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Domestic Violence in the UK Zimbabwean Diaspora

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Abstract

Political instability in Zimbabwe since the late 1990s resulted in a swelling of Zimbabwean political asylum seekers in the UK. Living in a developed liberal democracy may challenge traditional intimate relationship norms for both husbands and wives. A snowball sample of 30 interviews were conducted over a period of six months in 2019 with participants from Zimbabweans living on mainland UK. Our thematic analysis highlights how domestic violence predicates on cultural tensions in traditional patriarchal and liberal influences. Victims/survivors report difficulties disclosing the violence and discrimination by peers. Our findings have important implications for domestic violence interventions and those wanting to support victims.

Keywords: Zimbabwean diaspora, migration, culture, relationships, domestic violence.

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1: Introduction

Political violence and economic hardship in Zimbabwe in the late 1990s resulted in a mass exodus of Zimbabwean people seeking a better, safer, life in neighboring countries such as South Africa and Botswana (Gaidzanwa, 1999). The UK also became a popular destination for Zimbabweans travelling to Europe due to the former colonial connection (McGregor,2006) and many of these migrants have been doctors and nurses backfilling NHS shortfalls (Humphris, 2010). There are an estimated 110,000 Zimbabwean's living in the UK (ONS, 2018) with concentrations in the greater London and the surrounding areas, but also in major cities such as Leeds, Manchester, Birmingham and Coventry.

Various scholars have explored the Zimbabwean diasporas (Borraz, Pozoy and Rossi, 2008; McGregor, 2007; Bloch, 2008; McGregor, 2008; Pasura, 2010), and much of this relates to the economic impact of migration. For example, a study by Bloch (2008) highlighted how Zimbabwean migrants have lived in poverty as they have been unable to work legally whilst waiting for the outcome of their claim for asylum. But, despite the increasing interest in Zimbabwean diaspora, and new African diasporas more generally (Glick, 2010, Akyeampong, 2000; Phillips and Sweeney, 2006 ; Koser, 2003; Zeleza, 2005) there has been remarkably little interest on domestic violence (DV hereafter) as a consequence cultural challenge living in another country; the aim of this study.

1:2 Background of domestic violence in Zimbabwe

Domestic violence in Zimbabwe has a long history centering on unequal power relations between men and women, where women and girls are viewed as property whose role is to be subservient to men (Mashiri, 2013.) The justification

of female subordination that promotes and legitimises DV are based on construction of sexual identity. That is, manhood equates; with the ability to exert power over others by force, and in particular women. Custom, tradition and religion are commonly invoked to rationalize the use of violence against women. For example, a girl's sexuality is heavily controlled from birth where virginity becomes an instrument for bargaining in bride price discussions (Hunter, 2010; Wickstrom, 2010). However, similar restrictions are not placed on boys and promiscuity is common and even prized with men taking multiple wives (Bhana, 2018; Museka & Machingura, 2014; Venganai, 2016).

Bhana, (2018) argues that this sexual double standard translates into inequality in intimate relationships where it is considered normative for men to exact absolute control in the relationship. Goebel (2007) argues that such norms support DV, and indeed, DV is typically viewed as normative part of intimate relationships, as it is a means of controlling a spouse's actions and behaviours. Hindin's (2003) survey of 5907 Zimbabwean women of reproductive age (15-49 years) found more than half (53%) of the respondents thought wife beating was justified in certain contexts, such as arguing back (36%), neglecting children (33%), or being absent without informing her spouse (30%). Indeed, Tinarwo and Pasura's (2014, p.521) interview study with Zimbabwean migrants in Britain, found that migrant Zimbabwean women, their bodies, and their sexuality, become "symbols of homeland traditions, and cultural markers that distinguish migrants from the indigenous population". Thus, women who wish to leave an unhealthy relationship face ostracisation, challenges getting a divorce, and difficulties prosecuting perpetrators (Goebel, 2007). Drawing on the first author's extended Zimbabwean network in the UK, in which DV was expressed (an initial catalyst for the study), we wanted to examine the negotiation and contestation of women, their bodies, and their sexuality and its relationship to DV amongst Zimbabwean migrants in Britain.

1:3 Migration and domestic violence

Several studies have reported that international migration can aggravate the chances of tensions in intimate relationships (see Andersson and Scott, 2010; Frank and Wildsmith, 2005). For example, Mazzucato (2015) and Grillo and Mazzucato (2008) highlight how the strictness of migration policies makes it harder for couples to migrate together. As a result, many couples are geographically separated and confronted with difficulties maintaining ties (McGregor, 2008). Other factors contributing to intimate relationship tensions include cultural assimilation changing perspectives, opinions and attitudes (Pasura, 2011), the removal of cultural restrictions on strict fidelity or faithfulness, increased freedom through for example, access to finances once asylum has been granted (Boyle et al., 2008; George, 2000; Jolly and Reeves, 2005)

Boyle et al. (2008) suggests migration to more liberal societies creates a space for both men and women to renegotiate their pre-migration marital status and roles. For example, Hirsch (2003) found that migrant women from more culturally restricted countries challenge previous intimate patriarchal relationship structures if they became employed and/or educated as these roles placed additional pressures on their spouses to contribute more childcare and domestic chores.

But whilst opportunities for the renegotiation of traditional gendered roles in intimate relations (e.g. men as breadwinners and women as child-rearing stay at home mums) research on the Zimbabwean diaspora and other migrant communities (see Duri, 2010; McGregor, 2008; Morreira, 2010; Mawowa, & Matongo, 2010; Parsons, 2010; Pasura, 2011; Tinarwo & Pasura, 2014; Worby, 2010) suggests that traditional cultural values and practices travel with migrants. Indeed, Hirsch's (2003) study reported that male spouses were resistant to change as it is perceived as a threat to their masculinity often contributing to conflicts and violence (also see Kufakurinani, 2013 for more on the impact of migration on gender and family).

1:4 The Current Study

This study set out to examine the impacts of migration on the UK Zimbabwean diaspora and in particular what elements of migration contributed to separation and divorce using migrants' own accounts to ground the analysis, as suggested by Liebmann (2020). This was capitalised on using in-depth interview methodology to identify cultural tensions, norms, challenges, and disclosure (Baynham, 2006). Although we developed an interview schedule prior to the interviews we provided space for them to talk freely about what mattered most to them giving them some control over the interview agenda. This left space for to explore unexpected findings. Our analysis aimed to highlight cultural difficulties living abroad and how those contributed to domestic violence.

Research Question: *What impact does Zimbabwean and UK culture have on domestic violence for the UK Zimbabwean diaspora?*

2: Method

2:1 Design

A qualitative approach was adopted, focusing on the personal experiences of Zimbabweans living in the UK. Participants took part in the interviews facilitated by the first author who is Zimbabwean in origin. We thought the first author's ethnicity would encourage participants to talk more freely about their experiences (Oakley, 2000). As previously noted, interviews are an effective means for enabling people who have experienced traumatic events to talk freely about their experiences and have been used effectively by other researchers (Liebman, 2020). The participants were encouraged to speak openly about their experiences of living in the UK and the impacts they felt contributed to the violence they experienced, and the interview was broadly structured around some key questions which appear below.

2:2 Participants

Participants were invited through an advertisement placed on a specific Facebook page dedicated to Zimbabweans living in the UK. A total 30 participants were recruited either directly via the webpage or via snowball sampling (Robinson, 2014). Respondents were UK based (excluding Northern Ireland): Manchester 11, Leeds 8, London 3, Birmingham 3, Newport 1, Glasgow 1, Bradford 1, Huddersfield 1 and Wigan 1. Most of the respondents were middle-aged and with children. All the participants have been living in the UK for at least one year. The earliest migration date to the UK was 1997 and the latest date was 2016.

Our sample size was influenced by both theoretical and practical considerations (Robinson, 2014, p.29). On practical level, our sample size was determined by the response rate form the advert. Theoretically, the study had an idiographic aim which sought a sample size in which individual voices and experiences could be located and heard through intense analysis of each interview transcript. Thirty interviews provided enough scope for developing cross-case generalities.
All interviews were conducted via Skype and audio recorded by the first author over a period of six months in the autumn of 2019. The first author conducted all of the interviews as he is of Zimbabwean origin and it was hoped that would encourage participants to talk more freely about their experiences (Oakley, 2000). Interviews lasted between 40 minutes and an hour.

2:3 Materials

A semi-structured interview schedule was constructed using previous literature as a guide. Participants were initially asked demographic questions pertaining to marital status, number of children, nationality of spouse, and length of time in the UK. These were followed asked questions about their experiences of living in the UK such as: "what has been your experience of living in the UK? Have you experienced any particular challenges? [probe: Are these culturally related, and if so how?] Thank you for sharing that. Are you happy to share the reason(s) for you separation/divorce? [probe: Has the violence ended? How has the violence affected you?]. Thank you for sharing your experiences. What has been the attitude of your family and the Zimbabwean community to your experiences of DV? Have you sought or received any support such as from your local authority, DV support groups, or from your local Zimbabwean? [probe: If, yes, was that support appropriate, and if not, what additional support and information might you have required?]. Thank you all for sharing your story. And lastly, is there anything else you would like to add?

3: Ethics

Ethical approval was first gained through (blinded for review) University ethics committee. In line with British Psychological Society (2018) participants were provided with an interview pack before the interviews, which contained a participant information sheet, interview guidelines, consent form and a confidentiality agreement. After arrival, the first author then presented an introduction where he explained the aims of the study, anonymity and right to withdraw. A consent form was then distributed. All areas were then covered (see Materials section above), ensuring that the participant had time to respond in full to each question/topic, and that any areas considered important by them were followed up so as not to restrict what they said. At the end of the interview, each participant was given a full debrief and given details of both authors involved in the research and support services in case they wanted to follow these up. In order to maintain participant anonymity, we presented exemplar extracts with pseudonyms and all in-text identifying markers removed such as personal details, vernaculars or references. We have anonymised our dataset as far as possible (e.g. replacing names with R1 [Respondent 1], R2 etc. removing any in-text personal details or references.

4: Analysis

We adopted a thematic approach to the analysis (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012). There was a need for deep immersion in the data, which involved listening to the audio-recording, reading and re-reading the whole transcript alongside field notes and sharing observations and preliminary analytical insights between the authors. Themes were often composed of several sub-themes that identified multiple influences of the life of these Zimbabweans living in the UK. After the identification of themes, the transcripts were reviewed again to select representative quotes for each theme. The transcripts were reviewed a final time for additional supporting and disconfirming evidence of themes. We identified the following themes: *Patriarchal norms*; *Liberal influences*; *Disclosure; Discrimination*.

5: Results

The term, domestic violence, is well established, despite being open to various critiques: not all such violence is domestic, and the term itself is non-gendered. Partly for these reasons, domestic violence, along with intimate partner violence, has been conceptualised and described largely as perpetrated by males victimising their female intimate partners in order to have power and control over her, which may include violence and abuse often escalating over time (Capaldi and Kim, 2007). However, the concept of DV has broadened significantly in recent decades to include violence and abuse from family members, and also to include psychological, emotional, physical, sexual, financial or

emotional violence or abuse mainly between adults regardless of gender or sexuality (Kelly and Johnson, 2008), as well as of control of family and friends, space and time. Our analysis focuses in particular DV by one's spouse and the influences of both Zimbabwean and UK culture. We also explore the difficulties migrants face in disclosing this form of violence and the discrimination faced if they do.

We begin our analysis by focusing on the Zimbabwean relationship norms and their link to domestic violence. We begin with a woman talking about her experiences of a violent spouse. The extracts are presented as transcribed although some have necessarily been truncated due to journal word limitations.

5:1Patriarchal norms

R1

> So, you know as culture demands, culture wise, you have to kind of take it and, um, give your husband as many chances as you can, thinking that maybe he is going change, you know. So, even if you tell your auntie or even if you tell your parents, they will be just telling you, 'It's OK, you know, he's a man, you change' or, 'Just pray for him' you know, that kind of a thing. So, it's like, it will take you so many years for you actually to realise that, you know what, this is going to lead into something else, so the violence it became worse, where actually, um, I ended up, you know, um, physically being hit, you know… And, um, I had so many fractures in my body (June11,2019;Bradford).

It is clear from R1's comments that she views patriarchy in intimate relationships, and DV as normative of Zimbabwean relationship "culture wise, you have to kind of take it", "'It's OK, you know, he's a man". Rasool's (2015) interview research with South African women aged 19-46 years of age (see McDuff's, 2015 interview research with Zimbabwean women living in the UK and South Africa for similarities in shared family cultures and perceptions) found that maintaining the 'solidarity of the family' was more important than leaving an abusive relationship. But, it is clear from this woman's comments that remaining in an abusive relationship placed her at greater risk "so the violence it became worse…I had so many fractures in my body." Thus, at least for this woman, Zimbabwean culture played a significant role in the normalisation of DV and tolerance to it.

We found similar cultural perceptions from our interviews with men. This male interviewee talked openly about the "fights" he had with his spouse.

R2

> Men have to be the men in the house, the head of the family, and yes, fight obviously. I felt like she was disrespecting me because the fights were more often her beating me up if she thought she was not getting anything through to me…I think for me it was the calling of the police, that's the one that really pushed me into the decision to leave. I asked myself, why am I, why am I ending up being in a jail cell because of this… if I retaliate cos I always did, I slapped her on three different occasions. Every time she would call the police on me, but it was me who was a victim really. But where I come from you don't tell people that a woman hit you up. You take that like a man, it does not make you leave your house (November 1, 2019; London).

R2 talked about Zimbabwean culture prior to this extract and highlights here the normative subordination of women "Men have to be the men in the house, the head of the family, and yes, fight obviously". Like R1's, R2 links men's relationship role and the maintenance of masculine patriarchal status as a legitimate reason for DV. Anderson and Umberson (2004) point out that such positions and practices can be found across many cultures. Thus, in this respect DV and masculine status are not specifically Zimbabwean. However, our interviewees, perceived such practices to be part of Zimbabwean culture, and in later talk we see this being contrasted with perceived UK culture.

Despite the normalisation of DV (see Bhana, 2018; Goebel, 2007), what is also evident is his positioning of himself as the victim "more often her beating me up". Victim blaming is common in DV (Towns & Adams, 2016), and this

account centres on blaming her "if she thought she was not getting anything through to me". All three men in our study talked about their spouse making unreasonable demands that contravened traditional Zimbabwean intimate relationship norms. Tinarwo and Pasura (2014) interviews and participant observations of gendered relationships in the Zimbabwean diaspora found that in relationships were women challenged traditional relationship norms men reported feelings of disempowerment, alienation emasculation. Although women's rights in Zimbabwe have increased changes in legislation, Pasura (2011) points out that they are still some way behind those of the UK.

Women talked about wanting some equity in their relationship, but in doing so risked violence.

5:2 Liberal influences

R3

> If I am a woman, your wife, I go to work as much as you go to work, you guys can give the same respect, you're going to at least cook dinner, but some African men won't even go there, they don't want to cook because you are the woman, you are the one to cook so this is my view. Push that boundary at your own risk, a cup maybe be smashed into your pretty face. They are somehow trained from boyhood to silence woman in such barbaric ways unfortunately (October 17, 2019; Manchester).

Traditional Zimbabwean intimate relationships often mean women are expected to stay at home whilst he goes out to work (Bhana, 2018). But, in more developed nations such as the UK it is common for women to want to work or need to work to support the family finances (Wildman, 2020). Tinarwo and Pasura (2014) highlight how work, education, and influences from more liberal cultures have led some Zimbabwean women to want more relationship equity. Indeed, R3 highlights this "I go to work as much as you go to work…you guys can give the same respect, you're going to at least cook dinner", despite some Zimbabwean men's reported resistant to change "Push that boundary at your own risk" (Venganai, 2016).

In R4's talk below we see how more liberal cultural influences on Zimbabwean men's practices are reported to lead to irresponsibility and unaccountability.

R4

> I know someone in this country who can go and drink for two days and when they come home the wife is still as happy as if nothing has happened, because they still got that respect for the wife and the children. But, when it comes to our culture, when they come home, they know that you are not going to just let that lie and be forgotten, you are going to raise issues about where they were, and what were you doing. This will lead to physical violence, verbal exchanges and all that, but in the westernised culture they say fine… as long as they still come home but again their lifestyle is different. Within my culture you always have to respect a man as the head of the family, but my husband was an empty head, if he was ever the head, I was the brains in the empty head. But sadly, our culture says he is the head of the family. (June 20, 2019; Leeds)

R4 suggests a divergence between UK and Zimbabwean culture. That is, that Zimbabwean men who engage in "go and drink for two days" 'ought' to be held accountable. However, to do so risks violence "will lead to physical violence" and therefore, implying violence is a weapon that ensures men's freedom to do as they wish. We have shown how Zimbabwean culture can lead to a tolerance for DV in order to maintain the 'solidarity of the family' and keep a sense of their cultural identity as is common with traditional migrant communities in more liberal countries (Burholt, Dobbs & Victor, 2016). But, what we want to show now in the final two sections is how Zimbabwean culture impinges on disclosure of DV and in the implications for those who do.

5:3 Disclosure

R5

> You don't open your mouth and say me, and my wife had a fight. You swallow it, many people I know do. Sometimes my son used to say when you and mum talk it's like an argument, he used to come to me close to tears very close to me and say 'dad, dad, keep quiet

dad like he was calming me down. Then sometimes I have to listen, but sometimes I would revisit the issue in our bedroom or later when kids are away in a traditional way, you know using some physical force but that did not change things until I thought she may brave it and report me to the police. (August 3, 2019; Glasgow)

R5 is a Zimbabwean man talking about committing DV. Similarly, to other male interviewees in our dataset, DV is presented as way of maintaining traditional relationship norms and division of responsibilities "in a traditional way, you know using some physical force". Although, violence is presented as traditional it is interesting that he advocates "You swallow it, many people I know do". Presumably, that is an outcome of living in a country where DV is illegal and not openly tolerated (UK Government, 2004). Although Zimbabwe enacted the DV Act (Chapter 5:16) in 2007, tolerance levels for DV in Zimbabwe and sub-Saharan African countries more generally, are 36% above the global average of 30% (García-Moreno et al., 2013). Indeed, a cross-sectional study by Lasong et al. (2020, p.354) found that the majority of women of sub-Saharan origin "are prone to lifetime partner violence (45.6%) and sexual abuse (11.9%) than elsewhere".

In the following extracts the women talk about these cultural imperatives and non-disclosure of domestic violence.

R6

This it was how I was taught by my mother never disclose your home problems to anyone you, try to deal with them within even if you had to walk around with a swollen eye you rather say something fell on me, you deal with it in the closest of your family. So, I was a very discreet person and for my mum's teachings me um in nature I'm like that, so I never spoke to my friends my friends thought we were happy people thought and when we came to a divorce, people were so shocked (November 14, 2019; Birmingham).

R7

He's got a history of, he's a repeat offender of domestic violence, he's someone who can lift up his hand to a woman if he feels like, 'oh, this woman is disrespectful to me'. If he doesn't feel like the man of the house…. the community will see him as not really a man. People from the community would say your wife should see you like a king; they are taught traditional marriage (July 19, 2019; Huddersfield).

It is clear from R6' and R7's extracts that DV is something expected to be tolerated and not publicised, and that non-disclosure is a learned practice. Although there appears to be no statistics for DV disclosure by Zimbabwean women, given similarities in DV findings across sub-Saharan African countries (e.g. Iliyasu et al., 2011; Yoshioka et al., 2003), one might presume similar findings to Bifftu et al.'s (2019) systematic review of DV disclosure in Ethiopian women and girls. That is, that more than one third of women and girls did not disclosed their experience of DV. There are several reasons for this which included: the person's perception of DV as normal; fear of shame or embarrassment; knowledge of where to seek help and; concern of the consequences of disclosure by the community. In other words, the influence of cultural belief associated with domestic violence. The concern of the consequences of disclosure by the community was a common response by both wo/men interviewed. Several talked about the discrimination they experiences like R8 below when they could no longer tolerate the violence and sought help.

5:5 Discrimination

R8

So, when I seek help and I went to live in a women's refuge, I was there for nearly two years, I lived in a women's refuge because of my immigration status. I faced a lot of discrimination from my own Zimbabwean people. They were actually you know, surprised that I called the police and reported the case. People from our culture will endure things and keep them to themselves. So, I broke off with the culture by reporting. I suffered a lot of discrimination; it was a like I had done a shameful thing. People treated me like I killed him. Well, I would have killed him if I could anyway (September 4, 2019; Newport).

R8's talk suggests making DV public and therefore within the realm of the criminal justice system is viewed as a cultural taboo within the Zimbabwean diaspora community. Her report that "People treated me like I killed him"

indicates that she undermined his traditional patriarchal masculine status as head of the household (see Anderson & Umberson, 2004 for more on masculinity and domestic violence). Reported harsh treatment by other community members indicates the presence of gendered cultural policing with this community (Payne and Smith 2016).

6: Conclusion

It is clear that DV in traditional Zimbabwean relationships is considered a norm (Hindin, 2003), and that those who wished to leave an unhealthy relationship face ostracization, challenges getting a divorce or separating, and difficulties prosecuting perpetrators (Goebel, 2007). The participants in our study reported that cultural pressures from living in a different country exasperated intimate relationship tensions and consequently, violence ensued. Reported tensions for example, included women needing to work and wanting their spouse to contribute to household chores, or a male spouse disappearance. Other pressures talked about in the interviews included financial pressure from work restrictions and male spouse infidelity. Thus, for many women and men it appeared that they were trying to renegotiate their pre-migration marital status and roles to align with UK cultural requirements (Boyle et al., 2008). However, as they reported, spouses were sometimes resistant to such changes, especially when they felt their status was being challenged.

7: Implications

Our analysis has shown that cultural change can exasperate domestic violence. Thus, those services that interact with such migrant communities should be more culturally aware, perhaps as a result of additional training. Indeed, participants talked about emergency services and specialist support services for DV victims did not seem to understand the complexity of migrant intimate relationship experiences or the traditions they followed. This often meant that the victim was reluctant to disclose the abuse, proceed with prosecution, or leave the unhealthy relationship.

Our analysis also showed that traditional notions of gender status and roles in intimate relationships resulted in those who wished to leave a violent relationship experiencing community ostracization, or that family, friends and community elders suggesting the relationship continue, seeking to heal the difficulties and stop the violence. Thus, community awareness of the implications of DV for victims and the sharing of cultural experiences of living in another country may help.

Victims also talked about finding it difficult leaving a violent relationship due to migrant restrictions and so governmental services have a role to play ensuring that migrants experiencing DV have adequate means to access support services regardless of financial circumstance. We think there is a role for local government liaison officer or point of contact who is culturally aware.

8: Strengths and Limitations

Participants were detailed in their responses and shared a lot of personal information, which was a key strength. Asking DV victims to talk about their experiences enabled them to think about what aspects of their stories to share, and we would use this method again if we re-ran the study. However, there were limitations inherent in our study. We recognized that although there may be benefits to being interviewed by a fellow Zimbabwean, this is likely to have impacted in the co-construction of the data, and that this may have impacted on the quality and validity of data. The accounts also come from a limited number of the UK Zimbabwean diaspora we do not know how far their responses would generalise to other in the diaspora. Further research could examine this through more interviews from other geographical areas, as the majority of interviews took place with participants living in the North of England Whilst this research focused on DV victims, there was not scope to explore the experiences of DV for children and the wider

family or Zimbabwean community. Research in this area is clearly need.

9: Reflexive Summary

As researchers, we have tried to present the participants' accounts as accurate, fairly and disinterestedly as possible. The first author has academic expertise in social and cultural psychology and Zimbabwean cultures both in Zimbabwe and in the UK. The second author has academic expertise in social psychology and intimate partner violence. Both are qualitative researchers. Our analysis has been ratified by those who took part in our interviews. The analysis benefits from including different perspectives on DV, and results shed light on UK Zimbabwean UK diaspora DV victims' experiences of migration.

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