

Gender and Population Studies (GAPS) in Health

“Leaving that Thing Behind”: Shifting Gender Dynamics among Recent Ghanaian Immigrants to Canada, and their Implications for Health

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Abstract

Aim: An exploratory qualitative descriptive study was undertaken to explore how shifting gender power relations among recent Ghanaian immigrants to Canada informed their perceived health and well-being, and their subsequent health decisions.

Subject and Methods: Ten participants were recruited (five men and five women) and interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide. Data were subjected to thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Results: The central overarching theme was the *Diverging Gendered Experience of Worth and Power*. Men’s experience was captured by the sub theme *Decreasing Sense of Masculine Worth (Worth Less at Work, & Worth Less at Home)*. Women’s experience was captured by the sub-theme of *Increasing Sense of Feminine Worth (Feeling Empowered & Claiming ‘Breadwinner’ Status)*. Two other sub-themes spoke to the intersectional marginalization of Ghanaian immigrant social location in general including: *Worth Less because of Racialization*, and *Worth Less because my Education and Experience are not Canadian*. Men reported depression, psychological distress, and feelings of worthlessness related to their shifting social location, which was made worse by their masculine reluctance to seek support. Women found the shift in gender power-relations post-migration facilitated empowerment and increased agency in multiple spheres, although they still experienced intersectional marginalization as racialized immigrants from West Africa.

Conclusion: This study illustrates the profound shifts in intersectional gender power relations among recent Ghanaian immigrants to Canada, which may impact their health. These findings may inform future research, and programming directed towards supporting immigrants to navigate their shifting gendered social location in their new home.

Introduction

The traditional gender roles of Ghanaians are experiencing gradual reconstruction over time, with issues of gender, cultural practices, and power being particularly discussed since the 1990s as part of movements directed towards women's equality and empowerment (Ampofo and Boateng 2008; Manuh 2007). Despite the already shifting gender context in their country of origin, when Ghanaians migrate to western countries, such as Canada, the social context of their new home may accelerate and intensify tensions related to gender roles due to the resultant shifts in the intersectional realities of both immigrant men and women (Creese 2012; Creese and Wiebe 2012; Pasura and Christou 2017).

Ghanaian society is composed of many sub-groups with variations in social practices; some tribal groups come from a patrilineal heritage, while others are matrilineal (McGee 2015; Miescher 2007). In both matrilineal and patrilineal Ghanaian societies, traditional perspectives have consistently ascribed greater power and importance to men; however, women in matrilineal societies generally retained greater power in relation to property and parental rights (Ampofo and Boateng 2008;

Miescher 2007). Colonization and oppression by European powers added additional complexity to the situation by imposing colonial era patriarchal perspectives on countries such as Ghana, which contributed to the structural entrenchment of patriarchal perspectives in both colonial and post-colonial institutions, and has further undermined some traditional matrilineal perspectives and the power of women in general (Atuoye and Odame 2013; Miescher 2007). Consequently, the long shadow of patriarchy enacted by traditional, colonial, post-colonial, and globalized neoliberal sources casts its pervasive influence on Ghanaian gender roles and the day-to-day realities of Ghanaian women (Sossou 2006). However, economic crises, structural changes within the political and economic sectors of many African countries, migration, and greater education levels have resulted in greater empowerment of African women and changing power dynamics between men and women over time. This ascension of greater feminine power has enabled Ghanaian women to exert more control over their lives, assert their rights, improve their health, and acquire greater autonomy and power in the context of their relationships with men. While these changes to gendered power dynamics are largely

celebrated and embraced by Ghanaian women, many Ghanaian men find these shifts to be challenging and psychologically stressful, because they challenge hegemonic understandings of what represents masculinity in post-colonial and neoliberal contexts, such as fulfilling the roles of head-of-household or breadwinner (Connell 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Mfecane 2018; Overå 2007; Pasura and Christou 2017). In addition, these men may also perceive that these shifts in masculine roles and status threaten their own sense of personhood within their collective social and religious communities (Mfecane 2018). While this situation may be viewed as an inevitable and necessary transitional period in pursuit of gender equality and equity, many African men experience these changes as a “masculine crisis” associated with a decline in their status and value as men (Creese 2012; Creese and Wiebe 2012; Reid and Walker 2005).

While carrying out a qualitative study that explored the health care decision-making of recent Ghanaian immigrants to Alberta, Canada, these gender-based tensions emerged within the discourse of both male and female participants. It was apparent that these shifting gender dynamics, in conjunction with other intersectional challenges to status and well-being (e.g. racism, underemployment, and poor recognition of past education, experience, and professional qualifications) played a significant

role in the ability of these recent immigrants to achieve health in their new home. It is these findings that we explore in this paper.

Background

Gender in the Ghanaian Context

Pre-colonial Ghanaian men and women fulfilled important and complementary gender roles in running the affairs of their societies (Atuoye and Odame 2013). Women often exerted influence in decision making and held positions of influence in society, especially as they grew older and more respected (Miescher 2007). While Ghanaian women’s status did not usually exceed that held by men in society, many tribal groups recognized women’s power and assigned them important roles (Miescher 2007). For example, in the matrilineal system practised by the Ashanti’s (a fraction of Akan’s in Ghana) accorded women respect, and empowered them to occupy important positions in society (Atuoye and Odame 2013). Similarly, Dagbon women in the northern part of Ghana also shared upper-class status and could become chiefs (Vieta 1999). Boni (2001) noted that Baule women had significant political and economic power and were instrumental in controlling the affairs of their society. These examples do not suggest that matriarchal systems utterly supplanted men’s power, but women had some liberty of expression and power, which contributed to the overall

building of their societies. As stated by Akyeampong and Obeng (1995), the very involvement of women in state affairs and leadership highlighted the complementarity of roles and power in pre-colonial Africa. However, these ancient matriarchal perspectives were often oppressed and subverted following the introduction and widespread adoption of colonial era Euro-Christian and Muslim patriarchal perspectives (Chengu 2015). In the post-colonial era, Ghana has continued to retain social, economic, legal, political, and institutional structures informed by British colonial era patriarchy in combination with long-standing traditional Ghanaian perspectives on gender; therefore, many men continue to claim the role of leader and decision-maker in modern Ghanaian society (Anunobi 2002; Boni 2001; Sossou 2006).

Despite possessing the constitutional right to equality for decades, and the active ongoing efforts of women's movements that have sought to emancipate women from hegemonic masculinities and women's dependency on men's decisions in both the home and government, many Ghanaian women remain subjected to discrimination, violence, social, economic, and sexual exploitation (Anunobi 2002; Sossou 2006). Consequently, the project to create the conditions for a paradigm shift in gender relations continues,

and women are gradually regaining power and influence similar to that possessed among the matrilineal societies in the past (Chengu 2015). Women have begun to dominate particular economic and political sectors – shifting from the role of 'housewife' to serve as an 'active agent of society' (Overå 2007). With such changes to well-established gender roles, it is inevitable that Ghanaian men's roles and expectations are also impacted (Asiyanbola 2005; Overå 2007). Therefore, many African men have perceived the quest for gender equality and equity as an assault on masculinity and masculine power, which they feel culturally and historically entitled to (Reid and Walker 2005).

Gender Post-migration

After arrival in Canada, many African men retain a nostalgic conceptualization of African masculinity, centred on: images of the "'ideal' heterosexual family in Africa"; a conceptualization of the essential gender differences between men and women and the gender division of labor; and an expectation of masculine authority and respect for elders (Creese 2012). In Ghana, male authority as 'head of the household' may include the control of women's behaviors, choices, and decisions surrounding educational, financial, and health decisions (Brako 2012; Sossou 2006). Even though there are cultural similarities in the

manifestations of patriarchy worldwide, these conceptualizations of patriarchal authority held by many Africans have been identified as a barrier for the independence of women and their empowerment (Manuh 2007; Sossou 2006). However, migration to Canada, higher educational levels, the necessity of two-income families, the often-precarious nature of men's employment following migration, and the increased number of women becoming the 'breadwinner' after attaining Canadian advanced educational qualifications, is destabilizing these traditional gender-relations and contributing to greater domestic equality and a relative improvement in women's rights and status (Creese 2012).

While a shift to greater gender equality in the domestic sphere is viewed as preferable by women, who have immigrated to Canada from Ghana, Ghanaian immigrant men often prefer to idealize the gender-relations of Ghana, since retaining Ghanaian gender-norms maintains their status, power, and authority in the home, and reinforces their performance of hegemonic Ghanaian masculinities (Creese 2012; Manuh 2001). Acting in isolation, the impact of these shifting gender relations may exert a significant effect on these men's sense of masculine status and well-being; however, when occurring concurrently with other influences on their status as men (e.g.

racialization, underemployment/unemployment, poor recognition of previous education, training, and experience) the intersectional impact on their sense of masculinity and ultimately their health, and well-being may be further potentiated (Courtenay 2000; Creese 2012; Creese 2019; Creese and Wiebe 2012; Hill Collins and Bilge 2016).

Aim

The aim of the current study was to explore how shifting gender power relations among recent Ghanaian immigrants to Canada informed their perceived health and well-being, and their subsequent health decisions.

Study Design

A qualitative exploratory descriptive design, informed by an epistemology of social constructivism and the theoretical lens of gender theory (Butler 1990; Connell 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Courtenay 2000; Schippers 2007; Vandello et al. 2008), was utilized to explore how recent Ghanaian immigrants to Alberta, Canada made meaning from their gendered interactions in their new social environment (Creswell 2013; Thomas et al. 2014).

Participant Recruitment and Data Gathering

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Human Subject Research

Committee (HSRC) at the University of Lethbridge, and the Ghanaian Canadian Association of Calgary (GCAC) prior to the recruitment of participants. Both recent and long-term Ghanaian adult immigrants were purposefully recruited through the GCAC's networks, and posters in community centres, grocery stores, and churches. Additional study inclusion criteria included living in Calgary within the past 10 years and being between 18 and 60 years of age. Ultimately, ten participants were recruited (5 women and 5 men) with data collection continuing until no new information and perspectives were noted in interviews.

Once participants completed the informed consent process, demographic information including gender, age, education level, employment status, citizenship status, marital status, and the number of years that participants had been in Canada were collected. Qualitative data were collected in a private one-to-one interview, utilizing a semi-structured interview guide. All participants spoke English; however, the interviewer strived to ensure participants understood the interview questions, and clarification was provided as needed. Initial interviews were coded before proceeding to collect additional data, so that subsequent data collection could be informed based on initial insights. We began each interview with an introduction question: 'What

is like to be an immigrant man/woman after coming to Canada?' before proceeding to questions exploring health care decisions. For instance, 'How has coming to Canada changed your status as an African man/woman, and how does this influence your health care choices as an immigrant to Canada?'

Data Analysis

All interviews were digitally recorded and manually transcribed verbatim by the interviewer immediately following each interview, and participants were assigned a pseudonym to maintain their confidentiality when using quotations to illustrate findings. Following transcription, each participant was provided an opportunity to review the transcript to ensure that their views were captured accurately. Consistent with Braun and Clarke's approach to thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006; Clarke and Braun 2013), transcripts were initially read several times to become familiar with these data. Nvivo 12™ qualitative analysis software was used to manage these data and to code the transcripts (QSR International 2020; Welsh 2002). During the initial coding process, short segments of these data, which represented a specific interesting semantic or latent features of these data, were assigned a meaningful label to capture the essence of the coded text (Braun and Clarke 2006). In the third phase of analysis,

initial codes were reduced into categories or sub-categories representing similar experiences or perspectives, and candidate themes were identified and named (Braun and Clarke 2006). Supported by mind-mapping, the potential relationships between identified codes, categories, and themes were hypothesized. In phase four of the analysis, we determined if there were enough data to support the candidate themes, and if the theme label was comprehensive enough to represent the codes assigned to it (Braun and Clarke 2006). Some themes were retained in the thematic map as representing the experience of shifting gender power-relations among Ghanaian immigrants, while others were demoted to sub-themes or categories, or determined to be peripheral to the central question at hand. Data analysis continued until the thematic map fit the data set, while also potentially considering contrary cases that may depart from the central thematic representation (Braun and Clarke 2006). Phase five involved defining and further refining each theme so that the essence and story of each theme, and how they were related, was clearly articulated (Braun and Clarke 2006).

The criteria for trustworthiness of the findings presented by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were applied throughout the study and data analysis. Credibility was enhanced by collecting

data from men and women, through member checking with participants following transcription and analysis to ascertain the accuracy of transcripts and the resonance of findings with participant's experience (Lincoln and Guba 1985). A consistent narrative across participants enhanced the dependability of the study findings (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Journaling was used by the primary investigator to assist him in confronting any bias or preconceived notions as a Ghanaian immigrant man a priori and during the data collection and analysis phases. The confirmability of his findings was enhanced by the inclusion of two experienced qualitative researchers in the design and analysis phases, who supported his conclusions and interpretation of these data (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Finally, despite a reasonably small sample (n=10), transferability was enhanced by a rich description of the generated themes, and affirmed by the alignment of these study findings with previous research in this area (Creese 2012; Lincoln and Guba 1985).

Results and Discussion

Diverging Gendered Experience of Worth and Power

The central theme, diverging sense of worth, captured the key finding that men tended to experience a decreased sense of

worth related to the intersectional shift in gender-dynamics following migration to Canada, while women frequently reported feeling greater empowerment, self-worth, and control over their lives in their new home. While both Ghanaian immigrant men and women faced similar challenges in terms of issues like marginalization based on racialization, and a discounting of their previous education, qualifications, and experiences (Creese 2019; Creese and Wiebe 2012), the intersectional reality of their new social location contributed to an increased sense of worth among many women, while men frequently perceived their self-worth to be reduced in the social context of Canada. See Figure 1. This central finding is consistent with previous studies of African immigrants, which have identified a tendency for African immigrant women to see Canada a place where they experience greater rights and increased domestic equality, while African men often perceive the environment and cultural context of their home country to be preferable for their well-being (Creese 2012; Creese and Wiebe 2012; Manuh 1998).

Decreasing Sense of Masculine Worth

The sub-theme of *decreasing sense of Masculine worth* captured many Ghanaian men's experience of not only a decreasing sense of self-worth in general, but specifically a

feeling of diminishment as men in the face of multiple intersectional impacts on their social location. Because so much of their gendered identity as Ghanaian men, was tied to hegemonic masculinities associated with fulfilling the roles of 'breadwinner', 'head of the household', and spiritual leader for their families (Connell 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Mfecane 2018; Overå 2007; Pasura and Christou 2017), difficulties associated with employment, recognition of education and qualifications, economic, and career success, experiencing marginalization of their masculinity as black African men in Canada, and a perceived reduction of their status and power at home, created significant psychological and emotional distress among many male participants.

In fact, sometimes I don't feel that I am the man in the house. As culture demands, as a man I must work to support the family and...it is hard for me now. I feel like I have fail[ed] on my duties as a man. It leaves me thinking every day and night...It is more difficult than I thought. (Joe)

Furthermore, as can be seen in Joe's quote above, some men expressed a sense of desperation about the loss of their assumed

role of leader in the family, and a sense of powerlessness to rectify their situation. Past practices of power in the Ghanaian context, such as enforcing their position through physical domination or violence were not an option in Canada, where family violence is more strictly regulated and enforced, and not deemed an acceptable practice under any circumstance.

In our society irrespective of location, men still remain men in their homes, as breadwinner, spiritual leader and physical leader as well...no one challenges you, but here my wife can talk to me on tip of her voice because one cannot do anything to them knowing that the law will fight you back ... (Juvenal)

Research on men with depression and mental distress indicates that men often turn to anger and physical violence, and draw on their masculine resource of physical size and strength in an act of protest masculinity as part of a desperate attempt to align themselves with hegemonic masculinities and retain a sense of patriarchal power when feeling subordinated by psychological distress (Brownhill et al. 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Messerschmidt 2018; Oliffe and Phillips 2008).

Indeed, although experiencing marginalization in multiple spheres compared to their Caucasian Canadian-born counterparts, these Ghanaian immigrant men's response to these new gender realities could be considered a performance of aggrieved masculine entitlement, as they have moved from a context of patriarchal power and relative higher status to a context where they feel they are not receiving the treatment and respect they are entitled to as men (Kimmel 2010).

Worth Less at Work

In their quest to be the 'breadwinner' and fulfill their responsibilities as Ghanaian men (Mfecane 2018), male participants expressed disappointment and distress about their difficulty acquiring work consistent with their education, qualifications, and experience prior to migration to Canada. Expectations of post-migration prosperity and opportunities were shattered by unanticipated structural barriers to recognition of their education and experience. These men often found themselves underemployed in positions with fewer markers of status than positions they held before migration, and they were left feeling that they were valued less in the work world, which contributed to them feeling less as men.

In Ghana, I wear better suit and put on good tie to work, I am very free and

respected, but hmm here in Canada is not like that. I thought it was going to be same or even better than my previous work in Ghana... (Juvenal)

If you don't have family to support you when you here [Canada], you feel beaten up by the demand imposed on you which is a big blow. Also, the kind of job that we get is usually comes with very low income, the labour is difficult, and the pay is not good, that alone put[s] stress on you thinking how to pay for this and that and take care of yourself. Sometimes, no employment at all. (Cecil)

It is very difficult in this country [Canada] when you come fresh because you do not have good jobs and have to start from scratch to earn high income and afford better healthcare ...when I came here in Canada, I came with [a] first degree in psychology and it was very difficult to get a job. And I was told that I have to pass their exam before I can get a job. I have to take the low paying jobs available like that or I could not survive. I could not afford a personal car for my own errands. I used to rely on friends, and it was hell for me. (Jerry)

In some cases, these men were ashamed to tell family that they left at home in Ghana, that they had not achieved the anticipated success and prosperity in Canada. Sometimes this even created difficulties in relationships because of the perception that these men were not fulfilling their remittance obligations as providers for their families.

I cannot tell my wife the job I do to survive here, she will ask me to come back to Ghana. I don't want to have any quarrel with her again. She is difficult sometimes I have been thinking of hiding it from her always. I just want to get it done.

Worth Less at Home

Shifts in power-dynamics with partners and children also contributed to many participants feeling ashamed and diminished as men. Sometimes this shame, frustration and disappointment fueled anxiety, sadness, depression, and acts of violence by these men. As will be seen in the experience of immigrant Ghanaian women in the following section, many women were no longer willing to maintain a subservient relationship to their husbands following migration. Some women acquired education and employment that established

them as the primary earner, and consequently assumed the 'breadwinner' or leadership role in the family and claimed the power and status associated with this role in Ghanaian society.

My wife does everything in the house and even takes every decision. It's a shame on my side as a man but I'm the woman now in terms of responsibilities and leadership, because she earns more than I do, she pays greater part of the bills and has taken control in the house, my self-esteem is down...sometimes, I feel helpless. (Elder)

I could have married another woman here in Canada, but I went for you (wife)...my job is not stable... have lost it, very hard for me to handle the family this time. My wife is kind of helping but she is showing behaviours which were not like that back home; she doesn't do anything at home, no cooking. I think she feels big here... I always cried; if I just think of what I'm going through, even sex is an issue...I cried all the time. (Menu)

A man stabbed his wife all because there is competition and tension in some families because the women think they are now men, our women have

grown "horns" we are nothing to them now. About two years ago one ex-wife in Toronto killed her husband on the same issue ...[the] attitudes and behaviors of our women. It is sad and we never expected these ... marriage[s] are going down. Talk to more Ghanaian men and listen their worries (Menu)

As mentioned by previous studies, some men expressed a longing for a return to the dominant patriarchal gender norms present in their country of origin (Creese 2012; Pasura and Christou 2017)

Often time I feel psychologically exhausted and frustrated because of the attitude of my wife here, Canada. She does things like she is the head of the house and I'm the woman ... hmm, the same is happening to one of my friends in Ottawa...All because our responsibilities as the man at home are not affected by jobs? No respecter of our original culture in Africa. (Menu)

Deteriorating Mental Health and Reluctance to Seek Help

Male participants frequently reported that the consequence of their declining sense of worth as men was depression, sadness and in some cases suicidal ideation. The words used to

describe their situation elicited a sense of crisis in these men, which creates the conditions for deterioration in mental health and the potential for “acting out” behaviors associated with men’s presentation of depression including addictions, anger, and violence directed outward to those around them or inward in the form of suicide (Brownhill et al. 2005; Oliffe and Phillips 2008)

Sometimes I prayed for my wife, she wasn't selfish back in Ghana like am witnessing now. I felt severely depressed who take total control at home and renders me useless as the man...I seek God's help to endure her behavior or I will go back home...psychologically, it hurt and if care is not taken, I might act against her..(Joe)

I have a friend who committed suicide because he was turned down every time he applies to a job. I am just an immigrant here; what am I looking for, where I am going, nobody cares. I don't think I deserve to be here, so the next simple thing is to just commit suicide. (Peace)

Yet, although many men were experiencing depression, few were seeking out

help to address it, as admitting depression and sadness was interpreted as weakness by some, and they felt as men they should not admit pain or ask for help. This is consistent with wider literature on men’s depression, and is a significant barrier to addressing mental health issues in men of all backgrounds (Addis 2008; Branney and White 2008; Courtenay 2000; Ogrodniczuk and Oliffe 2011; Oliffe and Phillips 2008).

As a man, you do not have to be going to the hospital or the clinic like the women do. It is okay to endure it. Men are to swallow pain and drink the bitter medicine. We need to show that we are men. (Joe)

Increasing Sense of Feminine Worth

While Ghanaian immigrant women participating in the study were also experiencing significant adversity in similar areas to Ghanaian immigrant men, their intersectional reality in Canada tended to be perceived as an improvement in their status and worth as women. In many cases, this perception was intimately linked to a feeling that women had greater power and opportunities in Canada due to a greater emphasis on egalitarian gender-relations, and the presence of laws and policies to promote

gender equality in their new country (Creese 2012).

I saw coming to Canada was the better choice ever to have opportunity to be myself, not any more restrictions from my husband, and to create better life for myself...fortunately, Canada has equal opportunities for us. So when my husband first came, I told him that here in Canada, he should leave "that thing" [exercising too much power]. Now, I have my college diploma, and no more housewives. Canada has really enlightened me a lot especially to be independent. (Aunty)

Feeling Empowered

Female participants often reported feeling empowered by their new social location in Canada. Sometimes this sense of empowerment came from critical feminist education, while for others this greater sense of power was related to better protection under the law, success in employment, or changes in power-relations in their marital relationships (Creese 2012; Donkor 2005; Mianda 2004; Pasura and Christou 2017).

I feel much [more] empowered in Canada than in Ghana, I must say. Maybe, our culture is more of [a]

patriarchy which favors men [more] than women. But here, women are powerful, and my husband knows that so he dare try to control me here ...I will just report him to the government that he is abusing me at home... That's all ... I work full time and go wherever I want, take care of myself as I want...visit any clinic or hospital without him [husband]...Life is better for me... (Cecil)

When I first landed in Canada, I read about feminist club. I joined them and through activities and participations of meetings and programs, I got to know how powerful women are. Women are powerful civilians not for war but at home. Although I am in relationship, but I take full control of my life as I learnt from the club meetings. It empowers me as a woman. I don't rely on my partner anymore and he is mad at me and I don't care about that...(Aunty)

Now, I go to see the doctor at any time on my own, I do not have to wait till he [the husband] decide for me before I work and earn good money for myself and I can buy whatever I want. I feel free to use any medication of my choice without any influence from my partner. (Aunty)

This sense of empowerment also extended to an increased sense of agency in their lives, including greater agency to make choices about accessing health care services, and the perceived ability to improve conditions related to the broader social determinants of health such as employment, education, income and social status, and gender.

Claiming 'Breadwinner' Status

In Ghana, leadership of the family was usually affiliated with the 'head of household' and 'breadwinner' status of men; however, migration to Canada often destabilized these cultural norms and systems of power (Creese 2012; Manuh 2003; Mfecane 2018; Mianda 2004; Pasura and Christou 2017). Like *Dorcias* in the following quotation, some Ghanaian immigrant women draw on their historically matriarchal traditions, as support for women occupying positions of power or 'queen mother' status (McGee 2015). In this quote, *Dorcias* refers to Asantewa, the Queen Mother of Ejisu, who inspired the Ashanti chiefs to fight against the British occupation of Ghana in March 1900 (McGee 2015).

Our men fail to accept that it doesn't have to be always them taking control. We are queen mothers as per our culture ... Yaa Asantewa proved that ... I

take charge at home just to let my husband know that I can do it and beside we are in Canada not Ghana. Canada is more for women not men. They don't understand that ... (Dorcias)

Not only were many Ghanaian women achieving greater economic and career success than their husbands following migration, but they often presented their substantial financial contribution to the family as justification for their claim to leadership, decision-making, and power which has traditionally been associated with the 'breadwinner' role in their cultural context (Creese 2012; Donkor 2005; Manuh 2003; Mianda 2004)

When my husband landed here, I decided to go back to school to pursue diploma in nursing so that he can take care of the children....back home he was the lord at home... but here women have the power....I control the home because I provided most often until he can start working...I go where I want to go, seek any form of health services without telling him ... (Peace)

In some relationships the tables had turned, and the balance of power had shifted to the women, which was welcomed by many women, even though they recognized these

changes were challenging for the men in their lives, and sometimes their extended family, to accept (Creese 2012; Donkor 2005; Mianda 2004).

I was almost like two years jobless...housewife. It was the most difficult time of my life because it is only when my husband is free that I step out...When I got my papers and realised the opportunities I have here in Canada, I do everything on my own because I feel I was shut down for a good while.... I couldn't do anything because I was paperless and couldn't work ... it's my turn now because he is at home not working...I look after him, pay day care and rent, working two jobs, , and I come home at any time I want and he does the chores at home..., power sweet (Dorcas)

Worth Less because of Racialization

Participants social status, power, and agency were not only affected by shifts in gender power-relations and socio-economic success alone, as both male and female participants also experienced other intersectional challenges to their status and feelings of worth and well-being (Hankivsky and Christoffersen 2008; Hill Collins and Bilge 2016). As Ghanaian immigrants from West Africa, the

participants were frequently racialized as black by Canadians, who positioned them as an 'other' based on the collective white-normative imaginary that has developed due to: western European colonization by the English and French; an extensive history of displacement and erasure of Canadian Indigenous people; and Eurocentric immigration policy that existed for much of Canada's existence (Creese 2019). Many participants spoke of racism and discrimination in terms of their employment experiences and even their interactions with the health care system (Oppong 2019), as has been previously noted by numerous authors examining West African immigrant's experience in Canada (Creese 2019; Creese and Wiebe 2012; Donkor 2005; Mianda 2004; Oppong 2019).

This is what goes through my mind that it could because of my name sake and color...Maybe they search to see who I am before considering to select your resume or not ... That's my feeling is that because of color and my name... I'm not getting the job

Being subjected to racism on a regular basis, was perceived as a statement on their worth as individuals, potential employees, and immigrants in general, and the collective impact of these experiences could ultimately

contribute to internalized racism and an impaired sense of their own worth over time (Carter 2007; David 2014).

Worth Less because my Education and Experience are not Canadian

Most participants came to Canada with educational qualifications, work experience, and established careers, which had provided them with social status and a sense of worth and well-being in Ghana. However, on arrival in their new country, they discovered that their education and experience were also 'othered' and devalued because it had not been obtained in Canada (Creese 2012; Creese and Wiebe 2012). This was a devastating revelation to both male and female participants, who had dreams of success and economic prosperity in Canada.

My greatest challenge upon landing on this dream country is the main was not only being able to use my pharmacy bachelor degree from back home but also to lack of Canadian experience. It seems every job that I applied the first thing I was asked was Canadian experience... It is burdensome. Without going through Canadian educational system in order to find a job or that experience. (Peace)

Hmm, when I arrived in Canada life was smooth for a while and promising as

before I moved to Canada...So much plus many hopes for a better health and life. I came with all the qualifications needed, education and good work experience from home... but all this is not valid here, I could use it ... Is just useless... I feel like I'm empty ... (Aunty)

This unexpected reality created distress, disappointment, and depression, as participants not only faced socioeconomic challenges as a result, but also found themselves engaged in work that was much lower status and more menial than the work they had been engaged in before migration (Creese 2012; Creese and Wiebe 2012). Many felt all the work they had invested in their education and careers were lost, and that they had to start over from the bottom of the ladder because of unfair policies and assumptions made by Canadian professional associations and employers.

The surprised thing here is that when our family got here, we lost hope right from the beginning when we go to know that getting a job and even in your field here is very difficult. We came with home experience but not Canadian experience With all my qualifications as a degree nurse from Ghana, the system fails to recognize it... I'm still doing what I called menial jobs to help

me get certificate here to work. Most immigrants like me are doing laborer's work to survive...(Menu)

With my qualification (master's in business administration) as a branch manager I had to start all over again when I came to Canada... I felt lost here in Canada, I sometimes feel discouraged...I started my first job catching chickens in one company, next was security... (Jerry)

Therefore, 'othering' and marginalization in multiple spheres intersected with shifts in gender roles and gender power-relations to create a situation where Ghanaian immigrants often felt devalued. However, male immigrants appeared to experience this perceived fall in status to an even greater degree than the female participants because their expectations of status associated with patriarchal traditional perspectives in Ghana left them with an aggrieved sense of masculine entitlement (Kimmel 2010), combined with a new social context that made it extremely difficult to retain signifiers of Ghanaian hegemonic masculinities such as 'breadwinner' and 'head of household' status (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Creese 2012; Messerschmidt 2018; Mfecane 2018).

Implications for those Working with Immigrant Populations

Both male and female Ghanaian immigrant participants reported that the migration and settlement experience was extremely stressful, and there was a virtually universal narrative of some degree of intersectional loss in status and well-being in their new country (Creese 2012; Creese and Wiebe 2012; Manuh 2003; Mianda 2004; Oppong 2019). However, men appeared to be particularly struggling with depression and mental health challenges related to their shifting social location. This situation was likely made significantly worse by men's reluctance to seek support for their mental distress (Courtenay 2000; Creighton and Oliffe 2010; Oppong 2019) and their tendency to cling to Ghanaian traditional gender perspectives which support men's power and control in the domestic sphere (Creese 2012; Manuh 2003). Therefore, immigrant men's health and psychological well-being may benefit significantly from programming that assists them to navigate these intersectional challenges to their gendered social location following migration. Given that men's response to depression often results in addictions, aggression, and even violence (Brownhill et al. 2005; Oliffe and Phillips 2008), supporting these men may not only have benefits for men's

health, but also for the health of relationships and immigrant families in general.

Although Ghanaian immigrant women also faced racism, 'othering', and devaluation of their education, qualifications and experience (Manuh 2003; Mianda 2004), they also reported that these shifts in gender-power relations in the Canadian context gave them a greater sense of agency and empowerment compared to their previous lives in Ghana (Oppong 2019). While female immigrants from Ghana will often face significant health challenges and barriers to accessing the social determinants of health, findings from our study suggest that it may be possible for those working with this population to harness some women's greater sense of empowerment and agency in developing and delivering programming with them.

Study Limitations

There were several limitations in the current study. These findings are based on interviews with only ten Ghanaian immigrant participants in one western Canadian city, conducted as part of a study that was primarily exploring the health care choices of recent Ghanaian immigrants (Oppong 2019). Therefore, we should be cautious generalizing these findings to all Ghanaian immigrants and contexts. These narratives unexpectedly emerged during qualitative interviews related

to health care choices, and although they were explored as part of the semi-structured nature of the interview, it is possible that even richer data could have been obtained if questions to explore these concepts were developed prior to the interviews; therefore, additional research in this area would be beneficial with a larger sample with greater diversity. However, while the sample was limited in size, the trustworthiness and transferability of these findings is enhanced by the congruence of these narratives with previous research with Ghanaian immigrants, which has reported similar findings (Creese 2012; Creese 2019; Creese and Wiebe 2012; Donkor 2005; Manuh 2003; Mianda 2004)

Conclusion

Findings from this exploratory qualitative descriptive study illustrated the profound shifts in intersectional gender power relations among recent Ghanaian immigrants to Canada. Both men and women experienced several intersecting challenges to their gender performance and social location, including racialization, and marginalization of their prior education, qualifications, and work experience. Likewise, both men and women experienced a shift in gender power-relations following migration to Canada, which left men with a feeling of aggrieved entitlement as their patriarchal power and status as 'breadwinner'

and 'head of the household' waned in the social context of their new home. Consequently, many male participants reported depression and emotional distress due to their new social location, and a feeling of powerlessness. Women experienced this shift in gender power-relations as a positive move for them, with feelings of greater empowerment and agency to make decisions independent of masculine control. While additional exploration of these phenomena are recommended, these findings may be useful to those working with Ghanaian immigrant populations in the planning of

programming to support new immigrants to navigate these intersectional gender transitions post-migration.

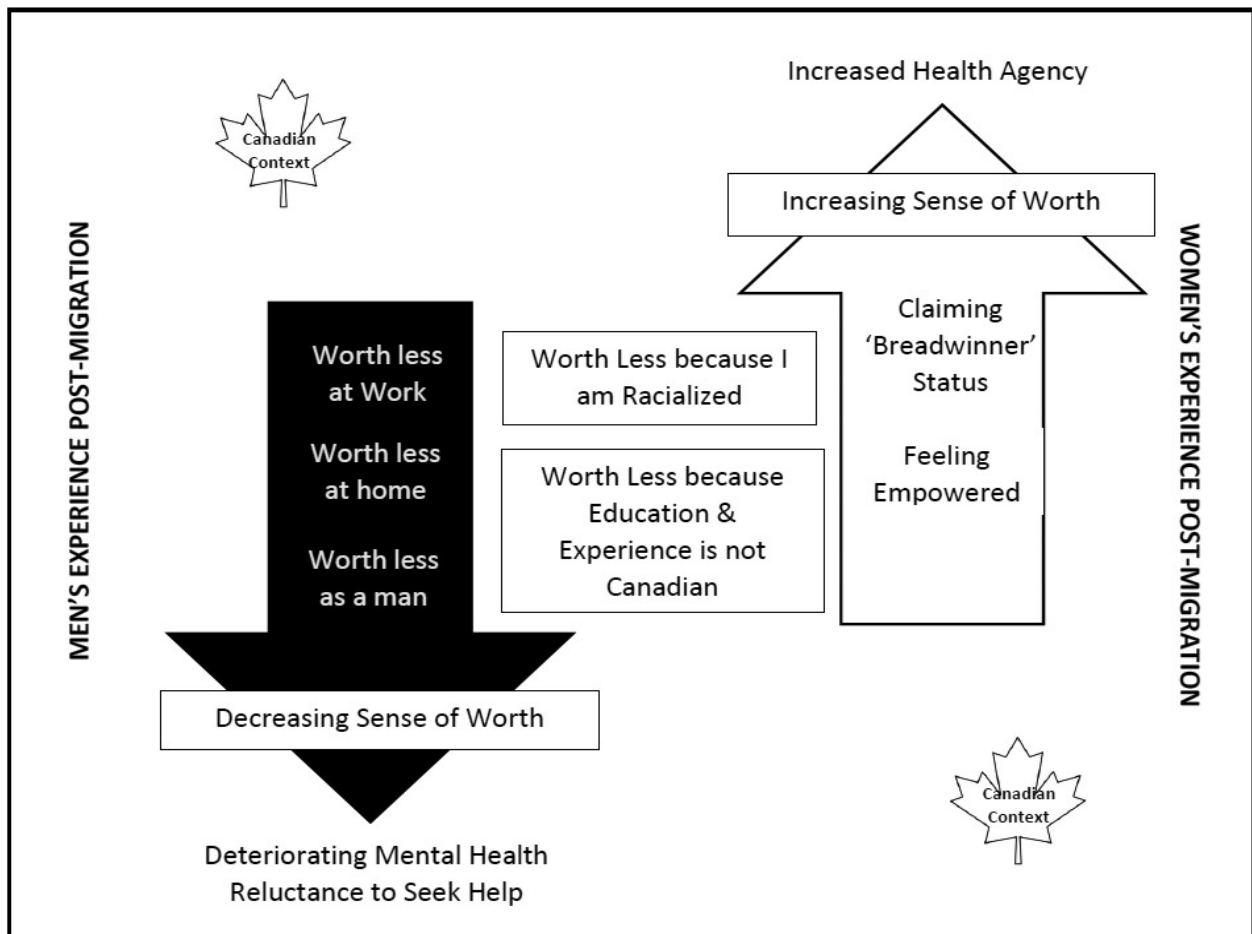


Figure 1. Diverging Gendered Experience of Worth and Power Among Ghanaian Immigrants Following Migration to Canada

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