and stereotypes. I saw that the social construction of gender in most societies privileges men, but I firmly believe men and women are of equal worth and should be deemed as equal in all respects. I am also a witness to the structural violence and patriarchy that exist and operate within oppressive systems and structures that have far reaching consequences in the lives of women all over the world.

The power imbalance in relationships between women and men as well as disparities, which exist in religious, organizational, governmental structures, and discriminatory cultural norms work to reinforce and maintain behaviours and beliefs of male privilege. At the base of this structural oppression is VAW. My personal and professional experiences have motivated me to learn more about women, their experiences, and bring to focus, the factors that often disadvantage women, keep them oppressed, subservient and subjugated.

I watched the video of a keynote presentation, *Transform Fear to Power*, in which Ghawi (2017) shared that her grandmother told her that "a girl is like a perfect glass vase. If it gets cracked for any reason, you can never fix it or glue it back, it will always be seen as cracked" (3. 37). Ghawi (2017) went on to refute this statement by sharing the inspiring story of how she survived an abusive relationship and achieved her dreams. This was my experience because in my culture, there are so many expectations of a woman. Girls are taught shame: they are told to close their legs, cover themselves; they are made to feel as if by being born female they are already guilty of something. Girls raised like this grow up to become women who silence and reduce themselves, who have no desires (Adichie, 2014). I was in a very toxic marriage and I felt trapped because that was not my idea of marriage. I had dreamed of marrying my friend and partner, not my master. On top of everything that was going wrong, I was expected to be 'wife material' (good wife). 'Wife material" is a term used in many cultures and religions to measure the amount of burden a woman can shoulder.

'Wife material' in my opinion is synonymous with a burden bearer. A wife material's worth is measured by how well she can cook, clean, wash, do chores and how tolerant she is of abuse. She is expected to dress and behave in ways prescribed for her by her husband. She is expected to welcome in-laws and visitors with a smile always even when it is inconvenient

and no matter how intrusive they are. She is not supposed to express her true feelings or opinions; instead, she is encouraged to pray because a woman must stoop to conquer. She is expected to live for her husband's pleasure alone. She is a woman who is seen and not heard.

I struggled against powerful forces like negative family dynamics and harmful societal norms to retain a unique selfhood and personal identity. I did not have the courage to end my toxic marriage for fear of cracking this precious vase. At that time, I was concerned about what people would say, being judged and I was afraid I would not make it by myself because I was not economically stable and that my children would not turn out well if they came from a home of divorce. Eventually I found my voice and I did crack the vase, which represented breaking free of the unrealistic expectations that limited me. After I was walked out on, I refused despite great pressure and condemnation to go back to that marriage, and I have travelled the world since then and I am pursuing my dreams.

Two important factors continue to shape the woman I am becoming- my faith in my creator and education. My faith in the creator keeps me centered and gives me the strength and hope to go through life believing that everything works together for good. The pain I have experienced in my journey is part of growing; every struggle takes me a step forward to my destiny and the scars I have are a symbol of strength that reminds me of all I have overcome. According to three of my mentors, Joel Osteen, Cindy Trimm and Joyce Meyer a person's pain and struggles can either make them bitter or better. I chose better. Education gives me a means to explore the world further and continues to broaden my horizon.

Education provides me with broad analytical frameworks, a well-developed focus, general theoretical knowledge, intellectual and analytical knowledge to explore diverse issues. Education has given me a voice and the vocabulary to experience the world, name my

experiences and tell my story. Through education I have a new lens and perspective to view the world. As a result of my studies, I have begun to find the vocabulary and expressions for my experiences, thoughts, ideologies, and values. I have always questioned and challenged patriarchal systems, institutions, religions, and hierarchies of power that work to dominate and oppress marginalized groups. It is my hope that I can make a mark in this world by inspiring others who come after me.

In my own personal journey, I find myself evolving constantly as I continue to experience the world. I believe that the greatest mystery in life is to discover who we truly are, and we will spend most of our life's journey unravelling that mystery. It might be an onerous or even an impossible task to know ourselves one hundred percent but like the layers of an onion, I am discovering different layers of myself. I am more assertive and now building more healthy boundaries. Self-discovery is ongoing and I am enjoying it and loving the woman I am becoming.

Research Background

Much of my social work practice has been in Northern communities and so this thesis focuses on Northern BC communities. Locke et al. (1998) state that "geography shapes life experiences, defines reality, and influences vision" (p. 74). Long-standing attitudes exacerbated by spatial conditions seen in social and economic structure in the Northern communities may not only influence women's experience of VAWIR but also their decisions to remain in or exit abusive relationships (Pruitt, 2007; Pruitt, 2008). An understanding and perception of the concept of north is relatively complex and can be somewhat imprecise (Graham et al., 2008; Schmidt, 2008; Zapf, 2009).

The North can be a place or consciousness or perception of place that has an economic, cultural, and geographical connotation. Various definitions lean towards a marginalization that exists within a structure of isolation and remoteness (Schmidt, 2000). Social work educators are beginning to realize that practice in remote, isolated communities requires a different level or sort of awareness that is not usually needed in an urban setting (Collier, 2006; O'Sullivan et al. 1997).

My interest in this research stems from a strong desire to understand why VAW continues. I would like to investigate the prevention, early intervention, and crisis response to acts of VAW. In my former professional role as a specialized community-based victim services worker supporting people who have been victims and survivors of crime and presently as a social worker, I work with women who have experienced and are still experiencing VAWIR. Having to deal with VAWIR on top of settling into a new country and a different system adds a double barrier to an already difficult situation. My interest in the topic of this research comes not only from my personal experiences but also from working with people who are victims and survivors of VAWIR. I am moved often by the stories I hear but the story of a woman I will call Amora stands out.

Amora, like hundreds of immigrants every year, leave her homeland and the comfort of familiar for a land of dreams and hope. Amora shared that she aspired to find peace, happiness and maybe more safety and comfort compared to what she left behind. Amora is the last child in a family of 6 children. She shared her experience of being the youngest female child in a very patriarchal system. She did most of the chores, was given the smallest ration of food and her opinions rarely mattered in vital decisions that concerned her. Her only

escape was school, but a civil war broke out in her country and movement restrictions prevented her from going to school. Life became very tough and even unbearable.

A family friend introduced her to their son in Canada and a month later he came home, and they married. She was sponsored by her husband to come to Canada. She was not allowed to talk to anyone, and her husband would hit her over the smallest misunderstanding, and he threatened to send her back home if she ever spoke about it to anyone. He reminded her constantly that he is the reason she left the deplorable situation in their country and she should be grateful that she is in a beautiful country like Canada.

Amora is not alone as statistics show that married immigrant women (59.5 percent), compared to their unmarried (49.8 percent) counterparts, experience higher levels of physical and sexual abuse (Dutton, Orloff & Hass, 2000). Abusers often use their immigration status as a tool of control to control their victims and force her to remain in the relationship and to keep her silent. Amora endured VAWIR for 7 years in which she gave birth to 3 children. While at the hospital to birth her third child, she confided in a nurse who found her help. Most persons who are victims of VAWIR suffer much more than from the physical violence alone, and they may also experience "lowered self-esteem, depression, drug and alcohol abuse, suicidal tendencies and diminished capacity to parent" (Hovius, 2005, p. 52).

My decision to pursue a master's degree in Social Work at the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) was born out of my desire to help people. As I work with women like Amora to support and empower them to overcome their experiences of VAWIR and to navigate through oppressive systems and structures, I often see the connections that exist between personal experiences and larger social and political structures that promote and reinforce gender inequality. This notion means that personal experiences are embedded in

political situations, contexts, and realities (Mullaly & Dupre, 2018; Weissman, 2007). Immigrant women face numerous and sometimes insurmountable barriers in reporting and seeking services for VAWIR. A number of these obstacles relate to immigration laws, policies, and legal processes they encounter due to their immigration status and sponsorship relationship (Alaggia et al., 2009)

VAWIR presents a human service concern because of the risk violence poses to the health of everyone involved. When violent acts are committed against a woman, it can have a negative physical and emotional impact on the person, the family, and the society at large. According to Heywood et al. (2019), VAW is a serious public health issue, which threatens the health of individuals across the world. They state that intimate partner violence can be experienced by both men and women, but the majority is still experienced by women because about 30% of women worldwide report that they have experienced violence at the hands of their partner.

Immigrants make up a substantial percentage of Canada's population and are recognized as valuable assets who contribute immensely to the country's social, cultural, and economic prosperity (Choudry & Henaway, 2012; Kaushik & Drolet, 2018). As a result, one would expect that Canadian immigration policy would make extensive provisions to ensure the settlement and integration of immigrants is relatively seamless, but various obstacles continue to make it very difficult for immigrants to successfully integrate in Canadian society (Kaushik & Drolet, 2018).

Immigrant women often negotiate race, gender, and class tensions in ways that significantly differ from immigrant men (Epp & Iacovetta, 2016). While there are numerous factors at play that contribute to women's risk of experiencing violence in relationship,

immigrant status creates circumstances that make it an even more complex problem for immigrant women in Canada (Alaggia et al., 2009). This research is intended to bring an understanding to how immigration and VAWIR can impact the lived experience of West African immigrant women in Northern BC.

Purpose Statement

In 2012, Peer Khairi, a 65-year-old immigrant was sent to prison for life after jurors found him guilty of second-degree murder in the 2008 murder of his wife, Randjida Khairi. The Crown portrayed the crime as a classic honour killing. The horrific brutality left Randjida nearly decapitated and drowning in her own blood. Khairi cut her throat open with a kitchen knife and to be sure his wife of 35 years was dead, he stabbed Randjida Khairi five more times in the torso and back. He told at least three separate versions of what happened to police, doctors, and the court. The version he told on the stand was very different from his police confession on March 19, 2008, when he complained of his wife's diminishing servitude and how she permitted their children to dress in a manner not seen appropriate in their religion (O'Toole, 2012a).

The murder was motivated by Randjida's desire for equal rights and her defence of their children's adoption of Western values. One of the daughters told the police that the father had threatened to kill their mother. On hearing the news of Randjida's death, the same daughter attempted to kill herself with a pair of scissors in the presence of the police officers who broke the news to her. Her mother, 53-year-old Randjida Khairi was sick with tuberculosis and epilepsy and was not able to do laundry without napping between loads. Khairi's crime had no doubt greatly impacted his family of 6 children and left them without both parents (O'Toole, 2012b).

The Khairi family migrated to Canada in 2003 and were on social support. Prior to the fatal incident, Randjida was in contact with a mental health support worker who testified in court that the family needed help with their practical day to day affairs. The victim had expressed her growing frustration because she was under emotional pressure and she felt isolated. According to O'Toole (2012b), the mental health worker, Ms. Nawabi, visited Randjida after she returned home from the hospital due to an incident where she had intentionally overdosed on prescription drugs. According to O'Toole (2012b), Randjida said that she tried to kill herself because life was too stressful for her.

Peer Khairi also expressed his discouragement and frustration because of his inability to speak English and to find a job. He also spoke of his problems with his wife and was not happy about her willingness to adopt Canadian values and to allow their six children to do the same. Peer Khairi expressed that he was not satisfied with his life, himself, and the way his children dressed. Randjida Khairi had threatened to leave him before she was brutally murdered. (O'Toole, 2012a).

The brutal and senseless murder of Randjida in her home reveals that certain unique factors impact the dynamics of VAWIR among immigrants that an intersectional analysis can shed more light on. These unique factors intersect with some of the specific ways in which immigrants deal with VAWIR. It is a sad reality that many people are exposed to great danger in their home, a place where they should feel safe. According to Dobash and Dobash (2012), when an act of VAW results in a death, the human cost can go far beyond one individual death. Often it may also involve the murder or injury of family members or bystanders, children, relatives, neighbours, and friends, which can have lasting as well as far reaching consequences for family and friends alike. There are some cases of domestic, family, or

intimate partner violence that go to the extreme of the domestic violence scale where there are concerns in community that the normal protocols in place may be insufficient to manage the risk of serious injury or death to protect the most vulnerable populations in our society (Ending Violence Association of BC, n.d.).

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the intersections of immigration status and VAWIR by exploring the lived experiences of West African immigrant women who live in Northern communities of BC to understand how multiple factors affect them. This thesis research contributes to the literature on knowledge that can help shape immigration policies that guide "entry regulations, immigration management and the formation of a multi-ethnic society" (Harzig, 2003, p. 55).

Research Question

Kirby et al. (2017) state that after a research interest and focus have been identified the next step is for the researcher to determine the best question to ask and plan how to gather data to answer the question. They state that the question should resonate and be important to the community in which the data is gathered. The overarching question framing this research and which it sets out to answer is: *How does the experience of VAWIR intersect with immigration to impact the experiences of West African immigrant women in Northern BC?* The sub-questions are: 1*) What are the impacts of neoliberal immigration policies on West African immigrant women in BC? 2) What are the barriers immigrant women experience in finding support? 3) What supports are available in the community to immigrant women seeking help with VAWIR?* Framing the research question and sub-questions in this way gave me the opportunity to take a transformative stance that advocates for change and this fits with

the philosophy of feminist research, which guided the entire research process (Sweetman et al, 2010).

Chapter Two: Literature Review

My research focuses on the intersection of immigration and domestic violence and how these shape the experiences of women of West African descent in Northern BC. I found it necessary in this literature review to provide some understanding of the concepts and issues related to domestic, family, and intimate partner violence and how they affect the whole family. The first part of the literature review analyzes information on family violence and current homicide rates in Canada and gives a general overview of the statistics in other parts of the world.

The second part of the literature review considers information on some of the laws, policies and practices related to and guiding the criminal justice system in response to domestic violence. Included in the second part is a review of policies on immigration and different immigration programs in Canada and how they relate to VAWIR. To understand BC's framework and efforts to address and combat VAWIR, I have included a review of BC's VAWIR policy and a summary of the results of one Interagency Case Assessment Team (ICAT) research project.

The third section on contemporary feminist theories examines theories and concepts that explore fundamental inequalities between women and men and analysis of issues that dominate feminist thought at different points in history. It also examines how feminist ideas responded to changing social, economic, and historical conditions of male power over women. The section on intersectionality examines the origins and application of the intersectional paradigm along with its use as a framework of analysis in this research. The final section identifies gaps in the literature with the understanding that the information presented in this thesis should not be considered exhaustive.

Family, Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence

Gerino et al. (2018) note that it is important to distinguish intimate partner violence from domestic violence. They state that domestic violence is a comprehensive term that includes many types of domestic abuse, such as child and elder abuse in a household. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2012) defines intimate partner violence as "any behavior within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm to those in the relationship" (p. 1). Holt et al. (2008) define domestic violence broadly as "the intimate context within which one partner is abused by another, involving both men and women as victims and same sex partner violence" (p.798). Kashani and Allan (1998) state that family violence refers to acts of violence and abuse by a family member over another.

In this thesis, I will be using the term VAWIR and by this, I mean all types of violence and abuse perpetrated by a man against a woman in the context of persons in an intimate heterosexual relationship. VAWIR is centred on the use of power and control, threat, intimidation, humiliation, and fear (Dwyer et al., 1996; Itzin, 2000; Laing et al., 2013). Laing (2000) states that VAWIR can take many shapes and can occur in many contexts, which include physical, sexual, psychological, economic, financial, and spiritual and can have negative consequences for all persons involved.

According to Abraham and Tastsoglou (2016), feminist sociologists and activists have created awareness and awakened a new consciousness in society about how VAW is linked to structural and cultural factors that subordinate women, intersecting inequalities, and limited rights. They state that VAW can greatly impact women's economic and social equality, mental and physical health as well as their economic security, and well-being. Abraham and Tastsoglou (2016) found that in the United States of America (USA) and Canada, factors such

as immigration or minority status, limited rights, lack of equal access to resources, and exclusion from decision-making processes not only contribute to VAW but also impede its elimination at the micro, meso, and macro levels.

Garcia-Moreno et al. (2005) note that, although there are statements and international declarations calling for the eradication of VAW, many agencies, governments, and policymakers do not appear to understand the enormous social problem VAW causes. VAW persists because it is rooted in gendered discrimination and gender inequality. Garcia-Moreno et al. (2005) call for the implementation of policies to prevent VAW, as part of the agenda for equality, development, public health, and human rights.

The power and control wheel (The Duluth Model, 1984) is a tool that in a snapshot gives the viewer a comprehensive image of what happens in an abusive relationship. It captures the pattern of different methods and tactics abusers use to exert power and control over their partner. In Canada, there are many challenges encountered in accurately assessing the scope of the problem of VAW. One of the obstacles arises from the inconsistency in the language used.

One may argue that when research and public documents make it difficult to distinguish between various forms of violence, it is difficult to understand, for instance, the factors that make an act of violence sexual instead of physical. Another challenge encountered is the under-reporting of acts of violence (Benoit et al., 2015). VAW has been identified all over the world as a public health problem, that violates the human rights of women and acts as an obstacle to the advancement of gender equality (Abraham & Tastsoglou, 2016; Benoit et al., 2015; Garcia-Moreno et al., 2005)

Figure 1

Power and Control Wheel

Power and Control Wheel

Physical VIOLENCE Sexual

Using Coercion & Threats
Making and/or carrying out threats to do something to harm you★threatening to leave or commit suicide★driving recklessly to frighten you★threatening others who are important to you★stalking

Using Intimidation
Making you afraid by using looks, gestures, actions★smashing things ★abusing pets★displaying weapons ★using looks, actions, gestures to reinforce control★standing in front of the door or exit

Using Economic Abuse
Preventing you from getting or keeping a job★making you ask for money★interfering with work or education★taking your credit cards without permission★not working and requiring you to provide support ★keeping your name off joint assets

Using Emotional Abuse
Putting you down★making you feel bad about yourself★calling you names★playing mind games ★making you feel guilty ★humiliating you ★questioning your identity★reinforcing internalized phobias and isms

Power & Control

Using Privilege
Treating you like a servant★making all the "big" decisions★being the one to define the roles or duties in the relationship★using privilege or ability discredit you, cut off access to resources or use the system against you★knowing "what's best" for you

Using Isolation
Controlling what you do, who you see or talk to★limiting your outside activities★making you account for your whereabouts ★saying no one will believe you★ not letting you go anywhere alone

Using Children
Making you fell guilty about the children★using children to relay messages★threatening to take the children★telling you that you have no parental rights★threatening to tell your ex or the authorities to take your children

Denying, Minimizing, Blaming
Making light of abuse★saying it didn't happen★shifting responsibility★saying it's your fault, you deserved it★accusing you of "mutual abuse"★saying it's just fighting, not abuse★accusing you of "making" them abuse you

Physical VIOLENCE Sexual

Adapted from the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project
Duluth, Minnesota

Several studies have focused on the scope and the impact of children's exposure to family/domestic violence, and they have produced a large body of empirical knowledge about its prevalence as well as its impact on children (Hazen et al., 2006; Holt et al., 2008; McDonald et al.; McGee, 2000; McIntosh, 2002; McIntosh, 2003). Fusco (2017) found three significant indirect pathways between intimate partner violence and child socioemotional problems were mother and child attachment, family functioning and emotional support. In homes where violence occurs, children often witness both violent physical and sexual assaults on their mothers. The research carried out by McGee (2000) found that out of the 54 children and 48 mothers studied, 71% of children witnessed the physical assault of their mother while 10% saw their mother being raped. McGee (2000) also found that family/domestic violence is an important indicator of the risk of direct physical and sexual abuse of children.

Some studies also reveal that men are also victims of family, domestic and intimate partner violence (Chaudhuri, 2012; Migliaccio, 2002). An examination of intimate partner homicide that occurred between 2008 and 2018 in Canada reveals that 59% of male victims were killed by a current or former legally married or common-law wife and 23% by a girlfriend (Burczycka et al., 2019). Men who are either perpetrators or victims suffer both physical and psychological consequences from family, domestic or intimate partner violence. Migliaccio (2002) states that to avoid being seen as weak or emasculated, a man who has been abused may be afraid to express his fears, ask for help, or even discuss his situation.

Rates of Family, Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence and State Responses

VAWIR has received increasing public attention over the past 20 years. Stockl et al. (2013) found from data obtained from 66 countries that more than a third of female homicides

are perpetrated by an intimate partner, which is the culmination of a long history of abuse. Burczycka et al. (2019) report that in Canada, six in ten spousal homicides were preceded by a known history of family violence. They also report that out of the 945 intimate partner homicides, which occurred between 2008 and 2018, 79% of them involved female victims who were killed by a current or former legally married or common-law male partner.

Burczycka et al. (2019) report that between 2017 and 2018, family violence against children and youth increased by 7% and in 2018 there were 18,965 child and youth victimized by a family member. They also found that the rate of police-reported intimate partner violence in Canada increased by 2% between 2017 and 2018, reaching the highest rate recorded since 2012. Women were overrepresented as victims of intimate partner violence being almost 8 in 10 victims (79%). Intimate partner violence was the most common kind of violence experienced by women (Burczycka et al., 2019). In Canada, VAWIR affects 1 in 3 women in their lifetime and abuse can continue even after separation. When compared to men, women are twice as likely to be reported being sexually assaulted, beaten, choked, or threatened with a gun or knife (Government of Canada, 2018).

Dubinski and Margison (2020) state that the first national survey conducted by Ending Violence Association of Canada, BC and London, Ontario based Anova revealed that during the height of COVID-19, gender-based violence was more severe and more frequent. About half of those surveyed reported they noticed changes in the prevalence and severity of violence while 82 percent said that the violence increased in frequency. A fifth reported that abusers' violent tactics changed while their control over their victims increased resulting in increased cases of strangulation and serious physical assaults leading to a higher risk of lethality. According to the World Health Organization (2021), levels of domestic violence

increased globally during the COVID-19 pandemic. They found that the risk of VAW is exacerbated during emergencies like epidemics due to increased stress, interruption of social and protective networks, an increase in economic hardship and decreased access to services.

The Ministry of Justice, Canada recognizes five main types of family violence: Physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological and emotional abuse, neglect, and financial abuse. There is a detailed list of actions that outline the behaviour that determines the criminal code and how legislative acts governing family violence are enforced (Sharrock, 2014). A criminal justice framework on domestic violence exists in Canada, which falls within the context of the Criminal Code (1985) and specific laws on family violence declared officially by six provinces and three territories are in force (Family Violence Laws, 2015). The criminal justice system cannot ignore that intimate partner homicides represent a significant proportion of all homicides (Stockl et al., 2013).

The response of the criminal justice system in Canada to VAWIR has evolved considerably over the last thirty years. Historically, VAWIR was seen as a family matter dealt with in private. In the 1980s, the pro-charging policies were adopted in Canada and this significantly helped to strengthen the criminal justice system's response to spousal abuse. The aim of the pro-charging policy is to ensure that the police treat VAWIR as a criminal matter and to lay charges where there are reasonable grounds to believe that an offence has been committed. The pro-charge and prosecution policies protect the victim by treating VAWIR as seriously as any other crime of assault. In the past, women failed to press charges against their abuser, for fear of further victimization, so the pro-charge policy is intended to absolve them from this responsibility (Sharrock, 2014).

The pro-charge policy was introduced in 1981 but it was not until the mandatory charging policy was introduced into the Policing Standards Manual in 1994 that it became more universally enforceable. This slow acceptance of the policy may have been due to a lack of cultural empathy for VAWIR within the law enforcement agencies. The absence of any criminal act called VAWIR in the criminal code means that when an abuser is charged with assault that sets in motion a chain of events that may negatively impact all the parties involved, which sadly includes the victim (Sharrock, 2014). Murphy and Ting (2010) argue that it is important to improve the criminal justice system response to VAWIR as part of any strategy to reduce homicide. They also state that in addition to this, there should be policies and protocols in place to improve response to reported incidents of violence; laws to restrict firearm access to perpetrators and other strategies targeting perpetrators.

Abraham and Tastsoglou (2016) state that with respect to VAW, the Canadian criminal justice response does not take into consideration the experiences of "systemic intersections of gender with race, ethnicity, class, faith practice, immigration, and social status" endured by First Nations, immigrant, and racialized women (p.569). They argue that these groups of women may experience more obstacles in getting justice and support services when they experience domestic violence. These systemic actions and omissions by the Canadian criminal justice may increase the vulnerability of First Nations, immigrant, and racialized women to VAW.

A review of literature shows that the incidence of VAWIR is not higher in the receiving country than the countries of origin of immigrants but rather that the experiences of immigrant women in domestic violence situations are often aggravated by their specific position as immigrants (Menjívar & Salcido, 2002). Burczycka et al. (2019) reveal that

women in rural areas experience the highest rates of VAWIR. Within immigrant families in Canada, the problem of VAWIR is compounded by additional vulnerabilities, including the language barriers, problems of poverty, unemployment and underemployment, integration, social isolation, lack of political power and culture shock (Alaggiaet al., 2009; Erez & Harper, 2018; Sokoloff, 2008).

Okeke-Ihejirika and Yohani (2017), examine the rates at which immigrant women seek help and their attitudes towards support. The broad understanding of domestic violence may be the same across cultures and conceptually, there may be some similarities in the experience of VAWIR among immigrant women, but it must be noted that even among immigrants in Canada there exists diverse countries of origin and cultures which makes it difficult to generalize about them. Even though newcomers in Canada share the common experience of migration, they are diverse and have distinct ideologies, values, cultures, beliefs, and personal experiences that make each person's story unique (Okeke-Ihejirika & Yohani, 2017).

British Columbia: VAWIR Policy and ICAT Research Project: Summary of Results

The VAWIR policy was developed in 1993 and this was a more elaborate revision of the original 1986 Ministry of Attorney General Wife Assault policy. The VAWIR policy is also a component of British Columbia's Domestic Violence Action Plan. The policy highlights the responsibilities, roles, and protocols for the criminal justice system and Ministry of Child and Family Development. The purpose of the VAWIR Policy is to "ensure an effective, integrated, and coordinated justice and child welfare response to domestic violence" (Ministry of Attorney General, Ministry of Children and Family Development, and Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, 2010, p. 2). The ministries of Public Safety and Solicitor General, Attorney General and Children and Family Development collaborated on the update

of the provincial VAWIR policy. The VAWIR policy was updated in 1996, 2000, 2004 and mostly recently in 2010 to reflect applicable legislative changes (including Criminal Code and provincial legislation) and changes to operational policies.

In April 2008, a coroner's inquest was held to investigate the murder suicide that occurred in Oak Bay, BC, in September 2007. Peter Lee committed suicide after he murdered his estranged wife, Sunny Park, their son and Sunny's parents. Lee stabbed Sunny Park forty-nine times, killed her parents, then stabbed their son, Christian Lee, in the chest twenty-two times, killing him, before killing himself (Turpel-Lafond, 2009). During the Lee/Parker Inquest, the Ending Violence Association of BC (EVA BC) and its program, Community Coordination for Women's Safety (CCWS), made submissions to the government and the Coroner's Office on the importance for a high-risk provincial domestic violence protocol (Ending Violence Association of BC, n.d.b).

In 2010, British Columbia's VAWIR Policy was revised to include a protocol for highest risk cases. This provided a clear direction for sharing information across sectors and the need to work collaboratively on responding to highest risk domestic violence cases. This updated policy document fulfills a commitment under the province's Domestic Violence Action Plan, which was launched in January 2010 in response to recommendations from the Lee/Park coroner's inquest and the Representative for Children and Youth's report on the death of Christian Lee. The focus of the action plan is enhancing and integrating the response to domestic violence by the justice system and child welfare partners to better serve all British Columbians (Ending Violence Association of BC, 2010).

Since 2010, the number of BC communities that have Interagency Case Assessment Teams (ICATs) have continued to increase (Ending Violence Association of BC, n.d.a).

Across BC, ICAT teams are made up of at least one member of staff from different partner community agencies who meet regularly to provide a collaborative response to highest risk domestic violence cases. This local ICAT team responds to referrals, reaches agreement regarding the risk level, and then creates a collaborative risk management plan to address victim safety as well as support and monitor perpetrators (Ending Violence Association of BC, 2010).

Community agencies are tasked with diverse roles in assessing and managing the risk and safety of individuals who experience family or domestic violence. As such, a coordinated approach and information-sharing among these agencies is required for successful risk and safety management and assessment. Since 2010, many communities in British Columbia (BC) have been developing interagency case assessment teams (ICATs) that are working to increase safety for those at highest risk for serious bodily harm or death due to domestic violence (Ending Violence Association of BC, 2010).

While it has been determined that ICATs are necessary to identify risk factors, provide supports to victims and offenders, eliminate systemic barriers to safety, reduce duplication of services, reduce the number of children removed from homes and assist in the overall reduction in domestic violence offences, it's been observed that there is a wide variation in practice, concerns about the lack of consistency and uniformity in practice and misunderstandings regarding privacy and ethical conduct, which may interfere with multidisciplinary cooperation between the justice system, child welfare, community agencies and anti-violence organizations.

The VAWIR policy explicitly recognizes the importance of having integrated cross-agency policies as a key element of an effective response strategy to domestic violence

(Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2016). In 2015, the Ending Violence

Association of BC (EVA BC) undertook a research project funded by the Law Foundation of

BC and Legal Services Society to better understand the rate of access to justice and increased

safety related ICATs. Twelve participating ICATs in BC were involved in the research.

The findings show that there were consistently high rates of reporting for most of the 19

risk factors set out in the 2010 VAWIR policy: Stalking/jealousy 95%, criminal violence

history 84%, previous domestic violence history 93%, substance use 95%,

employment/financial instability 80%, mental illness 88%, suicidal ideation/threats 76%,

access to weapons 86% and threats 94%. This finding shows that ICATs are handling serious,

"highest risk" cases of intimate partner violence. The research also revealed that ICAT client

demographics are consistent with current empirical data that show that most of the victims of

domestic violence and intimate partner violence identify as female while perpetrators are

mostly male (Ending Violence Association of BC, 2018).

Review of policies on immigration and different immigration programs in Canada

Immigration is motivated by a combination of push and pull factors such as poverty, wars

and economic opportunities and political instability. When one or more of these factors are in

play large numbers of people immigrate to countries that hold the promise of a better life.

Canada has an active immigrant admission policy as such Canada is recognized

internationally for its immigration and integration programs (Sidney, 2014). Two major

factors contribute to the number of immigrants that come to Canada each year. The first is that

Canada's natural population has continued to decline over time (Knowles, 2000). The second

reason is the need for skilled workers. According to Bolaria and Li (1988), early immigration

was due to the demand for workers to build railways and the need for assistance in the mining, forestry, and fishing industries.

The progressive outlook of Canadian immigration policy, which seems to be supported by democratic notions, is in practice often overshadowed by underlying ethnocentrism. Knowles (2000) states that one of the goals of the Citizenship Act 1947 was to place 'Canadians by birth' and 'Canadians by choice' on an equal legal footing (p.65). Natural born and naturalized Canadian citizens were meant to have equal status; entitled to the same privileges; and observe the same duties and obligations.

Over the years, Canadian immigration policy changed from racially discriminatory policies, which stopped in the 1960s, to the introduction of the point system in 1967 and later to regulating the immigration inflow between the late 1970s to the early 1980s (Green & Green, 2004; Reitz 2007). There are four main categories under which people come to Canada as permanent residents and these are: Family Class, Refugee Class, Humanitarian and Economic Class. In 2018 and 2019, 58 percent of new permanent residents came through the economic stream (Cheatham, 2020; Government of Canada, 2020). In 2019, 27 percent through family sponsorship, 14 percent through protected persons and refugees, and 1 percent through humanitarian or other (Cheatham, 2020).

In the last two decades, Canadian immigration policy has shifted and leans more towards a neoliberal focus by becoming more oriented to meet a labour market demand (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe, 2018). The current focus is on the immigrant's ability to adapt to the ever-changing global economy, and this means that there is a preference for educated English/French-speaking applicants who can fit more quickly in a changing and more sophisticated professional niche. More recent immigration policies and programs concentrate

on specific occupations to attract highly skilled workers who possess advanced educational credentials and professional experience that best address Canada's economic needs (Côtéet al., 2001).

The Canadian Government is focused on creating and sustaining institutional frameworks and practices that support individual entrepreneurial skills (Harvey 2005). These new immigration policies allow the state to prioritize its selection of highly educated, skilled, and well to do immigrants. These classes of immigrants are required to possess entrepreneurial skills and demonstrate their ability to be self-sufficient. These policies are aimed at maximizing human and economic gain from immigration as well as reducing the costs associated with settlement of new immigrants (Arat-Koc 2012; Kaushik & Drolet, 2018; Root et al., 2014).

Under the Economic Class, the Federal Skilled Worker Program is designed to attract skilled workers through Express Entry (Kaushik & Drolet, 2018). Between 2011 and 2016, about 1,212,075 people immigrated to Canada (Statistics Canada, 2017). In January 2015, the Government of Canada introduced a new electronic Express Entry system. This new system, which is faster and flexible for managing immigration, was designed to manage permanent residence under federal economic immigration programs. The Federal Skilled Express Entry is a faster and more flexible system for managing immigration applications of candidates who are most likely to succeed in Canada (Kaushik & Drolet, 2018).

The Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) is a variant of the economic class. TFWP includes numerous programs - Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program, Caregiver Program (formerly known as the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP), and Low and High Skilled Program. TFWP exists only to fill the shortage of the labor gaps in both skilled and

non-skilled trades. Vahabi and Wong (2017) state that while TFWP play a significant role in Canada's economy, they have remained an invisible and underpaid workforce. Immigrants who come to Canada through the TFWP often work in substandard working conditions because there are different sets of labour laws and regulations that govern permanent residents and Canadians than those that govern temporary migrant workers.

In November 2019, the immigration minister Marco Mendicino announced a multi-year plan that will bring approximately one million new immigrants to Canada between 2020 and 2022 with about 58% of the immigrants being skilled immigrants (CIC News, 2020). Under a neoliberal agenda, Canadian governments have adopted immigration policies that focus mainly on the benefits from the economic class of immigrants while focusing less on newcomers from the other two classes—family class and refugee/ humanitarian grounds (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe, 2018).

Holtmann and Rickards (2018) state that "the reality of Canada's immigration framework is complex, to say the least. There has been a great deal of change to immigration policies in recent years, making it difficult for many immigrants to understand their status at particular points along the pathway towards citizenship" (p. 298). Li (1997) states that individuals from visible minority backgrounds are seen as immigrants irrespective of how long they have been in Canada. Compared to Canadian citizens born in Canada, skilled immigrants experience high rates of underemployment and unemployment (Desjardins & Cornelson, 2011).

Some of the barriers that contribute to employment problems for skilled immigrants are that their foreign credentials are not recognized or devalued due to racial discrimination and biases. Some employers also require that they have previous Canadian work experience even if they only just arrived in the country (Murphy, 2010). While the current Canadian

immigration program prioritizes the entry of skilled immigrants with educational qualification and skills, it does not guarantee them successful settlement and integration into Canadian society.

Immigrants still face many challenges as they try to find appropriate employment that matches their qualifications and previous work experience. There is a need to create an immigration policy that promotes the socioeconomic inclusion of immigrants. The immigration policy should address the process of evaluation and recognition of foreign credentials so that immigrants can successfully integrate and settle in Canadian society. Under a neoliberal agenda, Canadian governments have adopted immigration policies that maximize the gains from the economic class of immigrants while minimizing the burden from the other classes—family class, refugee, and humanitarian grounds (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe, 2018).

Another important factor to consider is the effects these economic driven immigration policies have on women candidates for Canadian immigration. Epp and Iacovetta (2016) state that "the notion that migration was not just a linear uprooting and trans-plantation is not new". It is vital to follow the history of migrants from their country and their culture to ensure there is "lived connection between two geographical places rather than as an element in the national history of a single nation" (p.12). It is important to understand the immigrants' experience, to ask about immigrant women's ongoing emotional attachment to their homeland.

In many of the countries of origin of immigrants, most women do not enjoy equal rights to education and training as men. As a result of the situation in these countries, women have considerably less chance of being accepted as principal applicants in Canada's immigration programs because generally, most occupations and professional skills in demand are traditionally male dominated. Policy makers who design immigration programs do not appear

to take into consideration that by imposing many years of formal education and work experience, certain specified, preferred occupational skills and mastery of English or French language competency training as the main selection criteria, women who are disadvantaged due to the situation in their home countries stand a poor chance of coming to Canada independently (Côté et al., 2001).

Many women may be forced to depend on men to migrate to Canada. As a result, Canadian immigration programs limit women to the other three classes—family class, refugee and humanitarian grounds thereby complicating their already vulnerable situation as well as widening the class disparities for immigrant women. Family immigration policies were originally developed to promote family reunification however, Statistics Canada (2011) reports that "women were more likely to be admitted under the Family Class category", compared to the Economic Class or Refugee Class (p. 6).

Merali (2008) reports that Canada has experienced "a large influx of female marriage migrants in recent decades." (p.281). Under the Family Class, the sponsorship program allows Canadian citizens, persons registered in Canada as an Indian under the Canadian Indian Act or a permanent resident of Canada who are at least 18 years old, to sponsor their relatives to live, study and work in Canada with the goal of becoming permanent residents of Canada (Government of Canada, 2020).

The sponsorship agreement lasts for a three-year period during which the basic needs of the person sponsored are met by the person sponsoring them. The sponsor of a Family Class immigrant must sign an undertaking with the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration pledging to be responsible for supporting the person sponsored for three years. Support includes housing, care, and financial resources. The sponsorship agreement remains effective

for its duration even if the sponsor and immigrant are not living under the same roof anymore (Alaggia et al., 2009; Government of Canada, 2020).

With the vast majority of sponsored individuals immigrating under the family class sponsorship being spouses who are mostly women, any policy, law or regulation pertaining to spousal sponsorship is bound to have a disproportionately gendered effect (Simes, 2010). The sponsorship agreement creates a legal bondage of dependency which can create and reinforce patterns of inequality (Côté et al., 2001; Holtmann & Rickards, 2018; Merali, 2008). The sponsorship arrangement may give undue power to the sponsor because they are in the position to control the initial immigration process and make the person sponsored susceptible to dominance.

Even though it's been identified that sponsorship arrangements pose a threat to gender equality and sponsorship relationships are likely to create or intensify the dependency and vulnerability of women in relation to men, little attention has been given to sponsorship arrangement (Côté et al., 2001; Holtmann & Rickards, 2018; NAWL, 2001). While VAWIR is not present in every sponsorship situation, Côté et al. (2001) suggest there are various reports of VAWIR by immigrant women who are sponsored by their husbands. These women are vulnerable to abuse or intimidation by their spouses because they are threatened that the sponsorship will be withdrawn. Their vulnerability to maltreatment can be attributed to the fact that family immigration policies are not gender sensitive (Holtmann & Rickards, 2018; Merali, 2008).

Feminist Theories

While feminism may have a different meaning for different people in different eras, the core ideologies associated with the concept include rights, equality, equity and liberation of

women and other minority groups amongst others. Even though feminism has evolved over time and developed myriad meanings related to the circumstances and needs of particular eras and locations, it serves a purpose in providing greater intellectual understanding, practical insights, and making important contributions to the understanding of many areas of current social issues.

Feminism has been defined differently by various feminist theorists in different eras. The fact that there appears to be no single definition for feminism is not due to limited knowledge on the subject. Mann (2012) argues that to avoid prescribing a universal meaning of what feminism is, it is best to avoid defining it. The evasion of one meaning for feminism should not be viewed as a weakness; instead, it should be seen as a commitment to different meanings that offers multiple paths, which welcome unlimited approaches to give room for diverse interpretations and meaning of the word. It is important that any definition of feminism is kept open to amorphous meaning beyond the scale of narrow definitions that rob it of purpose.

Many theorists argue that the category known as 'woman' "is unstable and fluid" (Mann, 2012 p. 5). Woman is often used as a way of distinguishing through categorization; thus, *woman* is said to be a category of social identity. De Beauvoir (2011) asserts that "but if we accept, even temporarily, that there are women on the earth, we then have to ask: What is a woman?" (p.25). This question, which attempts to find a categorical definition of "woman' either by dismissing or accepting woman as a category of analysis, has framed the views of how feminist theorists explain what feminism should be and how to challenge inequality and inequity.

While there are those who argue that the category woman promotes essentialism and

homogenization because they believe that sex is fundamentally biological while gender is socially constructed, there are others who believe that both sex and gender are socially constructed. De Beauvoir (2011) attempts to tackle human history from a feminist perspective. De Beauvoir (2011) argues that the way men fundamentally oppress women is by categorizing them essentially as the other in relation to men. Men are made to occupy the central position of the self or subject while women are the object, the other. While men are essential, absolute, and "transcendent", women are inessential, incomplete and fated to "immanence" (p.316-317).

De Beauvoir (2011) investigates the sources of the inequality that exist in gender roles by tracing the root of the subordinate position women occupy in society. She examines biology, psychoanalysis, and history. While these disciplines reveal that there are essential differences between men and women, they provide no explanation for women's inferior position. Even though history has examples of female domination that existed from nomadic hunter-gatherer societies to modern society, they do not provide justification for male dominance. De Beauvoir (2011) argues against defining woman either by her biological functions or by an understanding of her as "eternal feminine" (p.25).

Eternal feminine refers to the belief that there is a basic essence that symbolizes womanhood, which women are eternally doomed to like the processes of fertility and reproduction. De Beauvoir (2010) dismisses the eternal feminine as a myth and states that "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (p.330). This explains the differences in biology or psychology as socially constructed by society. It is one's circumstances that determines character. A woman is not born bearing the features society places on her, but she is gradually moulded by her upbringing.

De Beauvoir (2011) argues that the destiny of women is a human choice that is the result of culture and circumstance. She also studies some of the ways that women reinforce their own subordination. She shows for instance in marriage situations where women are complicit in being the other. Women often find it difficult to break free from the characteristics they have been assigned due to their unwillingness to give up the security and comfort that comes with their roles as wife and mother (p. 502-590). De Beauvoir (2011) believes that women can be emancipated from female subordination if they can achieve economic autonomy and stability.

With regard to Intercourse, Dworkin (1987) took an anti sex stand on the topic of sexual subordination of women in a discussion of heterosexual intercourse. She argued that the sexual subordination of women in the act of sexual intercourse played a central role in reinforcing men's dominant role in society. Dworkin (1987) extensively cites the Holy Bible, Moses Maimonides, Leo Tolstoy (The Kreutzer Sonata), Kobo Abe (The Face of Another), Bram Stoker (Dracula), and Gustave Flaubert (Madame Bovary) to make her case.

According to Dworkin (1987), "The normal fuck by a normal man is taken to be an act of invasion and ownership undertaken in a mode of predation... He owns you - he fucks you. The fucking conveys the quality of ownership - he owns you inside out." (p. 47). Dworkin (1987) stated that the sexual domination of women through the act of heterosexual sex contributes to the material conditions of women in a society that oppresses women. Men's desire for sex has been an instrument for the oppression, exploitation, and dehumanization of women.

Mann (2012) notes that issues around the legislation of certain sexual practices as being patriarchal and/or violent was one of the areas that radical feminists had divergent views on.

The other area of contention being whether to concentrate on the censorship of violent and degrading images or just to concern themselves with violent acts and behaviors (p.100). According to Mann (2012), Dworkin believed pornography contributed immensely to the cycle of abuse as well as helped to institutionalize and legitimize gender inequality by constructing a social climate that encouraged sexual abuse and assault (p.100-102). Dworkin believed that women could gain freedom by having control of their bodies and by controlling the act of sex.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) state that the concept of hegemonic masculinity has had an influence in criminology and has been useful in theorizing the relationship, which exists between masculinities and a variety of violent crimes like rape and murder (p. 833). One of Bourdieu's (2001) central arguments is relevant in understanding gendered socialization. Bourdieu (2001) states that "symbolic violence, a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition, recognition, or even feeling" (p.1-2). Bourdieu (2001) argues that symbolic domination is a form of symbolic violence that works through "invisibilization" and brings about a refusal of legitimate, public existence (119). Men's desire to have control over women by committing violent acts against them can be said to be a form of symbolic domination which legitimizes masculine power over women through violence.

Radical feminism arose in late modernity during the second wave of women's movement in the United States. Radical feminists were focused on emancipating women by challenging male supremacy and patriarchy in all social and economic contexts. They worked at understanding how women can protect and control their bodies. Radical feminists oppose the

sexual objectification of women and raise awareness for issues concerning rape and VAW. Radical feminists were either distinguished by either being pro sex or anti sex. Sex was viewed as either pleasure or danger and this defined their discourse of what woman is and frames what feminism means to them (Mann 2012, p, 108-109).

Materialist feminism seeks to understand the status of women based on class. Marxist, Socialist and Anarchist feminist theorists believe that gender is socially constructed and thus, women are forced into gender roles, such as bearing children that restricts them to the domestic sphere. Hartsock (2003), using a Marxist understanding of the world, tries to explain why "patriarchal institutions and ideologies take such perverse and deadly form" and how a liberating direction can be achieved in theory and practice (p. 292). Just as Karl Marx developed a critique of capitalism by focusing on the proletariat, Hartsock focuses on women's life activity to analyze the sexual division of labor.

Hartsock (2003) believes that women's activities share similar characteristics with the activities of the proletariat. Under the sexual division of labor, women's activity is marked by the production of both goods and human beings; labor that is devoted to production of use-values different from those of men and labor that is structured by repetition different from men. Male experience and female experience are seen in the difference between "abstract masculinity" and "the feminist standpoint." (p. 299).

Standpoint feminism argues that when two social groups have their activities structured in opposing ways, then it provides an accurate vision of human relations in that society, which can be viewed from only one group's social positions. According to Hartsock (2003), women's life offers a good position to understand patriarchal institutions and ideologies. Using a psychoanalytic approach Hartsock (2003) explains the gendered situation of social

life. While a girl child because of her connection to her mother develops a relational view of the world, which promotes relationships with other people, a boy must detach himself from his mother and develop abstract masculinity which keeps him autonomous and opposed to others.

This oppositional consciousness a boy develops makes him want to dominate others. Hartsock (2003) states that women's standpoint which is derived from their experiences both in childhood and adulthood exposes abstract masculinity as a partial perspective because it does not offer a full perspective of reality and it reverses the proper view of human activity. A feminist standpoint is therefore essential to examine the oppressions in a society, which standpoint feminists say under values women's knowledge. Hartsock (2003) argues that a woman is one who, due to the subordinate position she occupies, can see and understand the world better than androcentric systems of knowledge.

Ramirez (2007) analyses the problem of bringing together race, tribal nation, and gender in defining what woman is. Feminism has been viewed by some Indigenous scholars as divisive as well as against tribal sovereignty; thus, they criticize feminism as being assimilationist and antagonistic to tribal sovereignty. Other Indigenous scholars assert that claiming a feminist identity as well as getting involved in the women's movement was empowering for them. Ramirez (2007) argues that race, tribal nation, and gender should be non-hierarchically linked as categories of analysis to understand the breadth of the oppression faced by Indigenous peoples.

Ramirez (2007) agrees that it is necessary for both Indigenous women and men to develop an Indigenous feminist consciousness based on the assumption that struggles for social autonomy will not deny Indigenous women's gendered concerns and rights. It becomes

a problem when Indigenous scholars' privilege race and tribal nation over gender because by doing so, Indigenous women are disenfranchised. She argues that race, gender, and tribal nation must be connected to combat the rampant sexual violence suffered by Indigenous women.

Postmodernist feminists argue that knowledge, universal truths, and norms are androcentric and socially constructed. This means that knowledge, universal truths, and norms are results and consequences of social, historical, or political interactions and interpretations and thus, dependent on one's background, perspective, or peculiar situation. Post-modernist theorists argue that it is essentialist to assume that the problems of women all over the world are universal or that women all over the world share a common experience of womanhood without taking into consideration the context of race, class, ethnicity, religion, and other such differences.

Butler (1999) and Mohanty (2001) examine the overpowering influence of Western feminism in creating an understanding of the position of the Third World women. Some argue that Western feminism has played a role in promoting ethnocentric universality and imperialism. Butler (1999) and Mohanty (2001) point out that this has happened because Western feminism has created an impression that there are uniform interests and desires among women. This happens when individuals fail to recognize that each woman has a unique story and/or when there is the assumption that patriarchy and sexual differences are the same in every culture. Butler (1999) argues against "the political assumption that there must be a universal basis for feminism, one which must be found in an identity assumed to exist cross-culturally" and "Western notions of oppression, … because they tend as well to

construct a "Third World" or even an "Orient" in which gender oppression is subtly explained as symptomatic of an essential, non-Western barbarism" (p.6).

Feminism is needed to challenge the way of speaking and writing about the countries of the global south. The global south is often described as poor, backward, primitive, developing, third world, underdeveloped, least economically developed countries, and non-industrialized nations. These categorizations originated from the West and should be challenged because labelling a group of people reinforces stereotypes. Adichie (2009) challenges us to watch the single stories we tell and stresses the importance of telling multiple stories to avoid the risk perpetuating stereotypes and limited knowledge. According to her, stories matter and many stories matter. Stories have the power to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Adichie (2009) asks everyone to broaden the scope of stories they hear about other people and cultures.

Postcolonial feminists question the imposition of Western values on the world and challenges the unacknowledged and unexamined assumptions at the heart of European and American disciplines, which do not take into consideration the meanings, values, and practices of other culture (McEwan, 2001, p. 138-139). McEwan (2001) states that postcolonial feminist's theories also challenge "totalizing discourses and a singular feminism…. based on the vantage point of white, middle-class Western feminists, which failed to acknowledge the differences between women" (p.139). Smith (1999) argues that Western systems must make space for Indigenous perspectives and allow them to have their voice strengthened to tell their own stories.

Even though feminist theorists seek to understand the global framework that supports the hierarchies of power and privilege to abolish them, Gunnarsson (2011) notes that "theorising

is a messy and never clear-cut project, taking place in the dialectic between the concrete and the abstract, the subjective and the objective, the specific and the general" (p. 34). An understanding of the category of woman cannot single out gender from, for example, race and class in an absolute way because these structures are constantly changing and are only relatively distinct from each other (Gunnarsson, 2011). While some feminist theorists agree that it is possible to think of the experiences of women as a group on a global level because although what woman is may differ in diverse locations, women do share similar difficulties and experiences worldwide, others insist that such similarities must be defined and not assumed.

Theories that attempt to destabilize the social group "woman" should not be seen as a failure of feminism or feminist theory but instead should be the promise of achieving a synergy and alliance of strategies that attempt to fix what woman is. A feminist lens not only allows for a critical analysis of generalizations about the experiences of women but also encourages questions about how these assumptions and generalizations contribute to inequality.

Mann (2012) states that "particular issues dominated feminist thought at certain points in history and how feminist ideas often were responding to changing social, economic, and historical conditions" (p. 13), yet these theories are still very relevant today. Feminism is needed to expose and bridge the gap that exists between abstract theory and practice to bring about a political transformation in the issues of gender inequality and inequity that still plagues the world.

Intersectionality

The term intersectionality theory was first coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. Crenshaw's work is instrumental for setting the stage for intersectionality frameworks both as a form of inquiry and as a structure for critical praxis both in academia and in the lived personal or collective experiences of individuals (Carbado et al., 2013). In the past two decades, there has been an ongoing discourse among feminist scholars on intersectionality. While there are some differences in interpretation and application, intersectionality theory explores the ways that hierarchies of power exist along multiple socially defined categories such as race, class, and gender. Intersectionality provides a theoretical framework for understanding how aspects of a person's social and political identities mutually construct each other through structural inequalities and social interaction to create a web of intersecting hierarchies (Alaggia et al., 2009; Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991; Steinbugler et al., 2006). Carastathis (2014) states:

> Four main analytic benefits are imputed to intersectionality as a research methodology or theoretical framework: simultaneity, complexity, irreducibility, and inclusivity. In contrast to unitary or additive approaches to theorizing oppression, which privilege a foundational category and either ignore or merely 'add' others to it, intersectionality insists that multiple, co-constituting analytic categories are operative and equally salient in constructing institutionalized practices and lived experiences. (p. 307).

Intersectional feminist theorists believe that any undertaking to define woman as a category will fail to show the differences that exist among women. Intersectional feminist theories were born out of the challenges launched by women of colour to show that there is a

missing race critique, and that this omission has left them on the "lowest rungs of the social stratification ladder" (Mann, 2012, p.160). Crenshaw (1991) explores the race and gender dimensions of VAW of color. Her focus on the intersections of race and gender emphasizes that any definition of woman must account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed.

Crenshaw introduced the term to address the marginalization Black women suffered within an antidiscrimination law as well as in feminist and antiracist theory and politics. She used intersectionality to highlight the ways in which social movement organization and advocacy around VAW omitted the vulnerabilities of women of color, particularly those from immigrant and socially disadvantaged communities. Crenshaw (1991) explicitly adopts an intersectional lens to survey the VAW of colour. In discussing structural intersectionality, Crenshaw (1991) examines the ways in which the location of women of colour at the intersection of race and gender makes their experience of domestic violence, rape, and remedial reform different from that of white women.

Political intersectionality, reviews how both feminist and antiracist politics reinforces the marginalization of VAW of colour. Crenshaw (1991) through an analysis of representational intersectionality, explains how the cultural construction of women of colour through their representation in popular culture contributes to their disempowerment. The term intersectionality gained more prominence when sociologist Patricia Hill-Collins reintroduced the idea as part of her discussion on black feminism. According to Hill-Collins and Bilge (2016), intersectionality began out of a need to introduce the complexities of intersections to provide a guide in the field. They examine perspectives, dissension, and debates that characterize intersectionality through various points in history.

Hill-Collins and Bilge (2016) state that starting from the 1960s and 1970s, the work of Crenshaw builds on social movements to shed light on individual and collective identity with a focus on social justice as the main purpose of intersectionality. It was the activism of women of colour that showed that the oppression they suffered could not be examined by only one axis of social inequality. According to Hill-Collins and Bilge (2016), in 1980s and 1990s works started to examine how intersectionality became established in academia. Its global spread and influence in the 2000s placed emphasis on human rights perspectives, academia frameworks and its adoption in digital media.

According to Trier-Bieniek and Leavy (2014) intersectionality theory, "contends that race, class, gender, sexual orientation and even age serve as vectors of oppression and privilege" (p. 9). In other words, hierarchies of oppressions like racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, classism, homophobia, and transphobia are interconnected and must be examined together. In mid-1980s, women of color and lesbians began to increasingly question "the feminist view that an all-encompassing, undifferentiated gender inequality is the primary or only factor causing domestic violence" (Sokoloff, 2008, p. 231).

Jiwani (2006) states that ''Embracing an intersectional and interlocking framework involves a further examination of the ways in which different systems work in concert with each other to engender particular forms and expressions of violence'' (p. 18). I believe that an intersectional framework should not aim to divide but to unite by exploring and understanding the nuances and uniqueness of each woman's experiences.

Intersectionality theory examines the way hierarchies of power and social systems based on race/ethnicity, gender, class, and culture intersect and create simultaneous, additional, and interlocking oppressions of women. Scholars in different disciplines have been motivated by

intersectionality theory to examine how various forms of privilege and oppression work simultaneously to uncover other forms of social identities that go unnoticed. Intersectionality focuses on the multiple and complex identities which make up one individual, and the ways in which these identities are fluid, and difficult to define. Intersectionality theory requires that social categorizations are examined as key and essential categories of identity and not as afterthoughts because of their interconnected nature, which creates overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage (Sokoloff, 2008).

An intersectional approach provides a framework for analysing immigrant status as part of an individual's racial location in the social hierarchy. Maynard (2001) observes that it is the critiques of White Feminism by Black feminists that has brought about a consideration of the implications of race and racism in women's studies. Black feminists have condemned the inherent racism in the analysis and practice that assume that White experiences are the norm. In the past, White experiences were used as the basis for generating concepts and theories which fail to recognize and acknowledge the internal differences of women that are not White. Maynard (2001) argues it is impossible to engage in a discussion about race without calling attention to the problematic nature of the term. The common understanding of race is based on the distinction based on skin colour, religion, nationality, ethnicity, and language.

Rattansi (2007) points out that few people now admit to racist feelings. Many people do not admit to the number of races that exist or to the differences between different races. The question then is: if races do not exist and very few people now admit to being racist, what makes it possible for responsible academic researchers across fields like the social sciences, media, political realms, and large numbers of ordinary citizens to claim that racism is still widespread and prevalent in the contemporary world?

Rattansi (2007) examines the idea of new racisms that studies racial discrimination, which is widespread but has no scientific basis. There seems to be an emergence of a new racism that is more covert and focuses on questions of culture, religion, class, and ethnicity. The new racism contrasts with the more undisguised and noticeable manifestation of earlier forms of racism. Rattansi (2007), explores institutional racism, by tracing it back to the late 1960s. Irrespective of individual attitudes and responses to racism, the history of racism provides a context to explain the process by which many White people benefited from social systems and organizational structures that seemed to disadvantage people of colour.

Miles and Brown (2013) state that racism is the result of a complex interplay of individual attitudes, social values and institutional practices that is expressed in the actions of individuals and institutions and is promoted in the ideology of popular culture. Racism changes its form in response to social change. Miles and Brown (2013) define racism as an ideology that expresses the myths about other racial and ethnic groups that devalues and places them in an inferior position. Racism exhibits the origins of historical, social, and cultural and power inequalities that exist in society.

Crenshaw (1991) notes that immigrant status is an example of how race affects violent victimization. Though many academic studies by progressives and feminists and theorists attempt to expand the narrow constructions of social categories, critique of race is often left out. Jiwani (2006) argues, ''Rather than viewing violence primarily as part of distinct social hierarchies of race and gender, violence may serve as the conceptual glue that binds them together'' (p.15-16). Sokoloff (2008) argues that there is no "one size fits all" approach to VAWIR as it pertains to women in general and particularly when it concerns marginalized battered women (p.153).

An intersectional approach is not based on a rigid framework; instead, it welcomes multiple identities without giving preference to a particular social category over others and it allows for a fair analysis of multiple representations of sexuality, race, gender, and class, among other facets of identity (Carbado et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1991. Jiwani (2006) advocates for a more complex dynamic for understanding interlocking and intersecting oppressions of violence when analysing the experiences of immigrant women. Erez, Adelman and Gregory (2009) build on the history of feminist discourse by providing a coordinated feminist analysis of immigration and domestic violence to explore immigrant women's vulnerability to, and experiences of, VAWIR.

 While immigrant women may experience the same stressors and trauma of domestic violence as women born in Canada, their situation is complicated further by immigration status and the peculiar circumstances that this creates. When immigrant status is analysed with a feminist intersectional lens, one cannot help but notice how the overall circumstances of immigrants can have significant implication for the occurrence of VAWIR.

Crenshaw (1991) notes that immigrant status is an example of how race affects violent victimization. I will argue that although many academic studies by social or political movements and theorists attempt to expand on the discussions around the limited constructions of social categories, critique of immigrant status is often left out. According to Jiwani (2006), Patricia Collin Hill states that, ''While violence certainly seems central to maintaining separate oppressions- those of race, gender, social class, nationality/citizenship status, sexual orientation and age-violence may be equally important in structuring intersections   among these hierarchies.'' (p.15).

When intersecting systems of oppression are examined, our understanding is increased and enhanced of the ways in which the dominant society constructs racialized communities. This has implications for the gendered dynamics within those communities (Sokoloff, 2008). Smith (2004) states even intersectional analyses of violence against women have not adequately considered the histories of colonization and genocide against Aboriginal peoples nor considered the continued economic, social, political, and environmental oppression that influences interpersonal violence against Aboriginal peoples presently. Sokoloff, (2008) suggests that while feminist scholars and theorists recognize sexism as a form of violence, "racist sexism" is not focused on by the mainstream feminist movement. "Thus, a ''discourse of denial'' surrounds explicit and pervasive racism against women of color—in the academy, the women's movement, and the wider society" (Sokoloff, 2008, p. 234).

According to Jiwani (2006), in bringing forward the unique vulnerabilities and susceptibilities of different groups of women to violence, we shed light on the systemic forms of violence at each site where they interconnect and intersect with intimate and interpersonal forms of violence. An intersectional approach and analysis helps create awareness of the multiple types of violence against immigrant women and other women as well as the interrelated factors that make them susceptible subjects of violence from within their own communities and homes within institutional components from the larger society.

Gaps in the Literature

A review of available research reveals that there are several gaps in the literature on the issue of VAWIR as it relates to immigrant women in Canada. There are some articles, which explore the lived experiences of immigrants in the United States and some parts of Europe. A review of available literature reveals that most research on immigrants in Canada concentrates

mainly on the experiences of Asian and Latin American women in heterosexual and monogamous relationships (Madden et al., 2015; Souto et al., 2016). The scarcity of literature on VAWIR and the lived experiences of immigrants of African descent implies that the diverse experiences of the immigrant population from this part of the world who live across Canada has not been adequately explored. Available studies focus on the factors that influence immigrant women's experiences of domestic violence (Erez et al., 2009; Raj & Silverman, 2002).

According to Okeke-Ihejirika (2020), "the literature on Sub-Saharan African immigrants in Canada is not only sparse, but also, in many ways, it hides more than it reveals. Often, African immigrants are either tucked into the larger group of 'Canadian immigrants' or an undifferentiated pool of Canadian Blacks" (p. 2). Okeke-Ihejirika and Yohani (2017) note that it is apparent that the current Canadian literature and policy documents have clear limitations. They argue that beyond recognizing the challenges these gaps in knowledge pose, it is important to initiate a discussion on developing comprehensive provincial and national policy guidelines on domestic violence for the broader Canadian immigrant population as well as direct future research.

Okeke-Ihejirika et al. (2020) carried out a scoping review of forty-eight articles to examine research on Sub-Saharan African international migration to Canada. They found that most of the reviewed studies were in Ontario, particularly the Greater Toronto Area. A majority of the studies were qualitative, with data gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus groups with participants. According to Okeke-Ihejirika et al. (2020), the scoping review revealed five major themes: Structural barriers to rebuilding self, family, and community; limited support systems available in the transition period; transnational ties and

commitments as a recurring mediator of migrant life; mechanisms for navigating transition and integration; and changing gender relations and roles. Each theme emerged from a group of articles within the selected literature and this scoping literature review reveals the need for further research on Sub-Saharan African international migration to Canada.

Ibu (2021), carried out a case study which investigated how conflicting gender ideologies influenced Nigerian-immigrant women's experiences of domestic violence in Canada. Ibu (2021) interviewed ten Nigerian immigrant women in Canada and found that while some study participants experienced a shift towards more egalitarian ideologies others maintained the patriarchal social stratification practiced in Nigeria. This resulted in conflicting gender ideologies that influenced the participants' experiences of domestic violence

I found that existing research focused on heterosexual relations without exploring the experiences of individuals in LGBTQS+ relationships. This may reinforce stereotypes as well as the idea of heteronormativity, which assumes that all people are heterosexual, or that heterosexuality is the default or normal state of human being. This notion tends to complement and accompany concepts like cisnormativity, gender binarism, and gender essentialism.

A heteronormative society operates on the belief that gender is a fixed binary. Male and female gender expectations, roles, and functions are often rigid, and the presence of alternate gender constructions are not an option. There is scarcity of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, queer, intersex, pansexual, two-spirit, androgynous and asexual immigrant women as well as immigrant women living with a disability (Mastrocinque et al., 2016; Thiara et al., 2011; Walker, 2015). It is possible that these women experience even more distinct forms of VAWIR. The goal of this research is to explore the nuances of

experiences with a feminist intersectional approach, which allows one to examine a group of people that make up the immigrant population present in Canada.

Most of the articles that explore the experiences of immigrants and VAWIR do not adequately examine Canadian laws and policies that deal with the impact of immigration policies on immigrant women. While the available literature will provide me the foundation and basis to begin my research, I intend for this case study to delve more into the experiences of women of West African descent to give voice to their experiences. One of the focal points of this research will be exploring the gendered nature of migration and examining the impact of immigration policies on women's economic position and how these are connected to VAWIR. I believe that the experiences and stories of the research participants will provide useful insights on the intersection of VAWIR and immigration and further bridge the gap in existing literature.

Chapter Three: Methods and Methodology

Social science researchers use qualitative approaches to interrogate social phenomena and to explore a deeper understanding of human behaviour. Qualitative methodology was suitable for this research because my goal was to learn specific information about personal experiences within a social context from a population. As a researcher, I was a key instrument in the research because I played a central role in the research process. I was tasked with the responsibility of gathering information; carrying out interviews; analysing all the data collected and presenting the results. This was a daunting task because data was gathered from four participants, at the natural setting where the problem was experienced (Creswell, 2014). I gathered data by talking to participants through a secure, password-protected virtual audio conferencing (zoom) and through the phone due to the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Framework

My research framework is made up of a combination of ideas, theories, concepts, experiences, and values that are inextricably connected and interwoven with the aim of answering the main research question. This qualitative case study was guided by the ontological beliefs and standpoint of intersectional socialist feminist theory and the philosophical underpinnings of transformative framework to examine the intersection of immigration status and VAWIR and how this relates to the position of women in society, patriarchal values, structural oppression, gendered socialization, as well as power and control to reflect on power and social relationships in order to improve society.

Transformative Framework

I chose to use a transformative framework because it is intended to aid people improve society and that is one of the primary reasons why I undertook this research project. According to Mertens (2009), the transformative framework is based on the acknowledgement of injustice and inequality as being pervasive and the belief that research and evaluation are important means for confronting these societal issues. Research should play a clear role in the identifying and challenging discrimination and marginalization arising from factors such as race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, socioeconomic status, age, and disability.

The transformative paradigm provides a comprehensive framework for categorizing and analysing an array of social issues like oppression and domination, which are present in society and are studied by several groups like feminist, Indigenous and disability right scholars as well as members of diverse ethnic or racial groups to transform society (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mertens, 2009). A transformative framework includes an individual's worldview and their implicit values and assumptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). There is the assumption that knowledge is affected by human interests and this reflects on the power and social relationships within society. Knowledge construction is intended to help people to improve society (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

I connected the transformative framework to all the steps in the process of this research by relating the different stages in the research process to transformative ideas. The philosophical underpinnings of the transformative framework guided this entire research process starting from defining the problem, literature review, identifying the research design, selecting participants, analyzing the data, interpreting, and reporting of results. I introduced

the transformative view into this qualitative case study focusing on a research problem that serves a purpose to a marginalized community like the immigrant community (Mertens, 2009).

Intersectional Socialist Feminist Research

Under the umbrella of a transformational framework, this research uses aspect of the lens of feminist research to examine feminist-based theories. By exploring the realities of the research participants, this qualitative case study examines their experiences on multiple axes like gender, race, immigrant, and economic status to better understand factors that shape the experiences of visible minority immigrant women dealing with VAWIR. Feminist theories interest me because I believe they address androcentrism in research and any insufficiencies and absences of women's perspective in disciplinary theorizing, research, and practice.

According to Haraway (2001), it is not enough to criticize existing modes of knowledge and perspectives of the world but instead she argues that feminists need new modes of knowledge. Haraway (2001) asserts that it has become necessary to consider feminist objectivity to bring about knowledge that is potent for reshaping a world oppressed and dominated by hierarchies of power. I believe a feminist lens brings forward the need for new modes of knowledge that challenges us to insist on a better account of the world and takes into consideration other perspectives instead of depending on radical "historical contingency and modes of construction" for everything (Haraway, 2001, p.66)

This study utilizes a qualitative case study approach guided by an intersectional socialist feminist approach to examine the intersections of immigrant status and VAWIR in shaping the experiences of West African immigrant women in Northern BC communities. This research uses an intersectional social feminist framework to not only challenge dominant

forms of knowledge and truth but give a space and voice to the reality and experience of marginalized groups to tell their stories. As a researcher, it was my priority to undertake a study that challenges the status quo in both its processes and outcomes (Potts & Brown, 2005). Reinharz and Davidman (1992) state that there are a variety of feminist methodologies, but they share some common aims and characteristics such as seeking to overcome biases in research, bringing about social change, displaying human diversity, and acknowledging the position of the researcher.

Feminist research is concerned with the intersection of race, class, and gender as well as patriarchal values, structural oppression, and violence (Bishop, 2002; Mullaly & Dupre, 2018; Scholz, 2010). According to Kennedy (2008), socialist feminism is a branch of the feminist movement interested in the link between patriarchy and capitalism. Socialist feminists believe that liberation can only be actualized by working to address the roots of economic and cultural factors that oppress women. Armstrong (2020) states that socialist feminists seek to interconnect feminist examination of gender inequality, social reproduction, and economic reproduction by exploring the ways that women's economic, social reproductive role and gender oppression contribute towards women's oppression. Rayaprol (2016) points out that in the feminist approach, theory and praxis are necessarily intertwined.

Carastathis (2014) states that "intersectionality has become the predominant way of conceptualizing the relation between systems of oppression which construct our multiple identities and our social locations in hierarchies of power and privilege" (p. 304). Several scholars recommend that an intersectional approach be adopted in research (Cole & Stewart, 2001; Kelly, 2021; McCall, 2005; Nielsen, 2011; Shields, 2008). A feminist intersectional approach allowed me to examine the multiple identities present in society. In the past,

feminism was a Western movement which did not take into consideration the experiences of women of colour. Thus, intersectionality is a major part of post feminism because it recognizes that several hierarchies of power interplay to shape the distinct experience of each woman.

Case Study Approach

The qualitative research approach I used in this research is a case-study. Creswell and Poth (2018) state that a case study is a method of inquiry in which a researcher explores comprehensively and thoroughly a process, programme, event, or individual. Detailed information is collected over a period using a variety of methods. The primary goal of a case study is to perform an in-depth analysis of an issue, within a context with the focus being to understand the issue from the perspective of participants (Harrison et al., 2017). A case study is a form of qualitative research that attempts to look in detail at an individual or small participant pool in order to draw conclusions only about that participant or group and only in that context (Marlow, 2010). In a case study, an intensive approach is taken to study a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of similar units (Gerring, 2004).

I chose to use a case study approach for this research because my goal is to describe a phenomenon and the real-life context in which it occurred and to critique the systems the participants have described (Yin, 2003). This approach was used to give voice to West African immigrant women who shared their stories of VAWIR while navigating the terrains of Northern British Columbia as newcomers. The subjective experiences of research participants are described with the purpose of identifying how their status as immigrants intersect with VAWIR to shape their experiences. Yin (2003) suggests putting boundaries on a case to prevent it from becoming too broad or having too many objectives. I bound the case

study to the stories of 4 participants, time, and place to ensure that this study remains within a reasonable scope. The boundaries indicate that I described only the experiences of the participants of this research as they were narrated. By placing these boundaries, I indicated the scope of the case study.

Researcher's Personal Reflexivity

Korstjens and Moser (2018) state that reflexivity is an essential part of ensuring the transparency and quality of qualitative research. Qualitative researchers evaluate the best methods to employ to best represent the voices of their participants while acknowledging their own position in the epistemological process (Chandler et al., 2015). My methodology included my personal reflexivity because as Malterud (2001) notes that "a researcher's background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions" (p. 483-484).

In my former role as a victim services worker and in my current role as a social worker, I strive to work from a non- judgemental approach and thus, I developed skills of reflexivity in my practice. I am aware of my own biases, so I am constantly and consciously examining and reflecting on my own beliefs, judgments, and practices. The various people I support present with stories of rape, child abuse, VAWIR, child molestation among a wide range of human experiences and I do not judge or label them; instead I work to support them to find resources, to build their capacity and in developing skills to ease their pain (Darawsheh, 2014; Finlay, 2002).

My professional and personal experiences with VAWIR as well as my lived experiences as an immigrant have caused me to develop strong convictions and, values about both

subjects. During the research process, I was conscious of the fact that I am the human research instrument and that it may be difficult to separate my research entirely from these passions and philosophies. I acknowledged that it was important that I was self-aware and reflexive about my role in the process of collecting, analysing and interpreting data, and in the preconceived assumptions I bring to this research so, I was constantly examining my own beliefs, judgments, and practices to identify how these may have influenced the research (Darawsheh, 2014; Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Westhues et al. (1999) assert that reflexivity is important, because research is not value free. During this study, I kept a reflexive journal where I made regular entries of the research process. My entries included records of methodological decisions and the reasons for them, the organization and planning of the study, and reflections on what was going on for me in terms of my own values and interests (Guba, 1979). By engaging in personal reflexivity, I ensured the research analysis was accurate and captured entirely the stories the women shared with me.

Different researchers may approach the study of a subject or phenomenon from different positions, approaches, or perspectives, which might lead to different yet equally valid understandings of the study. While these differences in ways of knowing may be viewed by some as a problem, these differences of perspectives may also be a means of providing a richer, diverse, and evolving understanding of complex phenomena. It is therefore very vital that a researcher from the onset makes their position, perspective, beliefs, and values clear (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Also important is to understand that there exists a distinction between preconceptions and biases. According to Malterud (2001) "Preconceptions are not the same as bias, unless the researcher fails to mention them" (p. 484).

For the past 30 years, researchers and practitioners have examined the impact of work stress experienced by human service workers. Studies on burnout have also been a useful field of study yet there are still concerns on how work stresses affect people who support victims of trauma. The concept of vicarious trauma sheds some light on the stresses associated with helping victims and survivors of traumatic events. Like the burnout research, early research on vicarious trauma has identified how both personal and organizational trauma correlates. Bell et al. (2003) review "the growing research on the organizational components of vicarious trauma and suggest changes in organizational culture, workload, group support, supervision, self-care, education, and work environment that may help prevent vicarious trauma in staff" (p. 463).

Bell et al. (2003) found that working with people who have experienced traumatic events challenges many of the beliefs held in the dominant culture about justice and human brutality and savagery. Being exposed to these realities may not only take a toll on workers' emotional resources but may also affect their perceptions and worldviews in radical ways. While preparing for this research I worked with the understanding that the stories I hear may impact me. My personal knowledge of oppression, abuse, violence, and injustice have sometimes been a difficult and isolating aspect of my work. Sometimes I become overwhelmed and burdened by the stories I hear. Before undertaking this study, I critically examined my life and asked myself what the stressors in my life were. I also critically examined what my self-care goals were and how they will help me to cope with the current stressors in my life as I worked on this thesis research.

Ethical Considerations

Several ethical standards were in place to guide this research. I provided information about research participant recruitment and ethical considerations (Appendix 4). I ensured that the ethical procedures, principles, standards of the Tri- Council were applied to this research by making sure that participants were accorded the respect and dignity due them. I highlighted the voices of the participants by using specific participants' quotes to ensure participants' voices were the central focus of the analysis. To ensure that the confidentiality and anonymity of participants were maintained, pseudonyms were used as an alternative to their real names.

Saunder et al. (2015) note that the process of anonymization is a complex one, which involves a nuanced process because anonymity is a continuum "along which researchers balance two competing priorities: maximising protection of participants' identities and maintaining the value and integrity of the data" (p.617). To further protect the women's identity, I removed any identifying features. As required by Article #6 of the BC College of Social Workers Code of ethics (2009) which states, "A social worker shall protect the confidentiality of all professionally acquired information by disclosing such information only when required or allowed by law to do so or when clients have consented to disclosure".

Participants were also given the choice of whatever pseudonyms they prefer, and I used this in the analysis of this research. Participants were recruited from different geographical areas in Northern British Columbia to further ensure privacy. The principles and limitations of confidentiality were explained and outlined to the participants prior to the start of the interviews. Participants were made aware that information obtained in connection with this study will be disclosed only with their permission.

Participants were also informed that the information they give to the researcher will be secured in a safe database and that their real names and location will not be shown in any part of the research. Participants were informed through the participant information letter that the researcher will securely store the tapes, interview notes, and transcripts in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home throughout the research process. Electronic files were also password protected.

Prior to the interview dates, I provided the participants with the informed consent to review at their own time and pace. This was done to reduce any pressure on the day of the interview. This option did not replace the process of going over the consent form on the day of the interview. Sending informed consent ahead of time gave participants some time to think in advance about any questions or concerns that they may have about the research, and to bring them forward on the day of the interview. Participants were also made aware they could remove themselves at any point during the research process and of their right to refuse to answer any question they may find uncomfortable to answer. Participants signed the forms out of their own free volition.

The participant information sheet explained the risks, benefits, rights, and all the information the participants needed to know about participating in the research process. Participants were informed of potential benefits and risks of the research and benefits of the research were not embellished. Some of the benefits of the research includes cathartic release that may come from sharing of traumatic and painful experiences. This could also be a vehicle for consciousness-raising and further establishing the women's personal and social identity by contributing to empowering others through their stories. Key practice ideas applied in feminist

approach include dialogic, egalitarian relations, consciousness-raising, reflexivity, and social and personal identity (Harms & Pierce, 2020; Payne, 2014).

Conscientization also known as consciousness raising are activities which seek to make people aware of how the existence of the power imbalance and oppression present in society have influences on their personal experiences. Through sharing their stories, social concerns are brought to the consciousness that may cause people to ask themselves questions structured to reveal deep seated stereotypical assumptions that they have never questioned or challenged. Potential risks may be the triggering of memories of painful or traumatic experiences and to help with this, I gave participants room to debrief upon completion of the interview. Participants also received a list of local counselling programs and other support services in their communities (see examples in appendix 3).

In accordance with the Social Work Code of Ethics and by law, the researcher has a legal obligation to report to the proper authority's any disclosure of a child being abused or at risk of abuse; or a plan to harm others or self. This was clearly highlighted in the information and consent for the interview procedure (appendix 5).

Research Procedures

Recruitment Process and Participant Sample

This research targeted participants who provided information required to answer my research questions. I recruited four participants for this research. The participants met the criteria of being female, are at least 19 years old, had some experience of VAWIR in a heterosexual relationship, are first generation immigrants of West African descent, who landed and have lived in Northern British Columbia for at least one year. According to

Creswell (2013) criterion sampling requires choosing participants who meet a certain eligibility standard.

I anticipated some difficulty in recruiting participants who met the selection criteria. I worked with the understanding that VAWIR is a painful and difficult experience to share and that many women would rather keep their experience private for many reasons ranging from fear to shame so, the information and consent for interview procedure (Appendix 3) explained in detail how privacy would be maintained as well as potential benefits and risk of participating in the research. I did this to provide some comfort for potential participants and encourage them to participate in the research. Two of the participants did not wish to be recorded while the other two asked that the recording be erased after the researcher transcribed the interview and this was honored.

I sent out e-posters through multiple electronic means to numerous Northern BC communities to increase the chances of recruiting participants. The participants for this thesis research were recruited using an e-poster describing its purpose and objectives (see Appendix 1). This e-poster was sent to various African and non- African groups (such as African association, religious groups, African groups on social media). I also contacted people through email and word of mouth. Interested or prospective participants were asked to contact me by email or phone. The recruitment poster emphasized that their participation will be completely voluntary.

A confidentiality and non-disclosure agreement (see Appendix 2) was sent out to those assisting with recruiting participants. It defines information use and outlines restrictions on use of the research poster and involvement with other participants to just sending them the research poster and referring them to the principal investigator for more information. The

confidentiality and non-disclosure agreement places a responsibility on the recipients to keep information confidential and to not use the information in an unauthorized manner as well as restricts involvement with other participants.

Participants were recruited and selected using a combination of snowball and purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling consists of selecting participants who match the conditions needed for the research (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006), while snowball sampling allows for recruitment through word of mouth. Because the intent of this research was to learn more about the how the experience of VAWIR intersects with immigration, it was important to carefully select participants whose knowledge and experience are "information-rich" and therefore are cases "from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research" (Patton, 2002, p. 46).

I chose four participants who best fit the selection criteria. Once the participants were selected and confirmed their interest in participating, they were sent the full information package, which included an overview of the thesis research in the Information Letter/Consent Form (see Appendix 3), Participant Information Form (see Appendix 4), and the Interview Guide (see Appendix 5).

Qualitative Interviewing

For this research, I collected data through one-on-one semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 4). To further protect the privacy of research participants, I did not collect demographic information except for information willingly disclosed during the interview. I acknowledged and upheld the importance of the knowledge gained from people's experiences, worldviews, and social reality. I believe that knowledge is socially situated and

constructed and that it is important to pay close attention to how other people shape our moral perception of the world.

How people define or categorize issues depends greatly on social interaction. Chandler et al. (2015) state that "the positionality and subjectivity of the researcher(s) and the participants simultaneously shape the epistemological process" (p.1). I believe that people are the best experts of their own story and they should be allowed to name their reality. During the research process, as a socialist feminist researcher, I was conscious of "the emotional and mutual-dependence dimensions in human experience" (Neuman, 2000, p. 83).

An interview guide was used to provide some structure to the interview and ensure that no relevant information was overlooked as it "provides topics or subject areas within which the interviewer is free to explore, probe, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate that particular subject" (Patton, 2002, p. 343). The use of an open-ended interview "helps delimiting in advance the issues to be explored" (Patton, 2002, p. 343).

The interviews were scheduled at a time and date convenient for the participants. I recorded the data for two interviews electronically with a tape recorder with the participants' permission. Two participants did not wish to be recorded so I took copious notes instead. According to Bachiochi and Weiner (2002), if recording devices are not used the researcher should record as much verbatim as possible and not try to summarize or formulate consolations during the interview.

Qualitative, one-on-one semi-structured interviewing involves an informal, interactive exchange of dialogue ensuring a purposeful conversation (Mason, 2002). The goal of the interviews was to ensure that the relevant contexts are brought to focus so that situated knowledge is produced (Mason, 2002). This was a useful method for delving into the depth

and complexity of personal narratives. Qualitative interviews provided the platform for research participants to tell their personal stories thereby giving them a voice. This method gives a voice to the voiceless by providing a means for those who have been silenced and marginalized to tell the stories of their experiences in their own words. Another key practice component of the feminist approach is the building and sustaining a relationship.

Rubin and Rubin (2012) stress that it is vital to work with interviewees as partners instead of treating them as objects of research. A feminist approach concentrates on building equal and egalitarian relations that requires that an alliance is formed. I worked to foster a relationship built on equality or mutuality by breaking down any hierarchy of power that may exist (Harms & Pierce, 2020). Ross (2017) calls attention to the prospects of empowerment that is possible when methodological choices disrupt traditional power imbalances in the research dynamic as well as addresses the shortcomings that are inherent in most research endeavours. Ross (2017) argues that conceptual roots of empowerment which connects individuals with systemic and structural power transfer advocates that a critical approach to research should do the same.

I believe the very process of participation was empowering for participants because by voicing their stories, they gain perspective on what they went through and the knowledge they gain can be a powerful catalyst that can facilitate change. Bishop (2002) notes that consciousness- raising can be liberating because through storytelling people are able to analyse a situation. Analysis leads them to develop a strategy on what to do. When a strategy is developed this leads to action that can change injustice. The aim of a feminist approach is change rather than make people adjust to the status quo. The research process can be a critical tool for consciousness-raising among participants (Ross, 2017).

Due to the restrictions of the current global pandemic, the interviews were not face to face. Even though there will be more nonverbal data to collect in the face-to-face mode, Oltmann (2016) notes that this nonverbal data may be ambiguous, leading to misinterpretation. Mealer and Jones (2014) states that "there is a difference in power between researcher and participant that can be ameliorated through virtual space" (p.35). The use of technology can either increase or reduce surveillance fears, depending upon the research participant. Marginalized groups may feel intimidated by the formality of a face-to-face interview, compared to the more casual use of the forms of technology (Taylor, 2002). The physical and social distance between the interviewer and the research participant during a virtual interview may improve responses from marginalized groups (Taylor, 2002; Trier-Bieniek, 2012).

Transcription & Member-Checking

The data was collated, transcribed, and analysed by me and pseudonyms were used throughout this research to protect the identity of the participants. For the sake of increasing accuracy interviewees were provided with a draft of their responses for review (Bryman & Cassell, 2006). Raw transcripts and the notes from the participant who did not wish to be recorded were then sent to participants via a password protected pdf document and member checked. Participants were asked to respond with any changes they wish to make and to indicate whether they wish to be contacted for a second round of member-checking after themes have been established. Only one participant responded with one minor change and this was immediately corrected.

Data Analysis Methods

The data collected through semi-structured interviews was analysed using inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). My theoretical framework is a good match with thematic analysis because this process of analysis is not limited to any theoretical framework. Inductive thematic analysis is also compatible with my research, as I did not gather statistical data but instead, I was interested in getting perspectives of women about their lived experiences. Through this approach the variety of ideas that became known through interviews and conversations with participants were better understood with thematic analysis. The focus of thematic analysis is on identifiable themes, living patterns and of behaviour (Van Den Hoonaard, 2012).

The strengths of thematic analysis are its focus on pattern recognition (Patton, 2002), and its flexibility in application. According to Braun and Clark (2006), it "is the first qualitative method of analysis that researchers should learn, as it provides core skills that will be useful for conducting many other forms of qualitative analysis" (p. 78). Taylor and Bogdan (1984) define themes as units obtained from patterns from topics in conversation, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings, folk sayings, and proverbs. The themes that were extracted from the data were coded. An inductive coding approach allowed me to accomplish my goal of moving past theory.

In qualitative research, a code is most times a word or short phrase that symbolically gives a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data (Marlow, 2010). In order to execute coding, the researcher marks sections of data with symbols, descriptive words, or category names (Creswell, 2014).

Through meticulous and painstaking processes, I made sure that my data generation and analysis was in accordance with my research question.

I used the six steps of thematic analysis outlined in Braun and Clarke (2006). The first stage of thematic analysis was to transcribe all the conversations (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I then read the data multiple times line by line looking for patterns and meaning related to my analytic objective. To do this effectively without leaving out any information, I wrote down important ideas and notes.

The second step involved dividing the data into meaningful analytical units and applying code to every meaningful segment of the data collected. After reading through again, I wrote down basic ideas and notes based on the meanings and patterns I found within the data. I then began to develop codes by identifying any aspect of the data that appeared interesting. I developed codes separately not considering the themes that previous research on the topic may have identified (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The third step of the thematic analysis happened when I began to search for themes by combining and categorizing related patterns of the codes into major themes. Themes are identified by synthesizing components or fragments of ideas or experiences, which often are meaningless when viewed separately (Leininger, 1985). I identified all data that related to the already classified patterns and used colours to categorize, distinguish and then organize similar ideas together. Braun and Clarke (2006) recommend the use of different visuals to capture meaning and relationships of codes and themes. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) "a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (p. 82).

In step four each of the major themes were broken down into sub themes after adjusting my developing themes. Sub-themes were then developed and according to Aronson (1994), sub themes that become evident from the participants' stories form a comprehensive picture of their collective experience. I rigorously studied how different ideas and components fit together in a meaningful way when linked together (Leininger, 1985). I also made sure that emerging patterns in the themes fit with the data set.

During the fifth step, the themes were named and defined acknowledging and appreciating why each theme was important. Finally, for the sixth and final step, I used reflexivity by ensuring that the analysis of the data is a true reflection of the views and opinions of the research participants. I ensured that my final product was understandable and that the analysis, which is analytical, focused entirely on the stories of the participants without being altered or tainted by my personal biases, views, opinions, or experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Creswell (2014) notes that the analysis process should also be reflexive. This includes the researcher's interactional experience with interviews. I carefully and painstakingly read over the research journal and field notes and ensured that I was reflective and aware of my subjectivity. I also went over my reflexive journal, which I had kept ensuring that my research is accurate and dependable. I also confirmed my analysis using member checking by sending the transcripts of final raw data and themes to participants who indicated an interest in a second member checking to ensure it entirely represented their opinion and point of view. Any comments or suggestions from participants were incorporated and the emerging themes and thematic description were written into the discussion in the final thesis document.

Data Management

The tapes, interview notes, and transcripts were secured in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home throughout the research process. Electronic files were also password protected. The data collected as a part of this thesis research was used for research purposes only. This purpose was specifically to provide more understanding and insights into the intersection of VAWIR and immigration and how this impact the lived experiences of West African immigrant women who live in northern BC. During the process of the thesis research, those who had access to this data other than myself were: my graduate thesis supervisor, Professor Dawn Hemingway, my graduate thesis committee members, Dr. Theresa Healy and Dr. Indrani Margolin. Whenever raw data was sent to my supervisor or committee members, I made sure that it is password protected and sent within the university's secure system servers providing a double password. As per guidelines of the American Psychological Associations (2005) all collected data will be held for a period of 5 years after publication in a secure place, after which time it will be disposed of in a secure manner.

Knowledge Translation and Gifts for Participants

Copies of this thesis research will be made available electronically to each participant. I am a firm believer in the principle of balance, and this is expressed through reciprocity and is reflected in the recognition of the dual nature of every action and counter action. It means that every action has a corresponding action. Reciprocity involves deeply acknowledging the gifts of others and responding in ways that honour them (Stewart-Harawira, 2005). I gifted participants with a $20 gift certificate to a local store as an act of reciprocity for giving me their time and sharing their story.

According to Hart (2010) "Reciprocity reflects the relational worldview and the understanding that we must honour our relationships with other life" (p.7). Reciprocity promotes balance and harmony. It requires that we honour the being of others and this is often demonstrated through the act of giving. One can give back material gifts as well as the gift of time and assistance. One can also show reciprocity by acknowledging publicly what one received from someone else (Hoffman, 2013). To receive their gift, participants were offered the option of either providing a personal mailing address to the researcher or choose to have their gift sent for pickup at their local post office.

Desired Research Output

The information gathered from this research is to provide insight into challenges immigrant women face as they navigate the terrains of integrating into the country in addition to dealing with VAWIR. It is hoped that by bringing forward these stories of 4 West African immigrant women in BC, the thesis research might be able to contribute to a major gap in literature. Through the theoretical framework and methodology that I have carefully chosen, it is my hope that this study will give room for a better understanding of how the experience of VAWIR shapes the experiences of West African immigrant women in Northern BC. It is my sincere hope that the findings from this study will contribute to new and important knowledge regarding the experience of VAWIR among the immigrant community.

I am also hopeful that the findings of this research will provide information that helps shape policies and practices that will improve the lives of immigrant women specifically in Canada and in the world in general. I hope to publish my research findings in relevant journals, newsletters of women's organizations, newspaper columns, conferences,

symposiums, and other sources that can serve as an avenue to bring change to immigration

policies that can empower immigrant women.

Chapter Four: Research Findings

This chapter provides the results of four qualitative interviews conducted with Gisele, Kanan, Ajoba and Obioma. The purpose of this case study was to use an intensive approach to study a smaller unit of four West African immigrant women in Northern BC with the purpose of gaining some potential understanding and relevant knowledge of a larger class of similar units on how the experience of VAWIR and immigration affect the lived experiences of immigrant women. During the interviews, questions asked of the participants assisted in understanding and gaining knowledge of how VAWIR and their position as immigrants intersect to define their unique experience.

Writing the findings for this thesis gave me the rare opportunity of not only exploring qualitative data, which is rich in meaning and complex in nature, but to also delve into the world of the research participants and excavate from the depth and complexity of personal narratives themes that saturated the data. The participants in this research have suffered violence at some stage in their relationship meted out to them by their male partners while in relationships with them. Data collected in the four interviews identified four meta-themes: Life in the home country, immigration, settlement and VAWIR, accessing support and life after the abuse. I have further divided meta-themes into the following themes provided in

Illustration Figure 2 that follows.

Figure 2

Overview of Findings

Meta- themes	Themes
While in Home Country	Family life Education and work Intimate relationship before Migration Patriarchy Double standards Controlling behavior
Immigration, Settlement and VAWIR	Emotional response Physical violence Private and public sphere Foreign credentials and Employment Isolation and loneliness Victim blaming Cultural dissonance and differences Views on intersection of VAWIR and immigration Fear of disclosing Abuse
Accessing Support	Support from family and friends Community support Government support
Life after the Abuse	Personal growth and lessons

Case Study 1: Kanan's Story

Life in the Home Country

Kanan grew up in an idyllic village in a West African country. Her father was a farmer who, though married to only Kanan's mother, had children from other women. Kanan narrated that she has a large extended family and most of her close relatives lived in the same vicinity. Even though all her relatives had their separate households, they all functioned as a cooperative economic and social unit. They helped each other out when there was a need. Kanan stated that she had many father and mother figures because it was the duty of everyone to raise the children in the community. In her culture, the men had all the say and their word was law. She saw this play out in different scenarios where women were forced against their will to do as the men in their lives commanded or demanded.

Kanan was socialized to see women as subordinate and even inferior to men. She stated that earlier in life she did not question any form of control nor did she even recognize it as such. In their community, men did the harder tasks and heavy lifting such as clearing land while women helped with planting, harvesting, and processing the food products. Women also carried wood and water and were responsible for taking care of household tasks involving food and children. Kanan's mother was a healer, and she remembers that many people came to the house seeking her services.

In her village children were expected to obey and respect their elders as well as learn gender-appropriate tasks early, particularly the girls. Just like it was the case with most girls in her community, Kanan's marriage to Ade was arranged. As expected from a dutiful and obedient daughter she married him when she was 17. Within 6 years of their marriage, Kanan bore him 3 children. After they moved to the city, an opportunity presented itself for Ade to

move Canada for work and Kanan stayed back and cared for the children. Kanan narrated that in the beginning of her marriage she was oblivious to the fact that a woman could have desires of her own. Everything was great in their relationship when she obeyed Ade.

Kanan had learnt to braid hair while growing up, so in the city, she started to braid hair for friends and neighbours for a small fee and soon her customer base grew. As Kanan started associating with other women, she started desiring to do something more with her life. Kanan shared, "*When I saw all those educated women working in those offices…. wearing nice clothes… driving nice cars, I just knew I wanted to do more… to be so much more. My current life felt colorless. I wanted to go to school. I was so envious*". Kanan wanted to go back to school, work and earn a living like some of the other women she met. When she brought this up to Ade, he asked if he did not provide enough for her. Even though he did, she wanted to be more and do more with her life.

Immigration, Settlement and VAWIR

Kanan and the children joined Ade in Canada in 2008. Kanan still nursed the desire to go back to school. Whenever she brought up the subject of school, Ade did not want to discuss it. She did not want to have to continuously depend on him for everything. Kanan wanted some independence. One day she challenged his decision about refusing for their child to go to a friend's home for a play date. According to Kanan, "*he slapped me so hard I could barely see with that eye and that hurt badly for days. No one has ever hit me so hard*". Ade told her that she should never talk back to him. He forced Kanan to have sex against her will even though she was in so much pain.

The physical abuse and forced sex continued for over a year. Ade told Kanan that she would be deported if she told anyone. Kanan was consumed with intense sadness and a

demoralized sense. She barely slept at night and gained so much weight. Kanan became friends with Linda, a woman she met in her children's school. As Kanan got to know Linda better, she trusted her enough to tell her about her ordeal. It was Linda who informed her of her basic rights and the dangers of abuse. Kanan stated "*She told me that no one should be treated that way... she said that in Canada there are laws to protect people against all forms of physical abuse*". The next time Ade hit her, Kanan summoned the courage and called the police. Even though she was afraid, she knew it was the right thing to do. The police came to their home and arrested Ade because Kanan had bruises on her face.

Accessing Support

After the arrest, Kanan called Linda and she came over and together they called the local shelter because she was terrified of even spending the night in their house. Kanan feared that Ade would come back and harm her. She was immediately accepted into a shelter. Kanan enrolled in counseling and was provided a referral and information on legal remedies available to victims of violence in her small community. With the support of a local agency, she eventually got full custody of the children. Kanan stayed in the shelter for about a month in which time she stated that she was exposed to different types of women who were at different stages in their life. Kanan stated that she also learnt from the experiences of other women when they shared at group meetings. The shelter helped her find housing and Linda, along with other people who knew about her situation, supported her, and gave her rides to the local food bank. Kanan said, "They *showed me great kindness that I can never repay*".

Life after Abuse

Kanan was afraid to be in the same space with her former husband and did everything possible to avoid any face-to-face contact between them. Kanan stated, "*I just could not bear*

to be in the same place with him". She would have someone around when he came to pick the children for visits. She found a job with a cleaning company. Kanan came to Canada with only secondary school education but today she has a diploma in social work and works in a women's shelter. She said it was a long and hard journey, but she survived and is in a much better place.

Case Study 2: Gisele's Story

Life in the Home Country

Gisele is the second of three children. Gisele was born into a family of very educated parents and relatives. Both her parents were university professors. Her paternal uncle is a well known and respected lawyer in their country. Just like an apple doesn't fall too far from the tree, Gisele toed the same line. Gisele shared that from a young age she knew she wanted to be a lawyer. After her secondary education, Gisele gained admission into the best law school in the country. Gisele stated that she still remembers the joy and pride she felt as she walked through the university gates where great people had walked.

While at the university Gisele said that she immersed herself completely into her studies and had little time for social activities. She graduated as the best student in her department and while she was still in the university, recruiters for top law firms approached her with job offers. She chose a renowned firm in the big city. It was at the firm that she met Sam. He worked at the engineering firm in the same complex as Gisele. They met in the elevator several times and later in the restaurant. On one of those occasions Sam struck up a conversation with her. About three weeks later he asked her out on a date. While they dated, she remembers that Sam was overly invested in her appearance.

She remembered that once he told her that her blouse was showing too much cleavage and he wanted her to change into something else. When she refused, he left very upset because she did not do as he asked. Gisele said that she had spent so much time picking out the outfit and planning for the evening, she took a taxi by herself and went to the dinner. He called her the next day to apologize. They would constantly disagree on issues and he always expected her to do what he wanted without taking her views into consideration. Despite this being a red flag, she married him.

Immigration, Settlement and VAWIR

There was an economic downturn in their home country. People were experiencing hardship and many people were looking to leave for greener pastures. Gisele and Sam along with other friends applied for Canadian permanent residency as skilled workers. They hired an agency to help them, and Gisele remembers that it was an expensive and tedious process but they both had good jobs so they could afford it. By their country's standard, they were well off and would even be considered to belong to the upper class. The process took about 3 and half years. In June 2013, they were issued their visa and they had 1 year before it expired. This period gave Gisele and Sam enough time to liquidate all their assets and plan their move. They had 2 young children and Gisele was pregnant with their 3rd child when they both resigned their good jobs and left for Canada.

Gisele shared that through the help of a contact provided by a friend, they found a 3-bedroom house in a nice part of town in Vancouver. This contact who helped them buy some furniture before they arrived also was kind enough to pick them up from the airport. Sam was confident that with his qualifications and years of experience he would get a job immediately. They agreed that he would find work first while Gisele took care of the children. They did not

know anyone, but a friend gave them the number of some people from their country. Shortly after they contacted a couple who invited them over to meet their family and helped them find their way around. After 6 months Sam had not been called for any interview and their savings were slowly dwindling. It was a harsh reality to discover that Canada is indeed a very expensive country.

Gisele found out that she was expecting twins and with their savings almost gone, Sam took the advice from their friends to apply for other jobs. They had to also move to a more affordable house as they could no longer afford their current house. Sam got a job as a security guard and he worked long hours. By the time he came home he was very tired and irritable. After the twins were born their friend Mark who worked with a nursing home in a Northern community of BC told them that they may be better off in that place as the cost of living was lower than Vancouver.

Mark told them that his company was always short staffed, and he could speak to his supervisor about hiring them. They did not need any experience as the company would train them on the job. Gisele and Sam moved to the community. They worked opposite shifts so that one of them would be home to mind the children because they could not afford childcare. They barely had time for anything but work and this began to take a toll on their relationship. They would argue often, and he would get very upset if she did not agree with his views. Gisele said:

> It started with him pushing me then one day he slapped me when we were
> arguing. He quickly apologized and said that all the stress was getting to him. He said
> he regrets leaving our country. He started to drink more and more. The violence began
> to escalate. One day he beat me so much that I could not go to work for a week. I did

not want anyone asking me questions about my black eye. I was afraid to tell anyone, especially the people back home because I was ashamed. We were supposed to be better off here. I was also afraid because if he was sent to prison how will I fare by myself with four young children.

Gisele decided that she would not tell anyone about the abuse. She bore the burden because she felt she was supposed to protect her home, but the situation took a psychological toll on her. She started to forget little things and make mistakes at simple activities both at work and at home. She said she had 3 medication errors in one week and her supervisor was very concerned. Gisele could not afford to take time off work because they needed the money to survive so she tried her very best to be very present at work.

Accessing Supports

Gisele eventually confided in Sara, a friend she met at work because she could no longer bear the burden by herself. It was Sara who suggested that counseling may help. Gisele told Sam about counselling but at first, he was in denial. He said that it was just a phase that would pass. Sam after some persuasion agreed to attend just one session. The counselling outfit was run by a couple who were married at the time for about 45 years. Gisele was surprised when Sam reminded her of their second appointment. They saw this couple for almost one year.

As their relationship improved, Sam decided to start from the beginning to build his career in engineering. He started the process of receiving the professional engineer license and this gave him something to live for. Sam had to work under the supervision of a licenced engineer, as well as pass a professional ethics exam. Gisele said, "*It was like he was infused with new life*". During the period when they were facing insurmountable challenges, there were several moments when Gisele and Sam wondered if coming to Canada was a mistake.

They left their high- powered jobs to migrate and had not been able to find comparable jobs. They questioned if their decision to move Canada was a good one.

Life After the Abuse

Gisele decided not to pursue a career as a lawyer due to the cumbersome process of getting accredited. She opted instead to do a course in human resources while working at her job in the nursing home. Gisele shared that they are not where they want to be, but they have made so much progress since they came. According to Gisele, their marriage is free from every form of violence or abuse. They still have their challenges like every couple, but Sam has learnt so many skills that help him to manage stress.

<div align="center">

Case Study 3: Ajoba's Story

</div>

Life in the Home Country

Ajoba was born into a polygamous family with fourteen children and three wives. Money was scarce and so were the basic necessities of life. Ajoba's mother and the other wives often competed for her father's attention. She stated that her father was the lord and master of their home and he dictated what happened, but he wielded his power fairly. She remembers that even though they had little they still managed to find joy in the simple things of life. When she looks back today, she realizes that one does not need too much to be happy. Ajoba said she was very happy back then. Ajoba expressed her love for nature and how she loved to go to the forest and the river. She was very close to most of her siblings, and they enjoyed doing activities together.

Ajoba was very beautiful so by the time she was 16, suitors started to ask for her hand in marriage. Her mother would often encourage her to marry someone of means to help the family, so they turned down suitors who they knew would not improve their lot in life. During

the Christmas of 2005 she met Kojo, the only son of one of the wealthiest men in the village. She met him at a naming ceremony, and he took an instant interest in her. They talked and Ajoba remembered him as being very handsome and charming. She learnt that he had gone to Canada to study and was working. He was back home for the holidays and had only a few days to spend in the village. When his father approached Ajoba's father asking for her hand in marriage, her parents asked her opinion and she said yes. Her mother asked that she complete her secondary education before joining Kojo.

Ajoba said, "*This was like a dream come true. I was going to marry a rich man and move abroad*". In a very sad tone Ajoba added, "*If only one can see the future or know that all that glitters is far from being gold*". She spoke to Kojo almost everyday and Ajoba felt she knew him well but, according to Ajoba, you never really know anyone until you have lived with them. They married in a very lavish ceremony about a year and half after they first met. Kojo promised that she would soon join him in Canada. Ajoba went to her new mother-in law's house to help out as often as she could, and she was always well received.

Immigration, Settlement and VAWIR

Kojo got his Canadian citizenship about 5 months later. In 2007, Kojo sponsored her under the family class sponsorship policy through spousal sponsorship. The sponsorship process took about 7 months. Ajobo spent a lot of time daydreaming of joining her husband and living happily ever after in Canada. All the pictures of Canada she had seen were so beautiful. In 2008, she landed in Vancouver after spending 20 hours in the air. Ajoba stated that she got immigration status at the airport where she also received her landing document. This important document confirmed her permanent residency in Canada.

Ajoba took another flight from Vancouver to the Northern community where Kojo lived. Kojo was waiting at the airport to receive her. Ajoba described her new home as being so beautiful and beyond anything she had imagined. Ajoba was pregnant the very next month and this made both their families very happy. Kojo bought Ajoba a cell phone so she could talk with family. They had a beautiful daughter and soon another child, a son. Ajoba planned on going back to school but the children came quickly. Ajoba stated that Kojo was quick to get upset but she knew when to retreat. Every time she talked about going back to school, Kojo would brush it off or quickly change the topic.

He said he made enough to sustain them and did not believe a woman should work. Ajoba shared that she felt so lonely because she had no friends but only her husband to socialize with. They went for African functions occasionally, but she did not have any time to really bond with anyone because he was always hovering around her. Once a lady, Mercy had invited her to go for a picnic with other women but Kojo answered for her and said that they had something planned for that day. It was as if he wanted Ajoba only to himself and while she enjoyed his company, she wanted to have some space to herself and to meet other people. Ajoba narrated, "*He was choking me. I needed some air and some space, but I did not say anything. I did not want to be misunderstood or to sound ungrateful or to complain*".

Ajobo took a bold step and collected Mercy's phone number the next time they went for another function in the community. She secretly spoke to Mercy while Kojo was at work. Mercy was in nursing school and told Ajobo how to get started on applying. She was very excited at the thought of going to school and eventually becoming a nurse. Kojo exploded on her the day she told him that she had been talking to another lady and was considering

studying nursing. His attitude changed towards her. Before then they had no real issues because she gladly agreed to everything he said and avoided any form of conflict.

Kojo started isolating Ajoba by preventing her from engaging with others and going for social events. He complained that Ajoba spent too much time talking to her mother on the phone. Ajoba said, "*In fact he started to complain about every little thing*". About a month later, she had a long talk with her mother-in-law who told her the place of a good wife. According to Kojo's mother, a good wife is one who remains at home taking care of her husband and children and always making their welfare her priority. According to Ajoba her mother-in-law said, "*Don't let these Western women turn your head*".

Ajoba felt trapped as it became so clear to her now that he is controlling, jealous and very possessive. It deteriorated to physical violence and he constantly told her that she was too dumb to be a nurse, that no one would hire when she did not even know how to speak English properly. Ajoba shared:

> It was as if a demon had possessed him. I could not recognize the man I married and gave my heart to. The man I shared my most intimate parts with was gone and in his place was a total stranger, a monster. I felt insecure and totally worthless as a person. I started doubting my abilities as a person. I was not a very strong person ordinarily so every time he bashed me with his words and his fist, I died. It was as if someone was stabbing with a knife. I eventually got so numb that nothing mattered. I lost so much weight because I found no joy even in eating.

He forbade her from going to church or talking to anyone including her mother. In order to instil fear in her, Kojo frequently threatened her with deportation and never seeing their children again. The first time he hit her was the day she talked back during an argument about

talking with her mother and family. She saw a different man who was revealed when she was no longer the dutiful girl he brought back to Canada. Ajoba expressed fear of sharing her experiences with anyone for fear of being deported.

Accessing Support

One night he hurt her arm when he pushed her and then told her that he would send her back home if she spoke to anyone about it. Despite her complaining of pain, he refused to take her to the hospital. He called in sick at work that day, but he had to leave for an appointment. That was when she called Mercy. Mercy came and took her and the children to the basement suite where she lived. They slept there that night and the next day, Mercy called a shelter who sent a taxi to get Ajoba and the children. She refused to report the incident to the police, but the shelter called the police because the children had witnessed the incident. He was arrested and charged.

Ajoba later learnt from her mother that the news had spread all over the community that she had caused her own husband to be imprisoned in Canada. Her mother faced a look of criticism for not raising her properly. Kojo's father then called her parents to a meeting where they were warned that there would be dire consequences if Ajoba did not undo the evil she had done to their son. Ajoba was afraid and called the police officer in charge of the case. She was told that this was out of her control. She wrote a letter explaining the situation and eventually he was given a peace bond.

Ajoba said that the women at the shelter were very supportive but also in the shelter were women who were misusing substances and her items were often missing. She felt completely lost with 2 little children in a country where she knew no one. Mercy asked her permission to share her situation with their church; she did, and 3 women visited Ajoba regularly. The

shelter eventually helped her get subsidized housing through BC housing and the ladies from the church assisted with furniture. She got support through a parent legal centre and she got sole custody of the children. Kojo as the noncustodial parent had a visiting schedule to have the children on the weekends.

Life after Abuse

Ajoba remembers this period as one of the most trying and tough times in her life. She had to upgrade her high school courses at the school district to be able to apply to the nursing program. Childcare was difficult to find but, through the women's group in church, they created creative ways to help each other. Kojo had her number and would send her emotionally abusive messages, which got to her at first, but she was learning so much about boundaries that she resisted him and would go as far as blocking his number temporarily. Once he took the children and would not return them until she told him that she would call the police.

Ajoba's mother told her that Kojo's parents continued to try to cause problems for them, but they were happy that she is safe. Ajoba stated that she had no interest in getting him into trouble; she just wanted to be free from him without losing her children. Today Ajoba is a registered nurse and married again. She went back to her home country last year and, even after all this time, she was shunned by many who view her as the woman who ruined her husband. She did not let their attitudes bother her but focused on enjoying the brief time she had to spend there with her family.

Case Study 4: Obioma's Story

Life in the Home Country

Obioma is the first child in a family of 7 children. Her mother gave birth to 6 girls in quick succession. She shared that one of her earliest memories is that of her mother doing everything humanly possible to conceive a boy child. Obioma said that her father loved them dearly and, in her opinion, never made her or her sisters feel less for being female. Her mother, on the other hand, felt pressured by the cultural norms that places a male child on an exalted pedestal. Obioma shared that she was about 24 when her mother adopted a beautiful young baby boy. She had already graduated from the university and moved to another city so, she did not quite bond with her brother as much as her younger sisters who were still living at home when he joined their family. Obioma told me that as her views of the world evolve, she has come to question and challenge harmful cultural norms.

Obioma shared:

> I have come to question my mother's decision to adopt a male child. This is not because I have anything against adoption but because I believe that the singular act showed that she was conforming to a culture that she should have challenged. I wish she resisted and decided that her six daughters were enough. I wish she was strong enough... I wish she concentrated on raising us to be all we can be and told us that we were worthy and enough.

Obioma informed me that she understands why her mother adopted was because she is from a different time. Obioma wishes her mother was strong enough to resist the pressure and stand strong and unshaken. Obioma stated that her father was a great parent, but she can't say that he was a great husband. Obioma watched her mother labour painfully in a very

patriarchal culture as she tried to hold it all together. Her mother bore her father's infidelity because it is believed that it is natural for men to cheat. She said that it is often said among her people that while it is wrong for a man to have an extra marital affair, that it is a taboo or a sacrilege for a woman to do the same. Obioma narrated how she saw certain relatives, especially female ones, act in ways that made her mother feel she was less because she did not bear a male child. According to Obioma:

My father sired a male child outside his marriage and though this child is male, I do not believe he did it because he was looking for a male heir. My half brother came to live with us for a brief period and my father sent him back to his mother because of some behaviors that my father could not condone. I remember that when my father died, certain uncles took the lead in pouring sand on his grave, a solemn act reserved for the immediate family. I also remember how certain aunties acted with so much hostility towards us at the funeral. One in particular slapped me, despite the fact that I was about 6 months pregnant at the time. When a dear uncle died his son stood on guard to make sure no one subjected my aunty to any dehumanizing widowhood rites. The loss of a spouse or parent is one of life's most traumatic experiences and we were not given room to grieve the loss of our father.

Obioma noted that the interesting thing is that women often champion and execute most widowhood rites. This may be because women, who are raised in cultures rooted in patriarchal hegemony, are conditioned unwittingly and inadvertently to act in ways that reinforce the norms that even work against them. Obioma said that after completing her university education, she worked in a large city in her country and her job exposed her to very rich and powerful men. There was the temptation for her to be a kept woman, but she wanted

to have a family. She met Ernest in her late 20's and she felt that they could grow together even though he did not have much. She believed that if they worked hard, they would make it to the top. Theirs was a short courtship and they were married within 3 months of meeting.

There were 3 ceremonies; the first was the traditional marriage performed in her village. A few days before they were to travel to the village for the traditional marriage, an ex-girlfriend of her fiancé contacted him and Obioma noticed that doubt set in and she asked Ernest if he was absolutely sure he wanted to continue and he said he was. A day after their traditional marriage ceremony, she could not get a hold of him for the entire day. Ernest did not answer her calls or call back. When he finally showed up at her house that evening, he said he had spent the day with the ex-girlfriend and was not sure he wanted to move on with the court wedding which was a few weeks away.

They argued and fought for days but Ernest later told her that he was convinced and wished to continue. She ignored this significant red flag and went ahead anyways with the court ceremony, which was attended by close friends and family. Many people frowned at the hastiness of their marriage. In fact, the church they attended at the time would not marry them because they did not complete the compulsory one-year courtship period stipulated by the church. A friend of theirs married them in a private intimate ceremony.

Obioma shared that Ernest continued to keep in touch with his ex-girlfriend and this caused issues for them. They had frequent quarrels and the first time he physically assaulted/violated was during an argument about a piece of furniture they were planning on buying. She slept at a friend's that night who predicted that it would only get worse, and it did. Obioma said that the physical abuse continued through the years. One incident that stands out for Obioma was when he wanted her to exercise only after their morning prayers, but she

wanted it the other way around because she would not be able to exercise once the children woke up. Obioma just had their second child about 2 months prior through a caesarean section which he witnessed.

When Obioma refused and made a remark that Ernest considered rude, he started punching her and stomping on her stomach. She took the baby with her and left for a friend's house. Obioma stated that he acted like a demon possessed man whenever he was enraged but would beg for forgiveness when his anger suddenly subsided. She kept forgiving until there was a total disconnection. Sexual relations became a chore for her, and she no longer wished to have sexual relations with Ernest. Obioma dreamt of meeting someone but in reality, she now had four children so she could not just leave. She worried about what people would say, how she would make it with little income in a very tough economy and how divorce would affect the children. There were some good times, but these were soon marred by many traumatic incidents that she preferred not to talk about.

Immigration, Settlement and VAWIR

In 2007, Obioma heard of an opportunity to come to Canada and followed through. She convinced Ernest for them to apply and after they were assessed, their agent advised them that it is best for Ernest to be the principal applicant. Obioma said that she prayed that it would work out and because her hope of ever coming to Canada was tied to him, she also knew she could not leave him then. Obioma told me about the gruelling process of gathering the documents and the waiting period as the application was in process. It was not until 2009 that they heard the results. When they were sent for their medicals Ernest wanted her to pay but she refused because up until then she had paid for about 80 percent of the cost associated with their migration.

This delay slowed down the process and they had to wait for another 6 months. As they were preparing to leave, they sold all their properties so they could have cash. A friend visited a few days before they left and told Obioma that she did not want to hear that they divorced as this was the trend with some of her friends who travelled to Western countries. Obioma wanted to tell her friend that their marriage was not a happy one. When Obioma and Ernest had another major misunderstanding, she told him that it was a good time to part ways because she did not want it said that they divorced just because they moved to Canada.

They moved to Canada in September of 2010. Obioma has family in Nova Scotia but was not very close to them at the time; they decided to settle in a community in Northern BC where Ernest had relatives. They stayed in the home of her husband's relative for a few weeks before they found housing. She started to work in a retail store near their house. According to Obioma, at first, she wondered if moving was a mistake because the weather was cold, she did not have any friends. Having to stand for so long in her retail job was hard on her back. At home life was not any better. The bickering continued and she felt all alone. During family meetings, she felt all by herself because she did not have any of her own people to talk to.

Obioma shared that Ernest's family members are very religious and judgemental so she did not really connect with them. She felt so isolated and alone all the time. Obioma comes from a large family with many fun-loving people who are more engaging and friendly. She decided to join an African church, but this decision did not sit well with Ernest who did not want to go there. He believed they should attend the same church as a family but Obioma insisted and started attending the church.

It was there she felt a sense of community and met people from her country who showed her how to get around. In the church, a man who was a professor in the university close to the

city she lived took a special interest in her and invited her to their home. She had applied to go to college to take a short course to become an early childhood educator. The professor told her that he believed that it was better she went to the university instead. With his help Obioma applied to the university and was admitted into a master's program.

The first time Ernest hit Obioma in Canada was during a cold winter night. They had an argument about their work schedules. He hit Obioma and her nose began to bleed. She ran barefoot to her neighbour's, another immigrant who asked if she could call 911. Obioma instead called Ernest's relative who took her to the hospital. A social worker asked her what had happened, and she lied because she did not want any problems for them. After this Obioma contacted her cousin who told her that abuse was not right and advised that she call the police if he so much as even threatens to physically abuse her.

The next time they had a disagreement she tried to reach out to his relatives, but they took his side so when he threatened to hurt her, she called the police. He was asked to leave the house and there was a no contact order. When the news spread that Obioma called the police, Ernest's family stopped speaking with her. Obioma's mother and one sister made statements to suggest that she was the one to blame. Obioma said that it was one of the loneliest times in her life.

Obioma stated

> It was as if I wore my marriage like a scarlet letter. Everyone who knew me knew of my marital woes. I carried the weight to make it work. I was often told that a wise woman builds her home. My sister told me that I was a failure if my marriage failed. An aunty told me that no one leaves their husband for beating them. My mother told me of all she endured at my father's hand, but she still stayed married.

Accessing Support

Obioma was referred to the local victim services and she contacted them immediately, but she could not go there because she had no means of getting to the meetings. Ernest took the car with him when he left, and she had to walk to work. She remembers falling very sick due to all the stress she was dealing with at the time. When she reached out to victim services asking for a ride to get to her appointments, a worker told her they do not offer rides. Obioma said that she received a letter from their landlord stating that Ernest had written to them to say that he wanted his name to be removed from the lease because he no longer lived there. Obioma's salary could not cover rent let alone other expenses.

Obioma narrated how her sister would message her blaming her about the break up. According to her sister, she was just looking for an opportunity to be with other men. Her mother was no different. Obioma confided in a woman in church who told her that she should block out every voice and look to the creator for solace. Obioma blocked her sister from sending her very hurtful messages and their relationship is still strained to this day. Obioma said:

> I did not have an easy relationship with my mother. I remember that she always wanted me to act in ways that were more feminine. I battled most of my life to be me and to stay true to my ideologies. She and my sister always preached submission. I felt trapped because that was not my idea of marriage. My mother and many others felt that I was not submissive. I realized that the parts of me that they wanted me to change were those qualities that made me strong, determined, and passionate…. the parts that made me unique. Over the years I have learnt to harness my strength to do and be more. I do not have to apologize to anyone for insisting that a marriage be fair.

One day while Obioma was weighed down with all that was happening, she went to the home of a neighbor and broke down in tears. The neighbour told her about a government program that assisted with rent. Obioma applied and got support through this housing program. Obioma also found a women's support group in the university where she was able to receive support, share her experiences and even volunteer.

Obioma and her husband attempted to reconcile and moved in together, but she found out that he had an affair when they were apart, and this hurt her deeply. There were times when she was hopeful, but the bickering continued. There was another incident that involved the police. With their on again off again relationship, Obioma vehemently refused to change her marital status to married because she did not want to lose the assistance she was receiving for housing. She had gained strength and resisted all his control. Obioma said, *"I have never considered myself a victim… I am not in any way a victim. I always stood up to him, but I never found the strength to actually leave. I wish I did not waste all those years with him…"* After another disagreement, he moved out of the house and this marked the end of their relationship.

Life after Abuse

Family members kept pressurizing Obioma for a reconciliation, but she was very conflicted. Obioma stated that while a part of her considered reconciling for the sake of the children, she knew she was done. Soon she started hearing stories of a woman he was having an affair with. She had reconnected with an old friend that was interested in her and they started getting close. He was married but talking to him provided her comfort and the distraction she needed. He listened to her pain and seemed to understand her pain. Against her better judgement, they started a relationship.

Obioma travelled any chance she got. Sometimes to see her lover but more times to explore the world. In this period, she started discovering new strengths about herself. Ernest would tell Obioma how people called her a wayward woman. There were numerous instances where he would make her feel she was an irresponsible mother. Ernest kept interfering in her life yet Obioma never questioned him about his affair. It was okay for him to find comfort in the arms of another, but he wanted her to be miserable.

Obioma ended the relationship with her married lover but she also knew that the only way to be free from Ernest was to get a divorce. As long as they were not divorced Ernest felt he had a hold on her. Their divorce was finalized in October of 2016 and Obioma heaved a sigh of relief. According to Obioma, "*I finally exhaled. It was as though a heavy burden had been lifted off me. It was a simple piece of paper that signified the end of a traumatic phase of my life. I left with the gift of my children and lessons to guide me for the rest of my journey*".

After the divorce Obioma had many advances from all kinds of men. She decided that this time she would not settle for just anybody but that she would do it right. She said that immersed herself to finding the spiritual connection through communion with the creator and service to others. According to Obioma, she began to receive the rejuvenation and strength she needed to work on being the best of herself. It was a lonely and painful process because she had to cut off the toxic people in her life including family members, confront her trauma and establish very firm boundaries to guide her relationships. Within a year she started her doctorate and began a business that is now thriving.

She poured all her energy into investing the right values in her children by being a great role model. She met a very good-looking doctor who was also divorced. A few years prior, he started a project back in their home country to provide free medical services, food and

sometimes housing to those who cannot afford it. Obioma had the same dream, and she joined

his team and today they have impacted millions of people in Africa and their organization is

growing to touch lives internationally.

Their friendship blossomed into something special because they shared a common vision

to improve the lives of others. In 2019, they were married in a very intimate ceremony with

their close friends and family attending. Obioma said that her husband is beyond what she

ever dreamed of. According to Obioma,*"In him God sent me a special cocktail- a true friend,*

a partner that listens, a confidant, a faithful lover and a wise man. I am so glad I did not

settle. I got the ending I did not even imagine was possible. I believe good can come out of

bad. We can turn our pain to strength". They share their time between their home country

and North America.

<div align="center">**Emerging Themes**</div>

While in Home Country

All the women in this research shared about their lives and experiences prior to coming to

Canada. The following themes emerged in the analysis of their experiences while in their

home country: family life, education and work, intimate relationships before migration,

patriarchy, double standards, controlling behaviour.

Family Life:

All the participants shared about their relationship and connection to their family. Three

participants come from a nuclear family that consists of a father, mother, and children, while

one participant shared that she comes from a polygamous family with three wives and

fourteen children. The participants' upbringing, family structure and their culture had an

impact on the trajectory of their lives, choices, and experiences. Obioma and Gisele grew up

in a middle-class family in an urban setting and were exposed to more diversity and the finer things of life. Speaking of her family, Gisele said, "*We are a very close-knit family*". Ajoba and Kanan grew up in more rural settings. Ajoba stated that for her family, the basic necessities of life were not always available. Ajoba speaks of her village, "*I remember my village. I can still smell the air. It was so beautiful and peaceful by the river. I wish I could go home often. I miss being in touch with nature. I was very close to most of my siblings, and we all enjoyed doing fun activities together*". One participant spoke of her relationship with extended family and how it was an uncle who inspired her to read law.

Education and work

All the women in this study had attained some level of education while in their home country. All the women in this research extol the importance of getting an education and express their strong desire to get more education. They all state that education has helped empower them and contributed to their advancement in life. Ajoba and Kanan completed secondary education/ high school before coming to Canada. Obioma and Gisele both completed their post secondary education. Obioma and Gisele also shared that they were working in big cities. Gisele graduated with honours and was a practicing lawyer and worked in one of the top law firms in the country. Obioma stated, "*I worked in a big busy city and I met very rich and powerful men in my job that liked me*". Kanan shared: "*When I saw all those educated women working in those offices….wearing nice clothes… driving nice cars, I just knew I wanted to do more… to be so much more. My current life felt colorless. I wanted to go to school*"

Intimate Relationship before Migration.

All the participants had started their relationship in their home countries before their move to Canada. Ajoba's ex-husband was already living in Canada and returned home to marry her. Kanan's ex-husband was the first to move to Canada for work and she and their children joined later. Gisele and Obioma were already married with children. Gisele and Kanan stated that their relationships were stable, and they did not report experiencing any form of abuse while in their home country. Ajoba was married before migrating but she hardly knew her husband and their relationship was fine till she moved to Canada.

Obioma stated that the abuse started before she moved to Canada and she was already contemplating leaving her ex-husband prior to coming to Canada. Obioma stated that her marriage was very turbulent and there were several instances of physical abuse by her ex-husband in their home country.

Patriarchy

Two women, Ajoba and Obioma spoke of their experiences of patriarchy. According to Ajoba, "*It was my father who dictated what happens like a lord and master. I remember that he was fair and would often listen and allow my mother and stepmothers and even us the children to express our opinion*". Ajoba narrated that when she shared with other friends in the village, they told of how their fathers exerted their patriarchal authority with an iron fist and she knew they had it easier in their house. Ajoba spoke of her father's kindness and her love for him. Obioma's reflections of her experience with a patriarchal culture is around the preference of the male child. She narrated that her mother struggled to bear a son as she felt pressured in a culture where the male child is seen as the crowning glory of the family and as such preferred. Kanan shared that *"the men pretty much had all the say...they are like kings or*

demigods. They controlled all of us. It is considered rude to question their decision or to talk

back. They thought for all of us. I saw it happen all the time."

Double Standards

One participant spoke extensively about her experiences, which revealed that there are different standards for male and female. Obioma revealed that she observed that the sexual promiscuity of men is socially tolerated and sometimes socially rewarded. According to Obioma, a woman's sexual life is not a private experience, but is viewed as an aspect of life that affects the family and the community. Women are not permitted to venture outside the sexual perimeter set by the sexual scripts in her culture. Any sexual indiscretion by a woman is greatly frowned upon; thus, the sexuality of women is suppressed. Geertz (1973) states that culture has the requisite implications of power and control mechanism within it, which allows for the exploitation of gender inequality. Speaking of the double standard that she observed Kanan stated:

> There were many things a man was allowed to do that women were not. For instance, it was okay for a man to sleep with many women but women who do such are called whores. We were told to keep away from them. My father had many children outside of his marriage, but my mother dared not do such or she would be sent packing immediately. I didn't even notice it then because that was how I viewed life then but today I question some of those experiences. Today I know better. Then I did not question it.

Controlling Behavior

Three participants explained that they experienced some form of controlling behaviour in their relationship before they came to Canada. Obioma narrated how her ex-husband would

get upset because she did not do as he said. Obioma stated "*He gets upset when he is not able to control me or when I refuse to do as he say*s". Gisele said Sam "*wanted to control how I dress, and I did not like that. I remember one time when he told me that the blouse, I was wearing was showing too much cleavage. He wanted her to change into something else but when I refused, he left in ange*r". Speaking of her ex-husband's control, Kanan described it as follows: *"He always controlled me and told me what to do and I did not question his authority. I was raised to see him as the boss"*.

Immigration, Settlement and Domestic Violence

Women within this research revealed some common experiences while they settled in Canada and experienced VAWIR. The following themes came up in my analysis of the period when the participants migrated and began adjusting to life in Canada: Physical violence, emotional response, private and public sphere, views of intersections of VAWIR and immigration, foreign credentials and employment, isolation and loneliness, victim blaming, cultural dissonance and differences, fear of disclosing violence. Two of the women, Gisele and Obioma, applied to come to Canada under the economic class as skilled workers while one woman, Ajoba, came through the family class and was sponsored by her ex-husband. Kanan was not explicit as to how she migrated but she stated that her husband was already working in Canada when she and her children joined him. The women in this thesis research faced varying types of challenges as they settled in Canada and this was exacerbated by the violence and abuse, they experienced in their relationship.

Isolation and Loneliness

All the women in this research experienced different aspects of isolation and loneliness while they were adjusting to their new life in Canada. Gisele stated that her family did not

know many people and it was a very lonely period. Obioma stated that she felt isolated from

her husband and his relatives and believed that she did not quite fit in. She also reported that

she felt lonely and did not have anyone to speak with most of the time. This feeling of

isolation and loneliness pushed her to find a community in the African church in the

community where she lived. Obioma stated: "*Due to feeling so alone, I decided to join an*

African church".

Ajoba stated that her ex-husband made efforts to keep her from socializing with other

people. According to Ajoba, "*He always wanted to keep to himself. He did not want me to*

talk to others. I think he was afraid that I would become more aware". She said that having

come from a big family, it felt very lonely being all by herself most of the time. At some point

he also stopped her from communicating with her mother and this caused her much distress.

Kanan described her experience like this: "*It was so lonely, and it was so depressing*"

Emotional Response

All the participants revealed an array of emotional responses both to their experience of

settling in a new country and dealing with VAWIR. Obioma said: "*If I did not face the issues*

in the marriage, it would be easier dealing with all the changes but having to fight frequently

on top of all that was going on made it so much harder. My retail job was stressful but the

issues at home made it so much worse". She further narrated that she felt "*overwhelmed, tired,*

lonely, confused and unhappy and it was hard to get up in the morning". Ajoba stated it was a

very difficult time for her and she felt fear, sadness, and loneliness. Gisele revealed that she

felt some of the emotions expressed by the other two participants in addition to feeling shame.

Gisele stated that she started to forget things and make mistakes both in her workplace and

home. According to Kanan, "*I felt totally worthless, empty and used by a man who should be*

protecting me". All the participants shared that the different emotions they felt had a negative impact on them and further complicated their situation.

Physical Violence

All the women in this study revealed that they experienced various forms of physical violence at some point in their relationship. One woman said, "*he broke her arm*". Another stated that "*he pushed me so hard I fell*". Obioma is the only woman who stated that the physical abuse started before they moved to Canada and continued here. Describing an incident in their home country, Obioma said: "*He started to beat me and stomp on my stomach. I just had our second child about 2 months before through caesarean section and he was there for the birth*". While in Canada she said, "The *first time he hit me was during a cold winter night*". According to Gisele, "*The violence began to escalate. One day he beat me so much that I could not go to work for a week*". Kanan narrated: "*He slapped me so hard I could barely see with that eye. The eyes hurt badly for days. No one has ever hit me that hard*"

Private and Public Sphere

Two of the women in this thesis research stated that their partners did not support their desire to further their education. Kanan stated that when she saw other women empowered by being economically independent, she desired that but every time she mentioned her desire to go back school to Ade, he would discourage her. According to Kanan, "*It was just not a topic he was interested or ever keen on discussing. If I could not go to school, then my fate was tied to being a mother and wife forever and I wanted more… I wanted to be like those working-class women in the city*" Ajoba stated that she wanted to be a nurse but Kojo felt that what he made could sustain the family and so Ajoba did not need to work. Kojo's mother told Ajoba

that a woman's place is in the home (private sphere) and her duty is to take care of her husband and children.

Cultural Dissonance and Differences

The four participants in this research expressed in various ways a sense of discord, disharmony, confusion, or conflict they felt amid change in their cultural environment. They described their experience of cultural dissonance and the different range of emotions they felt while adapting to a foreign culture. All the women spoke about the difference in the weather: *"It is very cold here. I don't like the winter, but I am sort of getting used to it"*; *"The weather for sure is very different, the winter cold is brutal. Oh my God, this country gets so cold. I was afraid I would literally freeze"*; *"it was dry and cold"*. The women also spoke of unfamiliarity with social norms. According to Ajoba, *"back home it is more communal. We do things together. Here people sort of keep to themselves. I like a balance of both.* Ajoba added *"Childcare is never a problem at home. You can leave your children with your neighbour; there is always someone. Anyone can correct a child ...you cannot do that in Canada or you will land in big trouble"*. Gisele spoke of experiencing new foods: "The *food at home is mostly organic. Certain food taste different here, but we have adjusted our taste buds and we used to it now"*. Obioma narrated:

> I also find that people in Canada are more individualistic whereas people in my country are more communal. When I first came it was very lonely here with no family and a very terrible marriage. I always felt so alone and that was so hard. While many people here are nice, some others are very racist. I have dealt with racism in many areas especially in the workplace and it is so sad.

Views of intersection of VAWIR and Immigration

The participants discussed their views of how their experiences of VAWIR intersected with their experience of immigration. The participants in their own words described how immigration status impacted their experiences of VAWIR. Each of the women spoke of the factors they believed were related to an increase in their experience of VAWIR. Obioma shared: *"The issues in our relationship made settling down more difficult. Two people working together can lighten the burden. I was overwhelmed most of the time and I even questioned my many times if moving was the right step*"

Gisele responded thus:

> Yes, yes yes. He does have control issues for sure like I have explained but the pressure of settling down made it way way worse. Settling down in Canada has not been very easy. It is not what we expected. So, the frustration heightened it and caused more stress in our relationship. For instance, some traits that may not overly come up in normal conditions become more heightened when people are under stress. I told you about our previous disagreement and of course couples fight but our immigration status made it worse. One big factor was coming here with all our work and qualifications… this was not recognized…. it was hard to start from scratch... Coming to a strange land where you don't really know who to trust or talk to. Our own expectations which we found out were not realistic. Fear of the unknown, fear of having to raise the kids by myself if he got arrested. It was just overwhelming

Kanan explained as follows:

> Of course, it made it so much harder. I did not know anyone. We should be doing this together… besides he came here first so he should be helping me settle down. Instead,

he was the problem. I had to deal with his meanness on top of the loneliness and the differences, the harsh weather… he should be keeping me warm and supporting me.

Ajoba narrated:

Yes, it made settling here more difficult. I agree that moving to a new country is hard, but it is much harder because I was not familiar with people here or how things work here. I grew up in a large family and there was always some to talk to but here I was always by myself. He made it very difficult for me to socialize with other people. I wanted to go to school but I didn't really know how to go about it. Another thing was the psychological aspect. I remember crying so much that I felt numb. I can't even explain it, but my heart was so heavy...it hurt so much, and I was not naturally strong.

Foreign Credentials and Employment

One participant described the challenges her husband and herself faced trying to find employment. She was a lawyer in her home country and her husband an engineer. They both resigned from their jobs and sold all they had before moving with hopes that they would find comparable jobs. When their savings were running down, Giselle's husband was forced to find work in a security outfit. They had to move to more affordable housing. In order to survive, they moved to find work in another community. Giselle said the following:

I decided instead of practicing law here to do a course in human resources. I am still working at my job. I am not sure that at this time I can go through the stress or rigours of practicing law. I think I am just taking the easy way out. Maybe I will never practice law again. It does hurt sometimes. My present job in a nursing home is not in any way comparable to being a lawyer or working for one of the most prestigious law firms at one time.

Obioma stated that before she came to Canada that she had worked in different capacities in her home country. According to Obioma: "*I had to start from scratch here. The first job was retail. I did it for survival and a few others after*". Obioma also shared: "*Some people with great jobs did not find great work here… some doctors have not been able to practice here. I know some people who had to do other kind of work… One in particular had to go back to read nursing here after practicing medicine in her country. Some others still do menial jobs. This can drain anybody emotionally and cause them to second guess themselves. It can affect a person's self esteem and their self worth. It is tough…*".

Disclosing the Violence

All four participants acknowledged that they were hesitant to disclose the violence to other people. The women in this research expressed various reasons why they did not immediately want to share or get help. Some of them feared that reporting or disclosing the abuse would only make matters worse for them. Obioma stated that she did not share "*I did not want any problems for us*". Kanan shared "*I was so helpless and afraid because of his threats. I was not sure what he would do. I did not think women have any rights here*"

Ajoba shared:

> I was too terrified to tell anyone. I didn't even tell my family because I did not want them to worry or be sad. My mother would have been devastated if she knew this was happening and she was when she found out. I did not tell anyone here because I was afraid, he would take the children and send me back home. How can I ever survive without my precious children? He told me I will be deported, and I believed him then.

Gisele stated:

At first, I was just too ashamed to talk to anyone. I was also afraid because I have heard stories of how men are arrested. I was afraid that it would be too much to manage everything on my own. I knew the pressures of moving caused most of this. I was just confused, tired. I thought it would go away. I was suffering so much. I did not know who to trust. I eventually summoned courage and told our friend when I could not, I could no longer bear the burden by myself.

Victim Blaming

Two of the participants shared that certain persons made statements or acted in ways that implied that they were in some way to blame for the harmful or abusive behaviour they experienced at the hands of their partner. Obioma described her situation: "*Most of the time I felt I brought this on myself. If only I was quieter. My sister said that I behave like a man and there can not be two men in the house. She always made it seem I was to be blame because according to her a wife should be submissive. Her idea of submission for me is slavery*"
Ajoba narrated her experiences, and she said the following:

> My mother told me that the news spread all over the community that I went to Canada and put my husband in prison because I am a wicked and ungrateful woman. I was given an opportunity every girl would die for and I ruined it. People would whisper, gossip... avoid my mother and even shun her. My mother faced a look of criticism and was accused of not raising me well to be a good wife and so I brought shame to my family by putting my husband into problems with the authorities. Afterall I am not the only African woman here. So why will I be different? A well brought up girl does not do anything that brings her or her family shame… I know how they think...No one knew all the emotional turmoil I suffered. They just talk out of their ignorance… A

man is always right... No one seemed to care about me... They only cared about me getting him in trouble. What about all he did to me. His father called my parents to a meeting where they warned and even threatened them that there would be bad consequences if I did not undo the evil I did.

Accessing Support

During the abuse the participants disclosed that they accessed various kinds of support. They shared of their experiences with the various forms of support that they received and how this helped them navigate through their challenges. I have categorized the different support the participants in this research received into the following categories: Support from family and friends, community support, and government support.

Support from Family and Friends

All the four participants disclosed that they received various forms of support from family and friends when they shared the difficulties of settling down in Canada and about the VAWIR they were experiencing. Ajoba shared that she received emotional support from her mother and her family after she found courage to share her predicament with them. Ajoba stated: "*My mother was one of my strongest pillars. After I told my family she was very supportive and provided me so much encouragement. I am so thankful for the love of my mother. My sisters also called when they could. I felt better when I shared... I knew they were praying for me*". Ajoba also received help from her friend Mercy. According to Ajoba, "*She was also supportive. She accommodated me and the children for the night and called the shelter and she stood by me through some of my darkest days*".

Gisele received support from her friend who advised her to seek help by going to counseling and promised to keep their discussion private. Obioma narrated that another

immigrant she met at church was instrumental in providing her the support and guidance that helped her find the right path that helped her with her education and career. When Obioma disclosed the abuse she was experiencing in her marriage to her cousin, it was she who encouraged Obioma to report it to the authorities. Her cousin not only provided Obioma with emotional support, but she also raised her consciousness to the dangers of VAWIR. Obioma also stated that *"she told me that abuse was not right, and she made me more aware as to why abuse is dangerous"*. Kanan received both emotional and financial support from the new friend she met at her children's school. This friend told her of her rights and why violence against women is bad. It was this consciousness raising that spurred Kanan to take action to stop the violence by calling the police.

Obioma also received emotional support and advice from another woman when she was under a lot of pressure from her family back home for calling the police. Obioma stated: "*I remember talking to a woman in church and she offered me emotional support and advised me to block out every voice. I did just that*". Obioma also spoke of a woman who she met in her workplace who introduced her to a food bank where she received support. Obioma in talking about this woman said "She *provided me with emotional support…. She took the kids and I to the park and activities in the community. She was such an angel. I am so grateful for her support"*.

Community Support

All four women in this study acknowledged they benefited from various community resources and religious institutions at different times, and they stated that these supports helped them with settling into the community and with dealing with the abuse in their relationship. Obioma started to attend an African church when she felt all alone. According to

Obioma: "*I felt there was a sense of community. I met people I was familiar with…people who I could relate with… people who sort of understood me*". Obioma also stated that "*when I started attending the university, I found a women's support group. The coordinator is amazing. She has been my reference in almost every job I applied for. I shared my experiences and made some friends. I later became a volunteer there*".

Obioma and Kanan both called the police at some point and their ex-husbands were charged. For Obioma there was a no contact order in place and her ex-husband later signed a peace bond. Obioma was referred to victim services but she could not attend because she was not able to make it to the appointment due transportation issues. Kanan received various kinds of support from the shelter where she attended different programs that empowered her. The shelter also assisted Kanan with getting affordable housing. Ajoba also received support from the women's group in her church. She said, "*Those women literally saved my life because I could not afford childcare*".

Gisele attended counselling services, and this helped provide some stability in her relationship. Gisele described the counselling as helpful. Gisele said: "*The meetings were very helpful. They asked us questions that got both of us to reflect deeply and this helped us make changes*". Ajoba stayed in a shelter and when she hesitated in calling the police, the shelter called them. Her ex-husband was charged but later signed a peace bond. Kanan reported that she benefited from counselling as well.

Government Support

Some of the participants received support from government funded programs and this helped to alleviate the crisis they were experiencing. Ajoba stated that she received a government scholarship. According to Ajoba: "I *am so grateful that I received the*

government scholarship because it helped me focus more on my studies". Obioma also

received support from a government program, which supported her with rent. Obioma

described the support thus: "*This was one of the most significant programs that helped. This*

program supported me till I started earning enough. I was lucky to have qualified for it".

Life after the Abuse

An analysis of the lives of the participants after they experienced VAWIR revealed that

one woman remained with her partner while three women are no longer with their partners.

The struggles of the women in this research reveal the myriad of barriers they faced to be free

of violence and become economically empowered. Two of the participants revealed that their

partners did not prioritize or support their need to be economically independent and tried to

determine what they could and could not do inside their homes and in the public sphere,

including getting an education that can lead to being gainfully employed and financially

independent. Their situation was further complicated by the violence they experienced as well

as their immigration status. Three of the women in this research were finally able to get some

more education and become financially independent when they ended their relationship.

Personal Growth and Lessons:

All the women reported that they witnessed growth and self agency in different aspects of

their lives since coming to Canada and experiencing VAWIR. They also shared some of the

lessons they have learnt through their experiences. Ajoba shared the following:

> I believe anyone can achieve their dreams if they believe, stay focused and consistent
>
> in their pursuit of their dreams. I am an RN today. It did not come easy. You have heard
>
> my story. I went through some stress to get here. So, I have learnt to believe. I have also

learnt to keep going. Coming to a new country is hard but many have overcome the challenges and are thriving. One has to believe that it is possible…

Obioma stated:

I have always believed in fairness for men and women. Coming to Canada has helped me stand firmly on these beliefs. When I took my citizenship test, I learnt more about Canada and it is a country that believes in fairness. I am glad I came here. Now I firmly state my beliefs and I stand by them. I believe that men and women have different roles but that they are all important and that these roles should compliment themselves.

Obioma is remarried and in speaking about her experiences she said: *"I believe good can come out of bad. We can turn our pain to strength. Pain has a way of making us stronger if we decide to use it well"*. Gisele stated: "*Looking back now I don't even know if I took all the right steps, but I was not thinking straight. The move changed a lot in our life, and I was not my usual self*". Gisele is still with her partner and she had this to say: "*I believe that men and women are equal. I have always believed that, and it has not changed and will never change. I did not leave him because I believed that he was redeemable and worth giving a chance*".

Gisele added:

Adverse situations change us and our responses. My outlook has changed these days. I take each day as it comes. I have also learnt that our plans don't always work in a straight line. There will be curves and twists so we must be ready to change as life changes. We grow and get stronger.

Kanan in describing her growth said:

It has been a long journey. When I look back, I don't know how I made it this far but here I am stronger and better. When people see my life, they know anything is truly

possible if we push hard enough. I am the little girl from the backside of nowhere. In my role I support women who are dealing with all sorts of issues. I am one of those women I used to envy back then. I am thankful… so so so grateful for where this long hard road is leading me….Yes, I did not know I had rights as a woman. I grew up believing I lived for the pleasure of everyone else. As a child I lived for the pleasure of my elders because I had to obey them…. As a married woman I lived for the pleasure of my husband and kids. Before now I was not allowed to experience my life… It was as if I lived my life for other people. Now I know I can have desires and still serve other people. I still serve other people but there is also a place for me in this world. I matter... I am worthy…

Summary

The analysis and findings of four interviews with immigrant women of West African descent from Northern BC communities who had experienced VAWIR are reported under the four themes that emerged. These themes included life in the home country, immigration and adjusting to life in Canada while dealing with VAWIR, accessing support and life after the abuse. The research found from the stories the research participants shared that each person's experiences are different and multi-faceted. Also revealed is that each person has their own unique way of coping with the situation.

While there is not so much known about the prevalence of domestic violence against racialized immigrants, the four women interviewed stated that they experienced various degrees of abuse- physical, emotional, psychological. Some of the factors that increased the vulnerability of the immigrant women interviewed to domestic violence, as well as affected their decision to seek help, were cultural dissonance, loneliness, and isolation. According to

Ponizovsky and Ritsner (2004), "Loneliness is generally understood as the unpleasant feeling that takes place when one's network of social relations is deficient in some important way, either quantitatively or qualitatively" (p. 408). Two major concepts of loneliness are discussed in the literature: loneliness that occurs because of social isolation and symptomatic loneliness. Several studies have consistently found that heightened levels of stress-related unease along with decreased levels of social support, among immigrant groups when compared to native populations as well as a relationship between loneliness and psychological distress (Ponizovsky &Ritsner, 2004; Ten Kate, Bilecen, & Steverink, 2020).

All the participants indicated that immigration-related stressors not only increased the potential for interpersonal conflict and violence within their relationship but also impacted their ability to settle. One woman reported that the violence started before they came to Canada and then intensified due to the new stresses of life in Canada. Three participants stated that becoming an immigrant in Canada became a protective factor as the support they received here empowered them to face the VAWIR. They found better legal and social supports in Canada than they may have found in their home country.

All the participants revealed that the support and empathetic responses they received were extremely helpful and made a positive difference in their lives and situation. Their stories revealed their experience of VAWIR made their immigration experience more difficult because, on top of dealing with the challenges of settling in, they were further weighed down by the turbulence in their relationship. They all reported various degrees of emotional, psychological, and physical distress. Three participants are no longer in a relationship with their ex-husbands, but one woman sought support through counselling and shared that her relationship is presently free of violence.

All the participants also agree that despite the many challenges they faced, they are in a better place than when they first arrived in Canada. Their survival stories reveal their incredible strength, courage, perseverance, their love for and commitment to their children as they endured so much stress in their relationship while dealing with the challenges of moving and settling into a new country with a different culture. They all agree that although their experiences traumatized and scarred them; they grew stronger.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Recommendations

This final chapter begins with a discussion on the findings of this research and conclusions gathered from this study with an analysis of how the findings of my study are linked to feminist theories and concepts discussed in the literature review. Also included is a discussion on strengths and the limitations of this study and suggestions for future research. In this chapter, I also provide future research recommendations based on the results of my research, which indicate specific measures or directions that can be taken.

Discussion

I conducted this research to gain a better understanding of how immigrant women from West Africa who live in Northern BC communities experienced VAWIR as newcomers to Canada and how this has impacted them. Four courageous women took the time to share their often painful experiences with me. The findings satisfied the purpose of the research, which was to explore how the experiences of VAWIR, and abuse intersect with immigration. As this study explored the experiences of immigrant women it has contributed to the understanding of how VAWIR exacerbates the already challenging situation of migration.

All the participants indicated that the problems they were experiencing in their relationship compounded the other issues like acculturation, lack of employment opportunities, poverty, social functionality, and housing that they were grappling with as immigrants. This research revealed that while male migrants are also exposed to vulnerabilities in the migration processes, women are more susceptible to maltreatment within the home, and can experience double discrimination as both migrants and as women in a new country as they try to find a balance in their essential roles of sustaining and rebuilding their families while dealing with the dynamics of settlement. This research also revealed that

VAWIR is a manifestation of deeply rooted unequal power relations between women and men.

Relevance of Selected Theories and Concepts

Intersectionality, socialist feminist theories and the concept of hegemonic masculinity and symbolic violence explored in the literature review are useful for understanding the realities of West African immigrant women in Northern BC who experience VAWIR. By using an intersectional approach to examine the lives of the four participants, I acknowledge that each woman has their own unique experiences of discrimination and oppression. In so doing, it was important to consider everything and anything that can marginalize each of the four participants e.g., gender, race, class, sexual orientation, physical ability. Taking an intersectional approach allowed me to focus on a transformative paradigm, which provided a comprehensive framework for categorizing and analyzing an array of social issues like oppression and domination.

The experiences and voices of the women in this thesis research brought forward in this thesis research engages and activates the reader in ways that may resonate with their experiences and values; and supports and uplifts the voices of the research participants within alliances. An intersectional approach provides a lens through which we can examine the processes, practices, policies, and structures that increase the risk of immigrant women to experiencing VAWIR because of their intersecting identities. Intersectionality provided me a framework for conceptualizing ways in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other.

A socialist feminist approach provided me a framework to examine the experiences of the participants to reveal a system of class rule that rests on forcible exploitation. The experiences

of Obioma, Kanan, Ajoba and Gisele reveal subjugation of women to male authority, both within the family and in the community in general. Some of the experiences of the participants revealed the objectification of women as a form of property; a sexual division of labor in which women are confined to such activities as child-raising, performing personal services for adult males, and forms of productive labor of lower prestige. Each woman shared how they wanted to be more without having to depend on their male partner.

Participants' experiences reveal emotional, verbal, mental, and economic abuse and how the men in their lives chose to employ ownership, oppression, and dominance over the participants. In talking about their observation of different sets of rules for women and men, which can be seen as double standards, two participants shared how it is okay for men to be promiscuous while it is a taboo for women. Another woman spoke of her husband's acts of sexual violence towards her.

The stories of the women in this thesis research reveal the specific ways women who experience VAWIR are exploited through unpaid labor, through their bodies, and by the way that systems of power can show contempt for values stereotyped as feminine, like nurturing and vulnerability. Socialist feminists reject the exploitation of any person and demand equal representation within institutions.

The concepts "hegemonic masculinity" and "symbolic violence" provide some explanation of how and why men maintain dominant social roles over women, and other gender identities, which are perceived as "feminine" in each society (Bourdieu, 2001; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005;). Bourdieu (2001) theories on gender construction analyzes the pervasive and insidious power of masculine domination and explains why male domination is acceptable and even "natural" (p. 1). Each experience also reveals physical advantage males

hold over female, which in the life of each woman in this research resulted ultimately in violence, or the threat of violence.

Feminist scholars agree that women have been oppressed and kept subordinate and that systems and hierarchies of oppression must be challenged and this notion is congruent with all the participants' experiences. Feminist research supports the argument that men's abuse of their intimate partners is used in dominant traditional patriarchal power structures to enforce women's subordinate position to reinforce inequality. VAWIR is centred on how men maintain power and control over their female partners (De Beauvoir, 2011; Dworkin, 1987: Mullaly, 2002). Feminism is still relevant in giving voice; raising awareness; creating new ways and ideas that can help form an environment for democratized activism that brings attention to issues about the rights, equality, equity and liberation of women and other minority groups

Strengths, Limitations and Future Research Suggestion

The goal was to carry out a case study, which is a form of qualitative research that attempts to look in detail at an individual or small participant pool to draw conclusions only about that participant or group and only in that context. Since I worked with a small pool of immigrant women, the findings from this research cannot be generalized to West African immigrant women who have experienced VAWIR in Northern BC. Compared to quantitative research it may be viewed as a limitation that only four participants were interviewed.

When examined in relation to the strengths of this qualitative research, there are also limitations in quantitative research like improper representation of the target population, inability to control the environment and difficulty in data analysis that should be considered. Conducting this thesis with a qualitative approach gave me the rare privilege of entering into

the private world of women with lived experience that cannot be duplicated in quantitative research. Through a qualitative approach I was able to explore both the diversity and similarities shared among the participants to gather more latent data than expected, providing me with a more individualized context to the data (Almeida et al., 2017).

An intensive approach was taken to study a smaller unit with the purpose of gaining in-depth understanding of similar units from a larger class. Using qualitative research to collect data, which is rich in meaning and complex in nature, helped to gain in-depth knowledge of the unique perspectives and experiences from participants. Participants shared their story in their own words, and I believe that the very process of participation is empowering as participants gained perspective about what they went through and the knowledge they brought forward to influence change in both their lives and the lives of others (Mullender & Hague, 2005).

I suggest that this research could be built upon to advance and extend its findings so that future qualitative and quantitative studies with more time and a larger sample population may provide information about supports available to immigrant women who experience VAWIR by exploring the experiences of immigrant women from other countries or sub regions. Future research may also conduct a comparative study that aims to examine the difference between northern geographical locations and elsewhere to compare cr43and contrast the differences in the experiences of immigrant women. Future research could also examine the experiences of the children in these turbulent relationships. I did not explore the experiences of children as this was beyond the scope of my study. Further research could investigate the impact of other factors that may intersect with the immigration experience for newcomers.

Recommendations

For real change to occur we must be committed to change. The first step to change is to unlearn old ideas, rules and norms that shackle us to systems that are oppressive. We must then relearn new ways of upholding equality that seek to benefit all. While analyzing the experiences of all the women in this research, I sought to gain more knowledge on what changes they thought would have benefitted them during their experiences or improved their outcomes. The first step is an analysis that acknowledges and accepts that each woman's experience is unique to them and multi-faceted and that the personal experiences of the women in this research are rooted in their political situation and gender inequality. Taking these into consideration along with the contributions of participant, I propose the following recommendations:

- I recommend that upon arrival all immigrants, especially women, are informed of their rights in Canada and provided basic education regarding Canadian laws pertaining to immigration. One participant stated that it would have helped if she knew what her rights were. All participants echoed the need for women to be informed of services that are available to women who are experiencing VAWIR and all other forms of discrimination and that these services are also tailored to cater to the peculiar needs of immigrant women. It is important that immigrant women who are experiencing violence be provided an avenue to escape if this is needed.

- I recommend that services which provide information sessions to newcomers are strengthened to provide them a more in-depth orientation to the culture and way of life in Canada. This could help new immigrants with the process of acculturation and adjustment into Canadian society.

● I recommend that services already being provided to immigrants are strengthened to be culturally sensitive and realistically cater to the needs of immigrants. One participant advocated for services that are designed for immigrants and preferably run by immigrants or those who understand all the issues that newcomers deal with. It is important that it becomes a mandatory practice that every newcomer is connected with settlement services when they arrive in Canada. These services should have education and information regarding the availability of resources like transportation, employment, food stores, banking and all such resources that newcomers will need in that location. It will help if there is an option for this information to be easily accessed virtually.

● I recommend a system that recognizes foreign credentials and work experience. A system like this would be of great benefit to all newcomers. This can help reduce the extra burden of unemployment and financial hardship which is one of the major stressors experienced by immigrants. According to Holtmann and Rickards (2018), "Anti-immigrant sentiments hover just below the surface of polite conversation. Structural racism influences the attitudes of public service providers" (p. 298). Systemic barriers and institutional professional standards exist in professional associations that govern admittance to those professions. Professional associations must release their stranglehold and recognize that the labor shortages in their professions could have are lethal consequences. There are many immigrant taxi drivers and shop keepers who were doctors, lawyers, and engineers in their home countries because their credentials are not recognized in their new country, in addition because there is often a very long, expensive path to re-license.

● I recommend programs offering financial support to immigrants who wish to upgrade their education. Immigrants could benefit from free workshops, seminars where they are

provided information on how to navigate the Canadian workforce as well as educational programs needed to transfer foreign credentials and work experiences to the Canadian workforce so that they can get comparable employment. Career workshops and job fair targeted at immigrants would create an opportunity where they can network and meet contacts that may aid new immigrants in obtaining gainful employment.

●   I recommend more education on the dynamics of harm women experience through VAWIR because all forms of violence against women not only come at a cost to women, but also to society at large. Understanding the trauma women experience through violence is required at all levels of contemporary society. Developing age-appropriate curriculum for grade schoolteachers would reduce the undermining of the self-sacrificial role demanded of women by romantic "stand by your man" ideology at one end of the age spectrum and also create discipline appropriate tools to recognize and act on symptoms of VAWIR.

●   I recommend that there is more funding aimed at creating awareness on why violence against women is a societal problem. More focus on prevention and intervention by strengthening specialized programs with knowledge of the additional and specific harms faced by immigrant women could be an important step forward in organizations that already work to lower the risk of violence in domestic settings

●   I recommend that compulsory courses be included in the educational curriculum starting from elementary school to teach about oppressive social norms, intergenerational impacts of child neglect and abuse, which includes the perspective and history of marginalized groups from other countries and cultures. Societal factors, such as patriarchy and oppression, are at the root of domestic violence. Including the perspective and history of marginalized groups can be a core curriculum element that can contribute to anti-racist and pro equity work.

Pedagogy that challenges dominant forms of knowledge and social development programs for children and youth that focus on the prevention of all forms of VAW, promotion of laws, enforcement of laws, mandates, practices, and education.

Conclusion

This study explored the experiences of West African immigrant women who live in northern communities of BC as they deal with VAWIR as newcomers to Canada. Using data gained from qualitative methodology and interviews with 4 participants, this study found that experiencing VAWIR is a major stressor added to the already heavy burden of stress that accompanies any immigration journey to a new country. Unemployment, isolation and cultural dissonance are all significantly more stressful if VAWIR is part of the readjustment process. There may be some similarities in the experiences of migration, but it must be noted that even among people of the same family or nationality there exists diverse and unique experiences of both migration and the experience of VAWIR, which makes it difficult to generalize about them. Even though all the participants share the common experience of immigration and VAWIR, their experiences are unique to them; their courage in telling, and the risks they took to be honest about their experiences will undoubtedly provide useful insights and ideas for change that will benefit other immigrant women.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Recruitment Poster

UNBC | UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR A THESIS RESEARCH PROJECT BY A MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK STUDENT

Topic: Intersections of Immigration and Domestic Violence and Abuse: A Case Study of the Lived Experiences of West African Immigrant Women in Northern British Columbia

What is the research about?

This thesis research seeks to learn more about the experiences of immigrant women with domestic violence and immigration. The researcher is interested in speaking to immigrant women from West Africa so that they can provide insight into challenges immigrant women face as they navigate and integrate into a new country in addition to dealing with domestic violence and abuse.

Please reach out!

If you are:

a first-generation West African immigrant woman living in Northern British Columbia and….

1. *You are a naturalized citizen, a permanent resident of Canada or have refugee status and have lived or still living in Northern British Columbia for at least one year in the past 5 years*
2. *You are currently* single*, married/in a common-law partnership or you were previously married/in a common-law partnership and have previous/past experience of domestic violence and/or abuse in a heterosexual relationship.*
3. *You are at least 19 years of age.*

As a participant in this study, you will be asked to partake in an interview to talk about your experience of immigration to Canada and your past experience of domestic violence. Your participation is **entirely voluntary** and would take up approximately 60-90 minutes of your time.

As a show of appreciation and act of reciprocation participant will be given a gift for $20 to a local store of their choice

To learn more about this study, or to participate in this study, please contact:

Principal Investigator (MSW Student):   **Supervisor:**

Stephanie Okigbo   *Professor Dawn Hemingway*

Okigbo@unbc.ca   *Dawn.Hemingway@unbc.ca*

This study has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board of UNBC

Appendix 2: Confidentiality and Non-Disclosure Agreement for those Helping with Locating

Women Interested in Participating in this Study

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This study, *Intersections of Immigration and Domestic Violence and Abuse: A Case Study of the Lived Experiences of West African Immigrant Women in Northern British Columbia*, is being undertaken by Stephanie, an MSW student at the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC). The study aims to learn more about how the experiences immigration of women from West Africa are impacted by their experiences of domestic violence and abuse to keep participants' information confidential; therefore, as you assist with participant recruitment, it is important to define some confidentiality standards (stated below). By appending your name and signature, you agree to uphold these standards.

I, (_____ [print name]), agree as follows:

1. To restrict my involvement with other participants by sending them the research poster and referring them to the researcher for more information.

2. I will not use the research poster for any purpose other than distributing to possible participants. _____

Recipient

_____   _____   _____
(Print name)   (Signature)   (Date)

Principal Investigator (MSW Student):

_____   _____   _____
(Print name)   (Signature)   (Date)

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact:
Principal Investigator (MSW Student)
Stephanie Okigbo
250 961 8471
Okigbo@unbc.ca

Appendix 3: Information and Consent for Interview Procedure

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<u>Information and Consent for Interview Procedure</u>

Project Title: Intersections of Immigration and Domestic Violence and Abuse: A Case Study of the Lived Experiences of West African Immigrant Women in Northern British Columbia

Note: This graduate thesis study is a partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree, Master of Social Work (MSW), at the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC).

<u>Who is conducting this study?</u>

Student Researcher
Stephanie Okigbo
Master of Social Work
University of Northern British Columbia
Prince George, BC V2N 4Z9
Okigbo@unbc.ca
250-961-8471
Project Supervisor
Professor Dawn Hemingway Associate Professor, Social Work
University of Northern British Columbia
Prince George, BC V2N 4Z9
Dawn.Hemingway@unbc.ca

Why have I been selected for this interview?

You have been selected to be interviewed to investigate how immigration and domestic violence and abuse intersect to impact the lived experience of immigrant women from West Africa. You are eligible to participate because you meet all the criteria listed in the recruitment poster:

1. You are a naturalized citizen, a permanent resident of Canada or have refugee status and have lived or still living in British Columbia for at least 1 year

2. You are currently single, married/in a common-law partnership or you were previously married/in a common-law partnership and have some previous experience of domestic violence and/or abuse in a heterosexual relationship.

3. You are at least 19 years of age

 After the interview, you may choose to withdraw your information on or before -----. All information collected by the time you decide to withdraw will be safely destroyed**, unless you consent to such information being retained and analyzed**. You do not have to provide a reason before withdrawing. Due to the size and scope of a graduate-level thesis, I aim to recruit three to five participants.

What will happen if I choose to participate in this research?

If you choose to participate in this thesis research, you will sign the attached Consent Form, ~~and~~ fill out a Participant Information form about your age, background, education, etc. to provide background about you, and participate in a one-on-one interview.

How will the interviews be conducted?

You may decide to have the interview by remotely Zoom or by phone. In consultation with the researcher you can choose a quiet place where you feel comfortable to talk freely and privately to make this phone or Zoom call and a suitable time to complete the interview. This interview may last anywhere between 60-90 minutes.

During the interview, you will be asked questions about your experiences of immigration and domestic violence. You may choose to answer all or only some of the questions. This is entirely up to you. Your responses will be recorded, and a transcript of this data will be created by the researcher. The transcript of the conversation will be made available to you within two weeks of the completion of the interview so you can read it through and request any changes (corrections, additions or deletions) to ensure that your opinions are properly represented. To make sure that your privacy and safety is protected the transcript of the interview will be sent to your email as a password protected PDF document. This password will be given at the time of the interview. It will be simple and easy to remember. We advise that you do not share this password with anyone. This password will give access to the transcript of the data which you can review. If you wish for any changes to be made you can email or call the student researcher with the requested changes. Once you have approved your transcript, the researcher will contact you again to check over themes that emerged from your interview.

How will your privacy be maintained?

If you decide to participate in the interview, some information, such as name and contact information, may be required to set-up an interview date and location. However, **no real names** or identifying information will be used in the public version of the thesis or other publications or presentations about this research. The researcher's notes regarding the information you share will be typed and stored on a password protected computer. All paper

copies (of the notes) and the audio recording will be kept in a locked box in a secure room in the researcher's home office. This information can only be accessed by the student researcher and her project supervisor. The information that you share in the interview will be saved until the final product is published up to a maximum of 5 years. After this time, all audio recordings will be deleted, all paper copies will be shredded. All other personal information of participants will be deleted at this time.

Please Note: At any point in the study, if you reveal that there has been an incident that involves abuse and/or neglect of a child or of yourself (or that there is a risk of such occurring) please be advised that the researcher may, by law, be required to report this information to the appropriate authorities.

Potential Risks

Some of the questions asked during the interview may seem sensitive or personal and may trigger memories leading you to re-experience certain negative emotions. You do not have to answer any question if you do not want to. The researcher will call with a hidden identity which will come up as a private number. You may also consider erasing phone or Zoom call logs after the interview if you are concerned about your confidentiality. The researcher will assist you in developing a plan to help reduce risk, including referrals to victim services programs, local counselling programs, or a suitable mental health professional, and doctor. Phone numbers for local counselling services will also be provided at the beginning of the interview.

Potential Benefits

Potential benefits may include feeling empowered by telling your story and knowing your experiences may help to strengthen laws, policies and practices of criminalizing violence against women and helping make immigration policies that benefit women. The research findings will also be available to appropriate levels of government, and women serving organizations, and may be presented at conferences or community presentations and published in journals in order to help/assist others in advocating and supporting immigrant women and this can increase rights and safety of immigrant women in British Columbia and beyond. If you need counselling and/or other services, you may contact women's shelters around you or any of the following organizations.

Please find a list of support hotlines for the various supports in the British Columbia at this link http://endingviolencecanada.org/getting-help/.

https://www.bchousing.org/housing-assistance/women-fleeing-violence/womens-transition-housing-supports

https://www.bwss.org/

If you are in immediate danger, Call 911
Or Call
Northern BC Crisis Line 1-888-562-1214 (British Columbia)
Victim Link BC- 1-800-563-0808 (British Columbia)
Immigrant women in Canada, you have certain rights and protections. Please visit this link to learn more.

https://www.bwss.org/resources/immigrant-and-refugee-women/

http://www.migrantmothersproject.com/home-2/about/

How will I get the study results?

The results of this study will be reported in the form of a graduate thesis; defended in the presence of university professors, students, and the public; and could be published in journal articles or books. A hard and electronic copy of this graduate thesis will be available at the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) through the Geoffrey R. Weller Library at the Prince George, BC campus, in addition to the online access for other post-secondary institutions. The final product and a summary of the findings will be made available through a customized link. There are three options through which you may access it. You can:

- Provide a safe and private email address into which the link and final product will be mailed electronically.

- Seek updates by emailing researcher Okigbo@unbc.ca

- Access the final product through the University of Northern British Columbia.

Thank You Gift

At the end of the interviews as a show of appreciation and act of reciprocation participants of this research will be given a gift for $20 to a local store of their choice. To receive your gift, you can provide a personal mailing address to the researcher, or you may choose to have your gift sent for pickup at a local post office (or place of your choosing). Please indicate below if you wish to receive this gift, and where it should be mailed.

 Yes, I would like to receive this thank you gift. Please send it to the following address:

_____

_____

_____

_____

No thank you

<u>Who can I contact for more information?</u>

If you have any questions about what we are asking of you, please contact the student researcher, Stephanie Okigbo at Okigbo@unbc.ca or 250-961-8471 or the Project Supervisor, Professor Dawn Hemingway at Dawn.Hemingway@unbc.ca or 250-960-5694. If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the UNBC Office of Research at 250 960 6735 or by e-mail at reb@unbc.ca.

Signature of Consent

1. I have read or been described the information in the information letter about the project:

     YES   NO

2. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this project and to receive additional details I requested.

     YES   NO

3. I understand that if I agree to participate in this project, I may withdraw from the project at any time up until the report completion, with no consequences of any kind. I have been given a copy of this form.

     YES   NO

4. I agree to being audio-recorded during the interview process.

     YES   NO

5. Follow-up information (e.g. transcription and study results) can be sent to me at the following e-mail or mailing address:

_____

_____Participant

Name: _____

     Participant Signature: _____

     Date: _____

Appendix 4: Participant Information Form

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Participant Information Form

Study: "*Intersections of Immigration and Domestic Violence and Abuse: A Case Study of the Lived Experiences of West African Immigrant Women in Northern British Columbia*"

Researcher: Stephanie Okigbo (MSW Student)

E-mail: Okigbo@unbc.ca   **Call or text:** 250-961-8471

Project Supervisor: Professor Dawn Hemingway

E-mail: Dawn.Hemingway@unbc.ca   **Call:** 250-960-5694.

The purpose of this Participant Information Form is to provide context for the themes emerging from various experiences of research participants. All identifying information included in this form will be kept confidential and will not be connected to you in the final written thesis. Instead, general statements about the experiences, stories and social identities of the participants will be made. However, place names will be included in the final report, so please consider that this is a potential risk for identification. If you have concerns about this, please raise this with the researcher and we can work together to find a solution.

The first five questions are required to confirm your eligibility to participate in the research. If you prefer not to answer the final question that is completely fine and will not impact your ability to participate.

Required Questions

1. **Are you a first-generation West African immigrant woman?   Yes/No**

2. **Do you currently live in Northern British Columbia or have you resided in British Columbia for at least one year in the past 5 years?   Yes/No**

3. **Are you a naturalized citizen, a permanent resident of Canada or have refugee status?**

   Yes/No.

4. **Are you currently married/in a common-law partnership or you were previously married/in a common-law partnership and have some experience of domestic violence and/or abuse?**

   Yes/No.

5. **You are at least 19 years of age? Yes/No**

   Additional Question (This question is not mandatory, and you can choose not to answer)

6. **What is the name of the African country you come from?**

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this research, feel free to include them here, and I will follow up with you directly:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Participant Name: _____

Appendix 5: Interview Guide

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Interview Guide

Study: *"Intersections of Immigration and Domestic Violence and Abuse: A Case Study of the Lived Experiences of West African Immigrant Women in Northern British Columbia"*

Researcher: Stephanie Okigbo (MSW Student)

E-mail: Okigbo@unbc.ca   **Call or text:** 250-961-8471

Project Supervisor: Professor Dawn Hemingway

E-mail: Dawn.Hemingway@unbc.ca   **Call:** 250-960-5694.

An Interview Guide acts simply as a checklist and basic structure to guide our conversation. Below is a list of some of the topic areas that this thesis research is curious about. Our conversation may not address every single topic on the list, and we may discuss things that are not on the list. This is simply a guide. If you have concerns about this, please raise this with the researcher and we can work together to find a solution.

Interview questions may be adjusted to respond to meaningful themes arising from the participants' response.

1. Please tell me about yourself (background, your education, some experiences you have had, and some of your hobbies and interests in order for me learn more about you)

2. Tell me about your life before you moved to Canada

3. Do you remember what the application and immigration process was like?

4. What did you find most different here in Canada? (For instance, the weather, the food, the work environment, the political climate) What do you like best? Do you have a community of people from your home country where you live? What is it like?

5. How long have you been/were in your relationship?

6. How many children do you have in the relationship, do you have other children from another relationship?

7. What is your understanding of abuse in a relationship?

8. At what point in your partnership did this violence/abusive behaviour start? Has anything changed since you came here?

9. What do you do for a living? Is this comparable to the job you worked before you came to Canada?

10. Have you faced difficulty settling in? If so, can you describe them? Do you think these changes are related to an increase in domestic violence/abuse in your marriage?

11. Has your immigration status impacted your experiences of domestic violence and abuse (DVA)? Can you describe some of the factors?

12. Have your views on gender relations, roles or DVA and general outlook on life changed since you came to Canada?

13. Would you say you like any difference you have noticed (How has it affected you)? Or if it is the same, is that good or bad?

14. Did you seek help? What services were helpful?

15. What services would you like to see available for immigrant women who are newcomers to Canada?

Appendix 6: Script of Initial Email

Script of Initial Recruitment Email

Dear sir/madam

Request for assistance with participant recruitment

My name is Stephanie Okigbo and I am a candidate for the Master of Social Work Program at the University of Northern British Columbia, Prince George, BC. With the approval of the Research Ethics Board and as a final requirement for a Master of Social Work, I am undertaking a research study with the title: Intersections of Immigration and Domestic Violence and Abuse: A Case Study of the Lived Experiences of West African Immigrant Women in Northern British Columbia. As an immigrant from a West African country, I am genuinely interested in understanding how the experience of domestic violence and abuse impact the growing community of West African immigrant women as they navigate and settle in Canada. You are receiving this email because of your status as an organisation/group who has substantial connections with West African women who may be interested in participating in my research project.

You may be of assistance by sending the attached poster to any contacts who may be interested in participating, advising them to contact me directly if they wish to participate or need further information. To ensure participant confidentiality, please ensure that your involvement in recruitment is limited to sending out the poster. I have attached the poster and a Confidentiality and Non-Disclosure Agreement. If you have any questions, or would like to speak with me, I am available to be contacted at okigbo@unbc.ca<mailto:okigbo@unbc.ca> or (+1)2509618471.

Thank you for your assistance in locating women who may be interested in being part of this research.

Best regards,

Stephanie