

Hidden abuse of Nigerian women revealed by researcher

July 25 2018, by Mike Addelman

A study of 16 Nigerian women living with domestic abuse has shown how they are too frightened of being deported to ask for help from the UK authorities.

Dr. Omolade Femi-Ajao from The University of Manchester says though the Government is committed to tackling [domestic abuse](#), the policy bypassed the Nigerian [women](#) who have conditional visas.

"Because these women are subject to immigration control, they are terrified they will be accused of breaching the conditions of their visa. That could mean they are deported or could lose their children." said Dr. Femi-Ajao who led the study which is the first of its kind to be carried out.

"So rather than seeking help from GPs, healthcare professionals, hospitals and local authorities, it's community and faith groups who are stepping up to fill the gap. I therefore argue there is an urgent need for the authorities to work collaboratively with them.

"But many of the women I spoke to, however, feel completely isolated; there's no one they can really turn to. They are hidden from view."

The women in the study, published in the journal BMC Women's Health, told Dr. Femi-Ajao they had been subjected to beatings, physical assaults, threats, humiliation and intimidation for in one case as long as 37 years

The women, aged between 18 and 54, all had [mental health issues](#) including suicidal thoughts and panic attacks, said Dr. Femi-Ajao. They reported experiencing the abuse from between 2 and 37 years; an average of 10 years.

But if [local authorities](#) do help, it will be targeted at children, not their mothers.

She said: "This research can't tell us the scale of the problem. But do we know it is a problem: 1 in 4 women in the UK suffer from domestic abuse so it's fair to assume the Nigerian community is no different from any other.

"The Government also needs to recognise that Nigerian women are much less likely to call a helpline which is partly down to the way they are brought up. They need face to face help with someone from their own community they can trust.

"And though there's a worry that an abusive partner might have some influence on community organisation and faith groups, it does seem from these women that leaders of these community groups and faith-based organisations are able to mediate and provide support.

"Much has been done to help women in other communities but we don't really know the scale of the problem in Nigerian communities.

"In fact, the scale of the problem is unknown in African communities as a whole. So now it is time we recognise that much needs to be done."

Ehinor Otaigbe, who worked with Dr. Femi-Ajao, is Director of Wonderfully Made Woman, a charity which supports Nigerian women and has worked with victims of domestic abuse.

She said: "Nigerian women go through domestic violence in the UK and some have come to Wonderfully Made Woman to seek help.

"Many of the women I see do not report [abuse](#) because of their immigration status. Many lack confidence and have problems with English, which means they have great difficulty communicating effectively with officialdom."

More information: Omolade Femi-Ajao. Intimate partner violence and abuse against Nigerian women resident in England, UK: a cross-sectional qualitative study, *BMC Women's Health* (2018). [DOI: 10.1186/s12905-018-0610-4](#)

Provided by University of Manchester

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