

Review of: "Square peg in a round hole: Migration and romantic relationship troubles in the UK Zimbabwean diaspora"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Thank for you for inviting me to read and comment on this paper. I learned from it and found it well researched and clearly written. Its strengths include:

- Interrogating an issue – marital breakdown among immigrant spouses – that has often been misunderstood and misrepresented (particularly in the context of South Asian, but also of other spousal migration to the UK). This paper shows that genuine marriages can break down through the stress and opportunity associated with migration.
- Highlighting some things the immigration authorities get wrong or could do better when managing migration, e.g. (i) allowing one spouse (frequently the husband) to control documentation and process, and thereby control and constrain the other (frequently the wife); and (ii) by denying migrants the right to work, potentially leaving some with a crisis of identity (e.g. the emasculated feelings experienced by some men who aspire to be breadwinners). In each of these examples, the outcomes include strained relationships and even manifest in intimate partner violence (IPV). There may be practical lessons in these findings.
- Some of the substantive findings are very rich, e.g. one interviewee states that 'One point I remember my father mentioned that, for you to be a woman, you should have a man in your life'. There's a lot to explore here, as there is in the quotation by the ex-husband who admits to beating his wife before they separated.
- The paper identifies worthwhile avenues for further research, e.g. asking 'What happens to the voices* of the dependents of the immigration process?'

There are some areas in which the paper could be improved, in addition to some copy editing and proofreading, notably:

- The terms culture and traditional culture are used convincingly but very generally. I feel the paper would benefit from more precise and differentiated use of these terms, and with acknowledgement of some of their complex dimensions and intersections, e.g. with religion and social class.
- This paper could be clearer about gender. I think it would be helpful to identify respondents by a few identifying characteristics – such as age, marital status (divorced, remarried, partnered, etc), length of time in UK, and gender (as self-identified). I get the impression most interviewees were women, and therefore most of what we know about men is through their ex-wives. This may be wrong, but I felt the need for more clarity and at very least an explicit statement where you outline the sample of interviewees.

- Linked to the above, I think there is more in the quotations to unpack, and that doing so could benefit from discussion of who the respondents are. This could be done while maintaining anonymity.
- I would like to see discussion of sexuality, as I wonder if some of those who separated did so because they found freedom to explore their sexuality in the UK. If they didn't, that is also worth saying, but this comes across as a blind spot in the methodology and/or write up.
- *The word *voices* is used loosely in places, e.g. above (see asterisk) where you ask 'What happens to the voices* of the dependents of the immigration process?' but as far as I can tell you really mean to ask 'What happens to the ~~voices~~* of the dependents of the immigration process?'
- You refer to an advertisement in which you recruited participants, and also to an interview schedule in an appendix, but do not provide either (in the version I was able to access) and think it would be helpful to do so.
- You conclude that 'From this analysis, we can deduce that immigration into the UK has a negative association with the marital relationships of migrant couples..' But it seems to me that this finding is skewed by your research design, seeking out divorcees. Is this right? What about those who stayed but whose relationships endured? I imagine that, for some of these, the nuclear family may have become stronger while the extended family may have dissipated a bit. I'm guessing this from what I know about the literature on migration in other settings. But whether or not it applies here, I suggest limiting the scope of the conclusion to divorcees and acknowledging that this is a self-selecting sample.

Thanks again for sharing this valuable research and work in progress.