‘The culture stands as a god’

The role of culture in the experiences of Nigerian women living in England who have experienced intimate partner violence and abuse

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Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate, without acknowledgment, any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma at any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, it does not contain any material that has been published or written without appropriate acknowledgment.

I would like to note that I changed my name from Oghenerukevwe Sophia Mene to Sophia Oghenerukevwe Bojeghre halfway through this study.

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Abstract

Intimate partner violence and abuse (IPVA) is a global public health and human rights problem which is widely acknowledged to have reached epidemic levels internationally. Despite the growing body of literature on IPVA against women in England, not much is known about the experiences of Nigerian women and how these can be analysed through existing key concepts in violence against women. This is a gap this thesis seeks to fill. The research underpinning it was aimed at exploring and understanding the role of culture in the experiences of help-seeking and coping strategies adopted by Nigerian women in England who are victim-survivors of IPVA. The study was conducted using qualitative semi-structured, in-depth interviews with ten Nigerian women living in England who were victim-survivors who experienced IPVA in their previous relationships. Thematic analysis uncovered the ways in which some of the consistent cultural norms that cut across the three dominant tribal groups in Nigeria, particularly norms related to families, relationships, and gender, are all implicated in providing a conducive context for IPVA to flourish.

To help explain this, this thesis puts forward a concept of 'conducive cultures' built on Liz Kelly's (2007) concept of a conducive context formulated to explain situations or conditions that allow and encourage violence against women and girls. Here the concept of a conducive culture is developed to describe the ways in which cultural norms operate to unfold the spaces in which women and girls are most likely to encounter violence and abuse and to narrow the spaces women and girls have to resist and escape. The thesis argues that the cultural and religious norms of Nigeria create internal cultural barriers which narrow the space for action of Nigerian victim-survivors in England. The practice of these norms is unfolded in three broad themes: 'men as the head of the family'; 'the importance of keeping the relationship'; and 'keeping up appearances.' These internal norms combine with external barriers for Nigerian women in England to further inhibit women's ability to disclose abuse and seek help. However, there are also Nigerian cultural norms which provide spaces for women to resist and build resilience, including the strength ascribed to Black women and the role of faith. This means that the concept of a conducive culture is multi-faceted; cultural norms can be conducive to violence but also to escape. The thesis ends in exploring these as well as other ways in which the participants coped with and eventually escaped from violence. It highlights what is needed to support women from the Nigerian community in England and suggests practical possibilities for change.

List of abbreviations

BM…..... Black and minoritised ethnic

IPV….....Intimate partner violence

IPVA.....Intimate partner violence and abuse

NGO… .....Non-governmental organisation

NRPF ..... No recourse to public funds

TA.....Thematic analysis

UPU… ..... Urhobo Progress Union

VAWG….....Violence against women and girls

WHO .....World health organisations

Tables and Figures

Table 1 Participant demographics..... 54

Table 2 Coding frame..... 59

Table 3 The six themes..... 60

Figure 1 Map of Nigeria..... 3

Table of Contents

Declaration **1**

Acknowledgments **2**

Abstract **4**

List of abbreviations **5**

Tables and Figures **5**

Table of Contents **6**

Chapter One: Introduction **1**

1. Background to the study 1
2. Situating Nigeria 2
   - *2.1. Geography and demographics* *2*
   - *2.2. Dominant ethnic and religious groups* *4*
   - *2.3. Patriarchy, gender norms, and the role of women* *6*
3. Thesis aims and structure 9
4. Terminology 12
5. Conclusion 16

Chapter 2: Reviewing the conceptual and empirical literature **17**

1. Introduction 17
2. The contested concept of 'culture' 17
   - *2.1. Hofstede's cultural dimensions* *19*
   - *2.2. The cultural dimensions of Nigeria* *22*
3. Core concepts in violence against women 25
   - *3.1. The continuum of sexual violence* *25*
   - *3.2. Space for action* *28*
   - *3.3. Culture and a conducive context* *30*
4. Violence against Black and minoritised women 32

4.1. BME women, VAWG, and help-seeking *33*

4.2. Gender norms and gender inequality *38*

4.3. Cultural and religious pressures and practices *41*

5. Conclusion 43

Chapter 3: Methodology 45

1. Introduction 45

2. Feminism and methods 45

2.1. Feminist standpoint epistemology *46*

2.2. Black feminist epistemology *47*

2.3. Positioning myself *49*

3. Ethical considerations 50

4. Recruitment and limitations 51

5. The process of interviewing 55

6. Analysis 58

7. Conclusion 61

Chapter 4: Participant experiences of IPVA 62

1. Introduction 62

2. Participant stories and reasons for participation 62

3. Experiential definitions and understandings of IPVA 65

4. A continuum of forms of IPVA 68

4.1. Emotional abuse *68*

4.2. Coercive control *70*

4.3. Economic/Financial abuse *72*

4.4. Physical and sexual violence *75*

4.5. Post-separation abuse *78*

5. A continuum of impacts 80

6. Conclusion 84

Chapter 5: Internal cultural barriers for Nigerian victim- survivors 86

1. Introduction 86
2. Towards a concept of ‘conducive culture’ 86
3. Key internal cultural barriers 89
3.1. ‘It has to be whatever he wants': Men as the head of the family 89
3.2. ‘You should endure': The importance of keeping the relationship 92
3.3. ‘People see us as a perfect couple': Keeping up appearances 96
4. The interplay between barriers and coping 98
5. Conclusion 102
Chapter 6: External barriers for Nigerian victim-survivors 104
1. Introduction 104
2. Barriers to help-seeking 104
2.1. Practical barriers: Economic and housing insecurity 105
2.2. Response of family 108
2.3. Protecting ourselves from outsiders 110
3. Rebuilding lives 112
4. Conclusion 116
Chapter 7: 'The culture is not going to speak for you’ – Conclusion and reflections 118
1. Introduction 118
2. Chapter summaries 118
3. Future directions 123
4. A final reflection 124
References 126
Appendices 148
1. Recruitment information 148
2. Ethical Approval Form (Victims-survivors) 149
3. Feedback from Ethics Review Panel 173
4. Information Sheets 175
5. Consent form 179

6. Interview guide for victim-survivors 180
7. Support contact 185
8. Section of a coded transcript 188

Chapter One: Introduction

1. Background to the study

The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2013) defines intimate partner violence (IPV) as any behaviour perpetrated by one partner over the other within an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual, economic, verbal or emotional harm. Though its prevalence can vary (Usta et al., 2012), according to the WHO, nearly 30% of all women who have been in an intimate relationship have experienced some form of physical or sexual violence by their intimate partner, and over one-third (38%) of all murders of women globally are executed by a male intimate partner (WHO, 2017). However, IPV is more than physical violence and encompasses emotional abuse, coercive control, and financial and economic abuse (Kaur and Garg, 2008). For this reason, some studies, including the present one, use the term intimate partner violence and abuse (IPVA) (for example Femi-Ajao, 2018; Hellevik, 2019.) My decision to use this term in relation to the experiences of Nigerian women will be discussed later in this chapter.

Not only is IPVA widely prevalent, but it is also a critical health issue with immediate, short, and long-term health effects including physical disability, injuries and chronic pain, mental illnesses such as post-traumatic stress disorder and depression, haemorrhaging, sexual and reproductive health problems, including sexually transmitted infections (Krug et al., 2002; Ellsberg and Heise, 2005; Hellemans et al., 2015). Evidence from research suggests that women who have experienced all forms of IPVA can exhibit distress such as anxiety, depression, feeling of guilt and isolation from the public (Georgia, 2003), and that the rate of substance abuse, suicide attempts, and depression are higher among victims- survivors of IPVA than the general population (Laisser et al., 2011; Georgia, 2003). In some countries, IPVA is also known to be a risk factor for acquiring HIV/AIDS, particularly for women in Africa (Ministry of Health, 2014, WHO, 2017). As a result of these well-recorded negative impacts, in 2000 intimate partner violence was recognised to be a priority of health by the WHO (Devries, et al., 2011), and is now widely acknowledged to be a global public health and human rights problem that has reached epidemic levels (Djamba and Kimuna, 2008; Goo and Harlow, 2012; Howard, Feder and Agnew-Davies, 2013; Laisser, et al., 2011; WHO, 2013). However, despite global

consensus about the importance of increasing our understanding of IPVA, and the growing body of literature on IPVA against women in England, little is known about Nigerian women's experiences in England or the United Kingdom (UK) more broadly.

Most of the research on Nigerian women and IPVA has been conducted in Nigeria and USA with only two qualitative studies specifically examining Nigerian women's experiences of intimate partner abuse and violence in England (Femi-Ajao, 2018; Ajayi, Chantler and Radford, 2022). Nigerian women's experiences in England are more commonly subsumed within the research on Black women or Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) women and domestic abuse (Femi-Ajao, 2018), although this creates problems when looking specifically at culture, as cultural norms differ widely between different cultural groups contained under this 'BME' banner. Consequently, there is a need to know more about how Nigerian women experience and cope with IPVA and how this supports and extends some core existing conceptual frameworks to understand violence against women more broadly. It is here that the contribution of this study is made.

This research makes an original contribution to the growing body of literature, policy and support on IPVA in England by adding unique qualitative evidence from ten Nigerian women who are not in contact with any statutory services for their experiences of IPVA. It explores their accounts of abuse, culture, and coping, by applying three core concepts in violence against women and girls' research: the continuum, of sexual violence (Kelly, 1988); space for action (Kelly, 2003; Kelly, Sharp and Klein, 2014) and the concept of a conducive context (Kelly, 2007; Kelly, 2016), all of which are explored in detail in Chapter Two. The concepts are used to explore participants' accounts, and the accounts of participants are also used to explore and extend these concepts. Before entering the study, this chapter will begin with a brief outline of Nigeria and Nigerian culture, given particularly for readers who may be unfamiliar with Nigeria and her dominant tribes. It then explores the operation of patriarchy and dominant gender norms in Nigeria, setting the scene for the rest of the thesis.

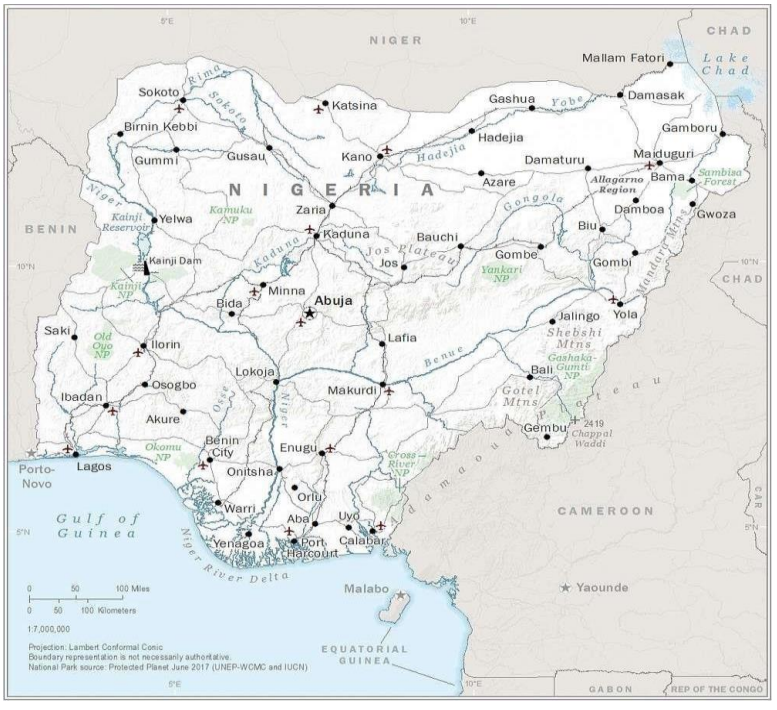
2. Situating Nigeria

2.1. Geography and demographics

In the late 19th century, Flora Shaw, a British journalist who later married Lord Frederick Lugard, the mastermind behind Nigeria's creation, suggested the name. However, before then, Lord Frederick Lugard was the governor of Nigeria's Northern and Southern protectorates (Stephens, 2020). Flora named the area Nigeria after the Niger River (from the Latin word for 'Black'), as most of the country's landscape was dominated by the Niger River.

As shown in the map in Figure 1 below (Public domain images, 2024), Nigeria lies on the west coast of Africa, occupying approximately 923,768 square kilometres of land, stretching from the Gulf of Guinea on the Atlantic coast in the south to the fringes of the Sahara. It has borders with the Republic of Benin (west), the Republic of Niger (north), the Republic of Chad (northeast across Lake Chad) and the Republic of Cameroon (east) and comprises 36 states with Abuja as the Federal Capital Territory (Bakare, Asuquo and Agomoh 2010; Okeke, 2017). Nigeria is Africa's most populous Black nation and the 14th largest globally (Okeke, 2017; Yakubu, 2021) and is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in Africa (Onyima, 2016). She is also one of the biggest in Africa. As of 2015, the population of Nigeria was estimated to be over 180 million people (Commonwealth Governance, 2015) forming about 250 ethnolinguistic groups (Okeke, 2017).

Figure 1 Map of Nigeria



This translates into a significant diversity in the language and culture across the country with languages from the three major ethnic groups; Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo are widely spoken as well as over 200 other languages and dialects (Commonwealth Governance, 2015; Okeke, 2017). However, the official language spoken by the Nigerian people is English which is part of her colonial legacy.

Nigeria was a former British colony that gained independence from Britain on 1st of October 1960 and the legacy of that can be seen both in her demographic make-up and in the immigration patterns of her citizens. Before Nigeria's independence, many Nigerians travelled to the United Kingdom, USA, France and other countries in the West to access higher education (Kea and Maier, 2017). Most returned to Nigeria immediately after completing their studies (Communities and Local Government, 2009). After the collapse of the petroleum boom in the early 1980s, Nigerians began to seek employment opportunities in other countries, including the United Kingdom (UK). There was an increased tendency for Nigerian migrants to settle permanently in European countries. The political instability in Nigeria has also resulted in many citizens seeking asylum in the UK. Combined, this means that the Nigerian community and Nigerian-born residents in England and Wales have been noted to be one of the most significant and most rapidly growing African communities in the United Kingdom (Communities and Local Government, 2009).

According to the Office for National Statistics UK, approximately 178,000 Nigerian nationals were residing in the United Kingdom in 2021, a significant increase from 90 thousand in the United Kingdom in 2008 (Statista, 2022), though this does not include undocumented migrants and British citizens of Nigerian descent (Communities and Local Government, 2009).

2.2. Dominant ethnic and religious groups

Understanding the ethnic and religious make-up of Nigeria is key to understanding some of the similarities and differences amongst Nigerian people living in England. Nigerians are known to be highly religious. The average Nigerian believes in a higher power or supreme being (God), which has been suggested to have shaped Nigerian society and significantly influence its dominant norms and traditions (Commonwealth Governance, 2015; Okeke,

2017). Muslims, mainly in northern Nigeria, are the most prominent religion at 50%. At the same time, Christianity, mainly in southern Nigeria, comprised 40% of the population and the rest making up 10%, hold indigenous/traditional beliefs (Commonwealth Governance, 2015; Okeke, 2017). However, there are also various ethnic groups that intersect with the main religious groups. The Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo are the three dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria and comprise 70% of the Nigerian population (Commonwealth Governance, 2015). Amongst these ethnic groups, Hausa is the most populous and politically influential, who makes up 30% of the Nigerian population, while the Yoruba make up 21% and 19% are the Igbos (Okeke, 2017; Ebegbulem, 2011; Linos, et al., 2013; Nwabunike and Tenkorang, 2017). This means 70% of the entire Nigeria population is made up of the Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo, with the rest of the population coming from other ethnic groups.

Hausa is the colloquial term for all Northern Nigerian ethnic groups and are geographically located in the northern Nigeria. They are predominantly Muslims and are known to practice Sharia or Islamic law (Nwabunike and Tenkorang, 2017). They are widely regarded as the most prominent ethnic group in Nigeria. The Hausas are the major ethnic group in Northern Nigeria, among other ethnic groups like Kanuri, Fulani and Shuwa Arabs (Nwabunike and Tenkorang, 2017). According to Linos et al. (2013), the Hausas have the lowest level of intimate partner violence and abuse when compared to the Igbo and Yoruba ethnic groups; Igbo which are the smallest of the three major ethnic groups are reported to have the highest rate of intimate partner violence and abuse. The Yorubas are primarily located in southwestern and parts of northcentral Nigeria. The people of Yoruba are primarily concentrated in states such as Lagos, Ekiti, Kogi, Kwara, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo. (Okeke, 2017; Ebegbulem, 2011; Linos, et al., 2013; Nwabunike and Tenkorang, 2017). They are the second most influential ethnic group in Nigeria however, they are the most common group of Nigerians living in England (Kea and Maier, 2017). The common religions among the Yorubas are Christianity and Islam, while a few practices ancestral religion.

The Igbos are mostly in the central part of south-eastern Nigeria. Though the smallest of the large groups, they are scattered across every nook and cranny of Nigeria and beyond. Geopolitically, the ethnic group is divided into seven geographic and political zones known as states. They occupy Abia, Anambra, Delta, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo and Rivers states. (Nwabunike and Tenkorang 2017). Most of the Igbos are Christians, and they speak

several regional dialects. They are renowned for their rich cultural heritage, which is highly male dominated. Traditionally, the Igbo women have been utterly excluded from land, inheritance, wealth, traditional titles and decision-making, ascribed to male privileges. Although, this practice has been evolving due to changes in the socio-cultural system of the people. These traditions practises are learned and passed on from one generation to another. (Okeke and Agu, 2012; Nwabunike and Tenkorang 2017).

Interestingly, findings from an attitudinal survey by Oyediran and Isiugo-Abanihe (2005) suggested that, within Nigeria, there are differing degrees of violence and abuse according to ethnic groups. While all ethnic groups within Nigeria have a strong patriarchal structure, the Hausa and northern minorities are more gender restrictive. The results show that respondents of the Hausa ethnic group and other northern minority ethnic groups were more supportive of violence towards wives and female partners than their counterparts of Igbo or Yoruba origin and southern minority ethnic groups. About 80% of Hausa respondents stated that a husband is justified for beating his wife, compared to 36.3% among Igbo women. This is contradictory to the findings of Linos et al. (2013), that the Hausas have lower rate of intimate partner violence and abuse compared to the Igbo and Yoruba ethnic groups. It also is in tension with research finding that Igbo men are more likely to use intimate partner violence and abuse against their women than the other two predominant ethnic groups in Nigeria (Linos et al., 201; Nwabunike and Tenkorang, 2017). This demonstrates in part some of the ways in which patriarchal norms are implicated in supporting the use of violence against women, something discussed in more detail below.

2.3. Patriarchy, gender norms, and the role of women

Nigerian women play vital roles as mothers, producers and community developers and organisers (Allanana, 2013). Despite their contributions, they are not given significant recognition and denied many opportunities to participate in formal and informal structural processes and decisions regarding the use of the societal and economic resources they generate (Allanana, 2013). This results in substantive gender inequality. Much of this is to do with the position of women under a patriarchal society and how this plays out in a cultural context where maintaining the relationship/family unit and the concept of the ‘ideal woman’ (Bakare, Asuquo, and Agomoh 2010) has tended to supersede the individual’s rights and freedoms. Within Nigeria's cultural context, the responsibility of

ensuring the stability and sustainability of the relationship rests heavily on women as they are judged based on how successful their marriage is, notwithstanding the risk they might be exposed to.

As will be discussed more in Chapter Five, there is a strong sense in Nigerian society of men as being rightfully and legitimately in control of the lives of women in their family. In effect, men are seen as the head of the family and whatever they say must be obeyed (Onoh et al., 2013). This has implanted male dominance into the structure of social organisations and institutions at all levels of leadership and means that, like most African societies, the nature of the Nigerian culture has been patriarchal (Bakare, Asuquo, and Agomoh 2010; Allanana, 2013). Patriarchy justifies the marginalisation of women in education, economy, family, domestic issues, inheritance, labour market and politics (Allanana, 2013). It is a system of social stratification and differentiation based on gender, which provides material advantages to males while at the same time placing harsh constraints on the activities and roles of females (Bakare, Asuquo, and Agomoh 2010). It means that, despite women's social and economic contribution (Allanana, 2013), the enforcement of gender roles amongst Nigerian women limits women's access to equal education, gainful employment and empowerment for financial/economic independence (Bakare, Asuquo, and Agomoh 2010), claiming this restriction arises from innate and this unchangeable sex differences. In this way culture is recast as the natural order, such as that women are naturally submissive to their male partners and are meant to be available to satisfy men's physical, psychological, and sexual needs (Nwabunike and Tenkorang, 2017). Non-compliance to these expected obligations can be used as justification for IPVA and conversely IPVA can be used to enforce the patriarchal gender order. In this way patriarchy has been discussed in the literature on African society as upheld by and sustained through violence against women (Okemgbo, Omideyi and Odimegwu, 2002; Okenwa, Lawoko, and Jansson, 2009; Tenkorang *et al.*, 2013; Nwabunike and Tenkorang, 2017).

The dominance of unequal gender norms in Nigeria has meant that notions of subjugation of women is so entrenched and accepted within Nigeria that some research has argued violence against women is justified. (Abayomi, Kolawole and Olabode, 2013). For example, Onoh et al., (2013) argue that IPVA in Nigeria is itself a cultural norm and accepted as part of the rules regulating intimate partner relationships. Women are taught to be subservient to men which makes them accept battering as part of obligation to be obedient to their partners (Abayomi, Kolawole and Olabode, 2013). Most of this comes

down to the dominance of patriarchy within Nigeria. Patriarchal beliefs and roles ascribed to men and women by culture affect them in adulthood, thereby limiting women's aspirations, making them lose self-confidence/worth and have low self-esteem in their career in adult life (Allanana, 2013). Women are expected to be submissive to their husbands, they are meant to take instructions from them if they want to have a peaceful and successful relationship (Ajayi, Chantler and Radford, 2022).

Arising from patriarchy is the importance of family, a norm which is shared across different Nigerian ethnic groups. Family is an essential aspect of Nigerian society (Labeodan, 2001) and is typically more prominent than in the West. This can be seen in the ways in which, common to all ethnic groups, family relationships are extended beyond the 'blood relative' limits of most Western conceptions of family. Phrases such as uncle, aunt, brother, sister, mother, father, grandmother, grandfather and cousin are applied loosely with men and women in society being addressed that way, depending on their age and degree of closeness to the individual who is addressing them, rather than on blood relationships (Labeodan, 2001).

There are several other key differences underlying the understandings of family and the norms that follow in Nigerian culture when compared to English, which are important to understand before encountering the experiences of Nigerian women in England with IPVA. For example, it is believed that the number of children in a family can improve a man's social standing in the community (Bakare, Asuquo,and Agomoh 2010). As a result of this, new-borns are regarded with joy and pride as they are the future, particularly male children who also signify wealth and affluence for the family involved. The payment of bride price is one of the standards of traditional practice amongst all the ethnic groups in Nigeria (Bakare, Asuquo, and Agomoh, 2010). The bride price or dowry involves presenting an agreed set of items to the bride's family before the commencement of the marriage, in exchange for the woman submitting herself after marriage to both the man and his family (Balogun and John-Akinola, 2015). Finally, in some of Nigeria's northern states as encouraged by the interpretation of Islam practiced there, polygyny is legal, early marriage is encouraged without the need for consent of the girl child, and men may marry several wives (Bakare, Asuquo,and Agomoh 2010). Girls are sometimes married out to older men at an early age; there is evidence some are married without finishing their primary school education (Bakare, Asuquo,and Agomoh 2010). Though these practices are not recognised legally in the southern region of Nigeria, the form of Christianity which is primarily

practiced there encourages women to be subordinate to their male counterparts based on some of its doctrines and practices (Bakare, Asuquo,and Agomoh 2010).

The importance of family in Nigerian culture means that there is a prevailing notion, like other African societies of family as being private and beyond the state's control (Bakare, et al., 2010). It has been claimed for example that intimate partner violence and abuse is widely accepted and justifiable in most Nigerian communities because it is a way for men to assert their rightful dominance in a family (Nwabunike and Tenkorang, 2017) as well as a demonstration of affection (Oyediran and Isiugo-Abanihe, 2005), and that the state should not interfere with violence within a family setting. As will be seen in Chapter Five of this thesis, the importance of family as an overarching cultural norm plays a major role in creating internal cultural barriers for Nigerian women seeking to escape abusive partners.

3. Thesis aims and structure

This thesis seeks to explore and understand more about the role of culture in the experiences of barriers and enablers to help-seeking and coping adopted by Nigerian women in England who are victim-survivors of intimate partner violence and abuse. Underpinning this research are three core objectives:

1. To make an original contribution to the existing body of knowledge on the role of culture in experiences of violence against women for Black and minoritised women in England.
2. To document the experiences of Nigerian women living in England with intimate partner violence and abuse.
3. To understand more about the role of culture in the barriers and enablers to help-seeking and coping for Nigerian victim-survivors.

Importantly, this thesis does not seek to homogenise in its explorations of Nigerian culture and Nigerian women. Instead, it uses a Black feminist standpoint (as will be discussed in Chapter Three) to investigate how, from the standpoint of participants, culture was understood as intersecting with IPVA. In line with this, the term ‘culture’ was not pre- defined for participants. What the research wanted to do was to illuminate how ‘culture’ as broadly conceived by participants impacted their experiences of IPVA. To do this I

decided not to impose a definition on participants, particularly for a concept as contested as culture which will be discussed in the following chapter.

This chapter introduces the broad subject area of Nigerian communities in England and the specific position of Nigerian women within these communities. I have highlighted the dearth of research on Nigerian women in England and their experiences of IPVA and will soon turn to discussing key terms used in this thesis including IPVA and victim-survivor.

The second chapter reviews the existing literature, both empirical and conceptual, and carves out the contribution this thesis makes to it. The literature review looks firstly at the concept of culture itself, drawing on the work of anthropologist Geert Hofstede (1997; 2001; 2011) to explore the dimensions of culture in Nigeria. It then moves onto looking in detail at three of the core concepts used in violence against women, namely the continuum of sexual violence (Kelly, 1989), space for action (Kelly, 2003; Kelly, Sharp and Klein, 2014) and the concept of a conducive context (Kelly, 1989; Kelly, Burton, and Regan, 1996; Kelly, 2007; Kelly, 2016). This latter concept will be developed in this thesis to discuss the idea of conducive cultures. This section also explores how these concepts have been developed by others. It then reviews more broadly the evidence base on intimate partner violence and abuse before looking at what is known about the experiences of Nigerian women specifically. It finds out that while there has been small number of studies looking at Nigerian women's experiences of intimate partner violence and abuse, there is the need for greater understanding about how their experiences interact with some of the core concepts in research on violence against women. This is the gap this thesis fills.

The third chapter gives the research methodology. It begins by positioning the research as a Black feminist project grounded in Black feminist thought and feminist standpoint theory. As a Nigerian woman myself living in England, I share insider knowledge with my participants, something that helped me build rapport in the interviews and understand their experiences. However, I also occupy a position as an outsider as there were many experiences that I did not share, and I came to the interaction as an interviewer not a participant sharing my experience. This complex position is explored in the methodology including reflecting on the emotional impact of conducting the research itself and the ethical challenges involved in it. This chapter then details the data collection process, including recruitment, culminating in ten in-depth interviews with Nigerian women in England who have experienced IPVA in a previous relationship. The recruitment process was difficult for reasons I will detail in this chapter however after participation, all

participants expressed their happiness at having taken part and their hope that their participation would make a difference to other Nigerian women, a hope I share. The chapter then discusses the analysis process. Drawing on Braun and Clarke's (2006) detailed account of how to conduct a thematic analysis, six key themes were developed out of an initial coding scheme of 14 themes. These six final themes were: culture importance of appearances, continuum, men's dominance, women's role, barriers to speaking, coping/staying. It is these themes that are threaded through Chapters Four, Five and Six.

The fourth chapter provides an entry-point into the analysis, responding to objective two by documenting the experiences of the participants. It begins by providing a snapshot of the experiences of the participants and their motivations for taking part in the study. It then looks at their definitions and understandings of IPVA before using the concept of the continuum of violence to conceptualise how IPVA played out in their lives. It explores the continuum in relation to women's experiences of a range of forms of violence namely: emotional abuse and coercive control, economic and financial abuse, physical and sexual abuse, and post-separation abuse. It finds out that, aligned with the concept of the continuum, participant experienced a range of forms that shaded in and out of each other and could not be readily distinguished from each other. The chapter then turns to explore the impacts of IPVA on participants across four dimensions: their mental and emotional health; impacts of relationships with men and children; impacts on physical health and injuries; and finally, impacts on education and finances. The chapter ends in acknowledging the harms of IPVA in line with Kelly, Sharp and Klein (2014) work on how it limits women's space for action.

Chapter Five examines the role of culture in women's experiences of IPVA, particularly the barriers to help-seeking as set out in objective three. Here it further uses the concept of space for action (Kelly, Sharp and Klein, 2014) to explore how Nigerian cultural norms work to create internal barriers for women to identify abuse, disclose abuse, and escape abuse. The three norms in particular that were highlighted in the research are 'men as the head of the family, the importance of keeping the relationship by enduring abuse and keeping up appearances to be perceived as a perfect couple'. As discussed above, key cultural and religious norms shared across the ethnic groups in Nigeria highlight the importance of family (underpinning the first two norms), as well as the ways in which conceptions of the role of women are based on the idea of an 'ideal woman', who prioritises men, her relationship, and her family above everything else. These are drawn

together in Chapter Five in the concept of a conducive culture for IPVA. This concept helps to identify the ways in which the interaction of certain cultural norms shape women's experiences of IPVA and limit their space for action. Chapter Five ends in exploring how some aspects of Nigerian culture were used by women to support their coping with IPVA. Here culture can provide resources for women with self-management as well as religious norms providing support for women of faith.

Chapter Six concludes the analysis chapters by exploring the external barriers participants revealed regarding disclosure and escape. It outlines the practical barriers women described such as struggle for financial independence and the need for accommodation, before moving onto the external barriers to disclosure. The first two of these, immigration enforcement and response of family, often arise in the literature however the last one, which is the need to protect oneself and one's culture, is part of the unique contribution of this thesis. The chapter looks at women's accounts of disclosing and escaping violence and abuse with a focus on external barriers and how these were overcome. It ends by highlighting the tenacity of women in rebuilding their lives, outlining the ways in which all participants finally got free from the abuse of their partners.

Chapter Seven draws together all elements of the thesis to conclude its argument. It explores some of the suggestions made by participants as to what needs to change to provide support and interventions earlier for Nigerian women in England living with IPVA as well as suggesting the need for more research centring the experiences of Nigerian women so as to better understand and support all victim-survivors of IPVA living in England. The chapter further outlines the limitations and strengths of this study, as well as information on how the outcome of this research will be disseminated. The thesis ends with a personal reflection following the tenets of feminist research about the impact of the research on me and the ways that I've been changed by the journey of this study.

4. Terminology

Culture is a term referred to throughout the thesis, but it is a contested concept. Culture is the lifeblood of a vibrant society, expressed in the many ways stories are told and celebrate, the way the past is remembered, and the future is imagined. Yet as noted by Spencer-Oatey, 'culture is a notoriously difficult term to define' (2012: 1). A more detailed

discussion of the concept of culture and how it is used in this thesis is given in the following chapter, which also reviews the broader conceptual and empirical literature on violence against women and the experience of Nigerian women. In addition, I have chosen to use two specific terms to refer to the violence participants have experienced and those who have experienced it themselves. Like many terms in the literature on violence against women, these are debated. As such, here I briefly outline the reasons for their use, specifically in research with Nigerian women.

The first notable term is that I have used the term intimate partner violence and abuse (IPVA) rather than the more well-known intimate partner violence (IPV). This is because some participants did not agree with the concept of 'violence' and were not comfortable with it as they felt they did not experience violence in their relationships since their partners were not physically abusive. Therefore, including 'abuse' is intended to recognise the breadth of their experiences and acknowledge their identification with the topic as will be explored in the findings. The term IPVA is also used in one of the only other studies on the intimate partner violence experiences of Nigerian women (Femi-Ajao, 2018). It may be that this term has resonance with Nigerian women more widely than my sample because it feels wider than the physical violence implied in just the term IPV.

A more detailed discussion conversation is needed about the use of the term' victim- survivor (Kelly, 1996), which is employed throughout this thesis rather than the term ‘victim’ or ‘survivor’. Though it has largely fallen out of favour now, back in the 1970’s feminists argued that the category of ‘victim’ has benefits for women and for those who have experienced rape and domestic abuse. It was seen as enabling women with the opportunity to emphasise the gravity and the stigma associated with the violence they experienced (Barry, 1979). As well as providing access to forms of redress only available to those who have been victimised. This can be seen in the UK for example where claiming ‘victim status’ enables victims to access certain rights and receive allocated compensation or benefits such as Criminal Injuries Compensation or CICA. However, feminists have also argued that in public consciousness the concept of victim connotes passivity and weakness (Kelly, Burton, and Regan 1996; Convery, 2006) and thus should be used with caution. Lamb (1999) for example argued that the subjectivity of the victim disappears when someone is identified instead as a victim-object. The other issue with the term ‘victim’ is that there has long since been a distinction between people that are considered ‘deserving’ victims and ones that are not (‘underserving’). This is a distinction

that matters for Nigerian women living in the UK who have experienced IPVA as it has impacts for racially minoritised women (Kelly, Burton, and Regan 1996). The deserving victims receive more sympathy from the public. They are seen as innocent and blameless, deserving of the label 'victim'. They are seen as weak, passive, and vulnerable, and often associated with being white, middle class, female, either very young or very old. Whereas undeserving victims are those who by virtue of their personal attributes or conduct do not fit into the classification of innocent or blameless (Kelly, Burton, and Regan 1996). BME women in England, especially those from Africa and the Caribbean, are usually seen as undeserving victims as they are seen as very aggressive, loud, strong and unremorseful (Kanyeredzi, 2013). This is due to the pervasiveness of the angry Black woman' stereotype (Morgan and Bennett (2006) which will be discussed later in this thesis as both a barrier and a resource for participants.

'Survivor' as a concept emerged due to some of these critiques with the term 'victim'. According to Liz Kelly (1988, p. 162), 'survivor means to continue existence after or despite a life-threatening experience.' It was thus seen that 'survivor' has positive attributes; it shows that there is hope despite the abuse and it is recognition that some women do physically, emotionally, and mentally survive relationships with abusive men (Kelly, Burton, and Regan 1996). This idea of time is important however in both understanding and critiquing the concept of survivor. The concept includes the assumption that the period of being a victim is over; implying a linear process of overcoming abuse. This is an unrealistic notion which suggests that a victim goes through abuse, accesses her rights, and gains empowerment. The real process can be very different, particularly for IPVA. As is echoed later in this thesis, Kelly, Sharp and Klein (2014) found that many women after escaping violent and abusive partners still experience post-separation abuse and must negotiate child custody, finances, accommodation and even their safety and that of their children. Here ending the relationship does not guarantee total freedom from their ex-partner's abuse. Due to the extent of post-separation abuse victim-survivor is a useful concept for those who have experienced IPVA as women negotiate between mitigating the abuse and using their agency to survive. As such, it is not as simple as the establishment of a binary between the two terms.

There is also a valid critique of the term survivor from an intersectional position. In similar ways to how the term 'victim' is used within a racist society to cast Black woman as 'undeserving' due to the ways in which they do not fit cultural stereotypes of femininity

based on whiteness, ‘survivor’ also does not necessarily work for Black women, because it can work to reinforce a stereotype of them as loud, resistant, and unharmed by abuse (a legacy of slavery) rather than being hurt, impacted, or having a sense of loss. Nigerian women like most Black women are often stereotyped as aggressive, hostile, bitter and temperamental (Kanyeredzi, 2013). While some have argued this could reflect survival skills adopted by Black women to deal with issues relating to social, economic, and political subjugation (Siegel, 1999), it is also connected to racism, casting Black women as the ‘other’ in contrast to what is seen as a more civilised and polite, quiet, white woman stereotype. The characteristics associated with being a survivor can thus be problematic for some Black women because they can buy into racist stereotypes that cast them as undeserving of support and, conversely, deserving of violence.

In part because of the tension between victim and its limitations on one hand, and survivor with its limitations on the other, Kelly, Burton, and Regan (1996) suggested using the term victim-survivor. The term is designed to indicate that women who have experienced violence are both victims and survivors simultaneously. As discussed by the criminologist Jan Jordan (2013), being a victim is not a linear progression to the attribute of a ‘survivor’ from abuse because an individual can see themselves as both depending on their circumstance; for example, a woman can be identified as a victim in survivor mode at the time she was experiencing abuse by struggling mentally to find ways to resist the perpetrator's attack. This has significant implications in terms of challenging the construct of the passive, vulnerable victim, given that an over-emphasis on these features can obscure recognition of the active survivor. On the contrary, emphasis on the survivor dimensions can deny the impact of victimisation in ways that could be harmful, making it challenging to expose victim vulnerabilities in the face of pressure to appear resilient (Jordan, 2013). This latter point particularly highlights the usefulness of the term victim-survivor for Nigerian women in the UK who have experienced IPVA, as in some ways it helps to move outside the limitations of victim (and the divide into deserving/undeserving) and survivor (with its implications that one must always be a ‘strong black woman’) towards a recognition that in every victim there is a survivor and, in every survivor, there is a victim. That the two overlap and blend into each other, like the continuum, rather than existing as discrete dichotomous categories. It is for this reason that not only the term ‘victim-survivor’ is used throughout this thesis, but also that the research itself sought to uncover both the victimisation of the women who participated and their survival or coping strategies. The hope is that in focusing on both, the critiques relevant to each when applied

to Black women are minimised, and instead a space is opened for women to talk about the realities of their lives.

5. Conclusion

This introductory chapter has set out to establish the parameters for this thesis and the research behind it. It has provided a background of Nigeria for readers unfamiliar with its geography and demography and helped to locate it as a country rich in cultural traditions and customs, many of which centre around the primacy of family and women's role in maintaining it. This then set the stage for the thesis, which seeks to explore how culture is implicated in creating and containing a context that limits the resources available to Nigerian women to escape violence and abuse when perpetrated by an intimate partner. It ended in exploring the terminology used in this thesis, paying particular attention to the terms IPVA and victim-survivor. With the scene set for the study the following chapter now looks in more detail at the existing literature to help identify the gap this research fills in understandings of IPVA for Nigerian victim-survivors.

Chapter 2: Reviewing the conceptual and empirical literature

1. Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature relevant to this study on the role of culture in Nigerian women's experiences of IPVA. It begins by exploring the concept of culture itself given its prominence in this thesis, drawing on the cultural anthropologist Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions to explore the different elements of Nigerian culture that are relevant to our discussion here. It then moves on to outlining the three core concepts in feminist research on violence against women and girls that will be applied and developed in this thesis. These are the continuum of sexual violence by Kelly, (1989) and its development by Kanyeredzi (2018a); the concept of space for action (Kelly, 2003; Kelly, Sharp and Klein, 2014) and the concept of the conducive context (Kelly, 2007). In discussing these, it points to how each are to be developed through the thesis in reference to the accounts of participants and their understandings of how culture is implicated in their experiences. The chapter will thereafter examine the broad literature based on violence against Black and Minoritised Ethnic women, focusing on IPVA, before looking at what is known particularly about Nigerian women's experiences in both the UK broadly and England specifically. Throughout, the chapter will demonstrate that there is a gap in knowledge about how both elements of culture and the core concepts used in violence against women and girls research apply when looking specifically at the experiences of Nigerian women in England who have lived through IPVA. It is this gap in exploring the connections between these three areas that this thesis seeks to fill.

2. The contested concept of 'culture'

The difficulty of defining exactly what culture is, was noted in early anthropological work (Bidney, 1944) and continues today (Raeff et al., 2020). Mironenko and Sorokin (2018), for example, have argued that culture does not have a distinctive ontological status, stating there is lack of a clear ground on which all the diverse elements of culture could be contained and emerge as a single entity (Mironenko and Sorokin, 2018). Instead, they believe that culture manifests itself both as a part of external reality, as artefacts and cities,

and as forms of social organisation and institutions, as well as being a characteristic of the inner psychic reality of people, individuals and communities (Mironenko and Sorokin, 2018). In the view of Matsumoto (2007), ‘culture is the set of ways that emerges when a group uses the basic tools inherent in its members to address the problems presented by the larger ecological context in which the group exists to meet biological needs and social motives’ (Matsumoto, 2007, p.1291).

This means that culture can be understood as the beliefs and values that characterise a particular social group. It informs cultural customs and practices, as well as cultural norms, which can be understood as the standards that culturally encourage, endorse, and excuse the behaviour of members of a society (Van et al., 2005). Non-compliance with a cultural norm or custom is often regarded as a deviation which, though it may not break any legal sanctions, is often likely to attract social sanctions from other members of the society (Ajayi, Chantler and Radford, 2022). However, it is more complicated than this in practice, as culture can encompass nationality, ethnicity, region, and religion, which can overlap and conflict within and between individuals in any group (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005).

Individuals, for example, can have intersecting cultural identities based on their identification with more than one group, something seen in a Nigerian context given the intersecting cultures of Nigeria and different tribal groups discussed in the introduction (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005). This means that while individuals may share, on one level, a similar cultural heritage, they may differ in the cultural customs or practices they perform or the cultural norms governing their behaviour, as other intersecting, tribal cultures may inflect these (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005).

Feminist researchers have further complicated the concept of culture. In their work looking at violence against women and girls (VAWG) interventions across six European countries, Kelly et al. (2019) discusses the term culture's benefits and limitations. Calling it a ‘contested concept’, they argue that culture cannot be seen as static and homogenous.

Instead, it should be viewed ‘as a complex and polysemous concept, in the sense that it has strong connections for some social groups with different and additional meanings that reflect social and power tensions' (Kelly et al., 2019: 121). The core discussion here centres on the flatness of ‘culture’ and its inability to reflect how different social actors take on and take up the dominant messages in a society.

The understanding of culture is essential for the discussion here, given how the inequality of power has been identified by the World Health Organisation as a factor that encourages

IPVA (Krugs et al., 2002). Kelly et al. (2019) argued that the concept of culture should be considered carefully to avoid crystallising groups and people as homogenous, with the argument that culturalising a social group can lead to stereotyping and justifying discriminatory opinions (Kelly et al., 2019). Nevertheless, not differentiating culture risks diluting and failing to recognise how variations in cultural norms affect victim-survivors experiences and the response they get from professionals (Kelly et al., 2019). The concept of culture helps people to explain themselves, their beliefs, and needs and understand professionals to find the appropriate intervention for their situation (Kelly et al.,2019). As such, even though it is a contested concept, it is important to think about culture when thinking about the experiences of and responses to IPVA, particularly in terms of how culture affects an individual's values and behaviours and what this means for victim- survivors in terms of coping and help-seeking. Doing so can be helped by drawing on the work of the anthropologist Geert Hofstede.

2.1. Hofstede's cultural dimensions

Despite the difficulties in defining culture that has been pointed to above, Hofstede (1997) developed one of the most widely used definitions as being 'the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another' (p. 3). He went further in his attempts to conceptualise culture, setting out a theory of the six cultural dimensions (or issues) that a society needs to come to term with to organise itself. These six dimensions are: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, long/short term orientation, and indulgence/restraint. The concept of culture can be explored using Hofstede's dimensions to understand, in line with Kelly et al (2019), how dominant norms and practices in a given society affect experiences of violence and the response to those who experience it.

Power distance, for Hofstede, is the extent to which the less powerful members of organisations and institutions accept the unequal distribution of power (Hofstede, 2011). This deals with the fact that all individuals in a society are not equal, and it expresses the culture's attitude towards these inequalities among people (Leko Šimić and Isah, 2022). Here, the marginalised and those at the bottom suggest the acceptance of inequality of power.
According to Hofstede (2011, p.9), 'This represents inequality (more versus less) but defined from below, not from above, it suggests that a society's level of inequality is

endorsed by the followers as much as by the leaders'. This inequality is expected and accepted in a society with high power distance. In contrast, members of a low power distance society believe that status differences between individuals are not inherent. However, they may be associated with their role, for example, men as the head of the home (Ajekwe, 2016). A preference for high power distance translates into behaviours that suggest one's position in life is defined by a clear family hierarchy and at work into a clear definition of who is to lead and who to follow. In a low-power distance society, social inequalities are minimised; there is a substantial belief in individual equality and the belief that hierarchies are convenient but not unalterable (Ajekwe, 2016).

The second dimension of 'uncertainty avoidance' refers to a society's tolerance for ambiguity (Hofstede, 2011). 'It indicates to what extent a culture programs its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations' (Hofstede, 2011, p.10). Societies with high levels of uncertainty avoidance prefer rules and absolute truths. They try to limit the chances of misconduct and rebellion by enacting strict behavioural codes, norms, laws, and rules. With these rules in place, people are expected to conform to specific subjugated roles to be accepted as legitimate members of their communities (Hofstede, 2011). In contrast, people in low uncertainty avoidance cultures are comfortable with lax regulations, relative truths and the uncertain world of self-employment (Ajekwe, 2016). These are societies where people are not only willing to take risks, but where taking such risks are rewarded (Ajekwe, 2016).

The third dimension is that of individualism/collectivism, that is the 'degree to which people in a society are integrated into groups' (Hofstede, 2011, p.11) and understand their sense of self through those groups, effectively whether a culture supports understandings that value the self over the community (Ajekwe, 2016; Olowookere et al., 2021).
Individualism is when the relationship between individuals is loose within the culture, and everyone is expected to be responsible for themselves and their immediate family, something that interpretations and understandings of 'British' culture have been said to reflect (Bouchner, 1994; Willis, 2012). Collectivism is when people are merged into strong, cohesive groups and are expected to be loyal to and watch out for members of their group, including the extended family, in exchange for collective protection (Hofstede, 2011). Collective cultures thus value the community over the individual, prioritise working in relationships with others rather than alone (Ajekwe, 2016), and encourage individuals to put the needs of the family and broader community above their own.

The fourth dimension Hofstede looks at is the distribution of values between the genders in a society, seen as a key dimension of a society's culture and playing a significant role in the norms and attitudes of the people living within it. For Hofstede, '[m]asculinity is a society in which social gender roles are distinct: Men are supposed to be assertive, challenging, and focused on material success; women are meant to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life' (Hofstede, 2001, p. 297). In a masculine society, the emphasis is on valuing money and things (Ajekwe, 2016). Femininity on the other hand signifies a society where there is an overlap of social gender roles. In this society, men and women are expected to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life (Hofstede, 2001). These kinds of societies are more likely to emphasise the quality-of-life values, relationships, and nurturing behaviour toward people in society (Ajekwe, 2016). This value system, Hofstede maintains, is inculcated early in life at the school level and sustained throughout adulthood (Hofstede, 2011).

The fifth dimension is that of long- or short-term orientation, in essence how much a society values the connection of the past with the current and future actions/challenges (Hofstede, 2011). National cultures with long-term orientation tend to be pragmatic, modest, and thrifty, often developing to a high level of prosperity (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). They are far-sighted and concerned about the future, encouraging pragmatic innovation, adaptation, and education (Olowookere et al., 2021). On the other hand, national cultures with a shorter- term orientation view change with suspicion, holding onto traditions, past events and traditional stability (Chukwu, Conrad and Crosbie, 2019). They value a sense of duty and obligation in individuals, as well as prioritising the present with immediate gratification taken precedence over more long-term goals. This means that countries with such cultures often have little to no economic development (Hofstede, 2011).

The final dimension or factor in establishing a national culture set out by Hofstede is indulgence or restraint. This refers to the freedom that societal norms give citizens in actualising their human desires. National cultures that score higher in indulgence allow for the relatively free satisfaction of essential and natural human desires related to enjoying life and having fun (Hofstede, 2011). Indulgent cultures encourage recreation, celebration and relaxation, and value the satisfaction of human needs and desires (Olowookere et al., 2021). On the other hand, restrained cultures see the value in limiting people's desires and withholding pleasures to align more with societal norms (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov,

2010). Cultures that are more restrained are more serious in their approach to work and life (Olowookere et al., 2021), and usually control the gratification of needs, regulating these 'by means of strict social norms' (Hofstede, 2011, p.10).

Through measuring these six dimensions in any given culture, Hofstede argues that you can evaluate the effects of that culture on the values and behaviours of its members.
Notwithstanding how significant Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions has been in anthropology and beyond, his work has received some criticism over time. According to Agneta Moulettes (2007), the theory of cultural dimensions has been critiqued for being vague and contradictory, as well as for its reliance on secondary data that was collected between 1968 and 1972. It has also been criticised for portraying nations as homogeneous, historically determined, and static entities (Moulettes, 2007), applying a flat analysis to the complex area of culture. These critiques are important as they encourage a critical reflection on the use of his work. Here I draw on Hofstede, and the ways in which his work has been used to develop 'cultural climate maps' where a country's dominant cultural norms are scored in a factor analysis from 0 - 100 across each dimension, not to suggest that these dimensions are experienced by all Nigerian people or experienced in the same way over time. Rather I argue Hofstede provides a route into exploring how what is experienced as the 'national culture' of a particular country is multifaceted and cannot be reduced to a single factor. His work is used here to provide clues to the patterns within a culture that may be conducive to IPVA.

2.2. The cultural dimensions of Nigeria

Applying Hofstede's theory to Nigeria reveals several patterns which may be conducive to the experience of violence against women. Overall, Nigerian culture has been classified as masculine, hierarchical, indulgent, and community oriented with strong traditional values (Bustamante and Ogunyemi, 2021). It has been found to have a high-power distance culture based on Hofstede's scores and ranking, celebrating hierarchy and formalities between superiors and subordinates, with women not usually part of decision-making (Zagorsek, Jakli, and Stough, 2004; Peretomode, 2012; Oruh and Dibia, 2020; Olowookere et al., 2021). This can be seen in the ways in which Nigerian culture expects women to respect and obey their husbands/partners, children expected to obey their parents regardless of the situation, and challenging this hierarchy seen as unacceptable and rude (Peretomode,

2012), As will be seen in the finding's chapters, the high-power distance culture in Nigeria creates a conducive context for the perpetration of IPVA as well as challenges for women seeking to escape.

Turning to uncertainty avoidance, according to Chukwu, Conrad and Crosbie (2019) review of Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Nigeria is not classified as either high or low on uncertainty avoidance as it had a 55% score (Chukwu, Conrad and Crosbie, 2019). This means that Nigeria's position on this dimension needs to be clearly defined (Olowookere et al., 2021). The maintenance of strict rules, law and order in a society may indicate a high uncertainty avoidance index (Olowookere et al., 2021) however studies have documented that in Nigerian culture formal rules are disliked but obeyed when necessary (Peretomode, 2012). This suggests this dimension may have less of an impact on Nigerian women's experiences of IPVA than some of the others. Where Nigerian culture is less equivocal is on the individualism/collectivism dimension. Oludipupo (2021) documented what he called the African spirit of collectivism; 'The African spirit of collectivism gives credence to the normative nature of person in the community. Africans believe that an individual is a communal being. Right from birth they believe that the process of becoming a responsible being lies in the collective effort of the members of society' (Oludipupo, 2021. p.6). Here, he argued that the spirit of collectivism infuses the African community into an inclusive lifestyle over an exclusive lifestyle found in the Western world (Oludipupo, 2021). Thus, Africans identify with the philosophy of corporate existence as opposed to the individualistic philosophy of the Western world, often displayed in their atomistic lifestyle. For instance, marriage in Nigeria is collective, involving the nuclear and extended family members. This differs from the individual approach in the West where a marriage is just between two individuals. This spirit of collectivism also reflects how women deal with issues relating to IPVA. When a woman is married, it is expected that her relationship goes beyond her nuclear family, consisting of her husband and children. She is expected to embrace and look out for her partner's family, as well as her own family. This means that making decisions to leave a relationship where there is abuse, have to account for the extended family, as they can be affected negatively.

Based on the Hofstede's dimensions, Nigeria has the quality of a masculine society with a score of 60% (Chukwu, Conrad and Crosbie, 2019). In applying Hofstede's (2011) masculinity/femininity dimension, Nigeria, being a masculine society, places more value on men and male associated traits compared to women, reflected in the admiration for

strong men while women are admired for being weak (Kalunta-Crumpton, 2015). Men also have more privileges in Nigerian culture than women, socially, politically, and economically (Kalunta-Crumpton, 2015), and the national culture holds beliefs regarding the expected roles of women as subordinate entity (Ajayi, Chantler and Radford, 2022).
Non-compliance to the norm that commands submissiveness and loyalty from women to men is seen as a threat and can be used as a justification for violence and abuse (Ajayi, Chantler and Radford, 2022), making it difficult for women to name what is happening as abuse, as well as to escape.

This difficulty is also seen in how Nigeria ranks on the final two of Hofstede's dimensions. Nigerian culture has been documented as being short-term oriented (Hofstede, 2011; Chukwu, Conrad and Crosbie, 2019; Olowookere et al., 2021), something that is reflected in the importance the country holds to her strong sense of nationalism and social standards. Ezedike (2016) suggests that cultural limitations are placed on women due to the restrictions approved by tradition and customs. These norms are embedded in conditions, statements, and actions carried out from the standpoint of tradition and customs that tend to marginalise and subordinate women and girls. People are less willing to compromise as this would be seen as a weakness, and a deviation from the rules laid down could attract some sanctions.
Concerning IPVA, this means that Nigerian women are inclined to accept their experiences and endure to ensure compliance. This was highlighted by Ajayi, Chantler and Radford's study of Nigerian victim-survivors – to be explored in more detail later in this chapter – which found that, 'those who deviate from these perceived norms are viewed less favourably by their immediate community; thus, women are left with no option but to remain in abusive situations' (2022, p. 471).
Finally, Nigeria has been found to be an example of an indulgent culture, where the people are known for happiness, fun-seeking and optimism even in the face of untold hardship (Olowookere et al., 2021). This impacts on a sense of cultural pride in 'enduring' challenging situations, including as will be seen the need to endure abuse. It also intersects with power distance and masculinity/femininity to create cultural norms which permit polygyny but not polyandry, where men's liberty to satisfy their desires are prioritised over the satisfaction of women.

Bringing the cultural dimensions together we can see that, in Hofstede's view, Nigerian national culture is one that encourages and values hierarchies, tradition, and masculine traits. It also values happiness and optimism together with a sense of prioritising what is best for the collective over what is best for oneself. I see these dimensions as playing a part

in forming a conducive culture for IPVA. However, some of the same dimensions can also create a space to resist and refuse. Nigeria's ambivalent rating on the dimension of uncertainty avoidance means there is a space to resist cultural norms, and its high rating as an indulgent culture means that there may also be space to value women's happiness.

Importantly, as will be explored in the finding's chapters, there is also something about the 'African spirit of collectivism' that gives victim-survivors from Nigeria a resource to cope with IPVA and can provide support for them in its aftermath. Before exploring the findings and how these link to culture in more detail, this thesis now turns to looking at some of the key thinking around violence against women more broadly.

3. Core concepts in violence against women

The evidence base on violence against women has grown significantly since early radical feminist organising. There are three core concepts coming out of this movement that are relevant to this thesis. These are: the 'continuum of sexual violence' developed by Liz Kelly, (1988) and its development by Ava Kanyeredzi (2018a) in relation to the experiences of Black women; the concept of 'space for action' (Kelly, 2003; Kelly, Sharp and Klein, 2014) and the concept of the conducive context which I will develop in this thesis in relation to culture. The following sections review the literature and trajectory of these three core concepts.

3.1. The continuum of sexual violence

The 'continuum of sexual violence' is a concept that emerged from Liz Kelly's (1988) PhD research on sexual violence to explain both the extent and range of sexual violence documented by the participants in her research. According to Kelly, the term 'continuum' can be used in two ways. The first is to describe that there is a basic common character underlying the many different forms of violence that women and girls experience from men in their lives. The second is to create a concept able to document and name the range of abuse, intimidation, coercion, intrusion, threat and force that women experience whilst acknowledging that experientially these regularly shade into each other so that it is difficult to separate unique forms into discrete categories. The sexual violence experienced by the women Kelly spoke with ranged from threat of violence, sexual harassment, pressure to

have sex, sexual assault, obscene phone calls, coercive sex, domestic violence, sexual abuse, flashing, rape and incest. Kelly argued that the way these differences forms of violence were spoken about by her participants suggested that they were not experienced on a hierarchy that mirrored the hierarchy of legal or policy frames; that instead the degree of 'seriousness' or harm could not be easily ascribed based simply on what kind of violence they had be subjected to. This means that the notion of a continuum should not be understood as a spectrum of gravity or severity based on harm or physical force, but rather a blend of complicated and interwoven experiences of violence, harassment, abuse, limitation for individual women. The 'more or less' aspect of the continuum applies only to prevalence: that there are forms of sexual violence which most women experience in their lives and which they are more likely to experience on multiple occasions such as sexual harassment, compared to others which are likely to be less common such as rape.
While these common forms are more likely to be defined by men as acceptable behaviour, they are connected to the forms of violence which are currently defined as crimes within the law.

Locating experiences of violence and abuse in women's everyday life contexts enables an understanding not only of the forms, but the meaning of these behaviours for individual women (Briere and Jordan, 2009; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005) and the complex terrain of choices, opportunities and limitations women negotiate. The concept of a continuum as used here foregrounds normative behaviour of heterosexual masculinity by men across women's lives (Gavey, 2005; Kelly, 1988) and beyond this more logical and less noticeable behaviours such as sexism, racism, ableism (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004). Kelly's key point was to intervene on the standard method of analysing violence against women as episodic and deviant cases of great cruelty and harm, to identifying it as every day and normative; a daily context for the experiences and lives of women and girls all over the globe. She contended that isolated focus on exhibitions of severe, disturbing and extreme violence against women leads investigators to seek explanations in individual pathology and abnormality of the perpetrator and/or the victim (Kelly, 1988). This approach distances the acts and their motivations from the structures and norms of 'acceptability', 'decency' and 'respectable society'; in effect it removes violence against women from its cultural context.

Kelly's way of thinking about the violence that women experience has been developed by other feminists working on violence against women, particularly for this thesis by the

feminist media scholar Karen Boyle and by Ava Kanyeredzi who works specifically on violence in the lives of BME women. The term ‘continuum thinking’ was introduced by Karen Boyle (2019) and is based on the context and connection between gender and violence. Boyle takes a historical approach, arguing that it is essential to find correct language to name the experiences of women of violence and abuse to make them visible. She explores how the Women’s Liberation Movement in the 1970’s used feminist consciousness-raising to create the means for women to identify and understand the gendered, structural nature of their personal experiences of male violence and abuse. This enabled women to name certain forms of men’s violence and abuse for the first time such as wife battering, incest and sexual harassment. Boyle claims this process of identifying and naming women’s experiences has been a continuous process up till now, drawing on examples such as technology-facilitated sexual violence, honour-based violence, and image- based sexual abuse (Boyle, 2019). She argues that to understand the connections between these different forms of violence, as well as to be able to name them and so make them visible, we need to think about continuums in the plural; that there are different continuums within as well as between different forms. This is a conceptualisation that as will be seen helps to make sense of the range of forms of violence and abuse experienced by participants in this study, that there is a continuum within IPVA as well as between IPVA and other forms of violence against women.

Although, the concept of continuum promotes an understanding of the commonalities and functionality of VAW, it is imperative also to account for differences and distinctiveness between forms and, crucially, between women. For example, it is neither true nor supportive to advocate that IPVA or other forms of VAW, impact on all women equally irrespective of race, class, or economic position. It is here that Ava Kanyeredzi has developed and expanded the concept by developing the ‘continuum of oppression’ to incorporate the range of forms of oppression experienced by BME women in England. The forms of violence and abuse experienced by participants in Kanyeredzi (2018a) research included racism, being subjected to immigration controls, intergenerational trauma and abuse, displacement through migration, and displacement through space, as well as violence perpetrated against them by men and also, for three participants, women.
Kanyeredzi traced the differences and similarities in these experiences, and like Kelly decades earlier, found that the degree of seriousness or harm could not be easily assumed by the form of violence and abuse experienced. For example, she discussed how her participants who were all Black women experienced intrusion when people talked about

their hair and their skin in a very similar way to how they talked about experiences of abuse. The connection here was within their body; how both racist intrusions and experiences of sexual violence felt similar within their bodies.

From this, Kanyeredzi developed the argument that the continuum of violence for Black women also includes racism. She drew on the concept of 'intersectionality' developed by Kimberlie Crenshaw (1991) as a way in which we can understand better women's whole experiences. For Black women, their abuse and experiences are racialised based on their social location. It is not that their experiences of violence against women sit outside of their experience as being a Black woman, the two overlap and are experienced together. In this way, Kanyeredzi's conceptualisation brings to the foreground the importance of culture to experiences of IPVA because she provides a way to understand how cultural norms, both those we embody or practice and those that are imposed on us, influence, shape, and crucially overlap with our experiences of violence. This came out perhaps most powerfully in Kanyeredzi's discussion of the silencing of violence against Black women. Her participants, many of whom were abused in childhood, spent many years trying to make sense of their experiences and the connections between these experiences (Kanyeredzi, 2018a, 2018b). What Kanyeredzi found was that her participants experienced layers of silencing directly from the abusers themselves who would threaten them or orchestrate the environment so that they could not speak, but also from members of their families and from cultural norms, as well through attempts to protect both of these. This latter point about silencing experiences of violence to protect an already stigmatised community is something that has also been found in previous research. Connell (1997) for example discusses how the negative public image portrayal of the Black community contributes to limited disclosure and suppression of inter- community issues of violence by Black women, including IPVA, to mitigate further stigmatization of the community (Connell, 2008). This development of the continuum of sexual violence to recognising a continuum of oppression, one which includes the experience of oppression through silencing connected to culture, echoes some of what will be discussed in the findings chapters and helps to ground my own development of a concept of conducive cultures.

3.2. Space for action

Space for action as a concept emanated from Eva Lundgren's (1998) work on 'life-space', used to understand how men are motivated towards being violent and abusive towards their partners, essentially capturing their desire to set limits on women's ability to express their freedom (Lundgren, 1998; Vera-Gray, 2017). Lundgran noted that gender-based violence decreases women's 'life space' while it increases the 'life space' of men (Lundgren, 1998) and in this way helped to expand what was thought about as the consequences of such violence. In 2003, Liz Kelly developed Lundgren's (1998) concept into the concept of space for action in her work relating to trafficking in women for sexual exploitation (Kelly, 2003). The concept was developed to reflect women's capacities to think and act from their perspectives and be independent across different aspects of their lives (Kelly, Sharp and Klein, 2014; Sharp-Jeffs, Kelly and Klein, 2017). In the 2003 report, Kelly called for a shift in focus from stereotypes of naive women being trafficked to looking at the structural violence that limits women's freedom, something she termed their 'space for action'. Here Kelly identified cultural elements such as the impact of gender inequality on women's options, pointing out that many women would not choose prostitution if they had access to other opportunities like paid employment or state benefits. This underscores the need to address the underlying issues that push women into situations like prostitution, rather than blaming individual choices. The constraining of women's space for action is further compounded from the failure of their community and the inefficiency of agencies established to meet to their needs (Kelly, 2003). This points to the ways in which a broader context is important in thinking about how women are affected by men's decision to use violence. Drawing on this, Kelly (2003) stipulated that while women's space for action is limited through violence from men, it is the opposite for men as their space for action increases, echoing the earlier work of Lundgren.

In 2014, Kelly and colleagues developed the concept further by developing tools to measure how women's space for action is decreased in situations of domestic violence. In the development of the concept, a scale of space for action was created which ranges across eight dimensions such as parenting, sense of self, community, friends and family, help-seeking, competence, well-being and safety, and financial condition (Kelly, Sharp and Klein, 2014).

The scale was then used over three years with a sample of 100 women who had received support from domestic violence services. They explored the process of rebuilding lives, focusing on the longer-term support needs of victim-survivors as they observed that whilst

interventions for women and children experiencing domestic violence are well developed, most women's support services lack the resources to follow up service users. Women were recruited into the study after utilising different domestic violence services provided by a Woman's Aid organisation and, through four waves of interviews, the researchers were able to follow their onward journeys. Similar to the original development of the concept, the results here showed the importance of wider contextual resources to help increase the space for victim-survivors, highlighting for example the importance of access to social and permanent housing (Kelly, Sharp and Klein 2014), something that as will be seen was important for participants in this project too. Ultimately, space for action is a useful reconceptualisation of agency in that it focuses not just on the actions of the individual but on how wider social and structural actions situate these and can provide spaces for victim- survivors of IPVA to resist and escape. As such it provides a useful conceptual basis from which to explore how cultural norms are implicated in both expanding and narrowing the freedom of victim-survivors.

3.3. Culture and a conducive context

The final key concept for the analysis within this thesis is the concept of a 'conducive context' which was again formulated by Liz Kelly (2007) but this time out of her research on trafficking in Central Asia. Conducive contexts are the situations or conditions that allow and encourage violence against women and girls to thrive. The concept was developed to highlight the importance of understanding the contexts for violence and abuse. Contexts include physical spaces that are structured by gendered power, authority and superiority.

Kelly (2007) made it clear that there are social, economic and political contexts that are conducive to trafficking that creates 'fertile fields' for exploitation (p. 81). The concept was developed through looking at trafficking and exploitation of women in Kelly's (2007). Kelly's concept of the 'conducive context' offers another way of understanding the broader gendered social, political and cultural conditions which facilitate men's violence against women.

According to Kelly (2016), the conducive context of violence and abuse is more visible when the forms and context of abuse are separated. The home which is perceived to be the safest place has created a conducive context for violence to take place. For Black women, including Nigerian women, conducive contexts are shaped by intersecting axes of power, namely the intersection of race, class, ethnicity and immigration (Hill Collins, 2000). The

same axes of power impact women's access to the necessary resources to rebuild their lives afterward (Kelly, 2016). Irrespective of the fact that violence against women is a global phenomenon, it has become clear from research that the rates of violence are not consistent across social groups, or between societies (Kelly, 2016). Women of colour especially from ethnic minority communities have a higher rate of violence perpetrated on them as has been shown in multiple studies (Crenshaw, 1991; Lee, Thompson, and Mechanic, 2002; Kanyeredzi, 2014; Stott, et al., 2021; Council of Europe, 2022).

The concept of conducive context has been usefully applied by scholars looking at the ways in which cultural norms create contexts that encourage and excuse VAW, though this has not yet been extended to Nigerian women. For example, Chantler and McCarry (2020) apply the concept to forced marriage as a way to think about the specificities of minoritised women's experiences of violence and abuse. Their work sees forced marriage as a pattern of behaviour rather than a discrete event. Conceptualizing forced marriage as a process allows the dynamics of this form of abuse to be more visible and attests to the often-long- term process of socialization starting in childhood (Chantler and McCarry, 2020). They identified several features of the conducive context for forced marriage within South Asian communities in Scotland – namely the immediate and wider context of girlhood, compulsory heterosexuality, pressure to consider and protect the family's honour, gendered cultural expectations, and insecure immigration status which compounds issues for South Asian women on spousal or other temporary visas – all of which constrain the agency of young Asian women. Moreover, in some contexts, marriage is a form of cultural capital and can transform women's status so long as the woman subscribes to the gender rules around marriage (Chantler and McCarry, 2020).

Chantler and McCarry's analysis also draws on Evan Stark's (2007) concept of 'coercive control' arguing that mothers are not only biological reproducers but 'cultural' reproducers for the nation; thus, they play a key role in the transmission of appropriate cultural values even if these are created by a patriarchal structure. The participants in their research narrated the influential role played by their mothers in presenting the idea of marriage to them as young children or adolescents, however this itself was the result of mothers, as women, being coercively groomed by cultural norms to accept this was the role for their daughters. In this way, 'the role of mothers is simultaneously part of, as well as pressurized by, the conducive context is central to understanding the operations of power in family contexts of forced marriage' (Chantler and McCarry 2020, p. 97).

Just like Chantler and McCarry (2020), Xiaochen Liang (2022) also drew on Liz Kelly's (2007) concept of conducive contexts as a theoretical framework to examine how local marriage culture and norms are embedded in the local social networks of marriage trafficking sites, and how this embeddedness creates a fertile ground for marriage trafficking and related exploitation (Liang, 2022). Due to the spatially uneven distribution of capital, there is frequent population movement along China–Vietnam border (Liang, 2022), with trafficking crimes occur frequently in these border markets when Vietnamese women travel to China to sell their agricultural products (Liang, 2022). Liang sought to understand Vietnamese women's experiences on this border, as well as the attitudes of individuals in local social networks toward marriage trafficking and victims. Her work revealed that for these communities and individuals, the expectation of marriage has an established belief in men's ownership of women. Men are expected to continue the paternal lineage and family name and to possess financial and social resources that are socially sanctioned, while women are expected to play a subordinate role in reproduction and caregiving. These cultural beliefs thus contributed to shaping the premise of ordinary marriage as well as creating the conditions to justify marriage trafficking (Liang, 2022). As such, Liang argued that marriage as a social norm is supported by social networks that indirectly support the development of marriage trafficking and create barriers to escape or detection (Liang, 2022).

Both Liang's (2022) work and that of Chantler and MacCarry (2020), help to establish the usefulness of applying and developing the concept of the conducive context in relation to cultural and social norms. The concept of conducive cultures will be developed in this thesis to indicate how cultural norms across Hofstede's six cultural dimensions can create a fertile ground (Kelly, 2007) in which the essential ingredients for the perpetration, excuse, and encouragement of IPVA. It is this that I pick up and develop in relation to Nigerian women Chapters 5 and 6, exploring the idea of conducive cultures as creating both internal and external barriers for victim-survivors to disclosing and escaping abuse.

4. Violence against Black and minoritised women

This thesis seeks to bring together the above core concepts with new research on the experiences of Nigerian victim-survivors. As such, before entering the methodology, this section of the literature review draws out the key themes from existing research on IPVA

and Black and minoritised women, exploring where possible research specific to the experience of Nigerian women. It is important to note from the outset however that the literature on Nigerian women and IPVA in England is very limited. As mentioned in the introduction there are currently only two studies to draw on. However, there is a wider literature in Nigeria on IPVA, as well as some useful connections with existing literature in England on IPVA in Black and Minority Ethnic communities which are drawn on here. To begin the discussion, I start with a broad overview of the literature on violence against Black and minoritised ethnic women in the UK, and specifically what it says about the challenges faced in terms of help-seeking and service response.

4.1. BME women, VAWG, and help-seeking

The evidence base on the IPVA experiences of Black and minoritised ethnic women has been growing recently due to the efforts of a core group of feminist researchers. This literature often focuses on the barriers to help-seeking for BME victim-survivors, as well as documenting differences and similarities in experiences of violence and its impacts.

Historically, when research looks at the barriers experienced by marginalised and migrant women to disclosing IPVA, it often focuses on institutionalised racism and immigration enforcement (Kasturirangan et al., 2004; Femi-Ajao, 2018; Ajayi, Chantler and Radford, 2022). It is regularly documented in the literature how victims-survivors who have immigrated to England or who have insecure immigration status face additional barriers such as fear of deportation; being separated from their children; language barriers and threats of harm to family members in their home country (Kasturirangan et al., 2004), with not much change happening over time.

Work in the late eighties for example identified the key role that the criminalisation by the police of victim-survivors by prioritising immigration issues over the incident of IPVA played in the experiences of BME victim-survivors (Mama, 1989). This is echoed in much more recent work highlighting the ongoing use of immigration as a weapon to inflict more abuse on women with insecure immigration status by colliding with the police which could ultimately lead to their deportation (Kanyeredzi, 2013; Imkaan and CWJ, 2023). Multiple studies have also shown how the hostile environment has had a negative impact in closing the space available for migrant women to disclose violence both to formal agencies and particularly to the police (see Jones et al, 2017, Siddiqui, Rehman, and Kelly, 2016). The

role of immigration controls is in fact one of the main areas that comes up in the literature specifically on Nigerian victim-survivors. Femi-Ajao (2018) conducted in-depth semi- structured interviews with 16 Nigerian women living in England aged between 18 to 54 who had been subjected to IPVA. The purpose of the study was to examine the factors that influence the disclosure and help-seeking behaviour of Nigerian women. She found immigration was a key factor limiting women's disclosure here, with participants who had entered England on dependent visas experiencing their immigration status as adding to the pressure to remain silent and endure abuse from their partner because of the fear of visibility, penury, and deportation (Femi-Ajao, 2018). Some women with spousal visas are not eligible for welfare support if their relationship is discontinued (Burman and Chantler, 2005).

Though this is no longer technically the case as there are specific funds and avenues for settlement for those women that have evidence of the abuse and reach out to certain agencies, recent interviews with women show that some of them are on visas that do not enable them to access this route, others are denied assistance by agencies that assume they have no recourse to public funds, and many women simply believe they will be deported because they are unfamiliar with England systems and laws (Anitha, 2008, 2010; 2011; Gill, 2004; Kesete, 2013; Thiara, 2020; Dhaliwal and Kelly, 2023). This is like the ways in which Femi-Ajao (2018) found that acculturation to England impacted women's confidence and trust in the agencies and systems around them and whether they would disclose to agencies. According to Femi-Ajao (2018), acculturation is defined as a cultural learning process experienced by individuals who are exposed to a new culture or ethnic group. Ninety percent of the participants in Femi-Ajao's (2018) study migrated from Nigeria to England as dependents of partners and husbands and with no recourse to public funds as a condition of their stay. They therefore believed that they did not have access to public services and support – sometimes irrespective of what their partners or husbands said.

For other women, abusers take a more active role in using immigration systems to continue the abuse. Kanyeredzi (2018a) for example found that men sometimes use immigration as a weapon to inflict more abuse on women with insecure immigration status by colluding with the police which could ultimately lead to their deportation. BME women are threatened with deportation if they do not do what the abuser and his family want them to do (Kanyeredzi, 2018a; Dhaliwal and Kelly, 2023). Other studies have also argued that

Nigerian immigrant women seek police involvement, statutory services or access to a refuge only as a last remedy when every other avenue of help has failed to meet their needs (Akinsulure-Smith et al., 2013); in part because of their immigration status (Burman and Chantler, 2005) and fears about what this means if they disclose. However, though a key feature of the literature, there is also a growing body of evidence looking at BME women's experiences outside of the impact of immigration.

In 2013, Ava Kanyeredzi published a review of the literature on Black and minoritised women's experiences in the USA to pinpoint possible gaps in what is known in the UK with regards to why black women may delay help-seeking or choose not to disclose violence and abuse. What she found connected to her later conceptualisation of a continuum of oppression (Kanyeredzi, 2018a), namely that violence in the lives of black women could be normalised by the historical continuum of violence that involves experiences of racism and marginalisation to the point that women struggle to be identified as victims and need help. A core barrier here is the stereotype of African women as strong.

Washington (2021) for example found that practitioners perceived black women as more resilient, and as such Black women who sought help from support services were less likely to be regarded by many services as 'deserving' victims. However, it wasn't only the ways in which this stereotype was imposed on Black women that impacted their experiences in the aftermath of violence. Kanyeredzi, argues both in this and in later work, that the construct of a strong Black woman can delay Black woman's help-seeking and prolong their suffering from abuse and violence (Kanyeredzi 2013; 2018a; 2018b). This is something that Wyatt (1992) and Washington (2001), for example also argued, finding that it takes African American women longer to seek help due to racialised stereotypes and the stories of rape passed on from family members. Victim-survivors thus adopted the meaning of these cultural ideologies as part of the personality of being a Black woman. This is also something that has been found in a more recent evidence review of the literature on Black and minoritised ethnic women and mental health in the UK (Thiara and Harrison, 2021) which argued that internal and structural inequalities aggravate the experiences of Black victim-survivors of IPVA and mental illness (Thiara and Harrison, 2021). The review found that this stereotype imposed on Black women was often interwoven with religion and faith, elements that are regularly used by Black and minoritised women as coping strategies to deal with mental ill-health and IPVA (Thiara

and Harrison, 2021), something that will be picked up in the finding's chapters in relation to our discussion of Nigerian victim-survivors living in England.

The review by Thiara and Harrison (2021) also found a number of other key factors behind disclosure barriers for Black victim-survivors including the fear of negatively contributing towards attitudes about Black and minoritised communities. Together with other studies in the broad violence against BME women literature, it also argued for the importance of language and interpretation as an issue for BME women seeking assistance. Anitha (2008; 2010; 2011), Belur (2008), and Gill (2004) all identified the interpretation of language as a barrier to disclosure. Their research participants testified that English is their second language and that this had created a communication block for call outs during domestic violence.

Belur (2008) identified problems with interpretation services as these interpreters were mostly middle-aged Asian men, particularly noting a case where the interpreter withheld important information from the police. This means that the police might not have a true account of the woman's experience of domestic violence incidents and could also impact the support offered to her. But also, statutory responses could be restricted by limited documentation of the incidence of the abuse, as Nigerian women may not have previously logged the abuse with the police, their GPs or other services in a position to provide documentary evidence in support of the incidence of the abuse (Femi-Ajao, 2018:8).

Beyond statutory services, there is also some research to suggest that professionals within VAWG specialist services denied and justified the prevalence of domestic violence against BME women (Anitha 2008; 2010; 2011; Belur 2008; and Burman, Smailes and Chantler, 2004; Burman & Chantler, 2005).

Negative social reactions from family and friends are some elements that connects to our earlier discussion about the cultural dimension of collectivism and how this is found in most cultures outside of a Western individualistic and capitalistic culture. Cowburn, Gill and Harrison (2015) for example examined the role of community pressures and culture in silencing BME victims of sexual abuse, finding this played a key role in inhibiting disclosures and seeking support when focusing on South Asian survivors in England. An earlier study conducted by Ullman and Filipas (2001) in the United States of America, explored the experiences of over 300 women from minoritised backgrounds who had experienced sexual assault. They found that BME victim-survivors received more negative social reactions from family and friends than white women and these reactions impacted

negatively on their mental health. This compounding impact on mental health is something that was also found in research over two decades later conducted in both England (Thiara and Harrison, 2021) and Scotland (Public Health Scotland). Both these studies found that BME women were more likely to encounter negative reactions to disclosures of violence within their community.

However, this negative reaction also extended to disclosing to services. Much of the literature on BME women and VAWG has documented this in terms of the impact of structural racism. Thiara and Harrison (2021) reviewed the evidence base on Black women in the UK in relation to domestic violence and mental health problems. They found research suggested that women from different BME communities had similar experiences of IPVA and mental health problems, including how these were augmented by religious and cultural pressures, immigration and asylum issues, racism and discrimination, low socio-economic status or financial hardship, and the role of the health service in medicalising them or ignoring their needs rather than providing counselling or social welfare support (Thiara and Harrison, 2021). They found evidence of both structural and cultural barriers to accessing support for mental health/wellbeing in the context of IPVA for Black women.

In 2023, the violence against Black and minoritised women organisation Imkaan together with the feminist legal campaigning group the Centre for Women's Justice examined the obstacles faced by Black and minoritised women in England who have lost their lives in domestic homicide and suicide in the context of domestic abuse. Their report found that Black and minoritised women faced the difficulties and state failings that all victim- survivors of IPVA face, but they also experienced additional obstacles that affect them specifically (Imkaan and CWJ, 2023). Here they argued that women from Black and ethnically minoritised communities are pressured not to report abuse because of the shame it will bring on women themselves, their partners and the extended family, again something that will be picked up in the findings of this study. Similar to the work of Thiara and Harrison (2021) and others, the report also picked up on the stereotype of a 'strong Black woman' and what this does to inhibit disclosure, however it additionally explored the stereotype of the 'angry Black woman' and identified the ways in which this image can result to insufficient involvement of professionals, who have racially pathologising assumptions about Black woman as 'hard work' (Imkaan, 2023).

Taken together, the broad findings from the literature on BME victim-survivors demonstrates the importance of taking an intersectional approach which acknowledges the unique challenges faced by BME women given their social and cultural context. This means it is especially important to understand more about this context for Nigerian women and as such the remainder of this chapter will pay particular attention to this.

4.2. Gender norms and gender inequality

Research on Nigerian victim-survivors oftens highlights the ways in which violence can be justified when used against women deemed to be subordinate or not submitting to their inferior position on the gender hierarchy. For instance, Balogun and John-Akinola's (2015) research attributed IPVA to a range of forms of insubordination - women's stubborn attitude, women denying the partner sex, not obeying his instructions, disobedience, non- submission to the partner, inappropriate dressing, keeping friends that the husband does not approve, infertility, late food preparation and either partner having extramarital affairs.

Gender roles and norms are also reinforced by intrusive family members as Balogun and John-Akinola's (2015) study found, especially interference from relatives on the husband's side and intolerance of certain behaviours increased where women were from a different ethnic group to their husbands. This points to the importance of exploring in more detail how gender inequality intersects with cultural and religious pressures and practices for Nigerian victim-survivors.

According to Abayomi, Kolawole and Olabode (2013), customary and religious practices in Nigeria are inherently patriarchal as they mostly support the position of the man as head of the house and his greater control and decision-making powers. This means women are in the subordinate position and male children are preferred over the female children. Bride price and libation are two connected practices that support such a patriarchal structure.

Bride price is understood by many to symbolize the sale of the girl and ownership by her husband and family (Abayomi, Kolawole and Olabode, 2013). The implication of this customary law is that a woman is regarded as the property of the man who is entitled to discipline her as he deems fit. Religion teaches that the woman is the weaker vessel and plays the second fiddle in the relationship. Irrespective of the benefits associated with the payment of bride price (Hague, Thiara and Turner, 2011, p. 556), Ajayi, Chantler and Radford (2022) found that bride price may increase men's sense of entitlement to his

wife's body and that this could, in turn, increase the likelihood of sexual abuse and violence. The collective cultural expectation to maintain marital status after the payment of the bride price justifies the stigma attributed to the breakdown of marriage which further reinforces women's subordinate position in the family (Ajayi, Chantler and Radford, 2022).

Gender norms are not only cultural however, the academic evidence base suggests that these roles and norms are supported through a number of social and material contexts. Educational attainment and economic or financial position are material features of women's position within society, and these have also been raised as concerns within Nigerian research on IPVA. In Nigeria, most women depend on their husbands for their economic sustenance, and this means they cannot leave an abusive man because they have no means of looking after themselves or their children (Abayomi, Kolawole and Olabode, 2013). Abayomi, Kolawole and Olabode (2013) argue that this economic inequality has encouraged some men to be abusive towards women. In an English context, some of the Nigerian women that Femi-Ajao (2018) interviewed were left with no means of survival when they were abandoned by abusive men on whom they had been entirely financially dependent Adding to the issue of acculturation, some participants stated that they were abandoned by their abusive male partners in England and were left with no means of livelihood. Being abandoned aggravated the distress associated with their experience of abuse from their partners, owing to immigration fears and insufficient finance (Femi-Ajao, 2018, p.7).

Conversely, if economic dependence or subordination is the norm and integral to male power, Nigerian women's prosperity could trigger violence, such as where she owns landed properties and businesses with or without the knowledge of her partner, or financial empowerment that limits her reliance on her husband as this may also affect be perceived as insubordination. In line with this, Balogun and John-Akinola (2015) found that women were more likely to experience IPVA where their level of education was higher than their partner's, indicative of a form of punishment for transgressing patriarchal norms. However, Onoh et al (2013) found that men with no formal or only primary education are more likely to be violent against women and that men with tertiary education exhibit lower levels of IPVA, and similarly, Abayomi, Kolawole and Olabode (2013) found that those with higher educational attainment were less likely to support IPVA and that educated women were more likely to be respected by their husbands. This demonstrates the complex interplay

between gender norms and material contexts, both of which inform and mutually construct each other.

In addition, and importantly, unequal gender norms and their connection to violence against women however are not only found in Nigerian culture. This means that for Nigerian women living in England, they can experience a compounding effect of the patriarchal culture from Nigeria and the patriarchal culture from England. In their research with Nigerian women in England for example, Ajayi, Chantler and Radford (2022) found that rape myths played a key role in preventing women from leaving abusers. Rape myths are attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but are widely and persistently held which tend to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women (Ajayi, Chantler and Radford, 2022). They have been found to be present across England society, including within the police. Two research participants in Ajayi, Chantler, and Radford's (2022) study gave an account of how rape myths helped to minimize the severity of sexual abuse. One was raped by armed robbers and her brothers asked her to keep quiet about it to avoid public ridicule. The other participant was raped by her stepfather, but her mother made her responsible for protecting herself from further assaults by instructing her to lock the door of her room before going to bed and ensuring that she dresses in particular ways such as always wear a bra and not wear shorts (Ajayi, Chantler and Radford, 2022).

Brinson (1992) asserted that rape myths operate through gender norms supported by patriarchy which suggest women and girls who wear certain clothes invite rape. Ajayi, Chantler and Radford (2022) add that dress codes are also impacted by culturally specific codes around what is considered acceptable behaviour for women and rape myths are maintained by unequal gender relations that support the structure of patriarchal, interpersonal violence and women's subservience. The prevalence of rape myths has a serious impact on women's ability to disclose sexual violence and seek assistance. Ajayi, Chantler and Radford (2022) argue that there needs to be more attention to wider patriarchal relations and gender inequality between and across cultures to impact the prevalence of rape myths within Nigerian communities in England and their impact.

Finally, it is important to recognise research showing how gender and racial inequality intersects and is internalised. Kanyeredzi (2018a) mentioned earlier, for example found that Black women in her study (including Nigerian participants) had been socialised in ways that legitimise and enable IPVA. Specifically, their self-worth and value was determined by their ability to construct an ideal heterosexual and patriarchal family made

up of a man, woman and children and where the woman was subservient. This gender entrapment into a patriarchal family also ties middle-class Black women's aspirations to her partner and children. Her status is determined by her family, peers and community. Black women are under pressure to not become a single woman, a 'battered single mother', or 'a poor woman, an unsuccessful woman, and a bad mother'. To avoid the stigma of falling short of this ideal family, she tolerates abuse and becomes entrapped within violent and abusive relationships (Kanyeredzi 2013). This connects with the role of cultural and religious pressures, something particularly prominent in the research on Nigerian victim- survivors.

4.3. Cultural and religious pressures and practices

A considerable amount of the literature on Nigerian women and IPVA refers to culture and religion as encouraging abuse and also acting as barriers to help seeking. Ajayi, Chantler and Radford (2022) argue that religious beliefs structure everyday behaviours and decision- making and when sexual abuse or violence is viewed through a religious lens, it can decrease the severity and seriousness of the offense and in turn discourage the victim from taking action to stop, report or prosecute the offender (Ajayi, Chantler and Radford, 2022).

This could result in separating the abuser from the abuse. Kalunta-Crumpton's (2017) research with Nigerian immigrants in the USA demonstrates that such cultural and religious pressures also travel across countries. She found that it is forbidden by tradition for a married woman to leave her marriage, despite any amount of abuse she receives from her husband.
Even though her research participants had left the shores of Nigeria and had been living in the USA for several years, they still upheld such cultural beliefs and practices (Kalunta- Crumpton, 2017). Moreover, Nigerian women who do leave their marriage are thought to bring shame to her family and the whole community and divorce is considered completely unacceptable (Kalunta-Crumpton, 2017). In parts of Nigeria, divorce carries humiliating consequences such as wife disinheritance whereby the woman, upon divorce, may have no right to any marital property, and full custody of the children is likely to go to the man (Chika, 2012).

Ajayi, Chantler, and Radford's (2022) study focused particularly on Nigerian women in England and the cultural barriers they experienced in disclosing IPVA. The authors conducted interviews with 12 Nigerian women aged between 27 and 46 living in Northwest England. Ten of the participants were recruited through organisations that work directly with BME women including refugee support organisations, while two were recruited through the researcher's direct contacts. The study identified four main cultural factors influencing women's ability to seek help: male privilege defined by gendered roles and expectations; religious beliefs; rape myths; and bride price with the associated practice of libation. Along the lines of the earlier discussion on cultural dimensions and how these apply to Nigerian national culture, the study found that Nigerian cultural norms privileged men within the community and Nigerian women were expected to behave in a respectful and submissive manner toward their husbands. These expectations were mostly informed by the family of the women and their partners, with women not expected to contest these gendered roles and viewed less favourably if they did (Ajayi, Chantler and Radford, 2022). The study also highlighted the role of religious norms in perpetuating the patriarchal structure. Abuse and violence, particularly sexual abuse, was further justified by the patriarchal cultural expectation that Nigerian women have a marital obligation to bear children (Ajayi, Chantler and Radford, 2022).

In Nigeria, it is also culturally unacceptable to seek outside formal interventions such as statutory services like the police. The police force itself is seen as a patriarchal institution known for its disdain toward victims who report IPVA (Fawole, Aderonmu and Fawole, 2005; Eze-Anaba, 2006; Abayomi and Olabode, 2013). The literature on BME communities in England makes similar points about obstacles to disclosure and help- seeking. Several studies have found that BME women are influenced by their community as they encounter the pressure of remaining in an abusive relationship from their community and socialised into not speaking about the abuse with people outside the community (Gill, 2004; Belur, 2008; Anitha 2008, 2010, 2011; Femi-Ajao, Kendal and Lovell, 2020; Femi-Ajao, 2018). Women may be blamed, shunned and ostracised by the community when they report abuse and so fears of these repercussions may be prioritised over help-seeking (Burman, Smailes and Chantler, 2004; Burman and Chantler, 2005; Gill, 2004; Anitha 2008, 2010, 2011). These cultural pressures and potential reprisals mean that women might look for help from within their immediate community, either through faith- based organisations or social groups (Femi-Ajao, Kendal and Lovell, 2020). Femi-Ajao's (2018) study with Nigerian women in England found they actively disclosed and sought

help from people they considered to be in an authority position within their Nigerian ethnic group – such as religious and community leaders and 'respected family members' - while remaining with the abuser and were much more likely to seek confidential help from within the community than statutory services (Femi-Ajao, 2018, p. 5).

5. Conclusion

This literature review has explored the concepts used in the thesis, including the contested concept of culture, and expanded to the literature on IPVA against Black and racially minoritised women, with a particular focus where possible on the literature on Nigerian women in England. The first section explored the concept of culture itself and applied Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions to explore the national culture of Nigeria. The second section turned to look at three key concepts used in violence against women, namely: the continuum of sexual violence, victim-survivors and the concept of conducive context in research on violence against women and girls. These concepts have not been applied to the experiences of Nigerian women in England in previous studies and their application here is one of the key contributions of this study. The continuum of sexual violence depicts the multifaceted way violence against women exists. This concept was developed by Kelly (1988) to explore how women's experiences of intimate partners violence are connected to enable women to understand their experiences of sexual violence and make it clear how typical and aberrant men's behaviour shade across one another. The dichotomy of victim- survivors developed by Kelly, Burton, and Regan (1996) is applied in this research due to its origins within therapeutic perspectives. It has increasingly become influential among feminist support services. The concept of conducive context, formulated by Liz Kelly (2007), was applied to culture, exploring the ways in which cultural norms can encourage the perpetuation of IPVA and limits the space for action for victim- survivors.

The review then moved onto look at the literature on violence against Black and minoritised women. It was noted that despite the growing body of literature on IPVA in England, there is still limited literature on the experiences of women from Nigeria who are residents in England. Only two studies have been conducted by Femi-Ajao (2018) and Ajayi, Chantler and Radford (2022) on Nigerian women living in England regarding their experiences of IPVA at the time of this research. Wider literature however shows the role

of gender inequality and cultural norms in perpetuating and sometimes justifying violence and abuse against Nigerian women by their male intimate partners. In exploring the relevant literature, this chapter has set out the key conceptual and existing empirical work that this thesis builds on to answer its research questions. The following chapter moves into discussing how these questions were answered, outlining the methodology of the study and the challenges of conducting research on such a silenced and unspeakable topic.

Chapter 3: Methodology

1. Introduction

The complexity of the themes found in the literature review, combined with the limited empirical basis for understanding Nigerian women's experiences, prompted the need for a research method that would enable exploration between both researcher and participants. For this reason, the study grounded itself methodologically in a feminist theoretical framework. This framework encourages a disruption of the traditional power dynamics in the research site and thus is particularly useful when researching victim-survivors of abuse where power inequalities have been at the forefront of their experiences (Westmarland and Bows, 2018).

This chapter explains this methodological approach of the study, beginning with outlining its grounding in feminist research practice and specifically the development of a Black feminist standpoint, including a reflection on my positionality. It then discusses the methods used for data collection, including the recruitment challenges, before exploring how the data were analysed including the final themes used. It ends in a discussion of the ethical considerations involved in researching an area that is so inclined to being a taboo in Nigerian culture.

Throughout, the chapter highlights the ways in which the study can be seen as embodying a positive empowerment approach (Downes, Kelly and Westmarland, 2014) which positions victim-survivors as valuable, capable, and able to benefit from research conducted with – rather than on – them.

2. Feminism and methods

The difference between feminism and other theoretical practices and perspectives is that its theory and practice are not specific to academic scholars or designed with the research in mind; rather it has been called a mode of understanding and a call to action (Westmarland and Bows, 2018). Due to androcentric bias and the problem of women's lives and experiences not being adequately captured through the traditional scientific lens, over the past two decades, feminist scholars have developed alternative epistemologies to guide research and articulated a new vision for the research process. (Campbell and Wasco, 2000; Letherby, 2003). These models offer a practical guide for revealing and eliminating

sexist bias in research, as well as to try to reduce and make transparent the power imbalances inherent within the research site.

The most central and reliable factor that defines research as a feminist is its guiding philosophy on the nature of knowledge (epistemology) and the process by which research is conducted (methodology) (Westmarland and Bows, 2018). This means that though there is no one 'feminist' research method, a feminist methodology is one that requires critical consideration of the research process (Westmarland and Bows, 2018) and is predicated on both a theoretical premise of women's oppression and practical commitment to understanding and ending it. Feminist research engages with methods to understand, respect, and give power to women, often drawing from the feminist practice of consciousness-raising, popular with radical feminist movements in the 1970's. In line with consciousness-raising, feminist epistemologies accept women's stories of their lives as legitimate sources of knowledge, while feminist methodologies embody an ethic of caring through sharing those stories. This means that the topmost priority of feminist research is to respectfully consider women's lived experiences, crediting women's voices as the source of knowledge (Campbell and Wasco, 2000). The dedication of personal experiences, empathy and emotions are elements feminist researchers put into the research process as the means of making connections with their participants (Campbell and Wasco, 2000).
This means that unlike the model of the distant, objective researcher and the passive participant responding to questions that have been predesigned, feminist research seeks to put the researcher in the frame as a real person with a social and individual history and position. It requires researchers to make explicit, their own positioning in relation to the topic, the participants, and the research aims, and to acknowledge the limits of some positivist research concepts such as objectivity and generalisability. This requirement is crystallised in what is called feminist standpoint epistemology.

2.1. Feminist standpoint epistemology

Feminist standpoint theory is the idea that knowledge is produced from the perspective of individuals with less power, believing that seeing the world from the oppressed, subjugated, or marginalised can give more information on how power works (Harding, 1992).
Understanding how knowledge is produced, what we can know, how we can know it, and who we think the knower needs to be are issues of concern in feminist research. As

feminist scholars argue, if we hope to restore the historical trend of women's misrepresentation and exclusion from dominant knowledge, creating knowledge from women's real or concrete life experiences is essential. Following this, standpoint theory began with the claim that society is distinguished by; race, class, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and politics, which are the factors that shape the structure of the society. The activities of those at the top who organise and establish the limits differ from those of the people who perform them, the way they understand themselves and the world around them (Harding, 1992). This theory is rooted in post-positivist critical theory informed by the principles of socialism, radicalism and feminism. Deviating from the ontological view that there is no single objective truth, standpoint theory claims that personal understanding of reality is structured by gender, race, class and sexual orientation. To survive, less privileged groups must submit to the ideologies of the dominant group. In so doing, the less dominant group has more chances of producing a good, accurate, and undistorted view of social reality due to their disadvantaged position (Westmarland and Bows, 2018).
Feminists argue that the standpoint must be developed by considering peoples' experiences through political and intellectual struggles against the inequalities in gender, class, race, and sexual orientation (Collins, 1989). The position of the oppressed group and their oppressors generate the basis for critical social analysis, though such a standpoint only emerged through consciousness-raising experiences.

By making women's concrete life experiences the principal source of our inquiries, we can construct knowledge that reflects and represents women. However, 'women' is not a homogenous group. Postmodern feminists (between the late 1980s and 1990s) argued that gender roles are socially created and that it is unrealistic to generalise women's experiences across different histories and cultures (Reinharz and Davidman, 1992). This notion builds on critiques from Black feminists about excluding Black feminist standpoint from white Western feminist traditions (Collins, 1989). As a Black woman myself, I draw on some of this critique in my own positioning of this project as one arising from a Black feminist epistemology.

2.2. Black feminist epistemology

Black feminist thought provides an insight into the standpoint of and for Black women. Kimberle Crenshaw, in 1989 came up with the term 'intersectionality' to define the ways

different social identities such as class, gender, racism, ethnicity and sexual orientation intersect and conflict to create multiple forms of oppression. However, Crenshaw criticised the 1970s- and 1980s-women's feminist movement for mainly focusing on the needs and experiences of white, middle-class women (Crenshaw, 1989). As Crenshaw's work has demonstrated, Black women intellectuals confront conflicts between two epistemologies representing white male and Black feminist interests. Black women may be in white spaces but may have a different perspective on what counts as knowledge because they speak from a position of marginality and are like strangers inside that space. Similarly, in Black spaces, Black women are not seen as knowers on the same level as Black men, meaning their knowledge is also subjugated.

Like other feminist standpoint theorists, Patricia Hill Collins (2000) recognises that all social knowledge reveals the standpoint and interest of those creating it. Collins (1990) states that 'when making knowledge claims about women, we must always remember that it is women's "concrete experience" that provide the ultimate "criterion for credibility" of these knowledge claims' (p. 209). This knowledge undergoes the process of validation through political criteria. This means knowledge is assessed by a group of specialists representing the standpoint of the groups from which they are created. This suppresses alternative standpoints as unreliable and results in forms of subjugated knowledge. Since elite white men have mainly been controlling the structures of Western knowledge, their dominant epistemologies reflect the interests and views of their group while other thoughts are deliberately suppressed. As feminists have noted this has historically meant that women's knowledge and interests have been excluded, but as Black feminists have also recognised, this means that Black women's interests have been suppressed not just based on their sex, but also on their race. A key route for this suppression in research or knowledge creation is, Collins (1989) asserts, through the claim that the validation of knowledge lies primarily in positivist epistemology. Due to the claim that for new knowledge to be accepted, it must be in line with existing bodies of knowledge that are accepted as true by the dominant group, views that oppose the subordination of Black women are most likely not to be seen as credible. This means that Black women's worldview has been excluded from much of the history of knowledge production through academic spheres (Collins, 1990). As a result of the difficulties in gaining access to subjugated knowledge and the suppression of ideas, Black women have made expressions through music, literature, daily conversation, everyday behaviour and other means

(Collins, 1990). As women gained access to higher education and media, they were able to express certain aspects of subjugated knowledge.

This means that, like the broader call of feminist research to understand women's oppression to change it, Patricia Hill Collins (1990) calls for Black women in academia to centre our standpoint and use it as a valid and legitimate basis to create knowledge.
Though she also recognises the struggle here, where the Black women in academia must negotiate between two conflicting epistemological ideologies that represent the interest of white women on one hand and on the other hand, the interests of Black women (Collins, 2000). Collins (1990) emphasises that the theoretical basis for research should start from the lives of the marginalised group, most significantly the poor and racially minoritised women. She believes that centring the lived experiences of African American women for example may unveil the consequences of domination, ethnocentrism and how they survive. For instance, African American women's views of femininity are informed by European ideals in the same and different ways as those of White women. Hill Collins (1990) added that Black women researchers usually operate from the perspective of an outsider-within: outsiders due to the power relations between dominant, ruling elites and Black groups and within (insiders) due to being members of minoritised groups. This means they have access to forms of knowledge that may be hidden from members of the dominant class. This position of tension is the basis from which the epistemology and methodology of this project is built.

2.3. Positioning myself

In line with this epistemological position, I believe that before entering further into my methodology it is important to be reflexive and position myself in relation to this project. My position as a Nigerian woman living in England means that I have experience of being a Black woman in a society where my interests and worldview is not represented by mainstream society. However, this is not the only position I hold. I am also a victim- survivor of intimate partner abuse. The combination of this and my position as a Black woman places me in this research in a position described by Collins (1993) as an 'insider- outsider.' Being Nigerian, participants could share their experiences knowing that I understood the culture of Nigeria. I was an insider who came to the research with not only the knowledge of Nigerian culture but also the love for my country. Also, being a victim- survivor of IPVA positioned me as an insider who was not coming to judge the women for their experiences as I had many of the same experiences, myself. This has also enabled me

to make more sense of my own experiences of IPVA. However, I was also studying for an academic qualification which meant I had a different relationship with the research than the participants. I was in a position of power in some ways in relation to my participants and I acknowledge that the stories I present here have been analysed through me and so may not be exactly how the women would represent themselves – something called 'my story of their stories' by Maddy Coy (2009). I return to this reflexivity at the end of this thesis, reflecting on what I learned and how I was changed by the process of speaking with participants.

3. Ethical considerations

I received ethical approval from London Metropolitan University Ethics Committee on the 20th of April 2020. Due to the nature of the topic and its taboo nature in the Nigerian community, I was particularly careful in embodying an ethical research practice. This went beyond the process of getting institutional ethics into *doing* ethical research which prioritised the wellbeing of both participants and me within the research site. Key safety protocols were incorporated (with more detail below), and women were only recruited if they were no longer in an abusive relationship. Before collecting data for this research project, participants were given an information sheet and consent form that laid out in detail the aim of the research and what the interview entailed (see the appendix). For women who participated remotely, the consent form was also read out to them, and verbal consent was recorded on the digital recorder before the interview commenced. Participants were given the option to discontinue the interview at any time if they did not feel comfortable and were given a list of support organisations if they felt they wanted to seek support afterwards. Particular caution was applied to ensure participant anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality throughout the process, meaning all participants here are referred to by pseudonyms and some of their responses have been edited to ensure there are no identifiable details (Reinharz and Davidman, 1992).

However, ethical research practice is not only about taking care to do 'no more harm' to participants. It is also important to centre and reflect on the researcher's experience. This is also a crucial part of Black feminist epistemology and the acknowledgment it requires of the standpoint of the researcher. Reflecting on the research process, I have noted how I have been personally impacted by the stories that have been shared. While transcribing the

interview responses, my tone of voice was sometimes slightly harsh on the participants. This made me feel uncomfortable and encouraged to be more subtle in my subsequent interviews, based on this reflection. Each time I transcribed, I felt I had a connection or bonding with the participants. I could sense their pain and the trust they had bestowed on me in sharing intimate and sensitive parts of their lives. I began to gain confidence as the number of interviews I conducted increased; my level of agitation before interviews became minimal as I no longer saw myself as a burden on the women who regularly told me they enjoyed participating and hoped their experience would contribute to ending violence against women. This further reinforces the 'positive empowerment approach' to conducting research on violence and abuse put forward by Downes, Kelly, and Westmarland (2014). Here, rather than focusing on victim-survivors as vulnerable populations for research, and ethics as concerned only with doing 'no more harm', ethical research on violence against women can and should focus on the benefits to participants of having their experiences heard, shared, and validated. The words of the women who participated in this study are not words that have been heard before, as the participants are not women who have contacted formal agencies or spoken about their experiences beyond informal networks. This means that their act of participation itself was an act of resistance and strength and this thesis hopes to honour that by using as much of their words as possible.

4. Recruitment and limitations

The methodology of the project arose from this Black feminist epistemology and sought to reveal and centre the experiences of Nigerian women. Nigerian women in England are classified as Black and racially minoritised, affected by intersecting relations of oppression, including gender-based violence, class, racism, ethnicity, immigration status, religion/faith, ableism and sexual orientation. To recognise and help reduce the various oppression Nigerian women in England undergo, it is paramount to produce knowledge from these women's perceptions. This knowledge can help increase understanding of the barriers and enablers experienced by Nigerian women. It may also provide insights into the experiences of IPVA of other Black women. As such, in collecting data I sought to develop methods that would enable Nigerian women to talk to me about something that, culturally, we are told not to talk about. This meant that I prioritised in-depth interviews and intended

to conduct these in person to help develop connection and rapport with the interviewees. However, before being able to collect any data, I encountered significant hurdles in recruiting victims-survivors. Not only the difficulty of talking about IPVA within the Nigerian community which I expected, but also events outside of my control namely the Covid-19 pandemic and mass protests in Nigeria in October 2020.

As detailed above, I received ethical approval in April 2020, during the first of many national lockdowns (see the Appendices for more detail). The coronavirus pandemic had a significant impact on my ability to recruit participants, as most people were in a state of uncertainty, grief, hopelessness, panic, bereavement, and confusion. Everywhere was shut down, and the only means of social events or gatherings were remote via zoom, Skype, WhatsApp calls, phone calls, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. This made what was already going to be difficult, given the topic and the target participants, even more challenging. Then, in October of the same year, a decentralized social movement and mass protests against police brutality in Nigeria occurred. The slogan 'End SARS#' through social media called for disbandment of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a notorious unit of the Nigerian Police with long; record of abuses. On the 20th of October, 2020, armed government forces attacked and killed unarmed protestants during the protest in Lagos, Abuja and other parts of Nigeria. This created a huge movement of solidarity with all Nigerians, both at home and abroad, and meant that for a few months I took the decision to pause recruitment as most Nigerians were opposed to the government and in solidarity for the innocent lives lost. I felt obliged on ethical grounds that to ask women to talk about violence and abuse against women in that context would have made me seem insensitive.

Even without these global disruptions, recruitment was always going to be difficult. The research sought to attract women of Nigerian origin over 18 years who lived in any part of England. Participation was limited to women who have experienced any form of IPVA, whether physical, emotional, psychological, economic, or sexual abuse. Due to the sensitive nature of this study, I initially targeted the sample size to aim at twenty participants and took a convenience sampling approach, advertising the study widely and hoping to snowball participants through that. Convenience techniques have been strongly challenged, particularly regarding selection bias and unrepresentative sample size (Reinharz and Davidman, 1992), however the sampling technique was chosen due to the expected difficulty of obtaining access to study participants because of how sensitive the

subject of intimate partner violence and abuse is. Even with this, building the sample of victim-survivors was incredibly hard.

Flyers outlining the study and my contact details were distributed and displayed across five different WhatsApp groups specific to Nigerian women of which I am a member (see the Appendices). The Secretary of the Nigerian community in London also posted my flyers in sixteen other Nigerian community group WhatsApp groups to which he belongs. As I did not receive any contacts through these groups, I modified the posters first by reducing the wording and later changed the word 'violence' to 'abuse' to enable women who wanted to participate and might not see their experiences as being violence. I contacted three administrators of the young adult women's wing of the Urhobo Progress Union (UPU).
This is a Nigerian social-cultural ethnic group that I registered with as a member and I wanted to recruit participants for my research through them. They advertised by publicising my research poster on their group WhatsApp page, but no one indicated interest in participating. I sent my research posters to my Nigerian friends and church members and asked them to share them with their Nigerian contacts. They all promised to do as I requested, but I did not receive any feedback from them. Emails were also sent to support organisations such as Black Women's Health and Family Support, London Black Women's Project, Nia Project, Rights of Women, Solace Women's Aid, Southall Black Sisters, Inclusive Social Welfare & Empowerment Foundation, and Women and Girls Network. It was only the Women and Girls Network that responded to my email, but they were unable to support the work, given the additional pressure on services resulting from Covid due to the need to operate remotely throughout of this period.

A lot of this difficulty was due to the restrictions of Covid meaning I could not physically attend churches, mosques, and community associations to meet possible participants in person, something that may have helped women feel able to participate. As the restrictions from Covid-19 eased off, I could attend my church service. I approached my pastor to explain the challenges and she helped share my details more widely. Although this did not yield any participants. I contacted few women (through an elderly family relative) who have ended their relationship to inform them about my research. Some of the women indicated interest and came forward to participate. Participation started to snowball until I ended with a sample of ten women between 30 and 72 years old. Table 1 below summarises the demographic information of these final participants alongside their pseudonyms.

Table 1 Participant demographics

Name	Age	Nigerian Ethnicity
Bose	50-59	Yoruba (Western Nigeria)
Ese	40-49	Urhobo (South-South Nigeria)
Gladys	70-79	Urhobo
Grace	70-79	Urhobo
Joy	40-49	Ibo (Eastern Nigeria)
Joyce	50-59	Ibo
Kate	30-39	Ibo
Mary	60-69	Ibo
Mercy	50-59	Yoruba
Susan	50-59	Urhobo

Due to the snowballing technique that was eventually used for my sample, the participants here differ from the two existing main studies reviewed in the previous chapter on Nigerian women in England who have experienced IPVA (Ajayi, Chantler and Radford, 2022; Femi-Ajao, 2018) in one significant way. Both these prior studies recruited their participants mainly from Nigerian community groups, faith-based organisations, the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) team and organisations that work directly with BME women, such as refugees and asylum seekers, with Ajayi, Chantler and Radford (2022) recruiting two women through direct contact. For the women I spoke with, none were receiving any support from statutory services, religious organisations, women's organisations, or community organisations concerning their situation of IPVA. This means the sample, though difficult to obtain, is unique in the current literature as it consists of women who are not currently engaged with any support services in England.

To help understand the needs of Nigerian women who did access services, as well as gain a greater sense of awareness of support for Nigerian victim-survivors of IPVA, I also interviewed two representatives from Non-governmental organisations (NGO) who worked with Nigerian victim-survivors. Initially I planned to analyse these and include in this thesis, however it became apparent that the issues the NGO representatives mostly worked with,

primarily immigration issues, were not the same as the participants. As such these interviews are not included as direct data in this thesis, however they significantly informed my understanding of the wider issues facing Nigerian victim-survivors as well as helping my ability to accurately signpost the women who spoke to me about their experiences of IPVA to culturally informed modes of support.

There is a limitation for this study though in terms of the sample and its size. The sample size represents only a minimal range of women from Nigeria living in the United Kingdom.
Though I intend the study to be explorative rather than generalisable, it is important to acknowledge the limitations in the diversity of the sample. As outlined above, due to the sensitive nature of this study, it was challenging to recruit targeted women from different settings, thus limiting the diversity of the women regarding their immigration status. In addition, women who participated only identified themselves as Christians, hence the perceptions and experiences of Nigerian women who are Muslims on IPVA was not included in the study. Despite these limitations, rich data was generated through the in- depth interviews while the semi-structured nature of the interviewing, explained in more detail below, gave participants the flexibility to tell their stories in their own way.

5. The process of interviewing

Given the need to explore in-depth women's understandings and experiences of IPVA, the study used the qualitative method of in-depth, semi-structured interviewing. This method is popular and has been used for a long time by feminist scholars. There are different interview methods; structured, unstructured and semi-structured. The difference among them is the level of control participants have over the process and interview content (Westmarland and Bows, 2019). I chose to use the semi-structured, in-depth research method in this study based on the limited knowledge of Nigerian women's experience of IPVA in England. This ensured that the questions asked addresses the overall research aim and objectives while allowing flexibility to explore broader issues given the limited knowledge on the topic. The flexibility of the semi-structured interview allowed me to ask questions about the participants' perceptions and thoughts concerning their experiences with IPVA in their previous relationships. This approach provided varied responses as the interview was guided by how much information the participants were willing to give (Bryman, 2015; Westmarland and Bows, 2019).

The semi-structured interview guide (see Appendices) included questions on demographics as well as the reasons for women's participation, before moving into their experiences of IPVA including what helped and hindered them and their coping strategies. Before the interviews, women were asked to give themselves a pseudonym to anonymise their identity and they were happy to rename themselves. To further anonymise the identity of women, any quotes relating to places have been excluded. I also sought their permission to record the interview with a digital audio recorder and to transcribe the recording. During the interview, I had to minimise the use of the word 'violence'; instead, I used 'abuse' to avoid offending two participants.
They made it clear at the beginning of the interview that they had never experienced violence from their ex-partner, and this is one of the reasons that this thesis uses IPVA rather than the more accepted term of IPV.

Due to the pandemic, to be able to conduct the interviews I had to negotiate contact to avoid breaking government rules on social distancing. Fortunately, however, I was able to have face-to-face interviews with six participants as they felt my research topic was sensitive and they were more comfortable doing a face-to-face interview than doing it remotely. These interviews were conducted at the participants' homes; conducive for in- depth face-to-face interviews and afforded the quiet private space perfect for interaction and recording. In line with my feminist methodology, interviewing women in their homes helped to even out some of the power dynamics in the research site; they felt comfortable and in control and I felt honoured to be accepted into their space. During the face-to-face interviews, I ensured we were wearing nose/face masks, washed our hands, had hand sanitiser and no hugging or shaking of hands. On reflection, though necessary at the time due to government regulations, wearing the nose and face mask could have helped conceal our faces, a pseudo-anonymous impression that may have helped participants feel more comfortable narrating their experiences. The women were relaxed during the interview process, and I checked on them to ensure they were comfortable and willing to continue with the research. Many expressed at the beginning of the interview that since the abuse and violence were in the past rather than very recent, they felt comfortable talking about their experiences. As the interviews progressed however, I often found myself feeling emotionally affected and at times had to draw on their strength in being able to talk about their experiences to ground myself enough to be able to hear them.

Four interviews were conducted remotely through WhatsApp audio and video calls. The younger women between 30 and 40 years felt more comfortable conducting the interview

remotely. One of the women requested that it be done by audio as she did not want her face to appear. She was also sceptical about the interview for fear of implicating her ex-partner as she was still protective of him. She did not want her involvement in the research to have negative repercussions for him. I had to reassure her that her participation in the study would not negatively affect her or her ex-partner and everything would be fully anonymised. Another possible reason they had preferred to be interviewed remotely could be the age difference between them and me, as the platform allowed them to distinguish themselves, and they had the chance to look away from the camera to enable them to express themselves. The older women between 50 and 72 years were comfortable with the interview being conducted face to face as some mentioned they felt it was an opportunity to share their experience to guide the younger generation. This category of interview lasted between an hour to two hours. The outcome of both methods of conducting the interview produced a rich result for the data analysis as participants felt comfortable and in control, able to share what they wanted in the way that felt best for them.

Data from all the interviews was securely stored on password-protected personal and University computers, where only I knew the password. None of the interview data had details of the participants information on it. Any paper-based data was stored in locked filing cabinets in a locked office at my university and contact information for participants was used only for the purposes of this study and was destroyed at the end of it. The anonymised transcripts have also been retained for creation of this thesis and will be destroyed when no longer necessary. Helping to operationalise my feminist approach, participants were given the option to see their interview transcript and comment on it if they wanted to, though no participants took this up. As a result of the sensitive nature of the study topic, contact details of support services were made available during and after the interview for all participants (see Appendices) with some of the information on these provided by two NGO participants who I interviewed to provide background support and information before conducting the interviews with victim-survivors directly. Though I did not share my experience on IPVA with the women during my interview session with them to help keep attention from me as the research focus is on their story, I perceived they knew I must have had my taste of the experience of IPVA; these are unspoken gestures as an outsider within. Despite not sharing my experience as the research is more about them, they trusted me well enough to share their experiences and I hope I have honoured their stories in this thesis by using their voices as much as possible.

6. Analysis

Once transcribed, the interviews were analysed using a thematic analysis (TA) approach. TA is a method for developing, analysing and interpreting patterns across a qualitative dataset, which involves systematic processes of data coding to develop themes (Braun and Clarke, 2022). It provides a robust and accessible method for qualitative analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Although TA is a widely used method, ‘it can be seen as a very poorly 'branded' method, in that it does not appear to exist as a 'named' analysis in the same way that other methods do’ (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79). However, this means that TA is a flexible and adaptive method which allows for a wide range of analytic options across a wide range of topics. This means a potential range of items can be analysed from the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It can be used to summarise or describe critical features of a large body of data, highlight similarities and differences across the data set, generate surprising insights, helpful for social as well as psychological interpretations of data and help produce qualitative analyses suited to informing policy development (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The six-phase guide to performing thematic analysis provided by Braun and Clarke (2006) was adopted in this research, involving a thorough line-by-line reading of the transcripts to draw out major and minor themes, categories, and meanings that were significant to the overall aims of the research. In the first ‘familiarisation’ phase, I transcribed the audio recording using Microsoft Word. The recordings were written verbatim and were reviewed twice to ensure that what was written corresponded with what participants said. Errors were corrected as soon as they were detected. At the end of each transcription, notes were taken on my initial thoughts about the interview. This phase also involved repeated reading of the data actively and searching for meanings and patterns (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The transcripts were read over again to get familiar with and understand the narratives of each participant.

Following familiarisation with the data, I began to organise the data; organising the transcripts in ways that provided answers to the research questions. This process enabled me to visualise the research questions in relation to each participant, as well as start to see the connections between them.

The next phase takes-off from the second stage, which involves data coding and theme generation. Through the process of repeated reading, ideas and patterns were identified to produce codes for the data. Following this process, I developed a set of 14 codes (see Table

2). A transcript has been included in the Appendix which shows these codes were developed from the data. I then entered the generation phase, focusing on the broader analysis by searching for themes. This involved analysing codes and considering how different codes combined to form an overarching theme (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Themes were then reviewed and reduced as it became evident that some contain limited data, and others can be combined. This phase also involved rereading the entire data set to ascertain whether the themes work with the data and to code any additional data within themes missed in earlier coding stages (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This process of generation and review resulted in the final themes seen in Table 3.

Table 2 Coding frame

Initial codes
Forms of violence
Impacts of violence
Parental grooming on cultural expectations of marriage.
Shame
Culture of silence
Enduring abuse
Failure of not keeping marriage
Men dictating every aspect of their wife's lives
Men's dominance
Housework and childcare
Role of family and community
Culture puts you in a place you should not be.
Stigmatisation of single mothers being irresponsible
Submissiveness
Men's ownership of their wives

Table 3 The six themes

Initial codes >	Theme
Failure of not keeping marriage	Importance of appearances
Parental grooming on cultural expectations of marriage.	
Stigmatisation of single mothers being irresponsible	
Forms of violence	Continuum
Impacts of violence	
Men dictating every aspect of their wife's lives	Men's dominance
Men's dominance	
Men's ownership of their wives	
Housework and childcare	Women's role
Submissiveness	
Culture puts you in a place you should not be.	Barriers to speaking
Culture of silence	
Shame	
Family relations	Coping / Staying
Enduring abuse	
Hoping abuse will end	

The final themes were then thought about through the lens of Hofstede's cultural dimensions. This helped to answer question three of this research, that is to understand more about the role of culture in the barriers and enablers to help-seeking and coping for Nigerian victim- survivors. Many of the connections here were self-evident, for example the connections between Hofstede's dimensions of power distance and masculinity/femininity and the themes on men's dominance and women's role. Others took more time to develop, such as linking the theme of barriers to speaking with uncertainty avoidance and short-term orientation. Taken together the themes and their connections

with the cultural dimensions of Nigeria are presented in the following chapters of this thesis and help build towards a concept of what it means for a culture to be conducive for violence against women.

7. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodology of this study, primarily that arising from a Black feminist standpoint epistemology. Where feminist standpoint epistemology points to the importance of taking a woman's perspective on the world as a true and valid form of knowledge, a Black feminist standpoint epistemology holds that it is not enough just to orient ourselves by gender; that race plays a part in our worldview and that Black women's worlds are thus best understood through an epistemology that starts from their position.

This means that to respond to the limited knowledge base on Nigerian women's experiences of IPVA in England, research needs to adopt an approach where Black women's experiences and understandings are centred, not just referring to participants, but to researchers as well. It is this perspective that underpins the methodology of this project. It means that my position as an insider – someone who had experience of IPVA as well as being a Nigerian woman living in England - created benefits for the study, helping create the space for women to come forward on such a taboo issue and ensuring a level of shared understanding about cultural beliefs and norms. Despite this, the timing of the project – during periods of both worldwide and Nigerian specific upheaval – made recruitment a struggle irrespective of my position.

Ultimately, ten Nigerian women living in England between 30 to 72 years who identified as victim-survivors participated in interviews. The interviews were analysed for themes by adopting the six-phase of thematic analysis method provided by Braun and Clarke (2006). These were explored alongside research on the cultural dimensions of Nigeria to help make sense of participants' accounts of experiencing and escaping IPVA. It is to these experiences that this thesis now turns, moving to Chapter Four where the experiences of victim-survivors on IPVA will be examined. Here, the various forms of intimate partner violence and abuse experienced by participants will be considered as well as how the concept of the continuum, set out in Chapter Two, applies not just in relation to the different forms of abuse participants suffered, but also to the impacts they experienced following the violence.

Chapter 4: Participant experiences of IPVA

1. Introduction

This chapter is the entry point to the findings, exploring the experience of IPVA from the perspectives of the research participants. It does this through giving an overview of the forms of violence and abuse experienced by participants from their abusive partners and analysing these through the concept of the continuum of sexual violence (Kelly, 1988). The different forms of abuse; financial, economic, emotional, coercive control, physical and sexual violence will be analysed as well as looking at post separation abuse. After these, the chapter turns to exploring the range of impacts these had; from mental and emotional impacts, impacts on relationships, physical health, and education and finances. These impacts are also understood through the concept of the continuum, particularly the ways in which participants saw them as shading in and out of each other. This study is new in the literature in that it is the first to explore the concept of the continuum specifically in relation to both Nigerian women's experiences of violence from their partners as well as the ways they were impacted. Before going into the analysis, the chapter begins by giving a brief snapshot of each of the participants, outlining their stories of IPVA and their reasons for participating in the research.

2. Participant stories and reasons for participation

All the victim-survivor participants agreed that their colour; ethnicity and culture influenced how they dealt with and coped with their experiences of IPVA. Only one participant (Susan) was born in England, the other women all immigrated to England as adults except for Gladys and Grace who were seventeen when they came to join their husbands. Though there were these similarities between participants, they all had a different story and experience of IPVA and there were various reasons why they wanted to participate. In order to provide an entry- point into the analysis, each woman's story and their motivations for taking part in the research are summarised in brief below.

Bose was a Yoruba woman in her fifties. She was in her twenties when she met her abusive partner. Her relationship with him lasted 23 years during which she was abused by her

partner emotionally, psychologically and financially. They had two children, and she was separated when we spoke. Bose wanted to use her knowledge and understanding of violence and abuse in her previous relationship to spread awareness to reveal some of the hidden and unspoken issues in marriage among Nigerians. She said she wanted to help inform Nigerian parents about the effect of raising their child to believe in the superiority of males over females. She felt that this was a way Nigerian people in England could challenge and prevent the continuation of IPVA in our communities.

Ese was an Urhobo woman in her forties. She was in her twenties when she met her abusive partner, while he was an Urhobo man in his thirties. Her relationship with him lasted 16 years during which time he abused her by coercive control, financially and emotionally abusive.
They did not have any children, and she was separated from him when we spoke. Ese was interested in participating in the research as she felt it was an avenue to narrate the story of her dark experience in an abusive and dehumanizing intimate relationship. She wanted others to learn from it and had a sense that this could help prevent other women being abused in the same way.

Gladys was an Urhobo woman in her seventies. She was seventeen years old when she was sent to her partner in England to be married by her family. When she was married at seventeen, Gladys' husband was thirty-nine. Their relationship lasted seventeen years. She had three children but lost one of them to death. She experienced coercive control, financial, emotional and psychological abuse from her partner during her relationship.
Glady believed the research topic was important and felt she had something to contribute given what she'd been through.

Grace was an Urhobo woman in her seventies as at the time of the interview. Like Gladys, she was married off by her parents to the family of her partner in Nigeria when she was seventeen and he was thirty-seven. She was sent to England to join her partner who was there as a student. He abused her emotionally, psychologically, and sexually. They had two children and their relationship lasted 8 years. Grace saw her participation in the research as an opportunity to bring awareness to the emotional and physical aspects of the abuse she suffered in her relationship. Like Bose, Grace wanted to be the voice for other Nigerian women in England who could not express their experiences of abuse due to cultural and other reasons.

Joy was an Ibo woman in her forties. She knew her previous partner in her thirties. She was abused emotionally, physically, financially and coercive control. Their relationship lasted for 2 years before separating and they did not have any children. She later got married to another man who she had 2 children with. It was this man she was with when the interview took place and she felt she had experienced a different way to have a relationship. Joy was passionate about participating in the study because she felt that IPVA is a prevalent occurrence in England, Nigeria and worldwide, which needed to be addressed through studies like this. She wanted to be a voice for the voiceless and hoped the outcome of this research would help the forthcoming generation from what they suffered in their intimate relationship.

Joyce was an Ibo woman in her fifties. She was in her forties when she met her partner. She suffered emotional, physical, sexual, financial and coercive control from her partner. They did not have any children together. The relationship lasted for 2 years before they separated. Like Bose, Joy, and Grace, Joyce chooses to take part in this study to share her experience so that others can know how to deal with similar situations.

Kate was an Ibo woman in her thirties. She got married to her partner when she was 20 years, and he was older than her by 15 years. Kate was abused emotionally, physically, sexually, financially and experienced coercive control while the relationship lasted. She also told me about her ongoing fears following the relationship, and the sense she had if she had not left, he would have eventually killed her. Together, they had 3 children and the relationship lasted 14 years. Kate agreed to take part to make people aware of her experience of IPVA so that efforts can be made to minimise the effects of IPVA for those who are experiencing or will experience it.

Mary was an Ibo woman in her sixties. She got married to her partner in her forties. He was an Ibo man who abused Mary emotionally, sexually and financially. They had no children, and their relationship lasted for 14 years. Mary wanted to help other women, especially the young ones who may not have been exposed to IPVA, so they could have a source of reference to avoid or minimise intimate partner violence and abuse. She was happy to participate in the research as she found it to be a using platform to help Nigerian women living in England to address the problem of IPVA. She felt that the Nigeria culture encourages the violence and abuse of women experience and will be good to find ways to reduce and discourage the abuse of women.

Mercy was a Yoruba woman in her fifties. She was in her twenties when she met her partner. He was an Ibo man, older than Mary by five years. He abused her emotionally, coercive control, financially and sexually; they had 6 children together and the relationship lasted for 28 years. On reflection, Mercy was unhappy about her experiences of IPVA in her previous relationship. She was unhappy with her experience and would want to see how she can help other women avoid the type of experience she had.

Susan was an Urhobo woman in her fifties and she met her partner in her thirties. She is the only participant to have been born in England. Her partner was an Ibo man who abused her emotionally, physically, sexually, financially and coercive control. They had two children (both girls) and the relationship lasted for twenty years before they were separated. Like Bose, Joyce, and Grace, Susan felt that there are a lot of unreported IPVA cases among women that needed to be publicised for awareness and eradication of the phenomenon with the help of various mediums such as this research. This was the motivation for her participation – to help get her story out there to help other Nigerian women.

3. Experiential definitions and understandings of IPVA

For the women who participated in this study, their perceptions of what IPVA entailed varied greatly. Their insights here provide valuable information for mainstream and other support services seeking to provide support to Nigerian victim-survivors. The first point of difference was about whether IPVA was gendered. Some participants such as Susan and Joy saw IPVA as only when a woman in a relationship is physically, emotionally and psychologically abused by a close male partner. They did not think it existed when perpetrated by a woman. However, it was more common for participants to feel the term applied equally to men and women. There were also some differences about what the term included, with women often relating it to their own experience as seen below.

> [IPVA] is the abuse I had from somebody that I had close relationship with, it's a constant thing and non-stop. From my own experience [IPVA] is not like beating but violent words being spoken to me all the time and sometimes it affected me so much that I could not function. (Bose)

When I hear [the word IPVA] I remember my experience with my previous partner. It is what I was experiencing which was beating. (Joy)

> [IPVA] is like what happened to me from my husband He beat me, insulting my parents and children and sometimes he will start destroying my property. Anything I buy, he will damage it. (Mercy)

For all participants, though there was a general understanding of what IPVA entails which was in line with the Home Office guidelines on domestic abuse (Home Office, 2022a), many did not identify financial abuse and coercive control as forms of violence and abuse in an intimate relationship even where they discussed these in the interview. Many also felt it took a long time to be able to acknowledge what was happening as abuse, either because it wasn't in the form they felt easier to name as abuse, or because their partner would apologise and ask for forgiveness as seen in the account of Joyce.

> Maybe six months into the relationship I realised he was abusive, but sometimes he would apologise and then we kept going because I really loved him. He [would] apologise, we would get on with it, then he will start again. I kept forgiving him and going back, so he kept doing it. (Joyce)

It was not just that abuse was hard to recognise at the beginning for many participants. Most of the women that took part in the research also said that their thinking about the abuse changed overtime. In the beginning many were hoping that their partner would change and so excused or minimised his behaviour. The cultural norm of collectivism, discussed in previous chapters, is implicated here as participants were expected to maintain the relationship of not just their nuclear family but also their extended family. Though this norm can create a support network that can be lacking in more individualistic cultures, for participants here it also created an additional pressure, a need to ‘maintain the relationship’ not just with their partner but with their entire family network. This will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

Understanding IPVA is not only limited to a definition, however. Participants also discussed their understanding of the motivations of the perpetrators of IPVA. Contrary to a feminist analysis, rarely did these motivations include that the abusive person sought power over them. It was more common that they supported some of the findings of work on IPVA against Nigerian women which focus on the violence as a result of problems in

the relationship (Kalunta-Crumpton, 2017; Balogun and John-Akinola, 2015; Femi-Ajao, 2018). Gladys for example felt that her husband was violent because of their age difference, something which she felt caused a break in what the 'normal' relationship between a husband and wife should be. Gladys' partner was an only child and wanted her to have twenty-six children, tied to the numbers of the alphabet. Though this request was impossible, Gladys felt her inability to meet it made him angry and she felt that combined with their age difference was the reason he was emotionally abusive towards her.

> The age gap between us was a bit much. I felt he was looking at me as a small girl. He was not treating me like a wife. It was after the breakdown of the marriage I got to realise that its emotional abuse because we could not sit down to talk like husband and wife, as young couples do that plan together; 'we are going to buy this, we are going to do this, we are going to go on holiday, we are going to do this. No. He looks at me and feels, 'she does not know anything so no need to sit down and discuss things.' (Gladys)

Though Gladys account is one about a power imbalance, it is clear she did not think about it in this way. It was not about her husband wanting to have power over her so much as it was the natural order of things given their significant age difference. It was similar for Kate who felt IPVA was motivated by incompatibility between partners. Her ex-husband's violence was understood not a choice to assert dominance so much as the result of misunderstanding.

> When you talk about intimate partner violence and abuse, the violence has to do with lack of understanding but also incompatibility. We are all different... just like the saying that 'one man's food is another man's poison'. There are things that I would not take so keen [be bothered] about, but the other partner takes keen about it. So, when there is incompatibility in that sense, then you get that issue of partner violence. (Kate)

Both Kate and Gladys explanations for violence help to demonstrate the ways in which, for many Nigerian women, Western feminist analyses of violence as being about power do not have as much resonance as a cultural argument that locates the problem as stemming from problems in the relationship. This means that the understanding they have of the causes of IPVA – and so the solutions – may be different than women brought up in Western

countries, something that creates a challenge for service providers in England – particularly those that do not begin from a Black feminist standpoint.

4. A continuum of forms of IPVA

As discussed in Chapter Two, the concept of a continuum of sexual violence (Kelly, 1988) is a core theory in Western feminist work on violence against women. Such a conceptualisation emphasises the interconnectedness of different violent acts as well as having been developed to highlight the importance of culture and of race (Kanyeredski, 2018a). For participants, though the understandings of the causes of IPVA differed from feminist explanations as described above. Kelly's (1988) continuum of sexual violence echoed women's accounts, with all ten participants in this research recounting that they suffered multiple forms of violence and abuse from their ex-partners. As explored in the work of Boyle (2019) participants' experiences showed that there are different continuums within as well as between different forms; that is there is a continuum within IPVA itself. The most common forms of IPVA were emotional abuse and coercive control with all participants in this study attesting that they experienced both. Next was financial and economic abuse, with only one participant saying she did not experience such. Five of the victim-survivors narrated the physical abuse they underwent in the hands of their ex- partners and five participants said that they were sexually abused. This section explains in more detail what the women's experiences were, as well as how they overlapped and interconnected.

4.1. Emotional abuse

There is lack of consensus among researchers on what exactly constitutes emotional abuse (Lammers, Ritchie and Robertson, 2005), however a useful definition is provided by Beverly Engel (2023) as 'any non-physical behaviour or attitude that is designed to control, intimidate, subjugate, demean, punish, or isolate another person' (p. 7). According to Engel (2023) emotional abusive behaviour ranges from verbal such as belittling, berating, constant criticism to more subtle tactics like intimidation, manipulation, and refusal to be pleased. It can manifest in various ways and often occurs alongside other types of abuse, making it insidious and challenging to detect. Like all forms of abuse, it can have a long-

lasting impact on mental health, self-worth, and relationships (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2014; Stockman, Hayashi and Campbell 2015).

Emotional abuse experienced by participants portrayed a range of variety and intensity. Bose, Mercy and Mary experienced verbal abuse from their partners making them demoralised, deflated and brought to tears. Gladys was not allowed to be involved in decision making or contribution to discussions on family issues. Her ex-husband would shun her contribution to most issues and make her feel worthless. Ese, Susan and Mercy were deprived of their partners physical presence at home most of the time. They were left lonely, isolated and bored as their partners preferred to be outside of the home with the excuse of work activities or other engagements. However, when women discussed the detail of what happened, the impact no matter the form of abuse was similar. Bose talked a lot about experiencing emotional abuse from her husband, something that got so bad and she started sleeping on buses to get peace from it.

> Part of the emotional abuse I experienced has to do with when the boys were growing up and my husband will be speaking violent words to me non-stop. Sometimes I'm crying, I will go and hide in the toilet crying because I did not want my children to see what was going on. It got to a stage that I can even say it's a daily thing. I wake up in the morning he's there saying violent words… It came to a stage that I had to change my job to a night shift so that I could just have a bit of peace away from him. If I finish work, I must stay on the bus for two hours trying to have a sleep on the bus before I can go back home. (Bose)

Though Bose tried to cope with the emotional abuse by staying out of the home, she said that when she returned home the abuse continued and her partner would be playing loud music during the day when she was trying to sleep from her shift work and accusing her of sleeping around with men because she was not coming back from work on time.

Describing the detail of the abuse however was difficult for Bose as she stated that she cannot describe the exact violent words in English. What her partner was saying to her was culturally specific; he used words from her tribe that might not be readily understood as abusive when described to someone outside of that tribe, let alone someone outside of Nigeria itself. This was like the experience of Mary who experienced regular gaslighting – a type of psychological abuse aimed at making victims seem or feel crazy creating a surreal interpersonal environment (Sweet, 2019) – from her partner. Mary's partner would use songs and parables to humiliate her. Initially she did not notice what was happening,

but when she did, she discovered it made it impossible for her to challenge him, as the abuse was being hidden by the cultural practice of song.

> He used to sing in parables instead of speaking direct because he knows that if he spoke directly, I would have probably reacted. But he would sing in parables where, if you analyse the meaning of that song, it affects you. If I made any comment when he was singing, he would say, 'But I'm just singing'. (Mary)

This sense of discovering over time that they were being abused also occurred for Gladys. Initially she saw the treatment her partner was giving her as normal, something she attributed to her naivety. However, she noted that because of the subtle tactics men used in abusing women, it was difficult to recognise the abuse. She came to realise that she was abused after she had left the relationship.

> When I was in the marriage, I never knew that I was being emotionally abused but we call it abuse now. Like in my time, living in this country, women are often abused in a subtle way but because of our culture from home we think it's normal. I felt it was part of our culture. (Gladys)

As Gladys mentions here, the role of culture in hiding what is and is not abusive was central across all women's narratives, creating some of the barriers to escaping violence described in Chapter Five. However, as in the accounts of Bose and Mary, it also worked the other way where culture hid what was abusive not from the women themselves but from the British society they were living in. Here culture became a resource for the men to abuse without detection, making it even more difficult for the women to name an already difficult to name form of abuse.

4.2. Coercive control

Closely connected to emotional abuse is the use of coercive control criminalised in England in 2015. The offence was brought into force to close a legislative gap where this type of behaviour occurred between intimate partners but was difficult to prosecute as harassment (Home Office, 2022b). According to the Home Office (2015), coercive control does not relate to a single incident, it is a purposeful pattern of behaviour which takes place over time from one individual to exert power, control or coercion over another. It is also

something that has been usefully theorised academically. One of the most influential scholars of coercive control, is Evan Stark, who originated the theory of coercive control. He defined it as the use of a range of tactics by abusers to 'hurt, humiliate, intimidate, exploit, isolate, and dominate their victims' (Stark, 2007, p. 5). For Stark, abusive partners can establish patterns coercive control, in a relationship that can either directly or indirectly compel compliance and obedience from a victim. Examples of such actions can include tactics such as using intimidation by way of stalking and other threats, isolating a victim from sources of social support and inhibiting a victim from maintaining independence (Stark, 2007). As with emotional abuse, all participants attested that they experienced coercive control in their previous relationships, and many talked about how they felt aspects of Nigerian culture were partly implicated in hiding or masking the abuse.

Participants' who spoke about coercive control often gave accounts which highlighted how their partner had isolated them from family members. This was particularly painful for participants given the importance of family in Nigeria as detailed in Chapter Two and the existing isolation that can be felt as a migrant. Both Ese and Susan gave accounts of how their partners had separated them from their family.

> He does not allow me to go out even to visit my family and friends. I did not used to go out apart from my work and my business but once I'm through with those places I will have to come to the house. I cannot go to any other place. If I want to go out to sing, he does not allow me to go out. (Ese)

> I was working and then from when I returned home from work, I look after the children. By then the time has gone. So, I hardly have time to socialise. I hardly meet family members. The only bit he could not stop me is seeing my mother, he was unable to do that. (Susan)

The narrative of Susan above is an example of how the coercive control of a male partner can quietly reduce women's space for action. Her husband was able to mask some of his isolation of her by keeping her busy with work and with childcare. Like emotional abuse, this then becomes difficult to name as abuse as it can be hard to see from the outside. The control of Grace's partner however was more visible, coercing her twice into terminating a pregnancy against her will.

> He said he does not want any more children then because he was studying, and I ended up just having a back street abortion. I was scared of losing my life through the abortion I was doing. It was very stressful and that was the main reason I had to leave him. (Grace)

Though what they experienced differed, there was a shared feeling for Ese, Susan, and Grace that it was hard to challenge what their partner was doing because of cultural norms that value a high-power distance and support men dictating what women can and cannot do. As detailed in Chapter Two, it is the man in Nigerian culture who oversees the family structure. If he wants more children – like Gladys' husband who wanted 26 (to name after each letter of the alphabet)– then the women must try to provide that. If he wants less, then it is again women's responsibility to make this happen. Joy talked about this powerfully. When she questioned her partner controlling her every action, he relied explicitly on culture to explain why she was subservient and had to obey his command.

> He dictated everything because according to him, you apply culture. For example, the way a Nigerian woman behaves when she is married to a Nigerian man is different from when a non-Nigerian person, let me say, a non-African or Western country marries a Nigerian woman. Their role is different because if you are married to a Nigerian man, the cultural norms will have to be applied. You must do according to the culture for the marriage to continue. (Joy)

This meant that for Joy, as for the other participants experiencing coercive control, challenging the authority of a male partner becomes challenging the authority of culture. It was not just about the individual but about challenging social structures, something that can be particularly hard for migrant communities who may need to hold onto cultural norms as a way of holding onto their place of belonging in a new country.

4.3. Economic/Financial abuse

The third, connected form of IPVA experienced by participants was economic and financial abuse. Here the relevance of the continuum of sexual violence is particularly apparent given that economic and financial abuse for many participants occurred alongside and blurred into their partners use of coercive control, something which is common in the literature (Sharp- Jeffs, 2015). Many different behaviours can comprise economic abuse

including restricting a woman's access to money, controlling or limiting her ability to pursue education or gain and maintain employment, and exploiting her financial resources like incurring debt in her name and stealing her money (Sharp, 2008; Weaver, et al, 2009). It helps the perpetrator derive a material advantage in a relationship by channelling a disproportionate share of the financial resources and decision-making powers within the family to meet their own needs (Sundari, 2019).

It has been argued that economic and financial abuse is the least researched area of IPVA compared to studies that focused on physical or sexual violence in relationships, (Westmarland, 2015; Postmus, et al., 2018). This is important as, when turning to the accounts of Nigerian women, economic abuse was incredibly common. Apart from Grace, all the participants in this study were abused financially/economically during their relationship, although many of the women did not recognise some behaviour from their partner during their relationship as abusive. As with the earlier discussion of experiential definitions, the major reason that the abusive aspect of their partner's behaviour was hidden was because of accepted cultural norms, particularly – as above – that sense of men as the rightful head of the household (see more in Chapter 5). This can be seen clearly in Gladys's account below of how the financial abuse of her husband was normalised by the other Nigerian women she worked with.

> When I first started working in the factory, they paid us cash in an envelope. At that time there was no wage payment through the bank account. At the end of the week, they will give us our wages in an envelope on Fridays... The older women were the first people, who told me, 'Now that you have been paid, please do not open the envelope otherwise you will get beaten at home'. They also said, 'Otherwise your husband will say you are a bad woman'. Because of that I never opened the envelope. As soon as I brought the envelope home, I would give it to him and he will now open it, count the money and give me pocket money. At that time, he will give me 50p for my pocket money. (Gladys)

Even the 50p pocket money was stopped eventually when her husband learned she had saved some of them and used the money to buy herself wrappers (loose pieces of fabric tied around the waist). He was angry when he found out and stopped giving her any money at all. He then moved her further away to isolate her not just from women from her tribe but from any Black women.

> He found out that I have been buying wrappers and folding them in each other. Then he said, 'So this is what you are up to, where did you get the money from?' I said, 'I saved the 50p you gave me and used it to buy wrappers from the people at the factory'. And he said, 'So it's that [location] factory and those Urhobo women, okay'. He felt insecure about my working in that environment where I was able to buy wrappers for myself and said, 'Those women are going to spoil you'. So, we relocated from that place to another area. At that time people of our colour were not in the new area we moved to. (Gladys)

Gladys did not realise at the time that her partner taking control of all the money she had earned herself was financial abuse because this was – and still is – a Nigerian cultural norm. Other Nigerian women in the factory where Gladys worked added to this; telling her that she should not do anything with the envelope containing her salary other than present it to her partner. There was no sense for Gladys then that this practice was abusive or that it was not also a common cultural practice in England. This sense that men control the money, even if it is not money they have earned, was also found in both Ese and Mercy's accounts of the financial abuse they experienced from their ex-husbands. Both women were financially independent and discussed how their husbands would take money they have saved from work, without permission or sometimes knowledge.

> He just asks for money always money. He wants money from me and at times if I keep money somewhere, when I check, the money has reduced. (Ese)

> If I gather money for the business, he will come and scatter it [take it]. He does not give me money. He would rather come and spoil my shop. I will provide food for him, yet he would not give me any money. If I do not prepare the food he requested for, there would be a problem. (Mercy)

Ese's partner also made her take out loans which he could not repay. For Kate and Bose, much of the abuse oriented around their partners refusing to contribute to the running of the household and looking after the children due to the women earning more money than them. It was a way of the men reasserting their control by ensuring that any economic security the women had was used up in the care of the family. It was also a way to create a barrier for women to escape abuse, making it harder for victim-survivors to be able to support themselves and their children independently as they would have little to no savings of their own (Abayomi, Kolawole and Olabode, 2013).

Kate's account of financial abuse started when someone informed her husband that she had some savings and when he confirmed it, he stopped providing any financial support to her and the children. He left the house and travelled for several months without providing financial support for her and the children. It was a very tough period because the little money that was in her account was not sufficient to cater for her and the children. This was when the relationship was still on. As the relationship ended, he completely stopped all financial support for the children. Bose also noted that her partner's violent and abusive behaviour started with money issues as he thought she has more money compared to him. Due to his insecurity he began to monitor her bank statements to see what is in her account until she asked him to stop, which he was not happy about. They argued about it, at the end he made her pay most of the bills in the house ranging from rent to looking after the kids. Like Gladys, for both Bose and Kate the abuse was again hidden due to the patriarchal structure of Nigerian society and the ways in which the roles in the household divide between men and women. While men are supposed to be the primary breadwinner, women are supposed to take primary responsibility for the house and the children. This means that men can use women's role as a way of controlling or limiting their finances, compelling them to spend more money on running the household as a way of ensuring that the men kept an economic advantage.

That the three most common forms of IPVA for participants – emotional abuse, coercive control, and financial abuse – were all hidden in different ways by some of the core cultural practices and values outlined in Chapter Two, has implications for the use of the word 'victim.' Participants who had experienced these forms often did not see themselves as 'victims' at the time as recognising that what was happening was wrong. The label 'victim' was reserved for women who experienced physical violence, as is discussed in more detail below.

4.4. Physical and sexual violence

Though there are many discrete forms of violence and abuse that are encapsulated by the broad term IPVA, physical violence is perhaps the form most often associated with the term. Physical violence can include a range of behaviours such as hitting, kicking, or slapping, through to burning and strangulation (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2014; Stockman, Hayashi and Campbell 2015; Slep et al., 2015).

Five women recorded that they were abused physically in this research. For Mercy, the physical abuse was connected to both economic abuse and coercive control, demonstrating the ways in which these different forms of violence are best conceptualised as a continuum.
Mercy, who gave an account earlier about the financial abuse of her ex-partner, talked about how he would use physical violence to enforce his other forms of abuse. He would expect her to prepare special meals and when she was unable to give him the type of food he demanded, he beat her. He tried to isolate her from men but when he saw men coming to talk to her at her restaurant, he beat her.

> At times he will come once for the weekend. If he does not meet me at home, he will come to my business place. He will eat, sleep in the house and then leave the next day. If I was asleep, he will approach me and beat me, spit on me and do anything he likes with me. He often beats me as he always thinks that I am having affairs with people that come to patronise my shop and speak with me... My hand was dislocated because of his beatings. I still go to the hospital because of that. (Mercy)

Mercy felt she could not quit her business because she did not have other means of income, but she also felt she could not ignore what he wanted because of his position as the head of their household. It meant she felt stuck and believed she had to accept the physical violence even though she knew it was abuse. However, it was not only violence such as hitting but also sexual violence that encompassed the forms of physical abuse women experienced. Five women also talked about experiencing sexual violence, though some of these did not talk about experiencing other forms of physical abuse. Often seen as separate but also a form of physical violence, Kelly (1988) defines sexual violence as ‘any physical, visual, verbal or sexual act that is experienced by the woman or girl, at the time or later, as a threat, invasion or assault, that has the effect of hurting her or degrading her and/or takes away her ability to control intimate contact’ (p.41).

It was something that was experienced by participants as difficult to separate from the expectations of what a woman should do for her husband. Joyce for example spoke about experiencing sexual violence in the form of coercive sex from her husband who desperately wanted to have children. Given the cultural importance of the family, Joyce felt she had to submit.

> I experienced sexual abuse from him. I wasn't consenting but he's like, 'You are my wife, you should do it', even though I'm not happy doing it at that time. (Joyce)

Mary also spoke about submitting but here it was not because of a sense of duty so much as because otherwise, her husband would not leave her alone.

> He would come asking for intercourse and I would say no, that I was not in the mood, then he will persist. At the end of the day, I will allow him so I can have some peace. That is forcing myself to consent, but not really from my mind. (Mary)

Kate stated that she experienced physical beatings from her husband during their relationship, there were times he beat her to the point that she was hospitalised, and he would also threaten her with an acid-attack in order to keep her in a state of constant fear. She also said she was raped regularly but felt she had to endure it as she was living under his roof.

> Whenever he comes around and feels like having sex, he will pounce on you with or without your consent. And then you will hear him saying, 'After all, I paid for it,' so I must get it whenever I want. Sometimes I will cry, then he will go have his way and then I will just say, 'Fine, no problem. I'm still under your roof.' (Kate)

Key aspects of Nigerian culture play a significant role in the lives of women experiencing sexual violence in this way, as women are expected to be submissive, and men are understood as having an overwhelming sexual drive. While this is similar in some respects to Western cultures, the belief of Kate's husband that as he has paid for her he has in effect paid for sexual access to her, is unique to a culture that has the practice of bride price. It would be considered taboo for Kate to complain about her partners sexual violence as she is seen as her husband's property once when her bride price was paid. It is also important to note that with the participants of this study physical and sexual abuse was not experienced in isolation, it was in a continuum, alongside other forms of abuse. Where the other forms were often excused through cultural norms about men's position as head of the family, this was also something that happened for physical and sexual violence, where men's use of violence was seen as a natural expression of men's dominant role; a role that continued for many even after the relationship ended.

4.5. Post-separation abuse

Post-separation abuse can be defined as the ongoing, wilful pattern of intimidation of a former intimate partner that includes legal abuse, economic abuse, threats and endangerment to children, isolation and discrediting, and harassment and stalking (Spearman, Hardesty and Campbell, 2023). Separation is a complex process, often involving iterations of leaving and returning (Spearman, Hardesty and Campbell, 2023). Repeated research has shown how dangerous leaving an abusive partner can be for victim- survivors (Kelly, 1988; Burman and Chantler, 2005; Izzidien, 2008; Voolma, 2018; Boethius and Akerstrom, 2020; Robinson, Ravi and Voth Schrag, 2021; Ajayi, Chantler and Radford, 2022; Amel Barez et al., 2022).
Most abused women are faced with post- separation abuse in the form of financial, stalking, emotional and psychological abuse (Kelly, Sharp and Klein, 2014). Moreover, this post- separation abuse requires women to do safety work by discouraging contacts or relationships that could compromise their safety and those of their children (Kelly, Sharp and Klein, 2014).

Research on BME women's experience in England suggests BME women's experiences of IPVA can be exacerbated by their partners and other family members to continue controlling women and children after separation (Thiara, 2013). The experience of post- separation abuse was something that sat over many of the participants' stories of escape but perhaps none, more so than Kate. When we spoke, Kate was still living in fear as she was afraid of her ex- partner coming after her and the children because of his violent behaviour. She planned to file for a divorce to enable her to travel to another country as to keep her distance from him.

> I still feel unsafe in this country, as I do not want my ex-partner to come after me or my children to harm us. If I have my way, I would like to be in a country far away from him. Anything that can keep us far from my ex-husband is just what I will wish for, because I think he may still come after me in the long run. He has been so violent, so anything that I can do to stay far away from him I will do that. (Kate)

Kate experienced stalking from her partner initially when she left the relationship as did many of the participants in this study. Here, women often talked about how cultural networks of family and friends were used by their ex-partners to continue to watch what they were doing and try to control them. Gladys, Mercy, and Bose talked about being monitored like this by their ex-partners through friends and family.

> He would be looking [stalking]. People will be telling him, 'Oh your wife has built a house, your wife has done this and that you know'. And that would stir him up emotionally. (Gladys)

> Sometimes he sends his friends to be monitoring me. They come to my shop and pretend as if they want to patronise me but that's not true. I got to know that they were informing me ex-partner about my activities, and the annoying thing is that what they were saying were all lies. (Mercy)

> He's still phoning my son and tells him things, but I do not get involved in it because I said I'm not interested when my son passes it on to me. I can show you some of the messages that he's sending, 'Your precious mother is this and that'. He is still being abusive because he's not getting his way the way he wants it to be. (Bose)

The commonality of post-separation abuse in the lives of participants demonstrates why it is so important to understand IPVA as existing on a continuum that does not always end when the relationship does. It also shows the importance of thinking about women who experience IPVA as victim-survivors, as discussed in Chapter Two, given that there is not a clear linear path out of being a victim to being a survivor. Given that post-separation abuse has been shown to be frequent for black and minoritised victim-survivors (Thiara, 2013) this demonstrates the importance of applying these key concepts in violence against women to the experiences of Nigerian women. As reflected by Kelly, Sharp and Klein, (2014) women are required to do safety work by deterring contacts or relationships that could compromise their safety and those of their children. For participants and given the importance of family (and an extended sense of family) in Nigerian culture, this is particularly difficult as isolating themselves from family and friends feels like isolating themselves from their cultural connections. This means that despite the freedom from the perpetrator which would have enabled women assume the status of a survivor, they are within the cycle of fear which encapsulates the unknown and known. The relationship may be over, but the abuse and control often continues.

5. A continuum of impacts

Given the range of forms of IPVA experienced by participants it is understandable that many documented wide-ranging impacts resulting from the abuse. It is important to outline these before moving into the deeper analysis of how culture was implicated in the abuse which will be discussed in the following chapter. It is not just that the abuse had short- lived and immediate impacts; its legacies followed many of the women even many years after the relationship itself had ended. These legacies can be thought of as existing on a continuum, with women talking about how impacts moved into and out of each other and seemed to compound each other rather than be experienced separately. They also, as mentioned previously, demonstrate the usefulness of the concept of victim-survivor as not being a linear process for women who experience violence.

Women spoke about very practical impacts on their life opportunities, particularly through their education and finances. Much of this was connected to the economic abuse many participants experienced. Both Susan and Ese for example talked about being set back financially by their abusive partner.

> For at least four years before the relationship ended, he was not contributing financially to anything in the house apart from himself. He does not pay the rent, and he only pays the water bill and the Wi-Fi so that he can have proof of address. That was the only thing he contributed to in the house. (Susan)

> I left because I could not bear it anymore. Things were different from how they were at first. I was in debt and owing money. I had borrowed money for him; there was nothing in my shop and salary was not forth coming because I had to pay back the loan. Even for us to pay our rent, was a problem. (Ese)

The abuse had on-going impacts in terms of their financial implications including bills and loan repayments. Both women also talked about the impact on their education because of the abuse. Here the connections between different impacts can be seen, with the financial impact affecting and limiting women's ability to continue in education.

> It affected my life choices in a way; like when I was shouldering everything. I would have got for myself an education, but I was unable to have because of too many responsibilities. Feeding and caring for his [children]. I could not achieve those things that I would have loved to achieve then. (Ese)

> I could have been able to go further in education than I did. It impacted my ability to study further financially because if I decided to go to school, I would not have enough money to cope and look after my children. (Susan)

There were also mental health impacts. Many women described losing self-confidence and developing anxiety because of the abuse they experienced. Those who had experienced post-separation abuse such as Kate earlier, talked about never feeling safe, even when we spoke many years after the abuse. Other women spoke about the long-lasting impacts of depression, such as Susan who felt the abuse had a significant impact on her mental health.

> It affected me psychologically as well. Because I was very depressed, I could not tell my mum what was happening. I felt very depressed and ashamed. Even thinking of it now, it makes me very depressed. (Susan)

Participants also spoke about the impacts on their self-esteem. Joyce's experience made her see herself as 'less than'; she lost her self-confidence and was living in fear. This was the opposite of her before her relationship with her partner as she believed she is a very strong woman with self-confidence and has everything she needs as a woman. Joy too felt she was not loved by anyone because of the way she was treated by her partner. She isolated herself from her friends and family, because she did not want to open up to anyone.

> It has affected my personality, and it does affect my confidence. It made me be bottling up things. I cannot speak out and I cannot be myself. I feel fear. It made me hate men. I hated men and maybe that's part of why I have not married because I think every man will treat me like how my ex-partner treated me. (Joyce)

> My ex-partner abused me emotionally to the point that when I sat down, I could not do anything. I felt like the world had ended and everything was going wrong in my life. I thought no one liked me and did not want to open up to anyone, so I kept it all to myself and I felt isolated. It also affected me in terms of being depressed and not wanting to eat sometimes. (Joy)

The impact of the verbal abuse from Bose's partner got to the point at which she started hallucinating. Her account of the consequences of the abuse sounded like a haunting, something that shows the seriousness in impact of forms of abuse such as emotional abuse that are often seen as less harmful than other forms of IPVA such as physical assault.

> Sometimes I am sleeping, and I can hear his voice in my head. I will be sleeping, and his voice is in my head. It's like he's around and then sometimes I will jump up and start saying, 'He's started again' but he is not there. It's a constant playback of what he's been doing that keeps coming to my head. (Bose)

The experience of Bose again shows the importance of the concept of victim-survivor in applied to the experiences of Nigerian women who have lived with IPVA. Although the relationship with her partner had ended, she could feel his presence in her head. She was both a survivor of his abuse and a victim of it at the same time. This goes to show that the journey of a survivor is not a linear process of first being a victim and migrating to being a survivor once the relationship has ended or when the perpetrator is out of the scene. For some women, it is never finished.

It also was not only in terms of mental health impacts that the consequences of the abuse manifested. There were significant physical health impacts for some participants, including injury, particularly where physical assault was used in the abuse. Both Mercy and Kate for example, who gave descriptions of the physical abuse they experienced, talked about ongoing pain in their bodies post separation.

As seen already in a couple of quotes in this chapter, the impacts of the abuse can also be seen in women's relationships with other men and with their children. Most women in this research said their experience made them hate and dislike men. It meant that many of them were single when we spoke, though they did in some ways want to be in another relationship. The experience of IPVA made Joy very sceptical and careful in relating with people, especially the opposite sex, and like Joy, Kate found it difficult to get into another relationship or even contemplate re-marrying saying that she was afraid that if she marries again, the new partner might also become abusive. For both Joyce and Ese, the response to the abuse was to withdraw from men. For Joyce this was starting to change, but for Ese it was something that continued.

> I do not deal with men that much. It is only now that I am trying to open up. I feel that every man is like that. Or once I get into a relationship, I will be treated like that. I am trying to relearn that we can get somebody else that will treat you nice. Maybe that is why I'm still single till today. (Joyce)

> My experience with it has made me like to withdraw from men. Even now, I just want to be on my own. (Ese)

The abuse also affected women's relationships with their children, but in more positive ways. Despite all the harmful impacts of the IPVA, for most participants, their experience of IPVA strengthened their relationship with their children. Bose for example talked about having a strong bond with her children. She said her eldest son knew what she was going through with his dad, and he was like her backbone. Both Kate and Grace said something similar:

> It did not affect my relationship with my children. It rather boosted our relationship because I now see myself as their mother and father since their father is not there. I tried to be strong, and I played both roles; the part of a mother and the part of the father. (Kate)

> My relationship and how I raised my children were not affected because they stayed with me, and I brought them up the best way I could. I do not have any problem with my children. (Grace)

The ways in which the women were able to connect with their children through their experiences of abuse show the resilience and strength in all the participants. Though they had all been through a range of forms of violence and abuse and experienced harmful impacts, many of which continued, they also all found ways of coping with and rising above the abuse of their partners. Joyce's story is an example of this. Despite everything that Joyce went through, she said the experience has made her more caring to others. It has also made her an advocate for other Nigerian women, helping them to speak out and escape abuse.

> I'm trying to treat people fairly. I tell people that are under or close to me and people that I care for I tell them not stay in an abusive relationship because many Nigerian women have died in abusive relationships until today. (Joyce)

This sense of taking their experiences of IPVA and using them to help other women ran through the stories of all the women who participated. Gladys spoke about using her experience with IPVA as a platform to advise her children. She sometimes sees some of what happened to her in her adult children's decisions and tries to guide them away from the same trap she was caught in herself.

> I sometimes tell my daughters if they are making certain decisions. I will say, 'Look, this is what I have gone through, so be careful. Talking is essential in marriages. You must discuss things with your husband.' (Gladys)

This sense of trying to change cultural norms for her daughters around how married couples interact, leads into the next chapter which discusses the ways in which cultural norms in Nigeria make it harder for women to escape IPVA. The range of forms experienced by participants here, and the range of impacts they have revealed, has demonstrated that IPVA exists along a continuum for Nigerian victim-survivors. It is a continuum which continues to affect women long after that have escaped, and that escape is made harder by certain cultural norms that normalise and excuse violence and abuse.

6. Conclusion

This chapter has been able to give a clear understanding of the concept IPVA through descriptive accounts of the experiences of participants. The range of forms of abuse that women revealed were emotional abuse, coercive control, financial abuse, and physical abuse including sexual violence, as well as post-separation abuse. Though drawing from the concept of a continuum of sexual violence (Kelly, 1988), these forms are understood in women's stories as often fading in and out of each other. In addition, the ways in which women described their experiences demonstrated the importance of the concept of victim- survivor.

Many participants described a process where they were both victim and survivor at the same time, not a linear process of once being a victim and now a survivor. Women were seen interchanging both roles (victim and survivor) even when they were no longer with the perpetrator. The impact and effect of IPVA was discussed extensively. It impacted on women's financial capability as they were left to be responsible in running their household as some of the men felt their women were earning more than them. This was one of the ways they controlled their women for them to exercise their superiority. Women also shared the impact IPVA had on their health, both physical and mental. Participants discussed experiencing depression and social withdrawal, while for many their self-esteem were affected, sometimes for many years after the abuse.

While this chapter has sought mainly to describe the experiences and impacts of IPVA that participants discussed, it was also evident that participants felt Nigerian culture played a

significant role in the violence and abuse they experienced in their relationships. It is this that many women felt accounted for the delay they had in naming the abuse and was a large part of the barriers they experienced in trying to escape from it. This is a point which will be picked up and discussed in more detail in the following chapter which discusses the ways in which some of the dimensions prominent in Nigerian culture can be seen as limiting women's space for action.

Chapter 5: Internal cultural barriers for Nigerian victim-survivors

1. Introduction

Drawing on the accounts of the forms and impacts of IPVA detailed in the previous chapter, this chapter explores the ways in which culture was experienced as limiting the space for action of participants. Studies on Nigerian women and IPVA have reported on how cultural and religious beliefs narrow the ability of women to escape abusive partners. For example, Balogun and John-Akinola, (2015, pp 2422- 2423) argue that 'in Nigeria, cultural and religious beliefs do not permit a woman to leave her husband as such a woman can be stigmatized', something that has been found in other studies on the topic (Abayomi, Kolawole and Olabode, 2013; Kalunta-Crumpton, 2017; Ajayi, Chantler and Radford, 2022).

This chapter builds on this existing body of work but brings a new perspective through the introduction of core concepts in violence against women and girls research, namely the continuum of sexual violence (which it develops to include a continuum of impacts), and the concept of a conducive context. It focuses on three specific norms about heterosexual relationships: the authority of men in a relationship, how women are compelled to endure abusive relationships and the importance of keeping up appearances of being both a good woman and having a good relationship, and the associated shame for women if a relationship fails. It describes these as internal cultural barriers which form part of a conducive context for IPVA. It then looks at external cultural barriers experienced by Nigerian women living in England. Here it explores the ways women tried to keep outsiders from judging Nigeria and Nigerians. Bringing together the internal and external cultural barriers, this chapter develops the concept of a conducive context to that of a 'conducive culture' and so it is to a brief explanation of this concept that this chapter now turns.

2. Towards a concept of 'conducive culture'

Where the term 'cultural barriers' is commonly used to refer to the barriers which prevent people from different cultures from communicating, here I am using it to refer to cultural norms which operate within cultures as a barrier to victim-survivors being able to escape IPVA and seek support. Cultural barriers thus do not only exist *between* cultures, but they also exist *within* cultures.

The conducive cultural environment in Nigeria has been documented in several pieces of research as the major source of intimate partner violence and abuse in Nigeria and more so in the United States of America and the United Kingdom (Femi-Ajao, 2018; Balogun and John- Akinola, 2015; Kalunta-Crumpton, 2017; Anyikwa, 2015). It was also explicitly part of many women's accounts in this study. Kate for example spoke powerfully about the role of culture as a barrier to disclosure. Given this, she attempted to manage the situation and only started speaking up when things began to get out of control.

> When I consider my culture, I would not want to come out and start speaking out. The culture stands as a 'god'. In my culture we frown so much at separation so when you consider that, you find yourself staying there. You do not want to complain, you do not want people to know about what you are facing or what you are passing through. You will just be dying in silence. (Kate)

Kate refers to the culture as being a 'god' here as it acted as a barrier in her decisions regarding her experience of IPVA. This shows how valuable culture is, as it establishes the different ways members of a society are expected to interact with one another.
Noncompliance to the cultural norm could result in one being ostracised. To avoid the cultural implication of leaving or ending her relationship Kate remained and endured the sufferings until it became unbearable. This is also clear in Mercy's discussion of her process of speaking out. Mercy found it difficult to tell anyone about her experience with her partner. She thought the abuse was going to end as she resorted to praying and believing God will turn things around for the good. Mercy was trying to be protective of her marriage because her mother was only married to her father when she was alive, and she wanted to keep up with that legacy. She eventually started speaking out when it became obvious that she could not deal with the situation all by herself.

> My culture did not make me to speak out about my experience. Because if I spoke out at the time, I would not have stayed that long in the marriage. I would have left

him earlier. It was 1998 I started speaking out. After giving birth to my third son. (Mercy)

Bose and Mary also highlighted the importance of Nigerian culture in the experience of Nigerian victim-survivors. For them, it is about the ways in which the culture positions men and women, in inescapable roles and how these gender norms form what I have termed a 'conducive culture' for men's violence against women.

> I think upbringing is part of it. I mean our Nigerian upbringing where men believe that women have no value is still on going. Because I know if I go to Nigeria, there are men I still have to challenge. Our culture does not encourage men to value women. I think it's the culture that is the fundamental problem and the upbringing of children. (Bose)

> I think the culture has a role to play. Every woman when you go into any relationship you are expected to have children. And I know they still do it, when the children are not forthcoming, they will class it as the women's problem. You are subservient because of that. (Mary)

This concept of a conducive culture builds on Kelly's (2007) concept of a conducive context and was first introduced by Maria Garner applied to the sexualisation of culture in England (Garner, 2020). As was explained in more detail in Chapter Two, the 'conducive context' is a sociological concept formulated by Liz Kelly (2007). According to Kelly, conducive contexts are the situations or conditions that allow and encourage violence against women and girls to strive. The concept provides a way of addressing how cultural norms operate internally to create cultural barriers across contexts. In this study I will be exploring the concept of conducive culture in relation to Nigeria, but this is not to say that these norms only exist in Nigerian culture, indeed many are shared by the Western context participants were living in. For instance, both Western and Nigerian culture have a gendered norm of women being the primary carers for children, however without some of the 'collectivist spirit' seen in Nigeria, it could be a greater barrier in the West for women seeking to escape as being relegated to the home could increase a sense of isolation as well as financial dependency. In many ways this overlap where both Western and Nigerian cultures have dimensions that are conducive to IPVA makes these dimensions even harder to challenge, particularly norms around gender inequality. However, the women in this study also recognised there were real differences between cultural norms in Nigeria and

those in the British society they lived in, particularly in terms of the relationship between a husband and wife.

> I can say that the way a Nigerian woman married to a Nigerian man relates to her husband is different to the way a Nigerian woman married to an English man will relate to her husband. For example, I understand that among the British, the couple share their family bills between the husband and wife. The Nigerian woman who marries the British man would expect she and her partner will relate in the understanding of splitting bills and having equal role in the family. The Nigerian woman married to a Nigerian man will have to behave according to the Nigeria culture and if she behaves otherwise, the marriage will not work. (Joy)

As Joy details, there are ways in which Nigerian and British cultures differ which can be illuminated through exploring the different cultural dimensions outlined by Hofstede (see Chapter 2). This does not mean that the concept of a conducive culture culturally specific to Nigeria, rather that the concept is intended to address how the arrangement of cultural norms can create a conducive context for the perpetration and minimisation of IPVA. When these collide with cultural barriers experienced outside of one's culture, it is difficult for women to find a way out of abuse. For participants in this study both internal cultural norms and external cultural barriers operated together to create a cultural context conducive to violence. This chapter will outline the first part of this equation, namely the internal cultural barriers.

3. Key internal cultural barriers

The three key cultural norms for Nigerian women in this study which contribute towards a conducive culture are: men as head of the family, the necessity of keeping the relationship, and the importance of keeping up appearances. All three are foundational cultural norms in Nigeria and combine to create a fertile field for abuse and a barrier to escape. The following sections focuses on exploring how these were described and experienced by participants.

3.1. 'It has to be whatever he wants': Men as the head of the family

As explored in previous chapters, Nigerian society is widely recognised as patriarchal in nature with high power distance and embedded gender inequality. This is crystallised in what Mezie-Okoye (2021, p.33) states as "the commonality of general belief system that the best place for women is in the 'kitchen'. This is a result of the Nigerian tradition that attaches higher value to a man than a woman. Womanhood is observed to be reduced to a mere infidel and a second-class citizen; hence, there is the commonality of general belief system that the best place for women is in the 'Kitchen'. (Mezie-Okoye, 2021, p.33). The man is seen as the head of the home therefore his authority need not be questioned (Abayomi, Kolawole and Olabode, 2013; Ajayi, Chantler and Radford, 2022). When a woman is 'given out' in marriage within Nigerian culture, she is often advised to be submissive to her husband because he is the head of the family (Abayomi, Kolawole and Olabode, 2013). This was echoed by many participants in this study, as illustrated below by Gladys, Bose and Joy below.

> The culture most of the time will always support the man. Whatever the man says is right. You the woman have no right to say what you are saying. You should keep quiet. The man is the head of the house so you must keep quiet. (Gladys)

> In my culture, you have to respect your man. A man is the head of the house. You cannot play the role of a man. You have to be submissive. Most Nigerian men believe that women belong to their home. that their women have to take care of the children, take care of the home and do the home chores. (Joy)

The dominance of patriarchy in Nigerian society means that traditionally men are being trained for leadership activities while women are confined to domestic activities (Allanana, 2013). As Bose describes below, even when Nigerian women overcome this domestic role, they are often faced with the discontent of their Nigerian husbands for usurping what is seen to be as their rightful role.

> Sometimes some women are well off with money and other things. Instead of supporting their women for their achievements as a family, I see Nigerian men who become aggressive because they believe their women should not achieve more than them. If your woman can achieve great things, the men should support them for their hard work rather than expressing discontent as her achievement makes him appear less than her in the relationship. (Bose)

Kalamawei, Paul and Precious, (2014), argue that men who fail to provide economically for their families in some societies are often criticised and humiliated. Here however it is women who do provide for their families that are humiliated by the men who feel they are losing the position their culture encourages them to have. Other studies have argued that Nigerian cultural norms can make women believe that men are permitted to show their authority in the relationship by being abusive (Abayomi, Kolawole and Olabode, 2013; Ajayi, Chantler and Radford, 2022). Women in this study spoke about something similar. Participants discussed Nigerian cultural norms that allow men as the head of the family to mask coercive control, and financial abuse and make it more difficult for victim-survivors to name what was happening.

Like Gladys' account previously of needing to hand her pay packet to her husband, Ese discussed how her culture expects her to submit her salary to her husband once she receives it.

> Like what I just said about our culture, you ought to be submissive to your husband in every aspect. Everything that belongs to you belongs to him. Like we were even told; when you receive your salary you have to give it to him. He will be the one to decide what to give to you. Whenever you need money, you will have to meet him to give you. Even in your business, you give him everything as if he owns you.
>
> That is what our culture says. (Ese)

It is not only in participant accounts of financial abuse however that the influence of cultural norms in hiding the abuse of Nigerian women can be seen. Kate gave an account of the coercive control she experienced from her husband, including his control over what she wore. This control over what women wear is again embedded in traditional Nigerian cultural norms. Udodiong (2019) asserts that to be seen as befitting of the respect and status conferred on a woman by marriage, society expects Nigerian women to dress in certain ways befitting of a wife and mother. This means not wearing 'revealing' outfits, tying wrappers around the waist, or wearing of blouse and headgear (Udodiong, 2019).

Kate's partner used this together with his position as head of the household to control what she wore and where she went. He would not let her work and expected her to be confined to the house, looking after the children and doing all the domestic chores. All of which, as described by Kate, is seen as part of a normal traditional Nigerian relationship.

> It has to be whatever he wants. It just has to be it. Even to the things I ate, the things I wore and the places I could go. When I put on an outfit, he will say, 'No go and put off that thing you cannot wear it and go out'. Even when I have changed

> into something different, he will say, ‘No, go back and change again’. Whenever I suggest what I want to do, his response will be negative and not encouraging. When I tell him of my desire to attend the wedding of a relation or burial, he will pick and choose which ones I could attend and that is final. (Kate)

Ese was more explicit in explaining how women’s submission to men was integral to her cultural traditions.

> According to my tradition, when a lady is married to a man, she ought to be submissive to him. Everything that she owns belongs to the man. That is our culture here. Everything the lady owns belongs to the man. Even if your parents trained you, everything belongs to them. That is how the culture made me hold on to him. (Ese)

The norm of men as the head of the family in Nigeria thus created a barrier for participants to leaving abusive relationships because of how it hid abusive and controlling behaviour making it hard to see and name what was happening as abuse. This barrier was further embedded in how Nigerian culture values the maintenance of the relationship over all else. This second norm meant that even when participants understood what was happening was abusive, they felt unable to leave.

3.2. ‘You should endure': The importance of keeping the relationship

Though there were many different reasons for participants as to why they decided to or not to speak up, a key barrier spoken by most women were the norms embedded across the cultural dimensions of Nigerian culture about not speaking to others about problems in a relationship (Balogun and John-Akinola, 2015; Femi-Ajao, 2018). While there is an often- made assumption in Western culture of ‘why didn’t you leave?’ for women experiencing domestic violence, for Nigerian women it is much more about 'why did you leave?’ as women in Nigeria are expected to remain in their abusive relationships in order not to bring shame to their family of origin and their community at large (Kalunta-Crumpton, 2017). Previous research has documented how Nigerian women tend to uphold religious and cultural values of partnership and resist any factor that will result to the discontinuing of relationships that exist among members of the family both nuclear and extended (Boethius and Akerstrom, 2020). The accounts of Susan and Grace echo this,

demonstrating how the culture of collectivism in Nigeria as illuminated in Hofstede's dimensions discussed in Chapter Two, can operate to make it harder for women experiencing IPVA to escape.

> The culture did not have any positive role. Culture played a lot of parts because it could have been different if I did not consider the culture. Because in our culture my parents will be disgraced, and it is a shame to my family if I just suddenly leave him. (Susan)

> My family and his family agreed that I should marry him so the culture played a great part in it in the sense that if I had rejected him, it would have brought shame to my family. But since I joined him in England that was the reason I was able to decide to leave him. If it was in Nigeria there was no way I could do that. (Grace)

Previous research has argued that Nigerian women are groomed to keep silent concerning issues relating to their partners to themselves (Abayomi, Kolawole and Olabode, 2013; Balogun and John-Akinola, 2015). From women's accounts in this study, what this grooming translated into was a feeling that it is expected of a Nigerian woman experiencing abuse that one should keep quiet about it, and a fear of the cultural consequences of leaving. This can be seen in Kate's account about why she felt she couldn't escape her partner.

> When I considered my culture, I said there was no way that I would be out there not married with children. I knew that everyone will be looking at me as a failure. I considered all that people will say and I said to myself, 'No matter what it is let me go and face it. Just hang in there. I saw the signs from the beginning, but my culture made me to go into that death zone. (Kate)

Previous research has shown how Nigerian men who perpetrate IPVA or seek divorce are barely stigmatised (Anyikwa, 2015; Kalunta-Crumpton, 2017). Instead, women who seek separation or divorce in response to IPVA receive negative stigma given the expectation of her to making the marriage work, including tolerating and confining victimization within the private sphere of the family. Participants often spoke about this stigma against women who leave their partners from their mothers, echoing Jo Wilson's (2016) work on maternal mimesis in African Caribbean British communities.

Gladys and Joyce discussed the ways this operated, talking about how their mothers used themselves as a point of reference to let their daughters know that they are enduring their marriages even when they are being abused.

> My mum, being an old woman as well, thought it was normal because she was married into a polygamous home. My dad married so many women because he was the only child of his parent and was looking for more children. (Gladys)

> As children, our parents and elders used examples from incidents and events about relatives to illustrate acceptable and non-acceptable behaviours and morals in our culture. My mother would say, 'Angela has been in her marriage for five years, you know she is still in the marriage, why would you want to come back?' She would continue, 'Why are you complaining? You have to endure'. My parents and elders will always use the use this word 'endure'. They believe you should endure it. (Joyce)

This idea of endurance was something that Mary had also experienced. When Mary told her sisters about her husband's abusive behaviour towards her, her sister's response was, 'if you feel your husband is bad, then let us exchange husbands'. From this Mary took that sense of endurance; that her sisters were also experiencing abuse from their partners and that Mary should stop complaining because that is just what men do. Mary also had experience of how failed relationships impact other family members given the collective culture of Nigeria.

Before Mary was married, her mother-in-law sought to establish whether Mary's older sisters were married. If they were not, or if they had left the marriage, her mother-in-law would not have supported Mary marrying her son. With this practice, women are careful about how they deal with their marital problems, because what is seen as a failure does not just fall on them, it can limit the choices of other family members.

The importance of 'enduring' a relationship is further supported by the ways that single parents are viewed in Nigerian culture. Here endurance becomes not just about maintaining the relationship between partners but maintaining that relationship *for* the children.

Abayomi, Kolawole and Olabode's (2013) study on Nigerian victim-survivors of IPVA, reported that the main reason women stayed with their abusive partners was their children. This is also something found in Anyikwa's (2015) research on the topic and is similar to the present study. Research participants regularly expressed anxieties about the impact on

children and their contact with their children if they were to leave the relationship. Bose for example was concerned about her children not having both parents while growing up, particularly as her children were sons and she had grown up without the presence of her biological mother. She felt her partner's presence helped her to check on her boys to put their behaviours right. This made her endure her partner's abuse until her children became adults as she discusses below.

> My childhood experience made me endure because I wanted my children to have their two parents. Also, because I had boys and there was so much challenge with boys' upbringing in this country, I considered it better to have their father for his support in their upbringing. Sometimes when they were being naughty, I would say to them, 'I'm reporting you to your dad for this behaviour' and they will behave. (Bose)

Susan on the other hand was worried about her daughters thinking that she was the reason why their father left the house. She talks about this as a barrier to escaping for many years.

> My children might not have understood what I was going through. They would not know if what their dad was doing was right or wrong. It was difficult for me then but when they became older and could understand the situation, I was able to make sure that he left. (Susan)

Mercy expressed how her children created a barrier to her escaping even though they wanted her to leave. She felt their lives would be harder if she decided to leave their father as they would not have the traditional family structure that is rewarded in Nigeria.

> I decided to remain in the marriage because of my daughters. My daughters wanted to leave but I pleaded with them about our family situation and for them to bear with me. The fact is that I did not want the situation whereby one man comes to marry any of my daughters. When they asked where their parent is, they will have to say, 'My mummy and daddy are not together.' They are at risk then. That is the thing that kept me in the marriage for long. (Mercy)

As is alluded to in Mercy's account, the cultural stigma associated with a failed relationship in Nigeria (a stigma that, as Susan discussed earlier, falls not just on the woman but on her wider family), compelled many participants to remain with their abusive partners. This leads to the last of the key ways that participants talked about culture as a

barrier to exiting an abusive relationship; namely the importance of keeping up appearances.

3.3. 'People see us as a perfect couple': Keeping up appearances

As discussed in the introduction, just as there are cultural norms that position men as the head of the family and set out their role and accepted behaviour, there are gender norms in Nigeria about the accepted or normal role and behaviours of women. Abayomi, Kolawole and Olabode (2013) state that societal norms in Nigeria dictate that a woman be submissive to her partner to ensure peace in the home and prevent IPVA. Nigerian women have also been found to keep silent about violence and abuse in a relationship as speaking up about their situation could raise mixed reactions from those they approach (Boethius and Akerstrom, 2020). In effect, as claimed by Ajayi, Chantler and Radford (2022), cultural and religious expectations of Nigerian women in relationships have compelled them to role-play a happy family in public. This is a norm that has also been found in the wider literature on BME women and violence against them where to maintain this status of a 'real family' and not be seen as a "battered single mother", or single woman, "a poor woman, an unsuccessful woman, and a bad mother", women can be entrapped in relationships with abusive men' (Kanyeredzi, 2013; 213). Bose described how she felt she had to role-play a happy family when at home she was being tortured.

> We always just keep things inside without saying anything. That's your culture, it's like I said they look at you as if you are not responsible and cannot keep your marriage. So, in front of everybody you play happy family, you pretend as if nothing is going on but there is a lot going on. Even in church people saw us as a perfect couple. But a lot was going on in the background. (Bose)

Bose went on to say that when their marital issues eventually got to the church, the Vicar was astonished. Her role-playing had been so good, that he had always used them as a point of reference when encouraging others about marriage and relationships.

This idea of keeping up appearances, alongside the dominance of men and the primacy of maintaining the relationship, creates barriers for women seeking to escape violence and abuse. This was evident perhaps most clearly in the experiences of Gladys who spoke about having to return to Nigeria to live with her abusive husband's other wives. At some

point, Gladys' husband decided to relocate to Nigeria without discussing it with her. Glady's elder brother advised her to travel back to Nigeria with her husband, so it would not be seen that she is the one who ended the marriage. Gladys conceded to her elder brother's advice, and she travelled to Nigeria with the children. Once there she realised her husband had married several other women and wanted them all to live together.

> What broke the camel's back was when he said that all of us must live under one roof as one big family in a big house. He had already planned the house because he was an architect. He bought the land while he was here in England. He said that all of us [his wives] will be cooking together as mates in Nigeria. I was not comfortable cooking in the same pot with his other wives. I said.' count me out, I cannot be so stupid'. He said, 'Well you either take it or leave it'. That was how the marriage ended. (Gladys)

Gladys was willing to try anything to keep up the appearance of a good relationship. The reason she felt she couldn't 'share a pot' with his other wives was that she was scared they would poison her out of jealousy. Just as Gladys went with her husband and tried to live with him to avoid being seen as having lost her husband, other participants spoke about how they continued doing what was considered the appropriate jobs for a wife, despite their husband's violence. Grace talked about cooking for her husband the whole way through the abuse, because that was what was expected of her as a wife.

> I was still cooking for him. It's our culture. I cannot run away from that. If it's the Western world culture the woman will not. But in my own culture whether he's abusive or not it's still my duty as a wife to cook for him. (Grace)

Connected to this need to keep up appearances or hide problems in the relationship was a key theme of silence which ran through participants' accounts. Previous research has claimed that Nigerian culture expects women to be silent about whatever situation they are facing with their partners (Ojifinni, 2020). Women who discuss their marital affairs openly are seen as wayward, impatient and lacking understanding of their partner and what is entailed to be in a relationship. As discussed previously, this can negatively impact not just the woman but her sisters, her children, and other members of her extended family. For Mary and Ese, this meant they spent many years feeling they could not tell anyone other than a select group of very close friends what they were going through.

> The culture did not allow me to tell many people, except close associates. Even when I told my sisters, they said, 'If you tell people what your man did, they will react and say, 'Oh, you are the one that spoilt your marriage.' (Mary)

> It was only recently that I told my mum everything that I really went through. I did not really want my family to know about it. There are even times when both of us went to visit my family. I will even give him money for him to give to my mum so it will look like he is the one giving the money to her. (Ese)

As seen from the participants above, the notion of 'keeping up appearances' for Nigerian women is not just the appearance of being a good woman (that is maintaining the domestic sphere), but also the appearance of having a good relationship. The combination of the two means that the cultural space to disclose, Jo Wilson's 'space to speak', is narrowed for Nigerian women experiencing IPVA. Instead, the cultural norm of keeping family or relationship issues out of public discussions is upheld (Anyikwa, 2015), and the culture internally creates a barrier for women seeking to escape.

4. The interplay between barriers and coping

Though some of the cultural dimensions of Nigeria were spoken about by participants mainly as internal cultural barriers to disclosure, there were also two important aspects of culture that seemed to function on multiple and conflicting levels: as both a barrier and as a form of coping. The first of these is the appeal to the idea of the 'strong Black woman' to be able to withstand the abuse and the second concerns the cultural hegemony of faith and religion. Both were discussed by women both as contributing to the internal cultural barriers that existed in relation to disclosure and escape as well as, at times, being a resource for coping with violence and abuse.

Nurius (2000) defines coping as a set of responses that work toward managing the threat, managing the meaning of the threat to limit its impact, and managing negative feelings associated with the threat. Though originally, I had expected coping to take more of a role in women's accounts (including some interview questions directed at understanding this), participants spoke to me more about the barriers and struggles to leave their partners meaning that barriers became much more of a theme of the thesis overall. However, literature has documented different strategies Nigerian victim-survivors of IPVA have

adopted in their bids to manage the negative implications of the abuse they experienced such as withdrawal, avoidance, social assistance/aid and the use of substances (Obilor, Diyoke and Awogu, 2021). The two existing studies on Nigerian victim-survivors experiences in the UK also found religion to be an important part of Nigerian women's coping with their experiences of abuse and violence (Femi-Ajao, 2018; Ajayi, Chantler and Radford, 2022), something that as will be seen in mirrored in this study. What has not yet been explored is the ways in which the stereotype of the 'strong Black woman' discussed in Chapter Two featured heavily in women's accounts of the internal resources they drew on to endure what their partner was doing. Where Ava Kanyeredzi (2013) found that the more a woman self-identifies as a strong Black woman, the more her space for action is decreased, here participants described using the cultural stereotype as a way of finding strength within themselves to cope with the abuse. This can be seen in the experiences of both Kate and Bose.

> I have always been known to be a strong woman. I do not take a lot of things to heart so much. So, I think that was actually what helped me to cope for those 14 years. Most of the time I wanted to leave, but when I considered my children I said, 'No. Let me stick in there. I have to be the strong woman that I am'. That was what helped me to cope. (Kate)

> I have a strong personality and I think that helped me because I believe if I need to do something I will say to myself I'm going to do this, and I will do it. I will say my self- belief and my strength is what kept me going. (Bose)

Mary found the strength she needed internally to cope, through the strength she had developed as a teenager in coming to a new country without her father or her family. In this way, her position as a 'strong Black woman' was experienced as a resource as well as a restriction.

> I think it's being strong. And there is no way you can be that strong if you are not a child of God. It's being a Christian and the upbringing my father gave to me. My father was always telling us his children, 'I'm not going to always be with you.' It was when I left Nigeria and came here as a teenager, I realised what my dad was always saying because I was on my own. (Mary)

The idea of mental and emotional strength also came through in women's descriptions of the mental strategies they would use to avoid, dismiss, or ignore the abuse. Mercy and Susan, for example, spoke about coping by blocking out or detaching from what their partner is doing.

> I ignored him. He is there and I pretend that he's not there. When I come home, I know I'm only going to face my children because I decided to cut him off my mind. I had to do that for me to cope. (Susan)

> Whenever he is talking, I will just be looking at him. If he abuses me or does anything I will leave him. If he says or do anything that I cannot endure then I will leave where he is and go elsewhere. (Mercy)

This use of the image of the strong Black woman as a resource by participants here, as well as something which made it difficult to disclose as found in Kanyeredzi's (2014) research, shows how cultural norms operate on dual and sometimes conflicting levels for victim- survivors. It also speaks to an interesting finding in a study on women's coping strategies against spousal violence in Pakistan. Zakar, Zakar and Krämer, (2012) found that women who were identified as marginalised, poor and had little or no education tended to adopt emotion- focused coping strategies (that is, those that are associated with avoidance) by increasing their religious involvement or placating or avoiding their husbands as these strategies were safe, less risky, and less confrontational. For Nigerian women in the UK, existing as minoritised ethnic people, many face financial and other forms of hardship. This may mean that, as in Zakar, Zakar and Krämer's (2012) study, in order to cope with abuse, Nigerian victim-survivors in the UK draw on strategies that are seen as less confrontational, such as leaning into the cultural stereotype of Black women as strong.

It also may be part of the reason behind why faith appeared in women's discussions as a cultural resource and how this provided a source of coping– such as the description from Mary above – but that this appeal to faith also contrasted with their discussions of how it acted as a barrier to both disclosure and escaping. In Nigeria as well as many other African countries, religion provides a significant identity resource and pathway to meaningful social existence, with research documenting the ways in which it is common for Nigerian people, whether currently active in a religious group or not, to turn to their faith or religious leaders for support and direction in times of crisis (Ukah, 2007; Antai and Antai, 2008). It has also shown the ways in which faith has been drawn on as a coping resource

for Nigerian people in times of difficulty, including for example caregivers of HIV children (Oyeyimika et al, 2020) and displaced adults, as well as how faith provides a source of coping for victim-survivors more broadly (Simonic, 2021). However, research has not yet fully documented the role of faith for Nigerian victim-survivors of IPVA both as a way of coping *and* – for some women – as a barrier to disclosure and escape.

Mary, Joy, Kate and Mercy all spoke about faith as a coping strategy, supporting them through forgiveness and prayer, and providing a way of feeling in control of an uncontrollable situation.

> I have to forgive my former partner, it's the Christian way of living. I'm a Christian so let me keep on going. Also going to church to pray for forgiveness has helped me cope. (Joy)

> I will say prayers to cope. I found myself praying more. I started going to church more frequently prayed and hoped that the man I got married to will change. But that change never came, you know. (Kate)

> If I go to church, I pray to my God because it is only God that can help me. After a long time going to church and praying, he did not change. He was rather becoming worse. (Mercy)

Though for Kate and Mercy prayer did not work to change the abuse from their partners, the way that participants described it as a resource during the abuse meant that the cultural dominance of religious belief in Nigeria, in comparison to the more secular England where participants lived, provided a source of support for victim-survivors. This echoes findings from Femi-Ajao (2018) suggesting that faith-based organisations are important entry- points for finding and supporting Nigerian victim-survivors in England. However, faith also became a barrier for some participants, particularly those who were in unmarried relationships. In the Nigerian tradition, relationships are acknowledged when they are official, for example involving payment of bride price, court registry marriage or religious marriage (Ajayi, Chantler and Radford, 2022). If these rites are not met, the value of the relationship is limited among members of both families and the community because they are regarded as people simply cohabiting, not legitimised couples. This created an additional barrier for women who were experiencing IPVA in relationships that were not

officially sanctioned. Joy felt she would be blamed not only for the abuse, but for living with a man she was not married to.

> I did not speak to nobody as I was not formally married to him and I felt people will laugh at me. I also feel people would blame me and think I deserve the abuse because I was not married to him legally. (Joy)

In this way though Joy found her faith to be a resource to cope with the abuse – seen in how she applied 'the Christian way of living' - it also functioned to narrow her space for action in that it limited her options for seeking help.

Uncovering the ways in which cultural norms operated in the narratives of participants to create internal cultural barriers to disclosure, also uncovers how some norms provided solace and strength for women. This means that while the concept of a conducive culture helps to highlight particular cultural norms that excuse violence or endorse it, the same norms can also be experienced differently, as a form of support and solace. Culture is *both a resource and a restriction* in this sense, able to both narrow and expand women's space for action.

5. Conclusion

This chapter drew from the forms and impact of IPVA on victim-survivors examined in Chapter Four to explore how culture limited participants' 'space for action'. It has highlighted some of the cultural factors affecting how Nigerian women in the England made sense of their experience of IPVA and how cultural norms created internal barriers to their ability to speak out about their experiences and seek help. In particular, it has focused on participants' accounts of three central norms. These are about men being the head of the family, compelling women to do whatever the men want. Secondly is the importance of keeping the relationship by enduring it. Thirdly, is keeping up appearances with the impression of being a perfect couple.

The chapter advanced the concept of a conducive culture to make sense of these internal barriers. Importantly it found that cultural dimensions and their relationship to IPVA can be multi-directional; that is acting both as a restriction *and* for some a resource. In this way the chapter also found that the influence of culture on women's experiences extends

beyond exploring its role as a barrier to escaping violence. It also addresses how it functions in the ways women talked about coping. Here Nigerian cultural norms can be seen not only as narrowing women's space for action but also, for some, as providing opportunities for women to live through men's violence and abuse. The following chapter expands on the internal barriers highlighted in this chapter by exploring the 'external barriers' Nigerian women in England face in dealing and coping with their experiences of intimate partner violence and abuse.

Chapter 6: External barriers for Nigerian victim-survivors

1. Introduction

Where Chapter Five looked at the ways in which certain cultural norms operated internally to narrow women's space for action – as well as, for some, to expand it – this chapter looks at external cultural and other barriers and their impact on the ability of victim-survivors to speak and escape, as well as participants' suggestions for how to overcome these.

Participants spoke about external barriers that existed by virtue of their being Nigerian women living in England. In many ways it is these external cultural barriers that much previous research on Black and minoritised women's experiences of violence in England has focused, as covered in Chapter Two. The discussion in this thesis so far has shown how some cultural norms – such as the strong Black woman stereotype and the dominance of religion and faith in Nigeria, can create what Joanne Wilson calls 'space to speak' (Wilson, 2016) at the same time as creating barriers to disclosure. This tension is also seen throughout women's discussions of disclosure. Given both the internal and external cultural barriers to disclosure, the process of disclosure and help-seeking for participants often took many years. As with the discussion of coping towards the end of the last chapter, here some aspects of Nigerian culture served as enablers for speaking for participants.

The chapter begins by exploring practical external barriers, the most pertinent for women in this study being economic and housing insecurity. It then looks in more detail at the barriers created for participants by the responses of their family and the need to protect Nigerian culture from judgement by outsiders. Finally, the chapter ends looking forward. It outlines how, even with the internal and external barriers discussed in this thesis, all participants managed not only to overcome them and escape the violence but also to rebuild their lives and share their experiences.

2. Barriers to help-seeking

In their systematic analysis of the literature on the external barriers to disclosure for ethnic minority women in England, Femi-Ajao, Kendal, and Lovell (2020) identify four key

factors that inhibit Black and minoritised women from talking about the violence they are experiencing from intimate partners. These are: immigration status; community influences; problems with language and interpretation; and unsupportive attitudes of staff within mainstream services. For this study very different barriers came up, perhaps because the participants here are different than those in existing literature on Nigerian victim-survivors of IPVA in that they had rarely accessed any external services. Immigration status also played much less of a role as an external cultural barrier than expected. Though immigration was anticipated, given the literature, to feature significantly in women's accounts, none of the victim-survivors in this research disclosed that they had insecure immigration status or discussed immigration as a barrier in escaping violence. Instead, what came out more strongly was the impact of practical barriers such as econmieconomic and housing security, a disclosure barrier created by the response of the family and a sense of needing to protect Nigerian culture from judgement and criticism by outsiders. These are each discussed in turn below.

2.1. Practical barriers: Economic and housing insecurity

The importance of external factors such as financial and housing independence for victim-survivors in escaping abusive relationships has been identified in multiple studies (Vyas and Watts, 2009; Sukeri and Man, 2017; Adedunmola et al., 2022; MacGregor et al., 2022) found that one of the reasons abused women cannot leave abusive relationships is their economic dependency on their abusers, necessitating the need to provide a stable source of income for themselves and their children. Similarly, a qualitative review of research on women's experiences of the intersections of work and intimate partner violence (MacGregor et al., 2022) argued not only for the key importance of secure finances for women experiencing IPVA to enable them to leave, but also that paid employment can provide a safe haven for victim-survivors; a place where they can be free from the abuse and the perpetrator, and a place for support to exit and recover. Mary reflected this in her understanding of how economic independence provides a route out for victim-survivors.

> When a woman has her own money, she can do whatever she wants to do with it. With education, the woman will be independent and when they see her, they may get upset but there is nothing they can do about it. (Mary)

However, paid employment for women can also create what feels like a challenge to men's authority and this can increase their use of violence to maintain power and control. Vyas and Watts (2009) acknowledged this, claiming that women's economic empowerment can positively *and* negatively impact women's risk of violence. Some of this was exemplified by Bose's situation instead of her employment being experienced as a source of empowerment, it ended up further impoverishing her given everything she became responsible for.

> Things just changed when he lost his job. I had to work hard as 'I have to do this, and I have to do that' because I needed to have roof over our head with the boys... His actions drained me financially. I could not have any savings because of the many bills to attend to. (Bose)

Connected to paid employment, housing and accommodation were repeatedly raised as key factors making it difficult for participants to leave, such as in this account from Ese about the struggles she faced after escaping violence

> I was owing. I borrowed money for him and there was nothing in my shop, there was no salary. My shop was down everything because of the money I borrowed for him. Things were really rough... Even for me to pay for the rent I couldn't pay. It was my younger sister that helped me to pay. (Ese)

While the importance of economic and housing security is a common finding across research with victim-survivors of IPVA, again there were some culturally specific barriers for participants in finding such independence. Gladys gave a particularly powerful account of this. Gladys experienced a legal battle in attempting to end the relationship as she was determined for the bride price paid for her to be returned to her abusive husband. This was because retaining it implied to other Nigerians that they were still married. Culturally, keeping the bride price after the dissolution of a marriage would be seen as taboo and Gladys could be cursed. Her partner, however, saw this as another opportunity to maintain his control over her.

> In the Urhobo culture you have to pay back the dowry. I said to my husband, 'Now the marriage has broken down, come and take your dowry.' He said no that he does not want to take the dowry. I took him to court, he refused and started fighting me. He was trying to use that to tie me down. (Gladys)

Even with this struggle, Gladys was able to escape her abusive relationship and she felt that a large part of the reason was her own financial stability. This did not only help her in having the economic resources to leave, it also – she believed - helped her receive support from her family as they did not think she would become dependent on them.

> One thing at home [in Nigeria] is that if your relationship with your husband breaks down or you have had a divorce and you do not depend on your family, you are okay. But if you keep on going to them for money, they will reject you. But that was not a problem in my case, so I was okay, and I never went to my family for financial support. (Gladys)

This shows the way in which cultural norms that mean a man should be financially responsible for the household can impact Nigerian women escaping abuse, as friends or family can believe that now she will need their support economically and so discourage her from escaping. Despite this belief, most participants talked about supporting themselves and their children financially after leaving their partners, sometimes with great difficulty. Susan and her daughters continued to live in their accommodation after her partner left.
She was solely responsible for all the bills in the house without any support.

> He stopped giving me money towards the rent because the flat was my flat before he moved in with me. Two years into the relationship all together, he stopped giving me money for the rent. He refused to pay rent. But he was still living in there. It was a rented property from the housing association by me. It has nothing to do with him in any way. His name was not in the tenancy agreement. Since he left me and my daughters, I'm still paying the rent myself. No support from anywhere. (Susan)

Bose also continued living in her apartment with her two sons when her partner moved out of the house, however she had more of a struggle than Susan due to the debts that had been incurred by her husband.

> I even got a letter from my housing association that if I do not get my rent paid then I will be evicted from the house. I had my council tax debt that I need to pay as well. I was taken to the court, and I was asked to pay. So, all those things wmade it harder. (Bose)

Though economic disempowerment was a barrier for participants in escaping IPVA, a barrier that was compounded by culture as well as their marginalised position in England, participants were able to and did overcome it in order to leave. However, the external barriers to disclosing what had happened to them were often experienced as being as difficult and in some ways harder for participants to overcome than establishing the practical means necessary to escape. These external barrier are discussed in the following two sections.

2.2. Response of family

A number of studies show the importance of informal support systems in seeking help after experiencing intimate partner violence and abuse, including those focused on the experiences of Nigerian victim-survivors (Femi-Ajao, 2018; Ajayi, Chantler and Radford, 2022).
According to Fanslow and Robinson (2010), informal sources of support such as family and friends are routes where victim-survivors most frequently talk about their experiences of violence but are not able to access the most helpful responses. Similarly, Dehingia et al. (2022) found that women in India who have separated from their partners after IPVA are more likely to seek help from anyone other than formal sources, often due to a lack of knowledge about what services exist. This pattern of prioritising informal support systems was seen with participants in this study, however in turning to the Nigerian community to disclose, women often spoke about experiencing barriers to speaking further. This is different than – though connected to – the internal cultural barriers discussed in Chapter Five. Here it is not so much about how cultural norms made it difficult for women to identify themselves that what was happening was abusive, but it's more about what happened after that identification when they went to seek support from family and friends.

Where participants did seek help, all participants went first to informal support networks, predominantly friends and family members. The reactions they got were mixed. Mary for example expressed ambivalence in her relationship with her family. They were not a source of immediate support but they were also not entirely rejecting. Rather, they gave Mary support conditionally, only when her husband broke other culturally expected norms.

> It is his reaction that my family did not like. There were certain things he did before he came over that he is not supposed to. But they did not want to tell me. So, when all these things happened [issues in the marriage leading to its breakdown], they said well, they just wanted to give him the benefit of the doubt. (Mary)

In a similar way, Bose's family were equally both supportive and unsupportive. They did not encourage her to leave, though they did offer her support to endure. Bose realised the relationship was over when her husband returned from Nigeria to England and did not come back to the house. Her partner left her and the children without any argument and ceased ties with Bose.

> It's only when he came back [from Nigeria to England] and he did not come home that I then said that means the relationship is over. My family believed what I'm saying but they cannot advise me to leave my home. They cannot advise me to leave my children. They just need to encourage me. They will phone to check on me and then that's it. (Bose)

Some of the reasons behind the responses here from both Bose and Mary's family are to do with the cultural norms around family and the prioritisation of relationships discussed in Chapter Five. These norms did not enable women to speak and did not encourage family members to support any decision to escape the abuse. This can also be seen in the account of Mercy, which was relatively unique in that it was only her – and Kate – who spoke about contacting the formal agency of the police.

> There were several attempts to arrest my ex-partner because I had to report to the police. When the police tried to arrest him, he will run away from the house. I do not even know how he gets the information. After some time, he will come back to the house and apologise to me. The family gets involved and they will ask us to settle that it is marital issue. (Mercy)

Even contacting the police was not enough to legitimise the abuse for her family. Instead, again the dominance of enduring and keeping up appearances creates a barrier for Mercy in being able to escape.

For other participants however, norms that prioritised maintenance of the family structure actually helped women speak about violence. This was the case for both Kate and Joyce who experienced high levels of physical violence from their partners. Kate's family was

supportive of her whilst she was in the relationship and made their efforts to resolve the issues emanating from their relationship. However, when it became clear her partner was not changing, they did everything they could to support Kate and enable her to leave, including her father giving her a room in his apartment until she was able to rent her own accommodation. Similarly, though Joyce's family was not initially supportive of her leaving, when it became clear the violence was escalating that they supported her decision to escape the violence.

> I spoke with my sister, dad, uncles, aunties and relations. They were all aware. When the situation got so bad initially everyone tried to speak to my husband. They tried to talk to him to stop the aggressive behaviour. It was not working. In the long run they gave me their consent for me to leave. (Kate)

> They [my family] felt that I have done the right thing even though they did not support me leaving initially. But for me being their daughter they are like, 'it's better for you to be alive than to be killed'. So, they were supportive. (Joyce)

In this way, the emphasis of Nigerian culture on maintenance of the family structure, can work to support victim-survivors when they need to escape violence by returning to their family of origin. However, it is also clear that the understanding of IPVA as something which is serious only when it involves high levels of physical violence might be influencing the support victim-survivors receive from the family. Both Kate and Joyce were experiencing physical violence, and both spoke at different times about fearing the violence would cost them their lives. As such, this demonstrates the need for more work to help shift this understanding, particularly given that for victim-survivors in this study emotional abuse, coercive and financial control were the more common forms of abuse.

2.3. Protecting ourselves from outsiders

The second significant external barrier found in this study was the need felt by participants to protect their culture, themselves, and their families from the judgement of outsiders.
This is not something that has come up in previous research but for participants here was one of the primary reasons they felt unable to disclose and seek support to escape.
Participants felt a need to protect their culture, protect their relationship and protect their children from judgement. All of which came together to mean they felt they could not talk

to anyone outside of their culture. Ese for example spoke about the role of culture as a barrier to disclosure. Here it was about the need to keep 'outsiders' out of knowing about the internal workings of the relationship.

> I was trying to cover him up. He is my husband you know. I was covering him up so that outsiders will not know anything. (Ese)

The illustration above clearly shows that Ese was protective of her partner being the head of the home; 'my husband'. This made her not to speak out about her experience when the abuse was going on particularly to people outside of Nigerian culture who would not understand the position he occupied in the home. Grace also talked about the ways in which the attempt to protect her culture from outsiders was part of the reason she felt she could not speak to someone who was not Nigerian. Grace was specific in talking about the importance of acknowledging not just how culture affects disclosure but also how culture differs amongst different groups.

> Our culture affects us in the sense that people will say 'You are from so and so place and this is what you suppose to do, and you are not doing it.' But it is our colour as well because different colour has different culture. (Grace)

What Grace is saying here about colour has to do with the different ethnic groups amongst minority ethnic groups in England. Though they are often collapsed together under the category of 'Black' in England, Nigerian culture is different from Ugandan, Ghanaian, and Caribbean culture. This means the barriers to disclosure exist both within and outside of the category of 'Black women.' Other participants however, such as Bose, saw similarities among women from across Africa in how difficult it is to talk about problems in a marriage.

> What I realised is a lot of women, especially we Africans, we are going through a lot with our marriage but find it difficult to speak out or ask for help because of how we have been brought up. Even though we live in this country we still have that background which makes it always difficult to say this is something I'm going through in my marriage. We feel ashamed, like 'why do I have to go through this and tell people that this is what I'm going through?' (Bose)

In some ways, Bose's view here responds to the critique of Hofstede's cultural dimensions as imposing a homogenous concept of national culture. Though in theory this critique may

be valid, for participants in this project the idea of a shared 'homogenous' Nigerian culture was less controversial. Instead, believing in a shared culture not only amongst Nigerians but also, in parts, across African nations, helped to provide a sense of belonging even where it also created some restrictions. This belonging is important for migrant communities and maybe even more for migrant victim-survivors of IPVA who have been isolated through their experiences of abuse.

Taken together this sense of the need to protect 'our' men and 'our' culture from judgement from outside created a significant barrier. The need to protect oneself, one's children and one's culture meant that disclosing to outsiders was perceived as dangerous, however as the previous discussion has showed, the space to talk to other Nigerian people was also closed down by the ways in which key Nigerian cultural norms encourage women to stay quiet and stay with abusive men. This meant that even in speaking to other Nigerian people, participants experienced a barrier – creating a catch-22 situation where they were facing judgement whether they disclosed within or disclosed to outsiders. As such the discussion in this chapter so far has shown how Nigerian victim-survivors of IPVA living in England experience compounded external barriers to disclose and escape violence; facing both those affecting all victim-survivors as well as particular barriers created through their intersectional location. In view of all of this, the strength of participants in escaping the abuse and rebuilding their lives cannot be underestimated. It is to understanding this, that the chapter now turns before the thesis concludes.

3. Rebuilding lives

Despite all the internal and external cultural barriers that participants experienced, all women in this study were able to – and did – escape their abusive partners. The process of leaving was different for different women and though it is not the focus of this research it is important to include a discussion of the ways in which women escaped. For some, such as Bose and Mary, it was their partners who ended the relationship. Bose's partner ended the relationship because she challenged his attitude and behaviour towards her. For Mary she felt he just 'got tired' of the relationship and left, something that she felt was made easier by the fact they never had children.

> He said something to me, and I just turned back and thought to myself, 'This is it, I'm not taking this anymore'. I said to him that day, 'If you repeat that word to me again you will not find it so funny'. He became quiet and I said to myself that this man is a bully because I did not expect him to be quiet. I knew that was a way forward for me. I had never spoken to him like that before, I was always quiet because I did not want the children to see that we were arguing or fighting. That was the day I got my voice back. (Bose)

> It was easy for him to leave because I felt he was not meant to be with me forever due to his attitude and behaviour. He was always looking for a way out. Thank God I was living in my own house, and I did not accept to have a joint tenancy with him. When he got tired, he left, and I was fine with it because I was not able to achieve the reason why I married him in terms of having children. (Mary)

For Grace and Kate, it was more difficult in that they had to escape, often with limited resources, after realising that staying was risking their lives. Grace had to exit the relationship as she was not feeling safe any longer given that her partner had forced her to have two illegal and unsafe abortions. Her parents were back home in Nigeria, and she was worried they would never know the cause of her death if she was to die from the frequent violence and abusive behaviour from her partner. She used education to escape.

> We were in Manchester when all these were happening then I had to take a decision to move to London. I had to apply for a course in one of the hospitals here to do theatre course and with that I was able to separate from him. He thought I was coming for training, but he did not know I will not come back. So, when I got admitted it was a way of me getting out. (Grace)

Like Grace who discussed in Chapter Four the life-threatening physical impacts of the abuse, Kate also expressed the impact of the abuse on her health, explaining that it wasn't only the violence itself but its impacts that meant her life was in danger. It was this that helped her to leave despite the cultural pressures to stay.

> My health became an issue. My life became at stake in fact, because I was now exposed to high blood pressure, so many ailments; at some point I had a high blood pressure, I had high cholesterol. They ran an x-ray on my chest and then they

> discovered that I had a particular kind of heart disease. It was quite life threatening. So, I needed to opt out. (Kate)

Though Kate's quote can make it sound like her decision was an easy one to 'opt out', many participants – including Kate - spoke about being caught in between leaving and staying for years. This speaks to the power of the barriers explored in this thesis and was well described by Ese.

> It was not easy at all for me when I made up my mind to leave at first. I left for just one week, but I could not stay without him. I could not pay the rent. I was like crayfish [emaciated]. But the second time around my family stood by me. They really helped me. (Ese)

Ese's experiences show the ways in which escaping is best conceptualised as a process not an event, something that requires external as well as internal resources. However, despite the situations the participants went through, and the barriers they had had to overcome, all of the participants spoke about looking forward to the future and what they felt it would bring. For many this was about starting a new relationship, demonstrating the continued importance of this in their lives. However, the idea of a new relationship was not spoken about with a sense of needing to endure, instead participants reflected that they wanted something different, that they no longer felt they had to submit to some of the cultural norms that were implicated in the abuse they experienced.

> I am hopeful, and looking forward to meeting someone new who will love and take care of me financially, not the one that will abuse me the way my ex-partner did. (Susan)

> I believe in love and relationship. I will love to start a new relationship. So, I'm just here waiting for Mr Right. If he comes fine if he does not come fine, as life must continue. (Joyce)

Other participants went further than this, feeling satisfied with their lives and what they'd created. They were looking forward to a future without a man in it, instead having the ability to fully enjoy their hard-earned freedom.

> My plan is that I want to live my life to the fullest. As I am happy, and I do not want to bother my head about men for now. Maybe later in life, if I change my mind but it's not in my plan for now. (Bose)

> It's a shame, but I will say marriage did not favour me and I am done with it. I do not think I want to remarry. I am not interested in any man. I just want to concentrate on my business, take care of my children and be in good terms with my family and neighbours. (Mercy)

To help other victim-survivors get to the point they were at, participants also shared their ideas about what was needed to overcome the barriers and challenges they had experienced. Participants in this study had various recommendations for services and supporters, both within the Nigerian community and outside of it, who wanted to help women like them overcome the barriers that have been outlined in this thesis. Participants wanted services to be practical-oriented, survivor-centred, and responsive to individual's needs. Though they discussed a range of interventions that they felt would be helpful, what drew these together however was the belief that – because of the impact of culture – Nigerian victims-survivors in England needed our own services, both statutory and non-governmental.

> I think there should be a separate service for Nigerian women because cultures are different, and places are different. What an English woman can take a Nigerian woman may not be able to take it. So, it's good to have Nigerian social services and make women aware of it because Nigerian women go through a lot of abuse in England so that they can access these services. And also, the men will know that when they abuse women they will be reported. (Joyce)

> Sometimes you go for help and some people do not understand what you are going through. It's just like pen and paper of what is written down in the thing that they must follow. If the Nigerian high commission can put up something for us women then it will be easier for women to seek help. It will feel like it is one of our own. (Bose)

This belief echoes arguments made in other Black and minoritised ethnic women specific policy-focused work. For example, the findings of Public Health Scotland (2023) on how mainstream/non-specialist services lack an understanding of the experiences and cultural

practices of BME women's communities, resulting in victim-survivors often withholding disclosure and not seeking support. For Marai Larasi (2013) this is particularly pertinent for African and Caribbean women in England as, in outlining the development of the specialist 'by and for' sector in England for BME women, she highlights how these services developed with a focus on South Asian women as it was assumed women from Africa and the Carribean would accept 'British culture along with their servitude' (Rex and Tomlinson 1979, p 291, quoted in Larasi, 2013, p. 272). This has resulted in services mainly targeted on South Asian women and not the general population of Black/ BME women (Larasi, 2013), creating the gap identified by participants here in terms of specialist services for Nigerian women.

What is clear from participants is that there is a desire for services not just for Black and racially minoritised women generally, but specifically for Nigerian women. The presence of cultural understanding is thus important in enabling victim-survivors to speak, as there is a need to understand women's experiences of abuse within their cultural context in order to provide them with the support that they need to be able to overcome it.

4. Conclusion

This chapter has explored the external barriers that acted to limit participants' space for action in escaping an abusive partner. Though women didn't discuss external barriers as much as internal barriers, financial independence and accommodation were often identified as some of the external constraints' women with the experiences of IPVA had in terms of ending an abusive relationship and rebuilding their lives. Both of these aspects can be particularly pertinent for migrant women who are dependent on their partners for economic and housing security. Although victim-survivors in this research had access to a sustainable job in England, many still struggled with their finances and their partners used this to perpetuate abuse towards them during and after the relationship ended, drawing on the external barriers to make it harder for the women to escape.

This chapter also explored how other external barriers existed beyond the more practical needs of economic and housing security. For participants, the response of family members could act as a strong barrier, pushing women back into a relationship they were trying to escape. However just as in the discussion about the interplay between barriers and coping

in Chapter Five, for some women, family was a resource, supporting their way out. The second external barrier existed because of a fear of racism. The study found participants spoke about a need to protect 'ourselves from outsiders', something which has not been previously brought out in other studies with Nigerian victim-survivors as a barrier to disclosure and help-seeking, but that is part of the broader literature on Black and minoritised survivors (see Kanyeredzi, 2018). Women spoke about feeling obliged to protect their relationship, children and culture from judgement which in turn meant that they could not speak to anyone outside of their culture. Given the findings outlined in Chapter Five about internal cultural barriers, this created a catch-22 for participants where they felt silenced by internal cultural norms yet also silenced by the fear of judgement that would come from speaking to someone outside of the Nigerian community.

Despite all the obstacles to escaping and the difficulties that lay ahead for many post- separation the participants were optimistic about the future. Many participated in this study to help other women in their positions and talked to me about what they felt was needed to further support Nigerian victim-survivors. Here they wanted interventions that understood and could respond appropriately to dominant cultural norms. Highlighting again the importance of understanding culture in attempts to increase the space for action of Nigerian women experiencing abuse in England.

Chapter 7: 'The culture is not going to speak for you' – Conclusion and reflections

> Any woman who is going through violence should not consider the culture or what people will say. Because when you are dead, the culture is not going to speak for you (Kate)

1. Introduction

This thesis has aimed to understand more about the role of culture in the experiences of barriers and enablers to help-seeking and coping adopted by Nigerian women in England who are victim-survivors of intimate partner violence and abuse. It has sought to make an original contribution to the existing body of knowledge on the role of culture in experiences of violence against women for Black and minoritised women in England, as well as document the experiences of Nigerian women living in England with intimate partner violence and abuse. It has achieved this by conducting ten semi-structured in-depth interviews with Nigerian women who identified as victim-survivors of intimate partner violence and abuse in a previous relationship.

This chapter concludes the thesis by summarising its findings. The first section details what has been expressed across the thesis. It looks through each chapter to highlight the important points and brings these together to make the thesis' overall argument. This is followed by my own reflections, looking back on what I learnt about myself and my resilience during the research, before concluding the thesis as a whole. Returning to my Black feminist standpoint as outlined in Chapter Three, this final note on reflexivity forms part of my research practice, helping to place me alongside my participants and level out some of the power dynamics that exist within qualitative research.

2. Chapter summaries

This research was undertaken with the hope of addressing the gaps in knowledge that exist about the IPVA experiences of Nigerian women living in England. It sought to explore the role of culture in experiences of violence against women for Black and minority women in England as well as document the experiences of Nigerian women living in England with IPVA and understand more about the role of culture in the barriers and enablers to help- seeking and coping for participants. In doing this it has helped to make an original contribution to knowledge by using three core concepts in violence against women and girls research, namely the continuum of sexual violence, space for action, conducive context all developed by Liz Kelly, as a lens to explore the accounts of Nigerian victim- survivors.

Chapter One provided the introduction and background to the study. It set out to provide a foundation to the study for a reader who is unfamiliar with Nigerian culture and norms, firstly by giving the broad geographic and demographic background and make up of Nigeria, and secondly by exploring what this means for Nigerian culture and customs, with a specific focus on patriarchy, gender norms, and the role of women. It also gave a detailed explanation of the use of victim-survivor throughout the thesis rather than the more commonly used terms of 'victim' or 'survivor'. Chapter Two gave a thorough review of the existing literature to help locate the present study. It started by defining culture, given its importance in this thesis, through the foundational work of Hofstede and his theory of cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede, 2011). It then focused in on three core concepts in research on violence against women and girls, all of which are relevant to this thesis; these are the continuum of sexual violence, the concept of space for action and the formulation of the conducive context, something that was further developed in this thesis in relation to culture. Previous literature has not applied these concepts to the experiences of Nigerian women and their application here forms part of the thesis' original contribution to knowledge. The chapter then reviewed the evidence base on violence against Black and minoritised ethnic women, highlighting that despite the evidence base on violence against women growing significantly over the past three decades, there is still limited literature on IPVA against Nigerian women in England. At the time of this research, only two studies have been conducted on Nigerian women living in England regarding their experiences of IPVA (Femi-Ajao, 2018; Ajayi, Chantler and Radford, 2022). It was towards contributing to this limited body of evidence that this thesis was conducted.

Chapter Three addressed the methods adopted in the study and outlined my methodology. It explained the theoretical base for this research, which was centred on feminist standpoint epistemology and Black feminist epistemology. Feminist standpoint theory believes that knowledge is produced from the perspective of individuals with less power, thinking that seeing the world from the position of the oppressed, subjugated, or marginalised can give more information on how power works (Harding, 1992). Understanding how knowledge is produced, what we can know, how we can know it, and who we think the knower needs to be are issues of concern in feminist research. As Patricia Hill Collins (1990) states ‘when making knowledge claims about women, we must always remember that it is women's “concrete experience” that provides the ultimate “criterion for credibility” of these knowledge claims’ (p. 209). This provided the methodological and epistemological foundation for the study. My position as a Nigerian woman living in England means that I have experience being a Black woman in a society where my interests and worldviews are not represented by mainstream society. However, this is one of many positions I hold. I am also a victim-survivor of intimate partner violence and abuse. The combination of this and my position as a Black woman places me in this research in a position described by Collins (1993) as an 'insider-outsider.' Being Nigerian, participants could share their experiences knowing that I understood the culture of Nigeria. I was an insider who came to the research with a knowledge of Nigerian culture and a love for my country. This came across in many of the participant quotes used in this thesis where participants sometimes referred to ‘our' culture in the knowledge that this was shared between researcher and researched. However, I was also an outsider in relation to the precise experiences of my participants. I hope I have done justice in this study to the experience of being both as to recognise and minimise the various oppressions Nigerian women in England undergo.

The chapter went on to explore the ways in which my methods were designed to enable Nigerian women to talk to me about something that culturally, we are not allowed to talk about. This meant I adopted in-depth interviews and conducted the interview in person to help develop connection and rapport. However, before collecting any data, I encountered significant hurdles in recruiting victim-survivors. There was the difficulty of talking about IPVA within the Nigerian community, which I expected coupled with events outside my control, namely the Covid-19 pandemic and mass protests in Nigeria in October 2020.
Ultimately ten victim-survivors were recruited for in-depth interviews.

Chapter Four was the first analysis chapter which focused on detailing the stories and experiences of participants with IPVA, as well as outlining their understandings of IPVA. It started by giving an overview of the story of each participant as well as their experiential definitions and understandings of IPVA. All the participants experienced some form of abuse, categorised into physical, emotional, coercive control, sexual and financial abuse, and many also experienced post-separation abuse. The chapter detailed the ways in which not only these experiences but also their impacts existed on a continuum (Kelly, 1988); overlapping and shading in and out of each other. Importantly, most of the participants did not make sense of their experiences as abusive at the time the abuse was happening. This was discussed in detail in Chapter Five in terms of the internal barriers that cultural norms created in terms of naming IPVA. Like Western society, Nigerian society is organised based on patriarchy (see Walby, 1989 and 1990 for an analysis of Western patriarchy) and there is a strong sense of men as being rightfully and legitimately in control of women's lives in their family. In effect, men are seen as the head of the family and whatever they say must be obeyed (Onoh et al., 2013). This meant that, in some ways, coercive control by men were built into what is expected in a heterosexual relationship and that challenging the authority of a partner was often seen as rebellion against cultural authority. It thus was not just about the individual but about challenging social structures, something that is particularly hard for migrant communities who may need to hold onto cultural norms to secure their place of belonging in a new country.

Chapter Five also built on previous work to capture the impact of culture as limiting the space for participants' actions. It did this by focusing on three specific norms about heterosexual relationships. The concept of 'conducive cultures' was developed here to indicate how cultural norms can create further barriers for victim-survivors seeking to escape abuse. Where, according to Kelly (2007), conducive contexts are the situations or conditions that allow and encourage violence against women and girls to thrive – here I have talked about how cultural norms and practices can unfold spaces where women and girls who have experienced violence are blocked from being able to acknowledge, disclose, and escape it. In relation to Nigeria, here the key themes of this study emerged as being cultural norms about ‘men's role as the head of the family’ and their authority in a heterosexual relationship influencing the need for women to do whatever they want. This is combined with the cultural norm attached to the ‘importance of keeping the relationship’, and another which holds the importance of ‘enduring’ hardship. The discussion of the interplay between culture and coping in Chapter Five also demonstrated how some cultural norms – such as the strong Black woman

stereotype and the dominance of religion and faith in Nigeria – can create what Joanne Wilson calls ‘space to speak’ (Wilson, 2016) at the same time as creating barriers to disclosure.

Chapter Six expands on Chapter Five by exploring the external cultural and other barriers that impacted victim-survivors ability to speak and escape abusive relationships, as well as participants’ suggestions for how to overcome these. Participants spoke about external barriers that existed because they were Nigerian women living in England. In many ways, much of previous research on Black and minoritised women’s experiences of violence in England has focused on these external cultural barriers. Financial independence and accommodation were identified as some of the external constraints that women with the experiences of IPVA had in ending an abusive relationship and rebuilding their lives.

Although victim-survivors in this study had access to a sustainable job in England, they still struggled with finance. Their partners used it to perpetuate abuse towards them during and after the relationship ended. However, it was not just about practical or material barriers, there were also barriers created by immigration for migrant women, as discussed by the NGO participants, and the impact of family response which has been found in previous research.

This study also found that protection – of one’s culture, one’s family, and oneself – aids in creating an external barrier to disclosure and escape for Nigerian victim-survivors in England. Despite victim-survivors' financial independence and following their recognition that what was happening was abusive, they had barriers to disclosing what had happened to them to people outside of the Nigerian community. These barriers were created by a fear of racism and judgement between Nigerian culture and judgement from outsiders.

Taken together, the chapters of this thesis make a powerful case for how culture intersects with IPVA to create barriers (both internal and external) as well as pathways for help- seeking and coping for Nigerian women living in England. This means that responding to and supporting Nigerian women living in England who have experience of IPVA is not as simple as extending the service already available to White British people, nor providing an overarching service for all Black and minoritised ethnic women as though there is a shared culture and experience across all people included in the category of BME. Instead, what is needed is a response that is also intersectional and understands the nature of compounding forms of oppression. Chapter Six ended in participant’s reflections on what this kind of response would be, and this chapter now turns to consider what comes next.

3. Future directions

As detailed in the summaries above, this study has contributed to existing knowledge by filling the gap about how culture acts as barrier and limits women's space for action when looking specifically at the experiences of Nigerian women in England who have lived through intimate partner violence and abuse. However, for the women who participated as well as for me, this research was not just about contributing to knowledge but about contributing to the prevention of IPVA through revealing and hopefully challenging the barriers that exist for Nigerian victim-survivors. Reflecting on my findings I believe there are four key steps needed to overcome the challenges identified by this research. These are
(1) Supporting Nigerian women to understand their rights and where to go for help; (2) ensuring support organisations reach out to and make themselves accessible for Nigerian victim-survivors (3) creating space for more testimonies from Nigerian women about IPVA to break the silence and show other women they can speak out and (4) Support organisations should make themselves more accessible and involved in research as this is an avenue to get feedback on the effectiveness of their role in dealing with intimate partner violence and abuse. My hope is that this research has gone some way towards the latter.

Though this study has contributed to the small but growing body of literature on Nigerian victim-survivors in England, much more research is still needed. Drawing from the accounts of participants here shows some promising directions for future research. For example, there could be a comparative study on the ways in which culture informs, expands, and/or narrows the strategies Nigerian women in Nigeria and Nigerian women in the diaspora employ to deal with IPVA. This could help build the knowledge base on how Nigerian culture can expand the space for action for Nigerian victim-survivors, as well as develop more understanding on the unique issues facing migrant victim-survivors. Given some of the challenges in recruitment during this study, there is also value for future research in exploring what works to encourage women from Nigerian communities and support organisations to be involved in studies about their experiences of IPVA. The silencing of IPVA that has been uncovered in this research suggests the need for strategies to enable victim-survivors and their supporters to speak, and it would be useful for future research for these to be the focus of an in-depth study itself. There could also be an interesting avenue in exploring women’s experiences after violence, particularly in terms

of starting a new relationship. This is needed as most of my participants were hesitant to end an abusive relationship due to the fear of being unable to get into a successful intimate relationship with a suitable partner and given the importance of this culturally in Nigeria.
Research could explore this in a more detailed way, exploring how Nigerian women who have exited abusive relationships deal with issues in their new relationships. The outcome of this research could help to ease the fears of starting all over intimate relationships, as many participants feared they might encounter more abuse and possibly more dangerous partners, in any future relationship.

4. A final reflection

This study has contributed to existing knowledge by filling the gap about how culture acts as barrier and limits women's space for action, looking specifically at the experiences of Nigerian women in England who have lived through intimate partner violence and
abuse. However, as a piece of feminist research it has done more than that. It did not seek only to understand participant experiences from a distance. It wanted to level the power inequalities that can exist in research and part of this was about allowing myself to be influenced by the research process and its findings.

I have been changed during the process of this study. Conducting this research and writing this thesis has not just been an academic exercise; it has been a personal journey. At times during the interviews, I was tearful and moved, reflecting not only on participants' experiences but also my own. Each stage of this research had its emotional tone in me as I could relate to almost all the aspects based on my experience of IPVA. The culture of silence evidenced in this research is reflected in how I was raised in Nigeria. As a young bride going into marriage, I was advised and cautioned by both my parents and close relatives that I respected so much, to keep whatever happened between myself and my partner away from a third party. During my pre-wedding counselling, this was also bolstered in the church, that I should not discuss matrimonial issues outside, not even with my parents. While in the relationship, I tried my best to hold the doctrine of silencing my matrimonial issues until things got out of hand. I was blamed for keeping silent when it became apparent that the marriage had broken down beyond repairs. Despite the messy relationship state, most of my family members insisted that the marriage should continue. This tells how marriage is valued at the expense of the lives of the individuals, including

children involved. With the effort of my dad, who had been my rock, I was able to disengage with the relationship and on the path of this research, which has been one of the ways I was able to escape the emotional and psychological torture of continuing with an abusive relationship. As such, this research has been a healing process, as my experience was not peculiar. Rather, like IPVA itself, the issues I experienced are better understood as systemic, not individual. I have freed myself from the guilt of having a failed marriage and my hope is that this research can do the same for others. As Kate said, 'the culture is not going to speak for you.' This research is an example of Nigerian victim-survivors speaking for ourselves.

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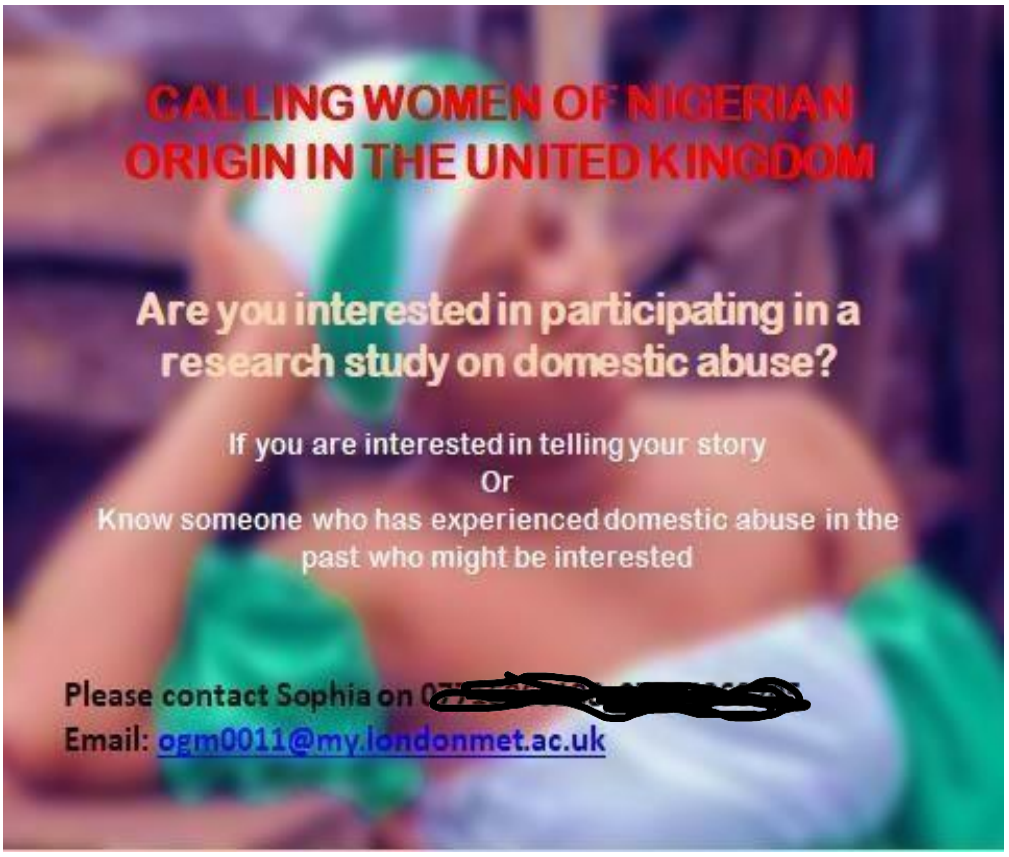
Appendices

1. Recruitment information



2. Ethical Approval Form (Victims-survivors)

LONDON MET RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW FORM

For Research Students and Staff

Postgraduate research students (MPhil, PhD and Professional Doctorate): This form should be completed by all research students in full consultation with their supervisor. All research students must complete a research ethics review form before commencing the research or collecting any data and no later than six months after enrolment.

Staff: This form should be completed by the member of staff responsible for the research project (i.e. Principal Investigator and/or grant-holder) in full consultation with any co- investigators, research students and research staff before commencing the research or collecting any data.

Definition of Research

Research is to be understood as original investigation undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding. It includes work of direct relevance to the needs of commerce, industry, and to the public and voluntary sectors; scholarship*; the invention and generation of ideas, images, performances, artefacts including design, where these lead to new or substantially improved insights; and the use of existing knowledge in experimental development to produce new or substantially improved materials, devices, products and processes, including design and construction. It excludes routine testing and routine analysis of materials, components and processes such as for the maintenance of national standards, as distinct from the development of new analytical techniques. It also excludes the development of teaching materials that do not embody original research."

Scholarship is defined as the creation, development and maintenance of the intellectual infrastructure of subjects and disciplines, in forms such as dictionaries, scholarly editions, catalogues and contributions to major research databases."

London Met's *Research Ethics Policy and Procedures* and *Code of Good Research Practice*, along with links to research ethics online courses and guidance materials, can be found on the Research & Postgraduate Office Research Ethics webpage:

http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/research/current-students/research-ethics/

London Met's Research Framework can be found here:

http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/research/current-students/research-framework/

Researcher development sessions can be found here:

http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/research/current-students/researcher-development-programme/

This form requires the completion of the following three sections:

SECTION A: APPLICANT DETAILS

SECTION B: THE PROJECT - ETHICAL ISSUES SECTION C:

THE PROJECT - RISKS AND BENEFITS SECTION A:

APPLICANT DETAILS

A1	Background information
	Research project title: The experiences and coping strategies of victim-survivors of intimate partner violence and abuse: an account of Nigerian women living in England.
	Date of submission for ethics approval: 14th April 2020
	Proposed start date for project: May 2020
	Proposed end date for project: September 2022
	Ethics ID # (to be completed by RERP chair):

A2	Applicant details, if for a research student project
	Name: Oghenerukevwe Sophia Mene
	London Met Email address: ogm0011@my.londonmet.ac.uk

A3	Principal Researcher/Lead Supervisor Member of staff at London Metropolitan University who is responsible for the proposed research project either as Principal Investigator/grant-holder or, in the case of postgraduate research student projects, as Lead Supervisor
	Name: Dr Sukhwant Dhaliwal (Supervisor)
	Job title: Course Leader of MA Woman and Child Abuse programme, Senior Lecturer
	London Met Email address: s.dhaliwal1@londonmet.ac.uk
SECTION B: THE PROJECT - ETHICAL ISSUES	

B1	The Research Proposal

Please attach a brief summary **(max. 1,000 words)** of the research project including:

- Background/rationale and conceptual framework of study
- Research questions/aims/objectives
- Research methodology
- Key references

If you plan to recruit participants, be sure to include information how potential participants in the study will be identified, approached and recruited; how informed consent will be obtained; and what measures will be put in place to ensure confidentiality of personal data.

BACKGROUND/RATIONALE

Intimate partner violence and abuse (IPVA) is a global public health and human rights problem which has reached an epidemic rate that requires immediate action (Djamba and Kimuna, 2008; Goo and Harlow, 2012; Laisser et al., 2011; WHO, 2013a). Globally, violence against women (VAW) has been an on-going critical problem that impacts on all human societies; most specifically violence committed by intimate male partners against women. Several studies have researched on the effect and impact of IPVA on women and it has been recorded to be a major cause of morbidity and mortality among women across the globe (Hatcher et al., 2013; Krug et al., 2002).

IPVA is experienced by women from all backgrounds and it is widespread without respect for ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, class, age, level of education or socio-economic status (Kaur and Garg, 2008). Conventions and regulations have been endorsed globally to end violence against women (HM Government, 2014). The United Kingdom (UK) government has called for a

collaboration of multi-agency to work together to end violence against women, as victim-survivors of IPVA have variety of needs that have to be met by different agencies (HM Government, 2014).

Despite the growing body of literature on IPVA against women in the UK, not much is known about the experiences of Nigerian women. According to Kalunta- Crumpton (2017), research is one of the key elements in making provision for women with lived experiences of IPVA. This research seeks to make an original contribution to the otherwise extensive literature on IPVA in the UK by providing an account of Nigerian women's experiences.

Intimate partner violence and abuse: IPVA is a gendered crime which is deeply rooted in the societal inequality between women and men. It takes place because she is a woman and happens disproportionately to women (United Nations, 1993).
IPVA can be described as 'the power misused by one adult in a relationship to control another. It is the establishment of control and fear in a relationship through violence and other forms of abuse' (Kaur and Garg, 2008, p.73).

Factors that influence IPVA: IPVA is a multi-faceted occurrence that is displayed within a social context that is prompted by gender, norms and intimate relationships (Testa et al., 2011). These factors include patriarchy, male dominance age, educational level, and men's quest to be in control in an intimate relationship (Kelly, 1987; Onoh et al., 2013; Balogun and John-Akinola, 2015).

Coping strategies: Coping strategies refer to behaviours and cognitions employed by an individual to decrease the impact of a stressful situation (Zanville and Cattaneo, 2012). According to Foster et al. (2015), the forms of coping strategies used by women with the experience of IPVA are not completely understood, as it relies greatly on the relationship context, circumstances and available resources.

Prevalence of intimate partner violence and abuse: The existence of IPVA is present in every country and it was identified as a priority for health by the World Health Organisation in 2000 (Laisser et al., 201). The prevalence of IPVA varies from one country to the other (Usta et al., 2012). The Department of

Health noted that on average, two women are killed every week in the UK by a current or previous male partner (ONS, 2018a).

There is no specific data addressing the prevalence of IPVA among Nigerian women in the UK. This is as a result of the grouping of Nigerian women under the umbrella term Black and minority ethnic (BME) communities in the UK. The term BME mainly refers to women of African, African-Caribbean and Asian communities. This does not mean that black women's lives, experiences and needs are uniform rather it recognises that there are some experiences, such as racism, that they all have in common.

Effect/impact of IPVA: IPVA is an act that violates the fundamental human rights of women (Howard et al., 2013). It affects the health and socio-economic status of women significantly. IPVA impacts include living in fear, poor self- esteem, physical injuries, psychological/emotional effect, health problems and sometimes death (WHO, 2013a). Evidence from research suggests that women who experience IPVA are more likely to exhibit distress such as anxiety, depression, feeling of guilt and isolation from the public (CDCP, 2013).

IPVA interferes with the cordial relationship that exists among family members and it impairs normal social interaction (Adib-Hajbaghery, et al., 2015). It also has an impact on the health and well-being of children and young people who witness violence against their mothers and other women (Kelly, 1996; Mullender et al., 2002; Coy et al., 2012; Chibber, et al., 2016).The costs to society of responding to IPVA and the overall economic impact are substantial and quantifiable (Greenan, 2004).

Barriers to non-disclosure and help seeking: According to Romito (2000), almost all the women experiencing IPVA talk about it to friends, parents and formal government organisations such as the doctor or GP and police department officer, but they are hardly listened to, believed and helped. They may even be threatened and insulted by those they sought help from, which therefore discourages them from disclosing their experiences on violence and abuse (Romito, 2000).

Research has revealed that support services may be unhelpful, non-supportive

and insensitive to issues such as the protection of victim-survivors' privacy, confidentiality and trust (Dunlop et al., 2005; Krugman et al., 2004). These concerns could act as impediments for women with the experience of IPVA most especially women from minority ethnic communities to make a disclosure of violence perpetrated against them (Ismail, et al, 2011; Onyemelukwe, 2016).

Moreover, the fear of social services taking their children, feeling of embarrassment and shame from friends, family and the community can act as barriers to disclosures (Izzidien, 2008).

The form of socialisation women receive from their country of birth, their immigration status and integration in the country they migrated to can also obstruct disclosure (Femi-Ajao, 2018). Women from BME communities are racially targeted by law enforcement agencies without considering their safety and security from the experience of violence (Imkaan, 2018). Nigerian women subject to immigration laws see reporting to the police, statutory agencies and domestic violence support services as a last resort. This is due to the fear of deportation and to protect their abusive partner from being arrested or detained by the authorities.
Nigerian women with lived experience of IPVA are more likely to access support from religious leaders, leaders and members of their ethnic community groups (Femi-Ajao, 2018).

The existing policy of sharing data by the police when victims approach them causes a restraint on most women who need support and also exposes women to risk of deportation and detention (Imkaan, 2018). The current funding inequalities among local authorities towards BME women's group also act as constraint for women to access and receive effective support by support services (Southall Black Sisters, 2018).

Coping strategies Nigerian women adopt in dealing with IPVA: The types of coping strategies utilized by women varies and are subject to whether they are still living with their abusive partner (Waldrop and Resick, 2004). These tactics include the use of multiple coping strategies such as relying on spiritual beliefs and divine retribution (Ting, 2010). According to Ting (2010), women from Africa tolerate or endure abuse as it is believed that abuse is to be expected in a male and female intimate relationship (Ting, 2010). Another strategy used is by

avoiding thoughts and behaviours that have the tendency of generating violence in the relationship (Ting, 2010).

Despite the growing body of literature on IPVA in the UK, there is currently a lack of specific data on the experiences of Nigerian women and the specific coping strategies that they adopt. Therefore my intention is to undertake research and collate data that can give a clearer understanding on the experiences and coping strategies of Nigerian women living in England in order to provide them with adequate support to cope with IPVA.

RESEARCH AIM

The aim of this research is to document the experiences and coping strategies of Nigerian women who are victim-survivors of intimate partner violence and abuse.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To make an original contribution to the existing body of literature on intimate partner violence and abuse against women.
- To document the experiences of Nigerian women living in the UK on IPVA, both those born in the UK and those subject to immigration rules.
- To explore the extent to which systems of support enable Nigerian women to cope with and exit intimate partner violence and abuse in the UK.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions are:

- What are the coping strategies Nigerian women adopt in dealing with IPVA?
- What are the sources of support for Nigerian women experiencing IPVA?
- Are Nigerian women able to access general or specialist support services for women fleeing violence and abuse?
- How has this support enabled women to cope with / exit intimate partner violence and abuse?
- What barriers do Nigerian women experience in trying to access support?
- What other forms of coping strategiess have they adopted?

- What are the barriers Nigerian women encounter in rebuilding their lives during and after intimate partner violence and abuse?
- How does race, ethnicity and immigration status enable or hamper the support women receive in dealing with their experience of intimate partner violence and abuse?
- How can policy and services be improved to support Nigerian women who are victim-survivors of intimate partner violence and abuse?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To capture the experiences and coping strategies Nigerian women living in England who are victim-survivors of IPVA, I will take a qualitative approach and conduct in- depth, semi-structured interviews to collate the data.

Recruitment of Participants

The interviews will involve; women of Nigerian origin, over 18 years of age, that are living in any part of England. Also they must have experienced or be experiencing IPVA; physical, emotional, psychological, economical or sexual abuse from a current or previous partner/boyfriend/husband. Due to the sensitive nature of this study and logistics of recruiting participants, the sample size is aimed at twenty participants. Recruitment will not be limited to geographical location; therefore, purposive sampling will be applied.

I intend to use a wide range of recruitment strategies including:

A. From support services provided for BME women such as Southall Black Sisters, London Black Women's Project, and Black Women's Health and Family Support.
B. Posters outlining details of the study with the researcher's contact details will be discreetly placed in female toilets and areas that have good concentration of BME especially Nigerian women.
C. Through churches and mosques where there may be good mix of people from different social-economic and educational backgrounds.
D. Female IN (FIN) group on Facebook.
E. Through visits to the various Nigeria social-cultural groups such as Yoruba cultural group, Igbo Kwenu, Igbo Ladies club, Urhobo Progress Union (UPU) and Efik cultural union.

The face to face interviews will be recorded with the use of a digital audio

recorder. The recordings will be manually transcribed and analysed using thematic data analysis method. The thematic data analysis will engage the use of Nvivo data analysis software.

Ethical consideration

In collecting data for this research project, participants will be given an Information Sheet (see attachment). This will lay out in detail the aim of the research and what the qualitative interview entails. Participants will also be given a Consent Form (see attachment) to sign and read to participant through the telephone to give a verbal consent. Participants will be given the option to discontinue the interview at any time if they don't feel comfortable, and also informed that they are free not to respond to any of the research questions (see interview guide attachment) that they don't feel comfortable answering.
Exceptional caution will be applied to ensure participant anonymity, privacy and confidentiality is in place (Reinharz and Davidman, 1992).

Data from the interview will be securely stored on password protected University computers, where only I will have knowledge of the password. Any paper-based data will be stored in locked filing cabinets in a locked office. Also, I will securely dispose of electronic and paper based data that contains confidential information about participants within three years of completing the research.
Participants will be given the option to see the transcript of their interview (within one month after the interview), through their personal secured email and if it is safe to do so. I will request that they return any comments on the transcript (correction or addition) within two weeks of receiving it. This will enable them to read and make any necessary adjustments to their responses. As a result of the sensitive nature of the study topic, contact details of support services (see attachment) will be made available during and after the interview for any of the participants who feel disturbed with the issues discussed.

Informed consent

Consent will be sought at the beginning of the research and be revisited at each point of contact with participants (initial contact, invitation to interview, at the start and end of interview, in any follow-up contacts). Participants will also be

asked if they consent to their responses being used in the research and to ensure that they are happy with the way that their information is being used.

At each stage, the discussion around consent will include:

- the purpose of the research and what participation will entail – that the interview will be exploring their experiences on IPVA and the coping strategies they are using to survive.
- any potential risks to participation (such as distress).
- who will have access to their data and how their data will be stored.
- the limitations of confidentiality and safeguarding obligations.
- the right to withdraw from the research, the options and process for doing so and the point at which withdrawal will not be possible (for example, after data has been published).

This information will also be provided to the participants in writing. At each stage of the research, it will be emphasised that withdrawal will not result in any negative consequences for them.

Data management/ confidentiality of data

Several steps will be taken to ensure participants' right to privacy and confidentiality of personal data is upheld at all times:

- Data will be managed during the research process in line with data protection and London Metropolitan University research guidelines.
- Participants will be offered the option of pseudonym (anonymous identification during the interview with names of their choice, numbers or letters).
- Data will be coded as soon as possible after collection using, unique reference numbers to protect participant confidentiality.
- Electronic data will be stored on password protected University computers, where only I will have knowledge of the password. Any paper-based data (interview notes/transcriptions) will be stored in locked filing cabinets in a locked office.
- Participants will be referred to only by their pseudonym in published materials to preserve anonymity.
- Notes will be kept on all communications where participants have been informed of their rights and their ability to withdraw from the research project.

The above steps will be fully explained to participants at the point at which

informed consent is discussed, to assure them that they will not be identifiable from their responses and as a reminder of their right to withdraw from the research.

ALTERNATIVE PLAN DUE TO CORONAVIRUS/COVID-19 GLOBAL PANDEMIC

As a result of the unprecedented global pandemic caused by the corona virus, the policies of national lockdown, suspension of all non-essential services, social distancing and social isolation have been introduced to mitigate against the spread. I have introduced a few alternative plans so that the research process can commence.

Recruitment: I have a backup plan to recruit participants online via Facebook, whatsApp groups and support services.

Interview: I am considering a telephone interview in the interim until the pandemic situation improves in the country as the face to face interview will not be feasible under the prevailing circumstances. The interview will be recorded with a digital audio recorder.

Risk assessment for telephone interview: Before conducting the telephone interview, it is important that I do a risk assessment with participants through an initial call. This will involve:

- Checking if it is safe to conduct the interview through the phone.
- Check for a suitable day and time to call the participant for the interview.
- Ensure that the participant is no longer in the abusive relationship. She should have exited the relationship at least six months ago.
- Devise a code with the participant if she is no longer comfortable with the interview; this could be because someone walked in while the interview was on. For instance, she could divert the conversation by talking about food recipe, the impact of coronavirus holiday plans, television show etc.

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B2 Research Ethics

Please outline any ethical issues that might arise from this study and how they are to be addressed.

NB All research projects have ethical considerations. Please complete this section as fully as possible using the following pointers for guidance. Please include any additional information that you think would be helpful.

- Does the project involve potentially deceiving participants? ***No***
- Will you be requiring the disclosure of confidential or private information? ***Yes***
- Is the project likely to lead to the disclosure of illegal activity or incriminating information about participants? ***Possibly***
- Does the project require a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check for the researcher? ***Yes***
- Is the project likely to expose participants to distress of any nature? **Likely**
- Will participants be rewarded for their involvement? ***Possibly***
- Are there any potential conflicts of interest in this project? ***No***
- Are there any other potential concerns? ***No***

If you answered yes to any of the points above, please explain.

Disclosure of confidential or private information: I will ask victim-survivors of intimate partner violence and abuse about the support they have received from individuals and support agencies. This may result in them disclosing personal or sensitive information. Informed consent provided in writing will be discussed at each point of contact. In the event of any language or literacy issues, the information will be explained verbally. Participants' right to privacy and confidentiality will be respected by offering anonymity and any identifiable information will be removed from the developed research instruments and published materials. Data will be anonymously coded as soon as possible after

collection, electronic and paper data will be stored in a secure manner.

Possible disclosure of illegal activity or incriminating information about participants

In the event that participants' discloses incriminating information such as their involvement in prostitution or illegal immigration status, I would not make mandatory report. Participants will be assured of their safely and I do not intend to cause more harm during the research process. Exception will be made in situations where participants or others are in extreme danger and this will be agreed before commencing the interview.

DBS clearance

As the research will potentially involve vulnerable adults and discussion of sensitive topics, a DBS check would be appropriate. The researcher has an online updated enhanced DBS certificate (see as attached).

B2 Participants likely exposure to distress

The discussion with participants may cause distress and raise traumatic experience they had undergone. However, it is anticipated that it may also be a positive experience – the interview will be constructed to allow for exploration of IPVA and the ways women can be supported. Throughout the interview, I will monitor the wellbeing of participants, ask them if they would like to take a break and remind them that they can withdraw at any time. Information on specialist support agencies will be provided. Some of the participants will be recruited through specialist services and will be referred back to them for support. Participants will also be offered the opportunity to reflect on their involvement with the research and give feedback to me at the end of the interview.

Participants will possibly be rewarded for their involvement?

I have set aside £400 to provide participants with light refreshment like water and

also to reimburse participants transportation costs upon tendering of receipt as the need arises. This is a way of encouraging them to participate as they may be going through some financial difficulties.

B3

Does the proposed research project involve:

- The analysis of existing data, artefacts or performances that are not already in the public domain (i.e. that are published, freely available or available by subscription)? ***No***
- The production and/or analysis of physical data (including computer code, physical entities and/or chemical materials) that might involve potential risks to humans, the researcher(s) or the University? ***No***
- The direct or indirect collection of new data from humans or animals? ***Yes***
- Sharing of data with other organisations? ***No***
- Export of data outside the EU? ***No***

If you answered yes to any of the points above, please explain.

B3

Collection of new data: the research will involve the collection of information from victim-survivors of intimate partner violence and abuse through interviews. As mentioned above, participant anonymity and confidentiality will be protected throughout the research by the appropriate creation, coding and storage of the information collected and through the obtaining of informed consent.

B4 Will the proposed research be conducted in any country outside the UK? **N/A**

B4

If so, are there independent research ethics regulations and procedures that either:

- Do not recognise research ethics review approval from UK-based research ethics services?

and/or

- Require more detailed applications for research ethics review than would ordinarily be conducted by the University's Research Ethics Review Panels and/or other UK-based research ethics services?

If you answered yes to any of the points above, please explain.

B5

B5 Does the proposed research involve:

- The collection and/or analysis of body tissues or fluids from humans or animals? ***No***
- The administration of any drug, food substance, placebo or invasive procedure to humans or animals? ***No***
- Any participants lacking capacity (as defined by the UK Mental Capacity Act 2005)? ***No***
- Relationships with any external statutory-, voluntary-, or commercial-sector organisation(s) that require(s) research ethics approval to be obtained from an external research ethics committee or the UK National Research Ethics Service (this includes research involving staff, clients, premises, facilities and data from the UK National Health Service (NHS), Social Care organisations and some other statutory public bodies within the UK)? ***No***

If you answered yes to any of the points above, please contact your school's RERP chair for further guidance.

B6	B6 Does the proposed research involve: • Accessing / storing information (including information on the web) which promotes extremism or terrorism? ***No*** • Accessing / storing information which is security sensitive (e.g. for which a security clearance is required)? ***No*** If you answered yes to any of the points above, please explain. To comply with the law, researchers seeking to use information in these categories must have appropriate protocols in place for the secure access and storage of material. For further guidance, see the Universities UK publication **Oversight of Security Sensitive Research Material in UK Universities** (2012).

SECTION C: THE PROJECT - RISKS AND BENEFITS

C 1	Risk Assessment
	Please outline: • the risks posed by this project to both researcher and research participants • if applicable, the risk involved in research abroad • the ways in which you intend to mitigate these risks • the benefits of this project to the applicant, participants and any others

Risk to researcher and how to mitigate them

There is the potential risk of vicarious trauma or emotional overload from repeated discussion of intimate partner violence and abuse. This will be mitigated by spreading out the interviews so that I will have a good rest in between. Also, a regular contact with My PhD supervisors and the use of self-care and contact with fellow research students. There is the risk of participants assuming I am an adviser or a counsellor. This will be mitigated by me informing them at the beginning of the face to face or telephone interview of my role as a researcher and if they feel distressed or need advice /support they can get in contact with support services which I will provide them with. To ensure any risk to physical safety is mitigated, interviews will be conducted in safe locations such as a room at London Metropolitan University, a room in a library, a council office or a safe venue of participants choice.

Risk to participants and how to mitigate them

As previously mentioned, the main risk to participants is the potential for distress – this will be discussed with participants prior to their involvement and mitigated in the ways already mentioned above (by seeking informed consent, monitoring of wellbeing during the course of the interview, providing options for withdrawal and the provision of information on additional sources of support).

Benefits

Overall, it is hoped that the research will improve the experience of victim-survivors of intimate partner violence and abuse. This will be achieved by:

- Making an original contribution to the existing body of literature on ending intimate partner violence against women.
- Documenting intimate partner violence and abuse experiences of Nigerian women living in England, both those born in the UK and those subject to immigration rules.
- Understanding the coping strategies adopted by Nigerian women in their effort

	to deal with intimate partner violence and abuse. • Exploring the extent to which systems of support enable Nigerian women to cope with and exit intimate partner violence in the UK.

Please ensure that you have completed Sections A, B, and C and attached a Research Proposal before submitting to your School Research Ethics Review Panel (RERP)

Please sign this form and submit it as an email attachment to the Chair of your school's Research Ethics Review Panel (RERP) and cc all of the staff and students who will be involved in the proposed research.

http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/research/current-students/research-ethics/

Research ethics approval can be granted for a maximum of 4 years or for the duration of the proposed research, whichever is shorter, on the condition that:

- The researcher must inform their school's Research Ethics Review Panel (RERP) of any changes to the proposed research that may alter the answers given to the questions in this form or any related research ethics applications

- The researcher must apply for an extension to their ethics approval if the research project continues beyond 4 years.

Declaration

I confirm that I have read London Met's *Research Ethics Policy and Procedures* and *Code of Good Research Practice* and have consulted relevant guidance on ethics in research.

I confirm that I will carry out risk assessment before embarking on my research and if any risks are identified I will submit a report to Health and Safety.

I confirm that, before doing research abroad, I will carry out risk assessment incl. observing UK Government travel advice (**https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice**). I will discuss any concerns with my supervisor and will submit any documentation that may be required.

Researcher signature: Oghenerukevwe Sophia Mene Date: 14th April 2020……..……

3. Feedback from Ethics Review Panel

	Approved	Feedback where further work required
Section A	Yes	

Section B	Yes	An excellent level of detail concerning the appropriate ethic steps to take. Reference to DBS. Provision of the appropriate additional documentation
Section C	Yes	A proper detailed risk assessment to participants and the researcher is provided.
Date of approval		20 April 2020
NB: The Researcher should be notified of decision within two weeks of the submission of the application. A copy should be sent to **research@londonmet.ac.uk**.		
Signature of RERP chair		M B Wheeler

4. Information Sheets

INFORMATION SHEET

VICTIM-SURVIVORS OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AND ABUSE: AN ACCOUNT OF NIGERIAN WOMEN LIVING IN ENGLAND.

My name is Oghenerukevwe Sophia Mene and I am currently studying for my PhD at the School of Social Sciences, London Metropolitan University. I am based at the Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit (CWASU).

The purpose of the interview

This study aims to get a better understanding of how Nigerian women living in England cope with their experiences of intimate partner violence and abuse. The interview is aimed at giving voice to Nigerian women living in England who are victim-survivors of intimate partner violence and abuse, as their experiences are not sufficiently documented. The interviews will be an opportunity for you to talk about your experiences. This could help other women in similar situations and will be completely confidential.

This study has been ethically approved by the London Metropolitan University Research Ethics committee.

If there is any aspect of the study that you are unsure about or feel that you may like to discuss, do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisors with the contact details below.

This interview is primarily aimed at giving voice to Nigerian women living in England who are victim-survivors of intimate partner violence and abuse, as their experiences are not sufficiently documented.

What will the interviews ask about?

The interview will ask you about your experience(s) of intimate partner violence and abuse- how you made sense of this act(s), who you told, the role your culture played in how you coped with your experience, the support you got from statutory and other agencies and the effectiveness of their support. The interview will require you to give some details of the type of abuse, the coping strategies that you adopted and the help you sought.

You will get the opportunity to ask questions about the study before agreeing to take part.

How the information will be gathered

If you consent to take part in the study, all interviews will be recorded with a digital audio recorder. I will also take notes.

Your participation is greatly appreciated, entirely voluntary and confidential; there will not be any negative repercussions for you if you decide not to take part. Also, you are free to withdraw from this study up to two weeks after your interview and your data will not be used for the research. You will not need to give any reason for wanting to withdraw from the study.

What will happen to the information you share?

I will ask your permission to audio record and transcribe your interviews. All recordings will be transcribed so that there is an accurate and full record of what you said. Only my supervisors and I will have access to the recording and the transcript of the recording. The audio files will be stored on password protected University computers, where only I will have knowledge of the password. Any paper-based data (interview notes/transcriptions) will be stored in locked filing cabinets in a locked office in the University.

All identifiable information for example, names, age, will be removed to ensure your identity is not known to anyone reading the thesis and/or other publications from this research. If you prefer, you can choose your own pseudonym for the interview to anonymise your identity. I will use this name in all aspects of the research process, for example when I extract quotes from your transcript to highlight points in my analysis.

These extracts may be used in my PhD thesis, book chapters, journal articles and any reports or presentations about the study.

You will have the opportunity to read your response during the interview (within one month after the interview), after it has been transcribed through your personal email if you wish to receive them and if it is safe to do so. I would hope that you can give me any comments on your transcript (any; corrections or additions) within two weeks of receiving the transcript.

Only my supervisors and I will have access to the recording and transcript. The audio files will be stored on password protected University computers, where only I will have knowledge of the password. Any paper-based data (interview notes/transcriptions) will be stored in locked filing cabinets in a locked office in the University.

I will be happy to also give you a copy of the key findings from the study.

How long and where will the interview take place?

The interview will last 1 to 2 hours and will take place at a suitable day, time and location such as a room at London Metropolitan University, a room in a library, a council office or a venue of your choice. It could also be done remotely through telephone, Zoom, Whatsapp video or Skype.

What if I have any concerns, or get upset?

Your well-being is very important to me. If you are concerned about any aspect of the research process you should feel free to let me know, at any stage; before, during or after the interviews to discuss any concerns or issues that you might have.

To ensure that you are not harmed or overly upset by the interview or the research process, I will explain throughout, what you are being asked to comment upon.

I will need you to complete a consent form (in writing/verbally) before we continue. I will respect the pace you set for the interview. Interviews can and will be stopped if you need this, either to take a break or if a certain question causes you distress.

For any further questions about the interview and its use, please contact; My contact details:

Oghenerukevwe Sophia Mene

Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit (CWASU), London

Metropolitan University

166-220 Holloway Road, London N7 8DB

My PhD Supervisors:

Dr Sukhwant Dhaliwal and Professor Liz Kelly

Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit, London Metropolitan University, Tower Building 166-220 Holloway Road, London, N7 8DB,

Email: s.dhaliwal1@londonmet.ac.uk

Email: l.kelly@londonmet.ac.uk

5. Consent form

VICTIM-SURVIVORS OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AND ABUSE: AN ACCOUNT OF NIGERIAN WOMEN LIVING IN ENGLAND.

Name of Researcher: Oghenerukevwe Sophia Mene

Please tick box

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet for the above study. ☐
2. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, asked questions and had these answered satisfactorily. ☐
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any point during up to two weeks after the interview, without giving any reason and without any repercussions. ☐
4. I have agreed for this interview to be digitally audio recorded and transcribed with my personal details and names anonymised or omitted from the transcript. ☐
5. I understand that data from the interview will be securely stored on password protected University computers, where only the researcher will have knowledge of the password. Any paper-based data will be stored in locked filing cabinets in a locked office. Also electronic and paper-based data will be securely disposed of by the researcher within three year of completing this research. ☐
6. I understand that extracts from the interview may be used in the PhD thesis, book chapters, journal articles, any reports, or presentations about the study. However, my name, or any other identifying details will not be used and my identity will remain confidential. ☐
7. I agree to take part in this study. ☐

Name of Participant ……

Date ……

Signature ……..

6. Interview guide for victim-survivors

VICTIM-SURVIVORS OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AND ABUSE: AN ACCOUNT OF NIGERIAN WOMEN LIVING IN ENGLAND.

The aim of the research is to give voice to women of Nigerian heritage who have experienced intimate partner violence and abuse.

It is important to me as a researcher and to the study, that you feel comfortable and secure during the interview process. I want to emphasise at this stage that:

All information is confidential to me and my supervisor. Your personal details will not be used in any way, and you will not be identifiable in the write up. The only time that your personal details will be used will be to contact you and send you a copy of the transcript of this interview (if this can be done safely and if you would like to see it) and a summary report at the end of the research process if you would like to see this.

I will ask you about your experiences and how you made sense of the act(s), who you told, responses to your situations, your coping strategies, what role your culture played in how you coped with your experience(s). The interview will involve giving actual details of any violence or abuse, as the research aim is to explore the coping strategies adopted in dealing with intimate partner violence and abuse. There are no wrong or right answers; whatever you tell me is valid and important.

Please take note that I am not an adviser or a counsellor. But I do have some numbers and details of support services if you would like these.

I will keep checking how you are but if at any stage you need to take a break, you are free to do so without explanation to safeguard your wellbeing.

Is all of that okay with you? Do you have any questions about this before we begin?

Self-reference Test the recorder, ensure consent form is signed, check how much time she has for the interview and if there is any other issue.

Background information

What name would you like to be identified with apart from your real name (in this research) How do you identify?

- How would you describe your Nigerian ethnic background?
- Do you belong to any religion?
- Relationship/children?
- Age

Before we speak about your specific experience, I'm interested to know:

- Why you chose to take part in this study?
- Why do you think taking part in this study is important?
- What you understand by the term intimate partner violence and abuse?

Experiences of IPVA

Do you mind if we talk about your personal experience now? Are you able to tell me about the experience that brought you to this research?

Prompts to help

- How old were you when you met this particular man?
- How many children are/were there in the relationship?

- Are you still in a relationship with him?
- How long was the relationship?
- At what time did you realise that he was violent or abusive?

Let me stress again at this point that if you feel that it is all getting a little too much then we can stop and take a break until you feel more comfortable.

Would you like a break or are you okay to keep going?

- Do you remember how you felt while this was going on?
- How did you make sense of it when it first started to happen?
- Did your feelings and thoughts change over time?

The role of culture and race

- Do you believe that your culture played a role in how you made sense of your experiences?
- Do you believe that your colour, ethnicity or culture played any part in your decision to tell someone about your experiences?
- Do you believe that colour, ethnicity and culture affect how a person deals with and copes with the experiences of IPVA?

Prompt: For all, can you say more?

What sorts of effects did this abuse have on your life?

Prompts:

- How about the way you see and feel about yourself?
- How about your relationships with others? Your friends, workplace, family members?

- Your relationship with your children? Did this change over time?
- Career opportunities, education and life choices?

Personal reference: Check on well-being of interviewee.

Coping strategies

- What are the strategies you adopted in order to cope with your partner/ex-partner violent and abusive behaviour?

  Could you please elaborate

- Are there any personal characteristics that you think has helped you cope?
- Is there any habit you have developed over time for you to cope with IPVA?
- Do you believe your culture played a positive role in your ability to cope with violence and abuse from your partner? If so, how?

Helpseeking and helping others

- What factors or things might deter you/may have deterred you from seeking help?
- Which types of services do you believe could be most beneficial in helping Nigerian victim-survivors cope with, and make sense of their experiences of IPVA?
- How can policy and services be improved to support Nigerian women in coping or exiting IPVA?

We are now coming to the end of the interview;

- Is there anything that you wish to add or remark regarding this interview or violence and abuse against women in general?

Check on well-being; see if she needs anything? And if she is still happy for her interview to be part of my data

Thank You for taking part in this study. Your participation is greatly valued and appreciated.

Give support leaflet with services.

7. Support contact

National Domestic Violence
24 hour helpline: 0808 2000 247

Black Women's Health and Family Support
1st Floor, 82 Russia Lane, Bethnal Green, London E2 9LU Tell:
020 8980 3503
https://www.bwhafs.com
Opening days/times; Tuesday and Thursday: 10am-5pm (Monday, Wednesday, Friday- Closed until further notice)
Promoting the eradication of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

Inclusive Social Welfare & Empowerment Foundation Tel:
02030049355
Email: info@inclusiveswef.co.uk

London Black Women's Project
661 Barking Rd, Plaistow, London E13 9EX Tel: 020 8472
0528
Email: info@lbwp.online.
Opening days/times: Monday to Friday 9am- 5pm

Nia project
The Angel, London N1 3XP
Tel: 020 7683 1270Opening days/times: Mon- Fri 10am- 5pm

This is a London based organisation working with women and children who experience sexual violence

Rights of Women,
52-54 Featherstone Street,
London, EC1Y 8RT.
Tel: 020 7251 6575
Email: info@row.org.uk
Opening days/times: Tues – Thurs 7pm – 9pm, Friday 12pm-2pm. The line is closed on bank holidays

Solace Women's Aid
Unit 5-7 Blenheim Court, 62 Brewery Road, London N7 9NY Freephone helpline: 0808 802 5565
Email: advice@solacewomensaid.org
https://www.solacewomensaid.org/
Opening days/times: Monday - Friday 10am - 4pm. 6pm - 8pm on Tuesdays
Offers free advice and support to women and children in London to build safe and strong lives.

Southall Black Sisters (SBS)
21 Avenue Road, Southall, Middlesex, UB1 3BL Tel:
020 8571 0800,
Email: info@southallBlacksisters.co.uk
http://www.southallBlacksisters.org.uk
Opening days/times: Monday, Wednesday & Friday 9:30 am – 4:30 pm
A resource centre offering services to women experiencing violence and abuse.

Women and Girls Network

For practical advice and support for women with complex needs who have experienced any kind of gendered violence
Call advice Line: 0808 801 0660
Opening days/times: Monday-Friday 10.00-16.00 and late evening Wednesday: 18.00-21.00 Email: advice@wgn.org.uk

For Emotional support and a safe space to talk Call
Sexual Violence Helpline: 0808 801 0770
Opening days/times: Monday- Friday 10.00-12.30 & 14.30-16.00 and late evening Wednesday: 18.00-21.00
Website: http://www.wgn.org.uk

8. Section of a coded transcript

Transcript	Initial coding
I: Good evening sister, I appreciate your interest in participating in this research. I would like to know first why you chose to take part in this study?	
P: What I realised is a lot of we women especially we Africans, we are going through a lot with our marriage but find it difficult to speak out or ask for help because of the background that we have been brought up so even though we live in this country we still… it's like an ethnic something that is always difficult to say this is something I'm going through in my marriage and like I said it's always difficult because we feel ashamed that why do I have to go through this and tell people that this is what I'm going through.. so that's part of it as well. I mean if I had spoken up on time all what I went through, even though I spoke to some people they were just family.	Culture of silence Shame / Failure of not keeping the marriage Role of family and community
But look I mean a lot is going on especially during this Coronavirus that domestic violence was taking place a lot in places I mean in some homes and it's on national TV then you look back at your own background that if I had spoken up on time may be I could have get help or not go through what I go through because sometimes you look at it and you just feel like I mean this	Culture of silence

is not right . Why do we have to be abused its supposed to be a relationship that the two of you suppose to share and not been abused in it. So that's why I'm taking part in this project. **I: Thank you for that. I was wondering also what you understand by the term intimate partner violence and abuse?** P: What do I understand? I don't even know how to explain it but just like from my own experience is like not beating but violent words being spoken to me all the time and sometimes it affect me, I can't function. It's from my husband. In a nutshell this is an abuse from somebody you have close relationship with. You live in the same house, under the same roof and it's a constant thing. non-stop. **I: Do you mind if we talk about your personal experience now?** P: Yes, we can. It started with money issues that my husband thinks I have money more than him. I'm earning more money than him and it started like opening my bank statement to see what is in my account and blah blah blah until I told him to stop which he wasn't happy about that. You have your account I don't know what is in your account, don't look into my personal account and see what I have in there. Anyway he wasn't happy about it but at most of the time I end up paying all the bills in the house; paying for the rent. I mean the children's finance's I have to do everything regarding my children. He's not involved in their lives, parent,	Enduring abuse Forms of violence Forms of violence Men's dominance

schooling, nothing it's just like he's just father figure and some of his family that were close by which they get involved but it's like he had this I don't care attitude. But I stayed in the marriage because I looked at it my children are boys and it's so difficult in this country bringing boys alone and not only that because of my own background as well. My parents were separated when I was about five years old which I find it so difficult to deal with. So, because of that I made a promise to myself that my children will not go through what I went through because we were being brought up by my dad. So, I stayed in that relationship purposely because of my children because I said this is a different country and it's so difficult bringing boys alone on your own.	Enduring abuse
I: Mmm	Forms of violence
P: The emotional abuse part of it is as the boys are growing up its like my husband will be speaking violent words to me non-stop and sometimes I'm crying I will go and hide in the toilet crying because I don't want my children to see what is going on and it got to a stage that I can't even say it's a daily thing. I wake up in the morning he's there saying violent words… I mean I can't even say. If you are from my country if I say some of the word he's saying to me,, I mean if you are my tribe like Yoruba tribe because I don't know how to express that word in English because this are very strong word in Yoruba dialect that looking back now and I'm still looking at it that, why do I have to be listening to this every day?	Impacts of violence