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Workplace Experience and Behaviour of Nigerian Migrant Women in Canada

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ABSTRACT
African women's migration, premised on better economic and social opportunities, often faces workplace challenges of acculturation and integration in their destination country(ies), impacting their workplace behaviour, productivity, and wellbeing. However, research on Nigerian women's intersectional realities and daily workplace experiences is limited, highlighting the lack of attention given to their unique issues and behavioural adaptations as migrant women. In lieu of this, the study examined workplace related challenges and behavioural coping mechanisms employed by Nigerian migrant women for better integration in new environment. To explain the phenomenon, the study adopted Intersectionality Theory of Crenshaw and Acculturation Theory of John W. Berry. Given the upsurge of migration along Nigeria-Canada corridor, this paper employed the exploratory research design to examine the workplace experiences of 10 Nigerian women in Canada through technology, regarding the issues and approaches in adapting to workplace behaviour. Using purely qualitative research methods, and in-depth interviews, the study examined Nigerian women workers across sectors who have lived in Canada for at least a year. Findings suggested that women workplace culture such as lack of structured training, exploitation, overwork, peer resentment, indirect communication styles, and persistent racialised and gendered barriers profoundly shaped the work behaviour of Nigerian immigrant women, often in challenging ways. The study emphasises the need for more inclusive, transparent, culturally responsive workplace policies, structural reforms, adaptive leadership, inclusive evaluations, mentorship opportunities, and culturally competent HR policies in Canada to support the professional integration of immigrant women, reduce marginalisation and promote their well-being.

Keywords: *Women migration, workplace cultural expectations, workplace behaviour, workplace challenges, coping mechanisms*

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND
Globally, the trajectories of migration have changed over the years. The increasing globalisation of labour markets has propelled the movement of people across borders, with women comprising a significant portion of this migratory flow. Prior to the 1970s, the movement of people was shorthand for male migrant's workers, thereby focusing on male labour migration; however, by the end of the 20th century, the trend of migration has changed in favour of female migrant workers, establishing "feminisation of migration" as an emerging trend that reflects women's increasing autonomy and economic agency (Humera and Fatima, 2017; Castles, de Haas and Miller, 2014). This implies that before the 19th century, family migration was the primary cause of female migration, but the inception of the twentieth-century birthed a new female identity induced by globalisation, female emancipation, education and industrialisation that allowed for their free migration for work and education. Since then, this has propelled many interrogations into patterns of migration, especially into the interplay of migration and gender (World Health Organization, 2018).
Women and girls made up 49% of all international migrants for work, with that percentage rising to 51% in more developed nations, remarkably outnumbering men everywhere except in Africa and Asia (IOM, 2023; Kanu, Bazza & Omojola, 2021). Notwithstanding of this increased mobility, the intersections of gender, race, class and status further contribute to the multifaceted challenges immigrant women face in their workplaces. The challenges faced in workplaces are rooted in

different behaviours from and towards immigrant women. Immigrant women engage in various forms of labour upon migration, which exposes them to different workplace experiences that affect their work behaviour, wellbeing, and integration (Hennebry, Grass and Mclaughlon, 2016).

A regional meeting published by Spotlight initiative (2018) showed that gender disparities and sexism remain throughout migration for work, leading to discriminatory perceptions, attitudes and behaviours towards female migrant workers, which deny women access to safe, equitable, and survivor-centred migration. Concurrently, workplace behaviour such as attitudes towards authority, interpersonal interactions, communication approaches and work ethics is influenced by migrants' cultural identities and their adaptation to new cultural expectations in host countries (Kofman and Raghuram, 2015).

Consequently, immigrant women's origin country, work sector and skill level determine their experiences of structural inequalities in host countries' work institutions which eventually result in exploitation, limited opportunities for upward mobility, and exploitation (Parreñas, 2001). Understanding the behavioural dynamics in workplace environments is crucial not only for immigrant women's well-being and professional success but also for fostering inclusive and equitable labour markets. By analysing the patterns, motivations, and outcomes of women's migration alongside their workplace experiences, we can better inform policies that support integration, gender equity, and labour rights.

Africa is often described as the continent with the most mobile population in the world, especially Nigeria (Akanle, 2023; Akanle and Ola-Lawson, 2022, Akanle, Kayode and Abolade. 2022, Ritcher, Vallianatos, Green and Obuekwe, 2020, Akanle, 2018), with Nigerian women constituting a significant proportion of African migrants in intra and international migration flows (IOM, 2020; Afolayan, Ikwuyatum and Abejide, 2008). This migration flow is mirrored in the continent's current economic migration patterns (Akanle, 2023; UNCTAD, 2018). Despite the significant growth of women's existence in the migratory labour market, the existing research on African immigrant women's experiences in workplaces generally focuses disproportionately on sexual exploitation and trafficking, particularly in domestic and informal labour markets (IOM 2020; Hennebry, Grass and Mclaughlon, 2016; Akor, 2011). There is limited empirical research that explores the ordinary, everyday workplace experiences and behavioural adaptations of Nigerian migrant women across different employment sectors (informal, professional and semi-professional workplaces).

From the above view, there is a paucity of research on how the day-to-day intersectional realities of Nigerian's women identity shape their experiences and behaviours within the workplace with impact on their productivity, mental health, and career trajectories, as well as the psychological and behavioural coping strategies adopted by these women. The key problem, therefore, is the little attention paid to the unique issues and behavioural adaptations of migrant women in workplaces. There is an urgent need for empirical research that investigates these processes, identifies structural reasons of inequality, and informs policies that promote integration, labour rights, and gender-sensitive workplace reforms.

Addressing this gap is critical not only for creating inclusive workplace regulations, but also for contributing to larger discussions about migration, gender, and labour. As a result, the aim of this research is to investigate the workplace experiences and behaviour of Nigerian migrant women in Canada, with a particular emphasis on identity negotiation, discrimination, adaption methods, and professional development across various sectors and areas.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
The intersections of workplace experience and work behaviour of immigrant women

Andall (2018) emphasised that the experiences and labour conditions that female migrants go through are influenced by the gender hierarchy in their destination countries. Women who work as migrant labourers are especially vulnerable to mistreatment, violence, and prejudice (IPU, ILO and OHCHR, 2015). Women who migrate may benefit from increased financial independence and new opportunities, but they may also be in danger of violations of their security and human rights. According to Jagire (2019), due to exclusions and exploitation, immigrant women in Canada face discrimination, overwork, and marginalisation in the workplace.

The most common problems pertaining to the working circumstances of female migrant labourers are low pay, excessive workloads and lengthy workdays, inadequate training resources, inadequate professional advancement opportunities, restricted mobility in certain nations, and documented mistreatment (Mũrage and Smith, 2023; IOM, 2006). Hennebry, Gras and Mclaughlon (2016), opined that women are continuously marginalised for the work they do because of an overall underestimation of low-skilled occupations, common misconceptions about migrant workers, as well as social conventions and gender-related understandings. Similar to this, Central Asian immigrant women in Russia report experiencing psychological anguish due to workplace discrimination that is made worse by language and cultural misconceptions (Zotova, Agadjanian, Isaeva, and Kalandarov, 2021).

According to a regional meeting published by the Spotlight initiative (2019), sexism and gender inequality persist during labour migration, resulting in prejudiced attitudes, behaviours, and perceptions towards female migrant workers that prevent women from accessing safe, equitable, and survivor-centred migration. Thus, the cultural identities of migrants and their adjustment to new cultural norms in host nations have an impact on workplace conduct, including attitudes towards authority, interpersonal relationships, communication styles, and work ethics (Kofman and Raghuram, 2015). A study carried out in Taiwan revealed that immigrant women face unexpected rivalry from co-workers due to differences in work ethics and performance, thereby leading to jealousy and conflict relationships (Wu, 2023)

The intersectional identities of migrant women encompassing gender, ethnicity, legal status, and socio-economic background often influence how they are perceived and treated in the workplace. The workplace experiences of migrant women are often mediated by a confluence of factors, including race, gender, migration status, and cultural background (Anthias, 2012). Migrant women frequently report instances of workplace discrimination, deskilling, limited upward mobility, and inadequate recognition of qualifications (Awumbila, 2015; Emejulu & Bassel, 2015). A study carried out by Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) (2023) revealed that immigrant women professionals experience marginalising behaviours, such as micro-aggressions related to accent, language, immigrant background, gender and race, which impede their ability to progress in their careers and exacerbate feelings of loneliness.

Additionally, cultural and religious stereotypes often shape the perceptions of Nigerian women in host societies, influencing both employer attitudes and co-worker relations (Dike, 2013). These elements highlight the part that work experience play as social determinants of health by contributing to deteriorated mental health and well-being (Mũrage and Smith, 2023). Prejudices and cultural misunderstandings can result in discriminatory practices and a lack of inclusion, which in turn affect their performance, job satisfaction, and mental health. Many employers and host societies fail to recognise the structural barriers faced by these women, instead attributing behavioural differences to individual shortcomings.

These conditions may foster coping behaviours such as withdrawal, over performance, silence, or assertiveness, which in turn impact workplace integration and performance. Migrant women

are often disproportionately concentrated in informal and low-wage sectors, where labour protections are minimal or poorly enforced, which subjects them to exploitative conditions, including long hours, wage theft, and harassment, which adversely shape their workplace behaviour, such as adopting coping mechanisms like silence, overcompliance, or withdrawal (ILO, 2021). In addition, immigrant women have reportedly distanced themselves from their co-workers to avoid conflict due to unexpected rivalry from co-ethnic co-workers (Wu, 2023)

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
The study adopted Intersectionality Theory of Crenshaw (1989) and Acculturation Theory of John W. Berry (1997). Intersectionality theory is a framework introduced by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to explain how different forms of social stratification such as race, gender, class, and other identity markers interact and overlap to create unique experiences of discrimination, oppression and privilege. In her book, "Demarginalising the Intersection of Race and Sex" (1989) she analysed the case of Black women's employment discrimination and how the legal system failed to address the combined impact of racism and sexism. She argued that traditional anti-discrimination frameworks were insufficient because they treated race and gender as separate categories of analysis.

"Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated" (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140).

It provides a nuanced lens to examine how intersecting systems of oppression shape lived experiences, and it continues to influence policies and practices aimed at achieving equity and inclusion. Crenshaw developed the theory to critique the limitations of single-axis approaches to discrimination, particularly within legal and feminist discourses. Intersectionality, therefore, challenges additive models of oppression and insists that marginalized individuals often experience discrimination in ways that cannot be captured by looking at one dimension of identity in isolation. The framework emphasises different types of intersectionalities such as interlocking systems of power and structural, political, and representational intersectionality.

Interlocking Systems of Power Intersectionality examines how systems like patriarchy, racism, capitalism, and colonialism interconnect to reinforce inequality. For Structural, Political, and Representational Intersectionality; Structural Intersectionality refers to how social structures (like laws, labour markets, or healthcare) disproportionately affect people at the intersection of multiple identities; Political Intersectionality critiques how feminist and anti-racist movements often marginalise those who belong to both groups; Representational Intersectionality explores how cultural representations (e.g., media portrayals) can reinforce oppressive stereotypes.

Acculturation Theory, developed by John W. Berry (1997), explains how individuals adapt psychologically and behaviourally when they come into continuous contact with a new culture. The theory outlines four acculturation strategies: assimilation (adopting the host culture while shedding the original), integration (maintaining one's original culture while also adopting the host culture), separation (retaining the original culture and rejecting the host culture), and marginalization (rejecting both cultures).

According to Intersectionality theory, Nigerian women in Canada often face **multiple, overlapping forms of marginalization**, not just as women, but also as Black, African, immigrant, and status. For instance, they may encounter **racial micro-aggressions** in predominantly white workplaces, **gender bias** in male-dominated industries, and **status-based discrimination** if they are on temporary work permits or lack professional Canadian credentials. Their workplace

behaviour (e.g., reluctance to speak up, over performance, or strategic code-switching) can be seen as adaptive responses to navigating these intersecting oppressions. Acculturation theory helps to describe how they adjust to Canadian workplace norms, values, and communication styles. Many may pursue **integration**, balancing Nigerian cultural values such as respect for hierarchy and communal relationships with Canadian workplace expectations like assertiveness, individualism, and gender equality. However, challenges such as racial bias, underemployment, or cultural misunderstandings may hinder successful adaptation, potentially leading to marginalisation or separation. Their workplace behaviour, including communication patterns, assertiveness, or reluctance to report discrimination, often reflects their chosen or imposed acculturation strategy.

METHODOLOGY
The study adopted an exploratory research design to investigate the lived experiences of Nigerian migrant women in Canada, thereby contributing to the existing body of knowledge. The research underpinning this article was conducted between 2024 and 2025 and involved the collection of primary data from Nigerian women residing in Canada. Canada as a country represented the destination for Nigerian migrant women. Participants were selected across 6 major provinces with the highest Nigerian communities including Ontario, Alberta, Manitoba, British Columbia, Quebec and Saskatchewan. Primary data was collected using a qualitative research approach. Specifically, ten in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted with Nigerian migrant women living in Canada. A non-probability sampling strategy, particularly purposive sampling, was employed to identify participants. The target population consisted of Nigerian women who were married, had children, and were employed at the time of the study. Participants were identified through snowball sampling via various networks, including occupational or professional associations, religious groups, and other Nigerian communities and organizations in Canada. Eligible participants had resided and worked in Canada for a minimum of one year. The interviews were conducted using the semi-structured interview guide. The interview method was selected for its effectiveness in capturing authentic and reliable accounts of women's lived experiences. Due to distance barrier, interviews were conducted virtually through WhatsApp and phone calls to facilitate participation. For the analysis phase, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Both content and thematic analysis methods were employed, utilizing coding and node generation to explore the diverse experiences of participants based on variables such as age, marital status, and duration of stay in Canada, profession, location and immigration status. The study strictly adhered to global ethical standards, including informed consent, non-maleficence, and voluntary participation. Additionally, the second author holds national and international certifications in the ethical conduct of research.

DATA AND RESULTS

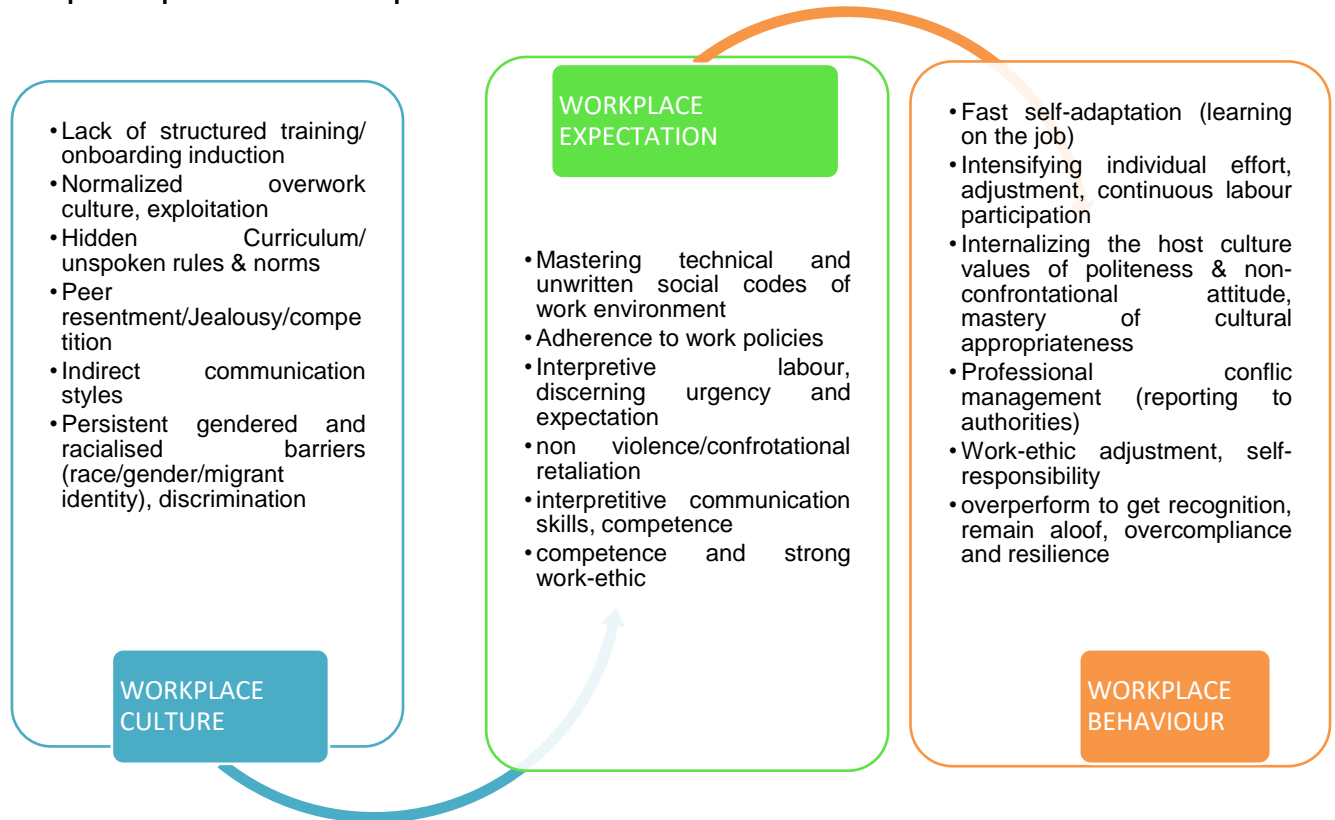**Table 1: Showing socio-demographics characteristics of participants**

Participant ID	Age (years)	Marital status	Status	Profession	Location	Length of stay (years)
IDI 1	33	Married	Citizen	Cyber security engineer	Ontario	9
IDI 2	30	Married	PR	Senior program consultant	Saskatchewan	4
IDI 3	33	Married	PR	Clinical Researcher	British Columbia	1
IDI 4	73	Married	Citizen	Retired	Ontario	49
IDI 5	56	Married	Citizen	Auditor	Ontario	15
IDI 6	33	Married	Citizen	Regulatory compliance specialist	Alberta	9
IDI 7	32	Married	Citizen	Cyber security specialist	Quebec	8
IDI 8	54	Married	Citizen	Social worker	Alberta	17
IDI 9	22	Single	Study	Business analyst	Manitoba	6
IDI 10	23	Single	PR	Personal Support Worker	Ontario	2

Source: Fieldwork, 2024-2025

Table 1 above outlines the socio-demographic characteristics of participants included in the study for In-depth interview (IDI). The research sample comprised of ten (10) women, who had migrated to Canada from Nigeria as adults. The age of the participants ranged from 22 to 73 years with length of stay in Canada ranging from 1 to 49 years. All participants lived across six (6) major provinces with the highest Nigerian communities, including Ontario, Alberta, Manitoba, British Columbia, Quebec and Saskatchewan. Six (6) of the women were citizens, three (3) were permanent residents, while one (1) was on a study visa. The participants were chosen across different work sectors (formal, semi-professional and professional). The findings and discussions were informed and corroborated by the diverse information from the participants' data. The socio-demographic variables helped to make more sense of the information given during the interview and enhance the comprehension of complexities and nuances related to the daily workplace experiences influencing the work behaviour of Nigerian immigrant women.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 1: Showing the workplace experience of Nigerian immigrant women, intersected by workplace culture, workplace expectations and workplace behaviour

WORKPLACE CULTURE	WORKPLACE EXPECTATION	WORKPLACE BEHAVIOUR
• Lack of structured training/ onboarding induction • Normalized overwork culture, exploitation • Hidden Curriculum/ unspoken rules & norms • Peer resentment/Jealousy/compe tition • Indirect communication styles • Persistent gendered and racialised barriers (race/gender/migrant identity), discrimination	• Mastering technical and unwritten social codes of work environment • Adherence to work policies • Interpretive labour, discerning urgency and expectation • non violence/confrotational retaliation • interpretive communication skills, competence • competence and strong work-ethic	• Fast self-adaptation (learning on the job) • Intensifying individual effort, adjustment, continuous labour participation • Internalizing the host culture values of politeness & non-confrontational attitude, mastery of cultural appropriateness • Professional conflic management (reporting to authorities) • Work-ethic adjustment, self-responsibility • overperform to get recognition, remain aloof, overcompliance and resilience

Source: Fieldwork 2024-2025

According to the chart above, it is revealed that workplace culture sets the rule for workplace expectation, which eventually influences the workplace behaviour of immigrant women.

Canadian workplace culture and work behaviour of Nigerian immigrant women

The narrative captures a complex interplay of perseverance, adaptation, and structural challenges that migrant women encounter when entering and navigating professional spaces. The speaker reflects on the pivotal role of higher education (a Master's degree) as a strategy for securing professional stability, suggesting that credentialing is both a source of personal empowerment and a necessary buffer against systemic barriers in the workforce. However, despite academic preparation, the participant encountered an unsupportive workplace culture characterized by a lack of structured training or onboarding. This environment demands rapid self-adaptation, implicitly privileging those already familiar with dominant workplace norms. For migrant women, who often must simultaneously navigate cultural adjustment and professional demands, this creates a dual burden: mastering both the technical aspects of the job and the unwritten social codes of the new work environment. The emphasis on having to "adapt really fast" signals a high-pressure setting with minimal institutional support, hinting at broader issues of exclusion, inequity in training opportunities, and the expectation of resilience from minority employees. A woman revealed that:

Settling into my career there were a lot of challenges. I'm glad I did my Masters, just because I really hope to settle into the job. But my first job, there wasn't any training, you learn on the job, so you have to learn. You have to adapt really fast, basically.
(IDI/33yrs/Married/Citizen/Ontario/9yrs/Cyber Security Engineer/2025)

The narrative highlights a prolonged period of cultural adjustment, underscoring the psychological labour involved in negotiating authenticity, identity, and acceptance. Professional advancement is framed not only as a matter of technical competence but also as contingent upon the mastery of social integration and "cultural appropriateness," revealing the intersection between cultural capital and career mobility. The participant recounts the challenges faced as a migrant woman navigating the subtle, often unspoken norms of workplace culture in a new country. Lacking the socialization opportunities typically afforded by formal schooling pathways, she entered directly into the professional environment without a structured induction into local cultural practices:

Even in the workplace, I know I struggled at first with small talk and tiptoeing around. Not knowing how to be your authentic self and all especially because I didn't come in through school. I think if you came in through school or something, there's a place where you integrate with other people. But I came in and was just thrown into the professional world. I wasn't sure what was acceptable. What level of me was acceptable or what level of me I would have to explain all the time. So, I think that was also a big learning curve for me. I'm finally comfortable, but it took me three, four years to get to where I am. And being confident in knowing the social cues, what to say, how to integrate. Because to advance professionally, it's not just how good you are at your work. You have to be able to be culturally appropriate. That was challenging, too.
(IDI/30yrs/Married/PR/Saskatchewan/4yrs/Senior Program Consultant/2025)

Migrant women, especially, must engage in interpretive labour, discerning urgency and expectations behind indirect requests. This can initially cause frustration and miscommunication, but over time, many adjust by internalizing the host culture's values of politeness and non-confrontation. Moreover, the participant's reflection on her Nigerian background indicates that cultural frameworks of communication are deeply ingrained and that acculturation involves not just learning new practices but reinterpreting one's own communicative instincts. The association of directness with confrontation, and confrontation with potential mental health risks, highlights how emotional regulation becomes a crucial part of workplace adaptation. This experience illustrates broader issues of cultural dissonance, emotional resilience, and gendered labour within the context of immigration and employment. It also raises important questions about equity and inclusion: if communication expectations are left implicit, migrant workers may be inadvertently disadvantaged or misunderstood. This participant's account sheds light on the hidden curriculum of Canadian workplace culture, the unspoken rules that migrants must intuitively grasp to succeed:

Canadians at work will tell you, oh, you know, whenever you have the time, whenever you're less busy, can you just look at this for me? I used to really treat it at surface level that, okay, when I'm less busy, when I have the time. But that person and this can even be your manager, so it's not just about your colleague alone. They will never tell you, oh, I need this report in 10 minutes, send it to me. Or the way Nigerians will tell you very directly. They will tell you, oh, whenever you're less busy. So the onus is on you to know, even though they tell you whenever you're less busy. That doesn't literally mean, it means that's just their polite way of saying, I need you to do this for me. So all of the messaging, how they message things, they are not very direct. And for me, I

found it annoying at first, but later I just understood that. It's just their way of life. I cannot blame them. That's just, I am coming from a more direct and confrontational culture but confrontation is a no-no here, any small thing; people can say mental health, anything. So you're always thinking of the kindest, most polite, least confrontational way to pass your message across. (IDI/33yrs/Married/PR/BC/1yr/Clinical Researcher/2025)

This narrative captures the complex interplay of workplace culture, peer dynamics, recognition, jealousy, and leadership response in the experience of a migrant woman worker. It reflects how success and positive appraisal can paradoxically generate resentment among colleagues, particularly when racial, ethnic, or migrant status differences exist. The participant's choice to seek a supervisory intervention, rather than retaliating, highlights a strategy of professional conflict management commonly adopted by marginalised workers seeking to protect their reputation and position. The supervisor's response, although supportive, also carried ambiguous undertones, suggesting a normalised culture of overwork and possible exploitation, masked as recognition.

So, there was a day, I can just tell you a big example I think I was off at work on weekend. Maybe the people there are talking good about me. But the lady I was walking with, she didn't like it. She didn't take it as if I was the only one walking there. That they were talking so good about me. But as I came on Monday, you know, it showed in her attitude. She was so angry. I was asking her, what happened? She said, I'm too much here. Then I called her attention. And I called the supervisor to explain to her instead of fighting her or acting with her. The supervisor came down and talked to us as the supervisor was talking. He said, you're always too much, not knowing that they talk good about me on weekends. So the supervisor was telling me that they always send me recognition. They always appreciate my doing everything. From CEO, they send me recognition and everything. That was why he put it to her face, cursing me. As the supervisor was talking, he said, this is too much. Get out of here. He was telling me, oh, you will die here because you work too much. (IDI/73yrs/Married/Citizen/Ontario/49yrs/Retired/2025)

This experience reveals how migrant women's workplace success can simultaneously elevate and endanger them, illustrating a paradox of recognition where achievement provokes both reward and resentment. It also points to structural vulnerabilities within workplace cultures that normalize overwork while offering only partial protections against interpersonal conflicts fueled by competition, envy, and underlying prejudices.

Findings illustrated cultural dissonance, a psychological conflict arising from differences between familiar (Nigerian) and host (Canadian) workplace norms. Migrant women may feel alienated when communication styles shift from direct to indirect, leading to potential misunderstandings and a sense of isolation. The participant noted that rather than giving open feedback, colleagues in Canada may "smile" while "hating" internally, leading to unexpected job losses. The participant signals a shift towards formal accountability and procedural justice, but also underscores how the finality of written assessments limits opportunities for relational repair. For migrant women, particularly those from cultures where relationships mediate work outcomes; this rigidity can be both alienating and intimidating. There is an emerging narrative of self-responsibility and work ethic adjustment, suggesting that migrant women may cope with unfamiliar workplace behaviours by intensifying individual effort, even at the cost of emotional wellbeing or relational connection. A woman's narrative highlights complex experiences of cultural adjustment, workplace interpersonal dynamics, and institutional practices in the Canadian work environment, contrasting them sharply with those of her Nigerian background.

> And then, other way is the way people behave, what they call work behaviour. In the workplace, things are not done exactly the way it's done in Nigeria. Nobody will tell you to your face what you are doing is wrong. They will just be smiling and even hating you. Suddenly, the person will lose their job. They do what they call performance appraisal. They take performance appraisal very seriously here. Not like Nigeria, where you can go and beg your girl and say, oh, girl, I'm sorry, this, this, that. Here, there's nothing like that. What is written there is written there. So, you just have to try your best. (IDI/56yrs/Married/Citizen/Ontario/15yrs/Auditor/2024)

The narratives reveal the subtle and evolving nature of workplace discrimination experienced by migrant women, particularly Black Nigerian professionals. Initially unnoticed, discrimination emerges through micro-aggressions and latent biases, becoming more apparent as the individual gains visibility and success. Migrants experience illustrates how competence and strong work ethic qualities traditionally celebrated in professional environments can paradoxically attract resentment when embodied by a racialised, migrant woman. Their identity as a highly educated, hardworking Black Nigerian newcomer positioned them simultaneously as an asset and a threat, highlighting the intersectional dynamics of gender, race, and migrant status in shaping workplace interactions. Furthermore, their broad competence and willingness to assist across roles challenged workplace hierarchies, eliciting tension rather than recognition. These accounts underscore how racialised migrant women can face systemic resistance not due to lack of skill, but precisely because of their excellence, revealing how discrimination is often triggered by perceived disruption of normative professional boundaries.

> Initially she wasn't complaining so much about that. But later, according to her, she started noticing little things, a bit of discrimination here and there, especially when you are doing well and your bosses or anyone can see that. You know Nigerians; usually we are very hard working. So even when our contemporaries, who are not Nigerians, who naturally want to take a break, or be ready to drop their tools, she was still going. So she kind of became, should I say, a favourite of some of the people there. Everyone knows that Linda was good and everything. I think the factors were she was female, professional, well educated, a Nigeria, black and then, someone who just came in, into the system. (IDI/P2 50yrs/Neice/Civil servant/2024)

Impact of workplace challenges on women

This section points to intersectional challenges faced by migrant women: navigating gendered expectations, cultural workplace norms, and systemic performance structures. It reveals how cultural mismatch can compound vulnerability in employment settings, where informal support systems are absent and institutional evaluations dominate. Moreover, the description suggests that migrant women may feel doubly invisible, socially, due to surface politeness masking true evaluations, and institutionally, through impersonal, written assessments that afford little room for relational negotiation or cultural expression. Ultimately, the narrative captures the complex negotiation of identity, professionalism, and cultural adaptation that defines the migrant workplace experience in high-context bureaucratic environments like Canada.

This narrative reflects the intense emotional and psychological strain experienced by a migrant woman during her early transition into a Canadian workplace. The participant describes the work environment as "hell," pointing to a profound sense of alienation, fear, and overwhelming stress. Several interrelated factors contribute to this experience: the pressure to perform in a new and unfamiliar cultural context, the demands of the professional role (interfacing with leadership early in tenure), and the internalization of uncertainty and insecurity common among newcomers attempting to establish professional credibility. Physiological responses (heart palpitations, sleep

disturbances) demonstrate how deeply workplace stress can manifest in bodily and mental health outcomes. This illustrates the intersectionality between migrant status, gender, and organizational culture in producing heightened vulnerability to work-related stress.

> So when I first got in, the first two months were like hell for me because I just got into the job and I had to go to meet different leaders to interview, and being someone that just came into the job space in Canada, it was exhausting, it was different. You know what, every day I used to have heart palpitations because of that job. I was so scared and I wasn't sleeping well, so I was always anxious. (IDI/33yrs/Married/Citizen/Alberta/9yrs/Regulatory Compliance Specialist/2024)

This narrative reveals how workplace cultural norms and behavioural expectations can significantly shape migrant women's experiences of stress, particularly during times of role transition and personal milestones like pregnancy. The immediacy of the work role change, coupled with the significant life event of pregnancy, produced a "compounded" stress effect, which was intensified by the lack of structural support mechanisms typically offered in culturally sensitive and inclusive organisations. In migrant women's cases, stress is not only tied to the demands of the role but also to an on-going negotiation between cultural identity, gender expectations, and institutional behaviour. The participant's experience underscores the critical need for organisations to develop adaptive, inclusive, and empathetic workplace cultures that recognise and respond to the intersectionality of their employees' lives—particularly for migrant women navigating multiple identity-related challenges.

> A job change almost immediately, like my role changing at work, and then getting pregnant almost immediately as well because I have an 18-month-old is stressful. (IDI/32yrs/Married/Citizen/Quebec/8yrs/Cyber Security Specialist/2025)

The narratives reveal that migrant women continue to encounter persistent gendered and racialised barriers within the Canadian workplace. Participants express frustration with being systematically underestimated, where competence is questioned despite qualifications and proven performance. These experiences reflect a broader pattern of implicit bias, where whiteness is often perceived as the default standard of professionalism and capability. The disbelief expressed by colleagues upon successful task execution points to racialised assumptions about intelligence and experience. For Black migrant women in particular, the intersection of race, gender, and migrant identity compounds marginalization, fostering a workplace culture where they must continuously over-perform to gain recognition. These findings underscore how workplace discrimination is not only structural but also deeply embedded in everyday interactions and perceptions, reinforcing exclusion and inequality despite formal citizenship or long-term residency. According to a Nigerian woman:

> Like in your workplace, you always see your white counterpart. They believe that indirectly, you cannot do the job and then, even when you do it, they say, oh my goodness, how do you know it? They think that you are inexperienced. And you're like, okay, I'm educated, I can do it. You know Nigerians, we are hardworking and we are aggressive. But generally, they would put a white person over a black person. (IDI/54yrs/Married/Citizen/Alberta/17yrs/Social worker/2024)

Coping strategies employed by Nigerian migrant women in workplace

Findings have shown that migrants have to work harder and extra than others to be able to meet up with expectations from the management and other co-workers. The systemic racism they encounter at work has made it important to work harder to invalidate the notion of being intellectually incapable. According to a woman:

> You have to work a little harder, you know, you have to always prove yourself because when you make the mistake, they're not going to see it as human error. They will see it as intellectual incapability. (IDI/54yrs/Married/Citizen/Alberta/17yrs/Social worker)

Also, it was revealed by migrants that, to deal with gender differentials and discrimination, the coping mechanism is to put more efforts even than a man by getting more work experience and qualifications. In summary, women have noted that they have to strive to put themselves ahead in many ways possible to give them an edge and also prove their competence, irrespective of their gender. A woman expressed that:

> You just have to put in more effort than, a man, you have to. It's annoying, but you just have to be more, you can't afford to, like, slack off. You have to make sure that, you don't give them anything to say about your work and I plan on getting more accreditations. So, it's, like, I'm qualified for this, so I can get promotions and things like that. Because here, work experience also matters. It's not just about, like, if you went to school for it or not. So, that's why, like, some people might not have a degree, but because of the work experience, it's easier. It's not as easy for a woman, like a man, in terms of work experience. I'm looking into, like, more certifications for myself for, like, roles that I want.
> (IDI/22yrs/Single/Study/Manitoba/6yrs/Business Analyst/2024)

Furthermore, to avoid work issues and conflict with other co-workers, migrants have expressed that they try as much as possible to ignore them by remaining aloof. A woman said:

> I am coping with them by not talking to them and greeting them. We just go on our separate ways.
> (IDI/23yrs/Single/PR/Ontario/2yrs/PSW/2024)

DISCUSSION

The study highlights how Canadian workplace culture profoundly shapes the work behaviour of Nigerian immigrant women, often in challenging ways. Jagire (2019) asserted that due to exclusions and exploitation, immigrant women in Canada face discrimination, overwork, and marginalisation in the workplace. Faced with cultural dissonance, participants struggled to adapt from Nigeria's direct communication norms to Canada's more nuanced and indirect workplace expectations, leading to feelings of isolation and uncertainty. Despite obtaining advanced qualifications, many experienced systemic exclusion and a lack of structured support, placing the burden of adaptation solely on them. Their competence, while earning recognition, sometimes provoked workplace tensions and micro-aggressions. A study carried out in Canada by the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) (2023) revealed that immigrant women professionals experience marginalising behaviours, such as micro-aggressions related to accent, language, immigrant background, gender and race which impede their ability to progress in their careers and exacerbate feelings of loneliness.

Nigerian immigrant women in Canadian workplaces face significant challenges that deeply influence their work behaviour such as cultural misalignment, lack of informal support, and impersonal performance standards, which often leave them feeling isolated, hyper-vigilant, and

vulnerable. Life transitions such as pregnancy further intensify stress, leading to emotional and physical symptoms like anxiety, heart palpitations, and sleep disturbances. This correspond to a study conducted by IOM (2006) that the most common problems pertaining to the working circumstances of female migrant labourers are low pay, excessive workloads and lengthy workdays, inadequate training resources, inadequate professional advancement opportunities, restricted mobility in certain nations, and documented mistreatment. In addition to this, another research asserted that migrant women frequently report instances of workplace discrimination, deskilling, limited upward mobility, and inadequate recognition of qualifications (Awumbila, 2015; Emejulu & Bassel, 2015).

The cultural identities of migrants and their adjustment to new cultural norms in host nations have an impact on workplace conduct, including attitudes towards authority, interpersonal relationships, communication styles, and work ethics (Kofman and Raghuram, 2015). In line with this, findings revealed that the need to constantly prove their competence, while managing intersecting roles as professionals, mothers, and migrants, results in over-performance, burnout, and emotional withdrawal. The impact of work experience as noted by Murage and Smith (2023) plays social determinants of health by contributing to deteriorated mental health and well-being. Persistent experiences of racial and gender bias reinforce feelings of invisibility, forcing many to adopt cautious, compliance-driven behaviours to navigate a workplace culture where their capabilities are frequently underestimated.

The findings of this study reveal that Nigerian migrant women in Canada adopt a range of coping strategies to navigate workplace challenges, particularly those arising from systemic racism and gender-based discrimination. Nigerian migrant women in Canada adopt various coping strategies to navigate workplace challenges stemming from systemic racism and gender discrimination. These women often overcompensated by working harder, engaging in emotional regulation, avoiding conflict, and relying on subtle strategies to maintain their professional standing, coping mechanisms that, while necessary, came at the cost of personal well-being. They often work harder than their peers to counter negative stereotypes and prove their competence, frequently pursuing additional qualifications and experience to stay competitive. To manage gender biases, many strive to outperform even male colleagues.

Additionally, to avoid workplace conflict and emotional stress, some women choose to remain aloof or disengaged. This is consistent with a study carried out in Taiwan that revealed immigrant women face unexpected rivalry from co-ethnic co-workers due to differences in work ethics and performance, thereby leading to jealousy and conflict relationships with women eventually distancing themselves from their co-workers to avoid conflict (Wu, 2023). These strategies reflect their resilience and the on-going need to assert their professional worth in inequitable environments. This is consistent with ILO (2021) that migrant women are often disproportionately concentrated in informal and low-wage sectors, where labour protections are minimal or poorly enforced, which subjects them to exploitative conditions, including long hours, wage theft, and harassment, which adversely shape their workplace behaviour, such as adopting coping mechanisms like silence, over compliance, or withdrawal.

CONCLUSION
In conclusion, the study reveals that Canadian workplace culture tends to privilege those already acculturated, placing disproportionate pressure on immigrants, and particularly racialised women, to adapt without adequate institutional support. To succeed in such situations, Nigerian migrant women must possess not only technical and academic skills, but also tremendous emotional resilience, cultural agility, and strategic navigation of racial and gendered power relations. Ultimately, the work behaviour of Nigerian migrant women in Canada is shaped by a continuous

negotiation of identity, professionalism, and survival. The compounded stressors related to migration, gender, and racialisation result in emotional and physical strain, over-performance, and a guarded approach to workplace engagement.

In lieu of this, these insights underscore the urgent need for more inclusive, transparent, and culturally responsive workplace policies that move beyond tokenism to genuinely support the professional integration of immigrant women. Addressing these systemic and cultural challenges is crucial for fostering equitable, healthy, and productive work environments for migrant women. Also, the findings emphasise the urgent need for Canadian workplaces to adopt more culturally responsive and inclusive practices. Without structural reforms that acknowledge the layered identities and unique stressors of migrant women, the workplace remains a site of inequality and psychological distress. Adaptive leadership, inclusive evaluations, mentorship opportunities, and culturally competent HR policies are essential to reducing the marginalisation and promoting the well-being and full participation of migrant women.

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