NIU Journal of Legal Studies Copyright©2026
Nexus International University ISSN: *3007-1860;* 12(1): 29-38

Domestic Harmony in the Diaspora: Conflict Dynamics, Coping Strategies, and Support Systems among Nigerian Migrant Couples in Europe

OLAWALE JAMES GBADEYAN, EYITAYO J. OYEYIPO,
OLUBUKOLA M. ARATUNDE, ADEMOLU O. ADENUGA
Osun State University, Osogbo, Nigeria.

ESTHER OLAPEJU FAGBEWESA
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

Abstract. This study explores how Nigerian migrant couples in Europe negotiate domestic harmony amid the cultural, structural and relational pressures associated with migration. Drawing on an interpretivist paradigm and qualitative design, the research is based on in-depth individual and joint interviews with 19 Nigerian couples residing in several European countries. The findings reveal that migration fundamentally reshapes marital expectations, roles and identities, often unsettling established gender arrangements and intensifying financial, parenting and acculturation-related stressors. Conflict was commonly expressed through the language of "pressure" and "misunderstanding" rather than overt confrontation, reflecting cultural norms that discourage open discussion of marital difficulties. Couples employed a range of coping strategies, including communicative negotiation, selective silence and faith-based practices, that were shaped by both Nigerian cultural values and the realities of life in Europe. Informal support networks, particularly church communities and co-ethnic friendships, played an important yet ambivalent role: they offered significant emotional and practical assistance but also reinforced expectations that sometimes-limited help-seeking and equitable negotiation. Formal support services were underused due to concerns about cultural mismatch and institutional intervention. Overall, the study demonstrates that domestic harmony in the diaspora is a dynamic, negotiated process requiring continuous adaptation, mutual meaning-making and the strategic use of available resources.

Keywords: Nigerian migrants; domestic harmony; marital conflict; coping strategies; diaspora families

1. Introduction

Nigerian migration to Europe has expanded significantly in recent decades, propelled by economic hardship, political insecurity, and aspirations for social advancement (Adepoju, 2006). As Nigerian communities have become firmly established in cities such as London, Dublin, Rome, and Berlin, the intimate lives of migrants have increasingly come under scholarly scrutiny. Migration is not merely a geographical relocation but a profound reorganisation of social relationships, expectations, and cultural meanings. For Nigerian couples, whose marital identities are shaped by collectivist family structures, strong kinship obligations, and culturally embedded gender roles, the transition into European socio-cultural environments introduces both opportunities for renegotiation and sources of strain (Kastner, 2010). While migration often promises improved livelihoods, it simultaneously generates new stressors linked to acculturation, role adjustment, labour-market precarity, legal uncertainties, and the challenge of sustaining transnational ties.

Evidence from studies of African migrant families suggests that these pressures frequently manifest within the domestic sphere, influencing marital disharmony and patterns of conflict (Akanle et al., 2025). Nigerian couples abroad must navigate not only interpersonal disagreements but also structural and cultural disruptions that shape how conflict is experienced, interpreted, and managed. In many cases, men and women encounter shifting gender expectations in Europe, women may find greater economic participation and autonomy, while men may confront the erosion of traditional provider roles. These shifts can destabilise established marital arrangements and provoke tensions linked to power, identity, and household responsibilities. At the same time, the persistent moral economy of Nigerian kinship, particularly the expectation of remittances continues to place emotional and financial demands on couples, shaping their decision-making, priorities, and experiences of conflict (John-Oti & John-Oti, 2025; Kastner, 2010). Remittance flows exceeding 20 billion US dollars annually reflect both the economic importance of the diaspora and the enduring obligations migrants carry (World Bank, 2022, as cited in John-Oti & John-Oti, 2025).

Despite these complex pressures, research on the intimate lives of Nigerian migrant couples in Europe remains limited. Much existing scholarship prioritises economic integration, remittance practices, or transnational parenting, leaving the everyday negotiation of marital harmony relatively underexplored. There is a need for studies that illuminate how couples themselves understand and navigate the emotional, cultural, and structural challenges inherent in diasporic life. A qualitative approach is well suited to this task because it captures subjective meanings, relational dynamics, and the nuanced ways in which harmony and conflict are co-constructed within everyday marital interactions. Rather than quantifying incidents of disagreement or cataloguing coping strategies in isolation, qualitative inquiry attends to how couples *make sense* of their experiences, how they narrate change, and how they draw upon cultural repertoires and personal histories to maintain stability.

This interpretive orientation aligns with acculturation perspectives that emphasise the diverse strategies migrants use to balance heritage cultural norms with host-society expectations (Berry, 1997). It also resonates with family stress and resilience theories, which conceptualise families as meaning-making systems that actively interpret challenges, mobilise resources, and develop adaptive patterns to sustain cohesion (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983; Ballard et al., 2020). For Nigerian migrant couples, harmony is not simply the absence of conflict; it is a relational achievement forged through continual negotiation between tradition and change, between personal aspirations and structural constraints, and between transnational obligations and local realities. Qualitative research allows these negotiations to be captured in participants' own words, revealing nuances that might otherwise remain obscured.

Furthermore, the coping strategies that Nigerian migrant couples employ are shaped by distinctive cultural and diasporic configurations. Communication, prayer, spiritual practices, advice-seeking from elders, and reliance on religious or ethnic communities all play significant roles in how couples manage conflict. These practices are often intertwined with Nigerian cultural values around respect, mutual obligation, and communalism, yet they are enacted within European contexts that may either support or conflict with these values. Similarly, support systems accessible to migrants vary widely. Some couples find strength in church communities, diaspora networks, or transnational family ties, while others encounter barriers to accessing formal support such as counselling or social services, due to stigma, unfamiliarity, linguistic challenges, or concerns about institutional surveillance. Understanding how these support structures are perceived and utilised requires a methodology attentive to meaning, context, and relational process.

Against this backdrop, the present study investigates how Nigerian migrant couples in Europe experience, interpret, and negotiate domestic harmony. It explores the dynamics of conflict as narrated by couples themselves, the coping strategies they employ in response to relational tensions, and the support systems, either as formal or informal, that shape their marital wellbeing. The study is guided by open-ended questions that seek to uncover: how conflict is understood within the diasporic marital context; how couples conceptualise and strive for harmony; which coping mechanisms they use individually and jointly; and what role support networks play in shaping domestic stability. These questions allow for an inductive, participant-centred exploration of intimate migrant life.

The significance of this study is threefold. First, it contributes to the limited but growing literature on African migrant marriages in Europe iuopby providing a nuanced, experience-based account of Nigerian couples' relational lives. Second, it advances theoretical understandings of acculturation, family

stress, and resilience by demonstrating how these processes unfold in the micro-dynamics of marriage. Third, it offers practical insights for policy-makers, counsellors, and diaspora organisations seeking to provide culturally responsive support for migrant families. Prior research suggests that wellbeing among migrant and refugee families improves when support services recognise both the vulnerabilities and the strengths that migrants bring to their new contexts (Fegert et al., 2018, as cited in *Lived Experiences of Migrant and Refugee Parents*, 2024). By attending to both conflict and harmony, this study highlights the resilience and creativity with which Nigerian couples reconstruct marital life in the diaspora, providing a foundation for policies and interventions that promote family stability and social cohesion in an increasingly diverse Europe.

2. Literature Review

The study of migration and family life increasingly highlights domestic space as a site where broader social, cultural and structural transformations are negotiated. Contemporary family scholarship conceptualises domestic harmony not as a static condition but as a fluid process shaped by partners' interpretations, emotional labour and ongoing relational negotiations. In migrant families, the interplay between structural pressures, cultural transitions and reconfigured gender expectations intensifies these dynamics, producing distinctive patterns of conflict and adaptation. Rather than treating conflict as an anomaly, qualitative family research demonstrates that disagreement can be both destructive and constructive depending on how couples frame, communicate and regulate it within everyday life (Ballard et al., 2020).

Across sub-Saharan African migration streams, movement to Europe frequently reorganizes family structures and conjugal expectations. Research on transnational families shows that migration often involves periods of separation, staggered mobility and multilocal living arrangements, all of which reshape intimacy, caregiving and decision-making processes (Awumbila et al., 2019). The African diaspora in Europe is marked by considerable diversity in partnership patterns, including marriages within co-ethnic groups, inter-ethnic unions, and relationships anchored in circular or return migration (Beauchemin et al., 2015). This diversity underscores that migrant marriages cannot be understood through a single cultural template; rather, couples navigate a range of relational arrangements shaped by immigration regimes, labour markets and social hierarchies embedded in European societies.

Within this broader field, research on migration and marital conflict suggests that mobility can amplify pre-existing tensions and generate new forms of strain. Umubyeyi et al. (2020), for instance, argue that migration often destabilises established gender roles, exposes couples to economic and legal vulnerability and disrupts support networks, increasing the likelihood of conflict in the absence of adaptive strategies. These tensions may arise around decisions regarding who migrates first, how financial responsibilities are distributed and how authority is exercised within the family. Such findings align with analyses noting that exposure to European norms of gender equality, autonomy and rights can challenge traditional expectations of hierarchy, obedience and respect within many African households (Idemudia & Boehnke, 2020).

For Nigerian migrant families in particular, these dynamics are especially pronounced. Nigerian kinship systems are often characterised by strong extended-family ties, embedded mutual obligations and culturally prescribed gender divisions in which men are expected to provide financially while women manage domestic and caregiving responsibilities. Migration can initially reaffirm these roles, especially where migration decisions are framed through a provider narrative. However, studies show that women's increased access to employment in host contexts, as well as the welfare and childcare systems in many European countries, can significantly shift economic power and everyday decision-making within Nigerian households (Kastner, 2010; Idemudia and Boehnke, 2020; Akanle et al., 2025). These shifts can provoke conflict when men perceive a threat to traditionally sanctioned authority or when women seek greater autonomy. At the same time, continuing expectations of financial remittances to extended family members in Nigeria place ongoing pressure on migrant couples, often creating disagreements around priority setting, obligations and intergenerational responsibility (Kastner, 2010).

Psychosocial research further demonstrates that the stresses of post-migration life, legal insecurity, discrimination, underemployment, language barriers and social isolation can directly influence the wellbeing of migrants and their intimate relationships. In a multi-country European study, Idemudia and Boehnke (2020) found that African migrants reported high levels of post-migration stress, often accompanied by deteriorating mental health, which in turn affected marital communication and conflict. Nigerian migrants also report challenges related to childrearing, particularly in countries where

safeguarding systems intervene when parental practices conflict with local norms. Such interventions can be experienced as undermining parental authority, generating tension between spouses over how to adapt disciplinary practices within the host environment (Bryan, 2019).

In response to these pressures, Nigerian migrant couples draw on a repertoire of coping strategies that reflect both cultural continuity and adaptation. Communication-based strategies are common, although disagreements are sometimes minimised or avoided due to the cultural stigma associated with exposing marital problems (Akanle et al., 2025). Spiritual and faith-based coping remains central, particularly among Christian families. Couples frequently interpret marital difficulties through spiritual frameworks and seek guidance through prayer, pastoral counselling and participation in faith communities (Ojo, 2018). Such practices not only provide emotional solace but also reinforce social belonging within diasporic religious networks. However, religious interpretations may either facilitate egalitarian negotiation or reproduce patriarchal roles depending on doctrinal orientation and pastoral advice.

Support systems available to migrants are both enabling and constraining. Informal networks comprising extended family, close friends, ethnic associations and church communities act as primary sources of emotional and practical support. These networks often mediate conflict by offering advice, intervening as arbiters or reinforcing communal norms regarding marital perseverance (Trillo et al., 2019). Yet they can also heighten tensions, particularly when extended family expectations conflict with the couple's own goals or when communal norms place disproportionate pressure on women to maintain marital stability at all costs. Formal support systems such as counselling, social work services and legal advisory centres are frequently approached with caution by migrants due to concerns about cultural misunderstanding, stigma, or fear of institutional involvement in family life (Bryan, 2019). The effectiveness of such services thus depends critically on their cultural sensitivity and ability to recognise the strengths, vulnerabilities and complex realities of migrant families.

Several theoretical perspectives provide useful sensitising concepts for understanding these dynamics. Berry's (1997) acculturation framework illustrates how migrants negotiate cultural maintenance and engagement with the host society through strategies of integration, assimilation, separation or marginalisation. This framework is particularly useful for examining how Nigerian spouses may differ in their adaptation to European norms, potentially producing divergent expectations that influence marital harmony. Complementing this view, McCubbin and Patterson's (1983) Double ABCX model of family stress and resilience emphasises how families' responses to stressors depend on available resources, the accumulation of demands and the meanings families assign to their circumstances. Applied to migrant couples, this model highlights the importance of structural resources such as stable employment and secure legal status, as well as psychosocial resources, including communication skills, cultural identity and supportive networks.
Together, these bodies of literature suggest that the marital experiences of Nigerian migrant couples in Europe cannot be understood solely through the lens of conflict or cultural difference. Instead, they must be examined as dynamic, meaning-making processes shaped by migration, acculturation, social support and deeply rooted cultural frameworks. The literature also underscores the value of qualitative research that privileges migrants' own narratives, offering a more nuanced and contextually grounded understanding of domestic harmony in the diaspora.

3. Research Methodology

This study is situated within an interpretivist research paradigm, which holds that reality is socially constructed and best understood through the meanings individuals assign to their experiences. This orientation is particularly appropriate for examining how Nigerian migrant couples in Europe navigate domestic harmony, as it foregrounds subjective interpretation, relational processes and the cultural contexts shaping intimate life (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Rather than seeking generalisable patterns, the study aims to explore the lived experiences of couples, attending to the nuances, contradictions and evolving negotiations that characterise marital life in the diaspora.

A qualitative design was adopted to enable rich, in-depth engagement with participants' narratives. In-depth semi-structured interviews were chosen as the primary method of data collection because they allow participants to express their stories, dilemmas and interpretations in their own words while providing enough structure to address core themes of conflict, coping and support (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Interviews were conducted with 19 Nigerian migrant couples residing in selected European cities, including those in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Italy and Germany. Purposive and snowball sampling

techniques were used to recruit participants who had been married for at least five years and had lived in Europe for a minimum of one year, ensuring their familiarity with both pre-migration and post-migration marital contexts.

Each couple participated in two interviews; one individual and one joint, depending on sensitivity and preference. Individual interviews provided space for personal reflection on conflict and coping strategies, while joint interviews illuminated collaborative meaning-making and relational dynamics. All interviews were conducted through the Zoom application in English language and Nigerian Pidgin English language, depending on participants' preference, and were also recorded with consent. Ethical considerations were central throughout the research process. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time, and pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality. Given the potentially emotional nature of discussing marital conflict, sensitivity, non-judgemental engagement and appropriate referral information were prioritised.

Data were analysed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase approach. This iterative process involved familiarisation with transcripts, generation of initial codes, organisation of codes into themes, review and refinement of themes, and the production of an analytic narrative. The analysis was inductive but informed by sensitising concepts from acculturation theory and family stress models, which helped situate participants' experiences within broader socio-cultural and structural contexts (Berry, 1997; McCubbin & Patterson, 1983). Reflexivity was integral to the analytic process; the researcher maintained a reflective journal to document assumptions, emotional responses and emerging interpretations, recognising the influence of positionality in shaping the research encounter (Finlay, 2017).

To enhance trustworthiness, several strategies were employed. Credibility was supported through prolonged engagement with participants and the use of member reflections, allowing participants to comment on preliminary interpretations. Transferability was facilitated by providing rich, contextual descriptions of participants' backgrounds and settings. Dependability and confirmability were strengthened through an audit trail documenting analytic decisions and methodological adaptations. Together, these procedures ensured that the study remained rigorous while attending to the complexity and depth of participants' lived experiences.

4. Findings

This section presents the main themes that emerged from the interviews with Nigerian migrant couples in Europe. Pseudonyms are used for all participants. While each couple's story was unique, their narratives converged around four broad themes: (1) life in transition and shifting marital landscapes; (2) experiences and interpretations of conflict; (3) coping practices and strategies; and (4) support systems and their ambivalent role in sustaining domestic harmony. For most couples, migration was described as a profound turning point that reconfigured almost every aspect of marital life. Participants often contrasted their lives "back home" with life "here", using this contrast to make sense of both new opportunities and emerging tensions. Several couples spoke of migration as a joint project fuelled by shared aspirations for security, professional advancement and better futures for their children. Yet, in practice, the move often unsettled established roles and expectations.

Men who had been primary breadwinners in Nigeria frequently found themselves in a perceived low-status or precarious jobs, or temporarily unemployed, while their wives accessed more stable or better-paid work. For some, this shift was welcomed as "teamwork"; for others, it threatened deeply held ideas of masculinity and authority. One husband in his late thirties described the transition succinctly:
"At home, I was the one bringing in the money, making the final decisions. Here, she got job first, and suddenly everything turned. It is like the ground moved under my feet." (Emeka, Male 38, UK)

Women often linked migration with an expanded sense of self, including financial independence and greater exposure to discourses of gender equality. However, they also described feeling "caught in between" the expectations of extended family in Nigeria, who still assumed traditional gender arrangements, and the realities of dual-earner life in Europe. As one participant put it, "You are expected to act like a village wife but work like an European woman." (Ngozi, Female 41, Germany). This sense of being "in-between worlds" formed a backdrop against which many conflicts were experienced.

Conflict was present in all relationships, but its meanings and triggers varied. Participants most frequently identified four interconnected areas of tension: finances and remittances, gender roles and household labour, childrearing practices, and the pressures of immigration status and discrimination. Financial disagreements were often tied to obligations towards extended family. Some couples described

strong pressure to send money home even when their own living costs were high. Where spouses differed in their priorities, arguments were common. One wife explained:
“His family will call, my family will call. Everybody has emergency. Sometimes I say, ‘Let us breathe small.’ Then he thinks I don’t respect his people.” (Bimbo, Female 32, Ireland).

Gender and domestic roles were another major source of conflict. Men who struggled to adjust to shared household labour sometimes framed their wives’ requests for help as disrespectful or “too European”. Women who felt overburdened by paid work and unpaid care work expressed frustration at being held to “old standards” in a new context.

Disagreements about childrearing often emerged around discipline. Many participants described fear of social services and uncertainty about what was considered acceptable in their host country. Couples recounted arguments over whether physical discipline should be abandoned entirely, moderated, or maintained “inside the house”. These debates were not only about methods but also about identity and the perceived erosion of cultural values.

Immigration status and experiences of racism also contributed to conflict, though often indirectly. Stress linked to asylum processes, visa insecurity or workplace discrimination spilled over into marital communication. Some partners withdrew emotionally or became irritable, while others interpreted this withdrawal as lack of love or commitment. As one husband reflected,
“You think the wahala [trouble] is between you and your wife, but sometimes it is this system pressing you, and you bring it home.” (Tunde, Male 52, Italy).

It is worth noting that a significant number of couples did not refer to these difficulties as "conflict" in a straightforward manner. In their place, they employed terminology like "misunderstanding," "pressure," or "change." Women in particular were concerned about being held responsible for any issues in the marriage that were seen to exist. As a result, they were reluctant to refer to the situation as a "conflict," as the term was frequently connected with failure or embarrassment.

Participants made use of a variety of coping techniques, which functioned on the individual, dyadic, and communal levels. Three tendencies in particular were extremely noticeable: coping based on spirituality or faith -based, communicative negotiation, and regulated quiet or managed silence. When tensions emerged, some couples recounted making a conscious effort to "sit down and talk" in order to address the situation. Frequently, these conversations involved the process of renegotiating obligations, clarifying expectations, and evaluating shared objectives for the family. Those couples that made use of this strategy tended to conceptualize conflict as being "part of marriage" rather than as an indication that the relationship was failing. They claimed that they would occasionally convene "family meetings" in which they would discuss matters pertaining to their finances, their children's problems, and their commitments to their extended families, attempting to arrive at a solution.

Many participants, on the other hand, talked of practices of selective or "managed" quiet in addition to open communication. To "keep the peace," several topics, such as relationships with in-laws, infertility, and former sexual relationships, were purposefully avoided. Women, in particular, talked about "holding things inside" to safeguard the marriage, even when they thought they were being treated unfairly. Some of the people who took part in the survey thought critically about this pattern and said that staying silent for a long period could occasionally lead to anger and emotional distancing.

In nearly every marriage, faith-based coping was a vital element. The process of relinquishing challenges, seeking counsel, and obtaining the resilience required for endurance was achieved through consistently referenced practices: prayer, participation in church services, fasting, and engagement in Christian fellowship groups. When faced with obstacles, whether pertaining to immigration or financial, some couples would engage in prayer together on a daily or monthly basis. In specific instances, pastors and church elders were solicited for consultation, and their guidance might significantly influence spouses' decisions toward reconciliation, formal counseling, or separation. Faith served as a source of fortitude for certain women, empowering them to assert their right to respect and to nurture one another. For other women, it reaffirmed the imperatives of perseverance and self-sacrifice

Additionally, participants identified several strategies employed daily: utilizing humor and teasing to reduce tension, temporarily withdrawing ("taking space") to regain composure, seeking advice from trusted friends, or juxtaposing their current challenges with past experiences in Nigeria to maintain perspective. The strategies for coping were rarely static; the couples indicated that as they gained greater proficiency and assurance in navigating life in their

host countries, their methods of adaptation evolved over time.

Support systems occupied a complex place in participants' accounts. On the one hand, informal networks. church communities, co-ethnic friends, neighbours and relatives in Europe or Nigeria were described as vital sources of practical help, emotional comfort and a sense of belonging. Many couples spoke warmly of church "families" who provided childcare, accommodation or financial assistance during difficult periods. Informal advisers, especially older couples and pastors, often acted as mediators during disputes.

On the other hand, these same networks sometimes intensified pressure and conflict. Women repeatedly mentioned feeling scrutinised by community members and worried about gossip if they disclosed marital problems. Some feared that seeking help would lead to stigmatisation or unwanted interference from in-laws. In a few cases, advice from elders or pastors prioritised the preservation of marriage over women's safety or wellbeing, especially when emotional or financial abuse was involved.

Formal support systems, such as counselling services, social workers and family therapy, were rarely used. Most participants knew little about these services or associated them with "oyinbo (Western) people". Concerns about confidentiality, cultural misunderstanding and the potential involvement of child protection agencies discouraged many from approaching formal providers. A few participants who had attended couple counselling, often through church-linked initiatives or community organisations reported mixed experiences. Positive accounts emphasised feeling "heard" and gaining new communication tools; negative ones described feeling judged or misunderstood.

Overall, support systems played a dual role: they could buffer the impact of migration-related stress and contribute to the maintenance of domestic harmony, but they could also reinforce unequal gender expectations and inhibit open discussion of conflict. Couples continually weighed the benefits of support against the risks of exposure, gossip or institutional intervention.

The findings suggest that domestic harmony among Nigerian migrant couples in Europe is not a static state but an ongoing process of negotiation. Migration alters established dynamics, exposes couples to new structural and cultural influences, and generates both opportunities and weaknesses within intimate relationships. Conflict emerges at the intersection of shifting gender roles, economic responsibilities, parental expectations, and post-migration stress; nevertheless, it is rarely recognized solely as "conflict."

Couples endeavor to maintain their relationships, modify them, or, in certain instances, recognize their limits through communication, deliberate silence, spiritual practices, and prudent utilization of support systems. In this perspective, harmony does not imply the absence of conflict; rather, it entails the capacity to coexist with tension, reframe responsibilities, and cultivate a sense of collective future amidst ambiguity and transformation.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the ways in which Nigerian migrant couples in Europe negotiate domestic harmony within a complex intersection of cultural, structural and relational forces. Rather than viewing migration as a backdrop to marital life, the couples' narratives position it as a central catalyst that reconfigures roles, responsibilities and expectations. This supports broader research which conceptualises migration as a transformative process that reshapes family structures, emotional bonds and everyday practices of intimacy (Awumbila et al., 2019; Beauchemin et al., 2015). For the couples in this study, life "here" in Europe was consistently contrasted with life "back home", indicating that their experiences of conflict and harmony are understood through a transnational lens in which both settings remain salient.

The theme of shifting marital landscapes illustrates how migration unsettles established gender roles and power relations. Men who had previously anchored their identities in the provider role often experienced job insecurity or downward occupational mobility, while women gained access to paid employment and social resources in host societies. This aligns with previous work suggesting that women's economic participation in Europe can redistribute power and decision-making within African households, sometimes provoking tension when such shifts are perceived as threats to male authority (Akanle et al., 2025; Idemudia & Boehnke, 2020). At the same time, women's accounts of being expected to "act like a village wife but work like a European woman" underscore the double burden produced by expectations from both origin and host contexts. The findings therefore confirm, but also deepen, existing analyses by revealing how couples themselves make sense of these tensions, often framing them not only as

economic changes but as existential challenges to what it means to be a “good” husband or wife.

Berry’s (1997) acculturation framework is helpful in interpreting these dynamics. Couples described differing attitudes towards European gender norms, childrearing practices and the use of formal services, suggesting that spouses sometimes pursue distinct acculturation strategies—some leaning towards integration, others towards separation or partial assimilation. Where these strategies diverged, conflict was more pronounced, particularly around issues such as shared domestic labour and child discipline. However, the findings also show that acculturation is not simply an individual process but a relational one: partners continually negotiate their respective positions, and domestic harmony depends partly on their ability to find workable compromises between competing cultural expectations.

The study further contributes to understanding the nature and meaning of conflict in migrant marriages. While finance, gender roles, childrearing and immigration stress emerged as key triggers, participants rarely labelled their difficulties as “conflict”; instead they spoke of “pressure”, “misunderstanding” or “change”. This resonates with cultural perspectives that associate explicit talk of marital conflict with shame or failure, especially for women (Ojo, 2018). It also suggests that measures of conflict which rely on self-labelling may underestimate the extent of relational strain in such contexts. The reluctance to name conflict directly may be linked to communal norms that prioritise marital endurance and the maintenance of social reputation (Trillo et al., 2019). At the same time, some couples were able to reframe disagreements as a normal part of marriage, a stance associated with more open communication and joint problem-solving.

The identified coping strategies, including communicative negotiation, regulated quiet or managed silence, and faith-based approaches, underscore the interaction between agency and constraint. Communication-centered strategies, such as "family meetings," reflect insights from family resilience studies that highlight the significance of collaborative decision-making and meaning-making in coping with stress (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983; Ballard et al., 2020). These couples utilized both Nigerian and European traditions: they preserved culturally known methods of family discourse while integrating concepts of partnership, mutuality, and transparency linked to host-society standards.
In contrast, managed silence, especially regarding in-laws, previous relationships, or delicate subjects, exposes the constraints of communicative principles in situations when revelation may incur societal repercussions. For several women, quiet constituted a tactical decision to avert escalation or safeguard the marriage, even at the cost of their own emotional welfare. This pattern undermines basic distinctions between "healthy" and "unhealthy" coping mechanisms; in these narratives, silence can serve as both a protective and detrimental factor, contingent upon duration, context, and the availability of alternative support systems.

Faith-based coping emerged as deeply embedded in couples’ relational lives, confirming the centrality of religion in Nigerian social worlds both at home and in the diaspora (Ojo, 2018). Prayer, fasting and engagement with pastors or Christian fellowship groups provided interpretive frameworks, resources for endurance and a sense of being held within a larger spiritual community. Yet, the findings also point to the ambivalence of faith-based support: while some couples drew on religious teachings to advocate mutual respect and shared responsibility, others encountered messages that encouraged women to tolerate harmful behaviour or discouraged them from seeking formal assistance. This complexity underlines the need for practitioners to recognise religious resources as neither inherently protective nor inherently oppressive, but as potentially both.

The ambivalent role of support systems more broadly is a key contribution of this study. Informal networks such as church communities, friends and relatives clearly buffered the stresses of migration by offering material and emotional assistance. However, they also functioned as mechanisms of surveillance and norm enforcement, especially for women. Fear of gossip, stigmatisation or unwanted interference discouraged some participants from disclosing difficulties, thereby limiting access to potentially helpful support. Formal services were underused, often perceived as culturally distant or risky in relation to child protection systems. These findings echo earlier work on migrant families’ ambivalent engagement with welfare institutions (Bryan, 2019), but add nuance by showing how couples weigh the perceived benefits of support against risks of exposure within overlapping social fields.

Viewed through the lens of the Double ABCX model (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983), the couples’ experiences illustrate how migration-related stressors (A), existing and newly acquired resources (B) and the meanings assigned to both (C) interact to shape marital outcomes (X). Economic insecurity, racism and legal precarity accumulate as chronic stressors, yet their

impact is mediated by resources such as dual incomes, supportive church communities and growing familiarity with host-country systems. Meaning-making processes are particularly salient: couples who interpreted difficulties as shared challenges embedded in a hostile environment were more likely to collaborate, whereas those who framed problems as individual failings or cultural betrayal tended to experience deeper relational fractures.

The findings suggest that domestic harmony among Nigerian migrant couples in Europe is best understood as a negotiated, ongoing accomplishment rather than a stable end state. It is produced in the push and pull between continuity and change, between attachment to Nigerian cultural values and engagement with European norms, and between the promise of migration and its everyday burdens. The study thus enriches existing literature by foregrounding the voices of Nigerian couples themselves and by illuminating the subtle, often invisible work through which they attempt to hold relationships together in contexts marked by uncertainty, inequality and competing obligations.

6. Conclusion

This study has explored how Nigerian migrant couples in Europe negotiate domestic harmony amid the intersecting pressures of migration, cultural transition and relational change. The findings show that marital life in the diaspora is shaped by a continuous process of adaptation in which couples reinterpret longstanding norms, respond to evolving gender roles and navigate the structural challenges of settlement. Migration is not merely a backdrop to their relationships; it actively reshapes expectations, responsibilities and identities, often revealing both new possibilities and new tensions within intimate partnerships.

The couples' narratives demonstrate that conflict arises not only from interpersonal disagreements but also from broader socio-economic and institutional forces, including labour-market instability, financial obligations to extended family and anxieties related to childrearing and legal status. These pressures complicate marital interactions, sometimes exacerbating pre-existing tensions and sometimes creating entirely new fault lines. Yet, rather than framing these experiences simply as dysfunction, participants interpreted them as consequences of "pressure" or "change", underscoring the cultural reluctance to speak openly about marital conflict and the enduring value placed on marital endurance.

Coping practices were multifaceted and deeply embedded in cultural and spiritual frameworks. Communicative negotiation, managed silence and faith-based practices emerged as central strategies through which couples attempted to sustain harmony. These approaches highlight both agency and constraint: while open communication and shared decision-making fostered resilience, silence and religiously framed endurance sometimes limited opportunities for equitable negotiation, particularly for women. The findings reveal that coping cannot be categorised as purely adaptive or maladaptive; instead, its meaning and effectiveness vary according to context, relational histories and the resources available to couples.

Support systems played a dual role. Informal networks, particularly church communities and co-ethnic friendships, were essential sources of comfort and solidarity but could also reinforce norms that discouraged help-seeking or prioritised marital preservation over personal wellbeing. Formal services remained largely underutilised due to perceived cultural distance, fear of institutional intervention and uncertainty about their relevance. This points to a need for culturally informed practices and outreach efforts within European support systems serving migrant families. Ultimately, the findings suggest that domestic harmony for Nigerian migrant couples is best conceptualised as a negotiated, ongoing accomplishment shaped by migration's demands and opportunities. It involves balancing cultural continuity with adaptation, protecting the marriage while seeking personal wellbeing and creating shared meaning in the face of uncertainty. By foregrounding couples' own voices, this study contributes a nuanced understanding of intimacy in the diaspora and highlights the importance of contextually sensitive support for migrant families navigating relational life across borders.

References

Adepoju, A. (2006). Leading Issues in International Migration in Sub-Saharan Africa. *African Development Review*, 18(2), 179–199.

Akanle, O., Famose, O., & Olabulo, T. Y. (2025). Spousal Conflicts among Nigerian International Migrants: Contexts of Conflict Management and Support System. *Unilag Sociological Review*, 17(1), 1–24.

Awumbila, M., Teye, J. K., & Yeboah, C. (2019). Transnational Migration, Family Separation and Reunification among Sub-Saharan African Migrants in Europe. *Journal of*

Ethnic and Migration Studies, 45(16), 2930–2947.

Ballard, J., Wieling, E., Solheim, C., & Lang, D. (2020). The Double ABC-X Model of Family Stress. In *Parenting and family diversity issues*. Iowa State University Digital Press.

Beauchemin, C., Hamel, C., & Simon, P. (2015). *Trajectories and origins: Survey on the diversity of the French population*. Institute for Research on Public Policy.

Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. Applied Psychology*: An International Review*, 46(1), 5–34.

Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2015). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (3rd ed.). SAGE.

Bryan, B. (2019). Race, Identity and Care in the UK Child Protection System: Perspectives of African and Caribbean Parents. *Child & Family Social Work*, 24(3), 359–367.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE.

Finlay, L. (2017). Characteristics, qualities, and skills of the interpretative phenomenological Researcher. *Qualitative Research in Psychology,* 14(2), 121–146.

Idemudia, E. S., & Boehnke, K. (2020). Psychosocial experiences of African migrants in Europe. *Journal of Psychology in Africa,* 30(3), 221–227.

John-Oti, E., & John-Oti, S. G. (2025). Migration and the diaspora: Impact on Nigeria's growth and development. *International Research Journal of Economics and Management Studies*, 4(5), 3–7.

Kastner, K. (2010). Moving relationships: Family ties of Nigerian migrants on their way to Europe. *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal*, 3(1), 17–34.

McCubbin, H. I., & Patterson, J. M. (1983). The family stress process: The Double ABCX model of family adjustment and adaptation. In H. I. McCubbin, M. Sussman, & J. M. Patterson (Eds.), *Social stress and the family: Advances and developments in family stress theory and research* (pp. 7–37). Haworth.

Ojo, M. (2018). Religion and family life among Nigerian migrants in Europe: Pentecostal perspectives. *Journal of Religion in Africa,* 48(4), 403–426.

Trillo, C., Enang, W., & Nwokocha, E. (2019). Social support, community networks and resilience among African migrants in Europe. *International Social Work*, 62(2), 849–862.

Umubyeyi, A., Persson, K., Mogren, I., & Krantz, G. (2020). *Gender relations, migration stress and marital conflict among African migrant couples in Europe*. BMC Public Health, 20, 1235.

World Bank. (2022). *Migration and development brief 37*. World Bank.