

Report Outline

Abuse in Intimate Relationships: African Women with European Men

The report examines intimate partner violence (IPV) within cross-cultural relationships involving African women and European men, focusing on the intersection of race, gender, migration, and economic dependency. The research emphasizes the vulnerabilities African women face in these relationships, particularly those shaped by migration and systemic inequalities, while also highlighting their resilience and adaptive strategies. The report explores two primary contexts: African migrant women living in Paris and Ivorian women in intercontinental relationships based in Abidjan.

The findings reveal mechanisms of control that perpetrators employ, including economic dominance, emotional detachment, and exploitation of racial and migratory privilege. Systemic cultural and gender norms amplify these dynamics, perpetuating stereotypes that portray African women as passive and subservient. European men often leverage these stereotypes alongside economic and social advantages to assert control. The report underscores the power imbalances resulting from the intersection of gender, race, and migration, where African women face dual expectations from their cultural backgrounds and their European partners, often leading to compounded vulnerabilities.

The research methodology is rooted in digital ethnography and leverages forums hosted within SIDINL Europe mental health newsletters. These forums, facilitated by psychologists, provided safe spaces for women in Paris and Abidjan to share their IPV experiences. Structured discussions covered types of IPV, cultural influences, and coping mechanisms. The Paris group consisted of African migrant women sharing histories of IPV tied to their migrant status, while the Abidjan group comprised women recounting experiences of dependency and power imbalances with visiting European men.

In both contexts, participants entered these relationships with expectations of emotional security, financial stability, and migration opportunities. However, these aspirations often led to disillusionment as control, abuse, and unmet promises became dominant features. In Paris, women described how their migrant status and limited networks exacerbated their isolation and dependency. Abidjan participants highlighted the transactional and unequal nature of their relationships, often tied to financial support and a lack of genuine commitment from their European partners.

The report highlights multiple forms of abuse, including emotional, financial, and physical violence. Migrant women in Paris were particularly vulnerable to economic abuse, as limited access to work or financial resources heightened their dependency. Emotional abuse often intersected with cultural misunderstandings and racial stereotypes, leaving women feeling isolated and devalued. Language barriers further deepened this isolation. Women in Abidjan faced similar power imbalances, complicated by the men's absence and inconsistent support, leaving them trapped in cycles of hope and unfulfilled promises.

Despite these challenges, participants employed various coping strategies to navigate IPV. Emotional resilience, faith, journaling, and community support were common mechanisms. Some women sought economic independence through informal work or community assistance, while others accessed external support, such as women's shelters or legal aid, despite barriers. Strategic compliance, where women balanced self-assertion with maintaining relational harmony, also emerged as a prevalent tactic.

The SIDINL mental health groups played a pivotal role by creating a safe, confidential space for women to share their stories. These groups, facilitated by psychologists, enabled participants to reflect on their experiences, identify coping mechanisms, and explore cultural influences on IPV. However, the forums were limited to women with internet access and the willingness to participate in group discussions.

The end of these relationships often marked a turning point for participants, who reflected on their experiences with relief and self-awareness. Many expressed renewed prioritization of mutual respect and shared values in future relationships. While some participants remained open to intercultural relationships, others emphasized reconnecting with their cultural roots to foster partnerships based on understanding and equality.

The report concludes by recommending policy interventions to address systemic barriers and prioritize the safety and autonomy of African women in cross-cultural relationships. A deeper understanding of IPV in transnational contexts is essential, alongside efforts to dismantle systemic inequalities and support vulnerable women. The narratives of resilience and self-empowerment shared by participants underscore the importance of fostering healthier, more equitable partnerships. The research contributes significantly to understanding IPV among African women in transnational relationships and calls for continued exploration of these complex dynamics.