GENDER, VIOLENCE AND HEALTH:

Post-migration changes in gender relations among Ethiopian immigrant couples in Toronto

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Post-migration changes in gender relations among Ethiopian immigrant couples in Toronto

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
In 2002, our research team received a small project grant from the Institute of Gender and Health Bridging the Gap competition of CIHR to undertake research the role of gender relations in the Ethiopian community in Toronto. The research objectives were to explore changing gender relations in the Ethiopian community in Toronto and patterns of adaptation to new roles, and to determine culturally appropriate preventive strategies to reduce marital conflict and ultimately, partner abuse. Individual interviews and focus groups were conducted with 8 Ethiopian couples.

Findings indicated strong evidence of change in gender relations following migration, particularly in the areas of household responsibilities, work responsibilities and relationships. In terms of household responsibilities, findings suggested that men were sharing more tasks at home in Canada but that the overall responsibility for household tasks remained with women. In terms of work responsibilities, all of the women worked in Canada and women's contribution to the household income was considered to be as important as their husbands. With respect to relationships, there was evidence of both positive and negative changes. On the positive side, there was more shared decision-making and more time spent together/growing closeness. On the negative side, couples faced new stresses and potential conflict as a result of lack of time together due to different work schedules, being tired and loneliness.

Individuals within couples adapted to change in different ways, some of which seemed to be more functional than others. Although these patterns were most apparent with respect to household tasks, they were clearly important in the couple's lives. Patterns of change included: Acceptance of old ways, Negotiation of new ways, Equality, Willingness to change, Acceptance, Resistance, Sacrifice, Tolerance, and Resignation. It was also evident from the interviews and focus groups that the patterns of change characterized by study participants were not static, rather couples adopted different patterns of change at different point of their adaptation process. The process of change was influenced by multiple factors such as age, length of marriage, experience in a third country and gender/culture.

All of the participants were concerned about the impact of change on Ethiopian couples and agreed that there was a definite role for community and religious institutions to help couples adapt to change and prevent marital conflict. Almost all the participants agreed that newcomers especially needed help. The main types of help described were: Education, Orientation and Counseling.

Specific recommendations include:
- Include information on changes in gender relations following migration in orientation programs (e.g., LINC) and materials
- Increase awareness of and capacity of religious and community leaders to address changing gender relations and prevention of marital conflict
• Increase community awareness about changing gender relations following migration and patterns of change
• Facilitate/support the formation of women's, men's and couples support groups
• Consider using established couples as a resource
Introduction
Violence against women is present in every society and culture (Locke & Richman, 1999). According to the 1993 Statistics Canada Violence against Women survey, partner abuse from husbands or common-law partners was reported by 25% of respondents reporting abuse. In Ontario, rates of partner abuse among immigrant and visible minority women were found to be as high as in the Canadian-born population (Cohen & Ansara, 2002). No data is available on the prevalence of partner abuse in the Ethiopian community in Toronto.

Although there has been increased national attention on domestic violence, little research has been devoted to identifying risk and protective factors associated with partner abuse in immigrant populations nor the most appropriate methods of intervention (Hyman, 2002). The Ethiopian Association in Toronto recognised this problem within their community and expressed concerns about how to best address partner abuse in their community. The process of developing our study objectives involved a series of discussions with Ethiopian Association staff and Board members. Initially, interest and concern were expressed about the lack of appropriate resources abused women can access and the social isolation many women experience. However, a consensus was reached to focus this project on the prevention of violence towards women by exploring the impact of gender relations on partner abuse and identifying the roles that community institutions could play.

In 2002, our research team received a small project grant from the Institute of Gender and Health Bridging the Gap competition of CIHR to undertake this research. The multidisciplinary research team consisted of staff and researchers from the Centre for Research in Women's Health (CRWH), Sunnybrook and Women's College Health Science Centre (SWCHSC), the Women's Mental Health Program of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), the Culturally Sensitive Patient Care Initiative of the University Health Network (UHN) and the Ethiopian Association in Toronto (EAT). Consultation on data collection, analysis and dissemination was provided by Mr. Birku Menkir (Executive Director), Mr. J.A. Mengesha (Past President of the Board), Mrs. Yeshoalul Meskel (Crisis Worker) and a project advisory team composed of staff and community members.

I. Ethiopia: Background and Migration History
Ethiopia is considered to be the oldest independent country in Africa that has never been under colonial rule. It is a land of great diversity in terms of its topography, climate, population and languages. There are over 80 cultural and linguistic groups that live together in Ethiopia. The major ethnic groups include Amahra, Oromo, Tigrean, Sidama, Shankilla, Gurage, Somali, and Afar. The dominant religions are Christianity (mainly Ethiopian Orthodox), and Islam. Approximately 80% of the population live in rural areas.

Until 1974, Ethiopia had been a peaceful country. However, in 1974, after a long and peaceful reign, the Derg (military), lead by Lt. Col. Mengistu Mariam, deposed Emperor Haile Selassie. The period which ensued between 1974-1991 was characterised by a totalitarian government, massive militarization, and the adoption of Communism. There
were also border clashes with Somalia and a civil war with the province of Eritrea. Thousands of suspected enemies of the military government were tortured and killed and the major exodus of Ethiopian refugees began. In May 1991, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Party overthrew the Derg. In 1994, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Party, joined by other ethnic based movements, formed a Transitional Government, and the province of Eritrea gained its independence, but ethnic tensions have continued.

Historically, Ethiopia had been providing asylum and was a home for millions of refugees and immigrants. However, in the last quarter of this century over one million Ethiopians have been displaced within the country and an estimated 1.25 million Ethiopians fled to neighboring countries, such as the Sudan, Kenya, Djibouti and Yemen. A relatively smaller proportion of Ethiopians immigrated to Europe and North America (McSpadden & Moussa, 1993).

Between 1974 and September 1998, the total number of Ethiopian immigrants whose destination was Ontario was over 13,000 (George & Mwarigha, 1999; Citizenship & Immigration Canada, 1999). This number does not include inland refugee claimants. Moreover, the mobility of Ethiopians from other provinces to Ontario is known to be very high. Currently, the Ethiopian population of Toronto is estimated by the Ethiopian Association in Toronto to be 35,000. It is well established that arrival and resettlement in a new country involves a period of significant readjustment and stress (Canadian Council on Multicultural Health, 1989; Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees in Canada, 1988).

II. Literature Review - Theoretical Framework

Although there are many forms of violence against women, this study dealt specifically with partner abuse or intimate partner violence (IPV) (aka domestic violence). IPV has been defined as the experience or threat of physical or sexual violence and/or psychological/emotional abuse by current or former spouses and/or non-marital partners (Saltzman, Fanslow, McMahon, & Shelley, 1999). Numerous studies attest to the fact that IPV negatively affects the health and well-being of women and their families (Wagner & Mongan, 1998).

Different etiological theories have sought to explain IPV. In our project we adopted the feminist perspective whereby structurally sanctioned gender inequality and male domination are assumed to create the conditions in which violence against women is tolerated. That is, violence results from women's traditionally devalued and inferior role in the family and society (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). Research suggests that IPV is more common in patriarchal societies where cultural values, including social mores and religious beliefs, dictate male dominance in gender relationships and create separate codes of conduct for men and women (Yick & Agbayani-Siewert, 1997). Male perpetrated partner abuse is more common in couples where men hold more traditional gender roles than their wives (Raj & Silverman, 2002).
Raj & Silverman (2002) further suggest gender relations not only serve as a justification for abuse but also increase women’s vulnerability to abuse by keeping them isolated and economically dependent. The absence of traditional supports compounds the issue (Haddad & Lam, 1994). This may be particularly relevant to immigrant communities as immigration to new and alien environments necessitates the re-creation, reinvention and negotiation of gender roles and relations (Bui & Morash, 1999; Sorenson, 1996) in the absence of traditional supports and social relations.

III. Study Objectives
The objectives of this study were:
• To explore changing gender relations in the Ethiopian community in Toronto and the ways in which men and women adapt to their 'new' roles
• To identify culturally appropriate preventive strategies to reduce marital conflict and ultimately, partner abuse

IV. Methods - Data Collection
Qualitative research methods and analyses were used. The study sample of 8 Ethiopian couples in Toronto was recruited using snowballing techniques. The main forms of outreach were newspaper ads, flyers distributed at the EAT and word-of-mouth. Respondents were contacted by telephone and requested to participate in an in-depth interview and focus group. All respondents provided informed consent and were offered an honorarium for their participation in the study.

Selection criteria included: 1) both partners must be immigrants, 2) both partners must agree to participate, 3) the couple must be married/living together prior to migration, 4) both partners must be of Ethiopian ethnic origin.

The data was collected by a male and a female Ethiopian (Amharic-speaking) Research Assistant (RA), trained in individual and focus group interview techniques.

1. Individual Interviews
The research team in consultation with the Project Advisory Committee developed the individual interview schedule. It went through several revisions based on the results of pre-testing and team discussions. Section A included demographic questions and questions about migration history. Section B included a set of open-ended questions addressing the following main areas: migration history, gender roles, relationships, help/support (Appendix I). The RAs were trained to probe as necessary to elicit depth and clarity. Partners were interviewed separately to ensure that the presence of a spouse/partner would not influence responses. During the pre-testing it was determined that respondents did not have preferences for male or female interviewers so each couple was interviewed by the same interviewer. The sample was considered to be adequate when saturation was obtained.

Each interview took between 1.5-2.5 hours to complete. All interviews were taped, translated (with the exception of 2 interviews conducted in English) and transcribed in English.
Data from the individual interviews was organized using N6 software. The noding scheme initially consisted of over 120 nodes. This was later reduced to 11 main nodes to improve data manageability.

2. Focus Group Interviews
After the in-depth interviews and preliminary data analysis was completed, focus groups were formed comprised of individuals who participated in the individual interviews. The purpose of the focus group interviews was to confirm/disconfirm the themes that emerged from the initial data analysis and inform on-going data analysis. The focus group questions were developed by members of the research team in consultation with the project advisory team and based on data and themes emerging from the individual interviews (Appendix II). Four main themes were discussed: Role changes, Adaptation to new roles in Canada, Rights of women in Canada, and Help/support. Two focus groups were conducted, one with male and one with female respondents. Each consisted of 5 participants. Focus groups lasted between 2-3 hours. The two RA's facilitated the focus groups. Focus group interviews were taped, translated and transcribed into English.

V. Data Analysis
The first step in data analysis consisted of the development of a coding scheme. Concepts already noted in the literature served as an initial guide. Additional codes were developed as the first interviews were coded and analyzed. Regular team meetings were held to discuss and reach consensus on the coding scheme. All of the individual interviews were coded. Preliminary analyses focussed on six nodes: Roles in Ethiopia and in Canada; Migration history; Changes in relationships; Sources of conflict; Sources of help; and Recommendations. This information was primarily used to generate the focus group questions. A similar process was used to development a coding scheme for the focus group interviews. Data from the individual interviews and focus groups were both used to identify the main study themes. Both node categories and transcripts were used to generate findings.

VI. Findings
A great deal of data was collected during the individual interviews and focus groups, only a fraction of which can be reproduced in this report. Report findings focus on information central to the study's main objectives: main areas of change, patterns of change and help/support.

1. Characteristics of the Study Participants
The study participants varied with respect to age, length of marriage and length of stay in Canada. Less heterogeneity was observed with respect to educational and religious background. Most participants were well-educated, though males tended to be better educated than females. The vast majority of participants were members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Although we didn't directly ask about income/socio-economic status it was apparent that the majority of study participants were well established. These characteristics were consistent with findings from the Pathways and Barriers to Mental Health Care for Ethiopians study conducted in 1999/2000 (Noh, Hyman, & Fenta, 2001).
According to this epidemiological survey, the Ethiopian community had an average length of stay of 9.2 yrs, claimed Amharic as a first language (86.5%), had completed College/University (67.7%) although 54.3% were underemployed and 68% were members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

Table 1 summarizes the main characteristics of study participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age range</td>
<td>27-71 years (Mean = 47 yr.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational background</td>
<td>High school graduate - PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious background</td>
<td>Protestant (1) and Ethiopian Orthodox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of marriage</td>
<td>3-42 yrs (Mean = 21 yrs.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of stay in Canada</td>
<td>3-20 yrs (Mean = 13 yrs.)</td>
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2. Roles in Ethiopia
In the individual interviews, couples were asked to describe their roles and responsibilities as a wife/husband in Ethiopia. Findings indicated women were primarily responsible for taking care of the household and children, and men were primarily responsible for 'outside' matters. The majority of men did not share household tasks with women and if they did, they performed activities such as gardening or repairing.

According to both male and female participants, in Ethiopia there were no expectations of men to share in household tasks. In fact, men were not even permitted to go into the kitchen. As one of the participants pointed out, as a child he used to get beaten if he “smelled of smoke”. Women participating in the focus group discussion maintained that, as young girls, they were encouraged to learn household activities while men were not obliged to do that.

The majority of female participants (80%) worked in Ethiopia and performed a double role, both that of providing income as well as being responsible for the household. Although women contributed to the household income, men were considered to be the primary breadwinners and women’s income was seen as complementary.

I was a bread earner, in Ethiopia I was- I was the main bread earner, I was employed and I bring food on the table, build the houses. And most of the house work was- not only most all the house responsibility was left for the wife including taking care of the children as well in terms of their health, their food, their cleanliness, their hygiene and so forth, all that was the duty of the wife (70-74 yr. old male participant)

In fact, the individual interviews and focus group discussions suggested that women were financially dependent in Ethiopia. For instance, one of the female participants pointed out that women were often obliged to stay in unhappy marriages because many of them would find it difficult to raise children on their own.

We are aware of it---we know that we had a subordinate position in marriage in Ethiopia. One of the factors that force us to love
our marriage there is economical problem. How many of us can work and lead our lives independently as women in Ethiopia? How many of them can divorce and live by themselves? Because of that economical problem there isn't that many divorces. They stay not because they are happy or that they enjoy their marriages, but because they say, "Where am I going to go?" So, she stays in that marriage (50-54 yr. old female participant).

The reliance on and contribution of additional instrumental support in Ethiopia must be acknowledged. Both male and female participants said that they were able to count on both hired help and family support. However, women still assumed the responsibility of overseeing the household and actually worked whenever their participation was needed.

As a wife, in Ethiopia, all the household activities are the responsibility of the wife. The man has no any role or responsibility in the household activities. There isn't any role and responsibility for the man. But the difference is that there is help, you can hire somebody to help you in the household activities, to take care of your children. You don't have to worry about all these activities. And therefore even though all the responsibilities are left for the woman, I think at all standard of life - even the poor can hire somebody, you don't have to be rich to hire somebody. So, it was not difficult there (40-44 yr. old female participant).

In summary, study findings suggested that women in Ethiopia men were the principal breadwinners and were accorded more authority in relationships as a result of education, income and cultural influences. Women performed the double role of work and household/children. However, there was evidence of change in gender role due to the migration process. These are described in the next sections.

3. Main Areas of Change
Three main areas of change in Canada were identified: Household responsibilities; Work responsibilities; Relationships. Each of these areas is described.

3.1 Household (Inside) Responsibilities
In terms of household (inside) responsibilities, there was evidence of change. Findings suggested that men were sharing more tasks at home in Canada but that the overall responsibility for household tasks remained with women. A couple of the women participants described: “70% of the work is mine" and "In Canada, we both are working, but I still take most of the responsibilities". Most men indicated that they helped with shopping, cleaning, taking care of children etc.

3.2 Work (Outside) Responsibilities
In terms of work (outside) responsibilities, there was evidence of major change for many of the couples interviewed. Although the majority of women had been working in Ethiopia, all of the women worked in Canada. Unlike in Ethiopia, in Canada, women's contribution to the household income was considered to be as important as their husbands. In fact there was an expectation that women would work. Among the couples interviewed, two male partners had retired and their wives provided the major source of
income. Findings from the men’s focus group confirmed that men supported the idea that women work and actually felt that women were obliged to work in Canada.

In the focus group interviews men and women were also asked what they thought about women working outside the home. It was interesting to observe that the majority of women reported that they worked because it gave them autonomy and a sense of independence, not only out of financial necessity. Both men and women observed that many women derived benefits from working such as reduced isolation and increased adaptation, in addition to generating household income.

When somebody stays home, you know the condition of this country, you can’t have the kind of socialization we have had in our culture. Therefore, she won’t be comfortable if she is not working, she can’t share ideas with anybody unless she is working. If she always stays home while I am working and coming home, it will create for her some sort of stress. It is because to work and come home and staying home do have big difference. Beside, it also brings some additional income if she works, it is a benefit (40-44 yr. old male participant)

3.3 Relationships

Relationships represented a major source of change for the majority of couples interviewed and there was evidence of both positive and negative changes as a result of immigration.

One of the positive changes in relationships was described as an increase in joint decision making among couples. Although there was shared decision making among couples on major financial issues in Ethiopia, some male participants also indicated that they had much more decision making power in Ethiopia than their wives.

We always discuss whenever we want to do something, like I may say what if we give this much for this wedding? We also discuss the money that we give for the church. We discuss everything, I don't hide anything from him and he doesn't hide anything from me (60-64 yr. old female participant)

The practice of joint decision-making seemed to have evolved over time. As one 40-44 yr. old male participant stated,

In here, you know, in the beginning I was the one who was actually...to make the decisions. Because, budgeting the finance was something that I had experience and we men try to dominate in that part. Because we make probably...because she was new and she doesn’t know how...

Another positive change in relationships was that husband and wife were spending more time together and described growing closer to each other. As one 60-64 yr. old participant stated,
There are a lot of changes like - usually we spend the evenings together, my husband and I. He doesn’t say now I am going with my friends... He is always with me and I am always with him. We go for a walk together and even sometimes we go to bars together, it very much brought us together.

On the negative side, couples faced new stresses and potential conflict as a result of lack of time together due to different work schedules and being tired. Other participants experienced loneliness because their partners worked long hours, evenings or nights. As one 35-39 yr. old female participant described,

Of course you would be happy if you could spend some time with your husband and if you could talk and chat with your husband, whatever the topic. But when you can't do that because of shortage of time, you may say until when? ... you may spend alone most of the time and you may tend to say what is the difference if I live alone or with him.

Then when she comes she does her work and after she finishes, she comes and sits with her coffee and say euffff... Then after what she needs is a peaceful sleep and what I want is a different thing. Then what do you think will happen? We quarrel (45-49 yr. old male)

One 44-49 yr. old male participant also described confusion over how couples determine authority in Canada. He stated,

As I told you earlier, what is here as equality is with authority, you understand what I mean? Because here both are working- what brings authority? Is it not money? Therefore both are working and there is that thing and therefore you have to do that and..

4. Patterns of Change - Main Forms
There was evidence that men and women adapted to new roles and responsibilities in different ways. Although these patterns were most apparent with respect to household tasks, they were clearly important in the couple's lives. Patterns of change included: Acceptance of old ways, Negotiation of new ways, Equality, Willingness to change, Acceptance, Resistance, Sacrifice, Tolerance, and Resignation. These main patterns of change are described here.

1) Acceptance of old ways - According to this pattern, both members of a couple were comfortable/accepted the traditional division of responsibilities and tasks. This pattern was only characterized by one couple. The husband did not help at home except for washing dishes and/or minding the children.

Regarding activities in the house, I am telling you frankly, as far as the woman can do the job it is not necessary to impose on him. This is our culture, we get used to it since childhood. If they are willing to learn and help that would be great but it is not necessary to lose your long-term relationship because he is not doing it now (35-39 yr. old female participant)
2) Negotiation of new ways - According to this pattern, couples negotiated tasks and responsibilities in Canada using criteria such as: Who does it better? Who has more time? Who enjoys doing the task? As one 40-44 yr. old male participant explained,

Let’s say, if your wife is a good cook and you are a lousy cook, it should be your wife that is doing the cooking. But if she is a lousy cook and if you are better, then you should do it.

3) Equality - According to this pattern, men and women believed that they were capable of performing both male and female roles. This pattern was described by only a few of the female participants.

...so basically it depends upon their decision where---how they should go about it themselves. It is instead how they make the decision—they could do—the woman, can do what is inside or outside and the man can do both at the same time (40-44 yr. old female participant)

In general, outside he is working. And at home, you know in this country, there is no as such thing as this is a work for women or men. Therefore, he does what he has to do; he cooks if necessary, do laundry, cleaning, taking care of the child (25-29 yr. old female participant)

4) Willingness to change - This pattern was more common among men. According to this pattern, men were willing to take on new tasks, either out of consideration for women or out of their own sense of responsibility. As one 50-54 yr. old male explained,

Well, after we came to Canada, I mean the situation is different. Here, to hire someone who works for you is neither common nor is it possible even if you want to. I have tried to share responsibility in everything that I could and in every way that I can. For instance, concerning cooking I do what I know how to. I don't know how to cook wat (sauce). If I knew how to, I wouldn't have minded doing it.

5) Acceptance - This pattern was characterized by acceptance, either that women must accept that they had more responsibility in Canada or that men have no choice but to change. As one 70-74 yr. old male focus group participant described,

It has been like the work inside the kitchen is for the women and the outside work was for the men. And when we come abroad, whether we like it or not, my brother over there has already said it nicely, whether we like it or not we have to change. Some of the things are things that we should do voluntarily but we do some of the things because we don't have any other choice. There will no be choices regarding sharing the work and therefore we have to share.
According to the former, women accept the fact that they carried more responsibility for ‘inside’ tasks and didn't expect a lot of help from husbands.

I never ask my husband even to wash the dishes even if he has the time because he has a lot of other duties that he had to do. I don't have to focus on this minor thing; and because he is not doing this and others are doing it I don't have to say that he is careless. This is a very minor thing, this is not our culture and most of them do not know how to do it. I do not mean they don't have to learn; they have to learn and have to do it when they are ready. But As far as I am able to do it I don't have to push him to learn this while he has a lot others to do. I think it is focusing on these minor issues that most are causing damage to their marriage relationship (35-39 yr. old female participant)

The latter pattern was expressed mainly by male respondents who felt it was their duty to change if at all they have to adapt to life in Canada.

It has been like the work inside the kitchen is for the women and the outside work was for the men. And when we come abroad, whether we like it or not, my brother over there has already said it nicely, whether we like it or not we have to change. Some of the things are things that we should do voluntarily but we do some of the things because we don't have any other choice. There will no be choices regarding sharing the work and therefore we have to share (70-74 yr. old male participant)

6) Resistance - This pattern was most common among male participants. Men adopting this pattern frequently expressed unwillingness to take up certain responsibilities and tasks, particularly those they felt belonged to women. For example, they didn't mind making coffee with a percolator, but felt it was a woman’s job to make coffee the Ethiopian way accompanied by the traditional coffee ceremony. Another example provided by a 70-74 yr. old male dealt with baking,

The reason why I am not baking "Enjerra" is that first of all my body doesn't even accept it; it is a matter of acceptance. But if I compelled to do so and if I am in a situation where I feel that somebody could be in danger if I don't do that, then I may consider doing that; but I don't know because that hasn't happened yet.

Male participants often rationalized their resistance by saying that they had no time to learn new tasks, trying to learn a new task would simply be a waste of time or cultural influences were too strong.

Other than those few things that we started to work together- I mean those things are still very limited. As was said earlier, for example it is almost limited to those things like regarding cleaning, making bed, washing dishes and so on. But regarding the other things like hot pepper, flour, spices and so on, nobody will allow you to get there. You know, the culture is still there. I do not know, for example, how much sugar or hot pepper
we need for a specific period of time; I can't even guess about it. And therefore since they are the ones who naturally know about these things, it is still left for them. I mean those things regarding the kitchen work (40-44 yr. old male participant)

7) Sacrifice - This was a pattern observed among female participants who described themselves as willing to take on the double burden of work, inside and outside, for the sake of raising their children. They accepted the idea that their primary mission in life is to raise their children and provide them with a good education and they do whatever it takes to fulfill this. They also felt that all women who had children should do the same.

He used to say to me that "you work at night and come back home, you have to get some sleep and you have to take care of the kids and you have to come fetch me. This is not good". At one point, I was not even able to open my eyes but I did not want to show it to him... So I never said I was tired. I worked and I took good care of my kids (45-49 yr. old female participant)

8) Tolerance - This was another pattern that was specific to women, characterized by wanting change but believing women must be patient and not make demands on their husbands in order to avoid conflict. As one 50-54 yr. old female described,

...So we hold on to the idea of not going for divorce. So, to avoid such mishap, I tolerated. I believe that it was patience that prevented me from taking that kind of major decision---my silence, my working without complaining. He then started saying "what?" So, we were able to get to this stage. It wasn't because my husband was nice to me around the time we came here or that he had changed automatically. It was because I tolerated---.

9) Resignation/Resentment - These patterns were also specific to women. Many women were resigned to the fact that husbands don't help or were able to help but didn't. Data from the women’s focus group suggested that many female participants simply “gave up” because they were tired of asking their husbands to carry out certain tasks. Instead of expecting their husbands to change, they said they were the ones who had to actually change and not care so much anymore about carrying out certain tasks. As one 50-54 yr. old female participant explained,

You tell him to tidy up. He does it for today. He does not object it. He says “Ok. I will tidy up”. Then you know what happens to you? You get tired and give up.

In summary, a variety of patterns of adaptation to new roles could be observed in the study population. Although some of these patterns may be considered more 'adaptive' or healthier than others, it is important to stress that all of these marriages were intact, indicative of couples having developed functional strategies to work out their differences.
5. Dynamics of Change

It was evident from the interviews and focus groups that the patterns of change characterized by study participants were not static, rather couples adopted different patterns of change at different points of their adaptation process. Moreover, many couples recognized that this process was dynamic and were able to describe it as such. For example, one man described three stages of change: Culture, Discussion, Habit.

The first stage consisted of maintaining the culture or the traditional form of division of tasks they have migrated with. During this stage most men didn't help at home or expect their wives to take care of the household. As a 50-54 yr. old female respondent described,

To do the laundry, I take the cart and sometimes my husband sits and watches TV or he does whatever he wants to do. He was not the type who’d say, “Let me help you”. That was then, around the time we came here.

However, maintaining culture is a two way process. Women too did not expect their husbands to help with tasks. As one of the male participants described, “if you see couples who just came here for the first time, soon after they came the women don’t even allow you to get into the kitchen”. Women also found it difficult to ask husbands to help because, “It is a little difficult to break that barrier and say to men “Do this”. They might think, “She is giving me an order”. This is because they grew up in a different environment and “it takes time to come out of that culture”.

Over time, changes occurred. At the second stage, discussion, as one of the male participants pointed out, “things are decided together”. There was also a growing recognition that men had to help their wives. One 50-54 year old female participant recounted how her husband changed through time,

I think he watched me through the window going far pushing the cart. He felt it and started saying, “Does she have to do all this by herself?

At the third stage, tasks were described as 'carried out simply out of habit'.

And what we see at the third level is that there are some tasks that remained with one of them as a habit. For example, if the man does ironing clothes one or two times, first she will say please do also these ones but later it will specifically be his task and continue doing that (40-44 yr. old male participant)

However, there was still evidence of gender divisions in tasks. With the exception of one couple, all women cooked and husbands cleaned, did dishes or shoveled snow.

Factors that influenced patterns and rates of change were identified. These included - age, length of marriage, experience in a Third country and gender/culture.
Age and length of marriage were perhaps the strongest influences on change. Older women tended to be more patient, less demanding and accepting of the traditional gender division of tasks. Men and women who were married longer stressed the importance of understanding among couples and were much more comfortable with traditional division of tasks. While the older wives said that they did not expect their husbands to help at home or at least wished they didn’t, the younger wives, on the contrary, expected their husbands to help. The older wives did not feel like asking their husbands to help either because they felt that their partners were aging or they took consideration of the social status their husbands have had back in Ethiopia. The degree of tolerance also depended on age. Older participants were much more vocal on this than the younger ones.

Experience in a third country also played a significant role in the way couples adapted to new roles in Canada. For those couples or men who had lived in an industrialized 'Western' country before arriving to Canada, adapting to new roles was faster and easier because of their prior exposure to Western lifestyle. Even for those who had lived in a non-Western country prior to coming to Canada, the migration process by itself facilitated change for them. For instance, when she was asked how the traditional division of tasks had changed for them in Canada, one of the women participants said, “We have come through a different country. Since both of us did housework, we were hired by families to do housework, when we come here, it is not a big deal for my husband to do housework. All of us started working right away—equally”.

There were also gender/cultural influences on patterns and rates of change. Most of the female participants accepted that they carried more responsibility because it was a women’s “nature” to do so. They rationalized by saying that they ended up having more responsibility because it was them who took it upon themselves to do more. In other words, it was in their nature to assume more responsibility. Many men participants also accepted the 'natural' division of labour and showed patterns of resistance regardless of educational background or age.

It was difficult to assess whether SES influenced patterns and rates of change.

6. Help/Support
This section describes data collected in the individual interviews and focus groups pertaining to who needs help (target groups), advice from participants, types of help needed, main sources of help/recommendations.

6.1 Target Groups
It is well recognized that adaptation is a process, not a singular event. Most of the study participants were well established, having survived the hardship that comes along with learning a new way of life. To that extent, participants indicated that it was others, more specifically newcomers, who needed help. Almost all the participants agreed that newcomers especially needed help. As one 53 yr. old female participant said, “Well, whoever comes to Canada whether that person is a university, high school or college graduate has to know the way of life here.”
Several of the participants felt that women should be targeted for specific help (in terms of information) regarding their rights in Canada.

Other participants specified that men needed help specifically to learn about how to change and accept the reality in Canada. The fear that men were made to suffer by women taking advantage of their rights suggested that men should also be helped in the adaptation process.

6.2 Participants Advice:
Focus group participants were asked what type of advice they would give to newcomer couples in Canada. Responses could be categorized as:

i) **Accept the change** – Most of the study participants emphasized the importance of accepting the reality of a new life situation of North America and the need for patience. For example, women may need to limit their expectations of their partners for some time, and men may need to learn how to gradually overcome resistance in accepting change.

   ...whether it is men or women, there is the problem of not understanding the life in North America. Because the women, for example, demand the men to do unexpected things. I mean, you don't come here and change in one day. For example, as I said earlier, when we were in Ethiopia, the tradition there is not the same as here. When we come here, women want men to change overnight. This is not possible. There are men who have never been in the kitchen in Ethiopia. If you ask him to go in the kitchen overnight, it is not going to work. It is not possible. Of course, there are guys who do not want to change at all. That kind of guy has to change (50-54 yr old male participant)

ii) **Preserve relationships** – Most of the study participants emphasized the importance of being open in communication in order to avoid arguments and maintain positive relationships. Sharing common goals and values were also considered to be essential to strengthen and preserve relationships. As expressed here,

   ...In the final analysis transparency is the only solution to people, they have to be completely honest as to what their problems are and be able to accept an honest relation of their feeling with each other. If- if- if you close yourself in and- and just- just pretend all the time, then it is not going to be a solution (70-74 yr. old male participant)

   Of course, our women -don't say anything about their problems-she sulks and keeps quiet. She does not tell anyone—even him. If you don't tell him today, when you are still married, when there is still love—how do I say this? - it will become very big. If there is a black spot—a problem—it is important to talk about it immediately and try to solve it right away. If you give it time—then it becomes a disease (45-49 yr. old female participant)

   The main thing is once somebody is in marriage life, there should be strength; you need to have spiritual strength. And so the main thing is understanding each other and trying to go ahead together
with what they have already decided together. The rest of the things that are coming from outside are all secondary. But if both agree and decide together and have an objective, then they can try to manage even if they don't get any other help. And therefore the main thing is your relationship inside the home; the spiritual strength and having a common goal (65-69 yr. old male participant)

iii) Be open to learning - Many of the study participants pointed out the value of being open to learning in order for couples to familiarize themselves with some of the changes that they were going to face in Canada.

...Even if it is for a short period of time, it is very useful to go to school. It will minimize arguments. In addition, it will familiarize with the culture of the society. It will show you the progress of the country. Those of us who learned other cultures—those of us who came with a different culture—have to learn the culture of this country—how to raise children— the law—you have to learn everything (65-69 yr. old male participant)

- whatever their status- women who come single, there should be a way for them to go to school. Because, education at least is good whether it is for yourself, your country or your people. Secondly, they have to know that life here is difficult, it is not like back home (50-54 yr. old male participant)

iv) Don't take advantage of rights (to females) – many of the study participants (male and female) expressed concerns that that women misuse their rights in Canada and need to be advised on how to use their rights properly. As described by one 53 yr. old female participant,

When I say rights—if that right makes them abandon their marriages, if it makes them lose their respect for their husbands—-if it makes them lose their respect for their family—I wouldn't call that a right. When I say rights, I mean right that is based on the understanding between partners. I wouldn't uphold "women's rights" if it leads to the break up of marriages. "I have the right to divorce, I have the right to do this or do that" -- I wouldn't call that a right. Right is for me discussion. It is sharing information (50-54 yr. old female participant)

6.3 Types of Help
Participants were asked to describe the types of help needed by couples in Canada. The main types of help described were: Education, Orientation and Counseling.

Education: Several of the participants mentioned that both men and women need to be educated about marriage and relationships, women's rights in Canada, Canadian culture and ways of child-rearing. As one 66 yr. old participant explained, “The question of rights, men’s rights and women’s rights, children’s rights, the lifestyle, school is the best place to learn all that.”
Orientation: All participants felt that orientation was critical for newcomers. As described by one 50-54 yr. old female participant,

I would say that we should have a "Welcome to Canada" program like before in consultation with the government—not by white people but by Ethiopians. This could have been a platform to discuss—what kind of problems they are going to encounter, what kind of hardship they are going to face, what kind of experience they have to go through...

Counseling: Some participants felt that pre-marital and marriage counseling by trained professionals should be available in the community. However, in order to use such services there may initially be a need to reduce the stigma associated with going for professional help in the Ethiopian community. As explained by one 65-69 yr. old male participant,

Our problem is that we don't tell our problem to others. We just pump it inside and it will be out when it bursts out or when it is about to burst and shows some smog...

6.4 Most Frequently Named Sources of Help

1. The Ethiopian Association in Toronto (EAT)
Most participants named the EAT as one of the best sources of help for Ethiopian couples. This was because 1) the EAT can embrace all members of the community regardless of their religion background, 2) community awareness that help is available there, and 3) the EAT is recognized and supported by the Canadian government and has the resources to help the community. For example, as one 70-74 yr. old male described,

Well, I think that the initiatives should be taken by the Ethiopian Association in Toronto mainly because it does not—it includes all religious citizens, whoever Catholics or Orthodox or Muslims or whatever, they could all be catered for by the Ethiopian Association. So it is—the association should create a forum and address itself to married couples and have them come in and prepare a dialogue and let them discuss...

The following recommendations were made by the participants regarding the EAT. That the EAT should:

• Start a program to enable married couples to get together and discuss common concerns and obtain advice from knowledgeable members of the community (e.g., elders, long-term Ethiopian couples, volunteer study participants).
• Play a larger role in helping couples adapt to the Canadian way of life, particularly the expectation gap that most newcomers face when they arrive, by providing appropriate orientation.
• Hire more counselors and have well trained counselors available who can help couples solve problems in a culturally appropriate way.
• Facilitate the formation of support groups for both women and men and create a platform for discussion so that both can be helped to adapt equally.
• Take the initiative and network with religious organizations and other community institutions.

The following were described as some of the shortcomings of the EAT:

• Since the EAT doesn’t have the proper count of the community members and doesn’t embrace all community members, it is serving an insignificant number of community members relative to the estimated number of the community that is living in Toronto. As one male participant explained,

> I don’t know it is said that there are 40,000 Ethiopians in Toronto – How many of this population does the Association embrace? A thousand? So we need another media (French) to reach the population. Otherwise, they might think that they are doing much only when a limited number of people are going there. They are doing much even if it is 300 people. But 300 out of 40,000 are just insignificant. It is very limited.

• The EAT does not have enough well trained professionals to deal with the problems of couples in a culturally appropriate way.
• The EAT should give priority in helping to the community who live in Toronto.

2. Religious Institutions

Most of the study participants perceived religious institutions as good sources of help for couples and places where couples could receive culturally appropriate counseling. As one of 40 yr. old male participant described “… but in my opinion, either the churches or mosques, because they are there to teach about religion and God’s word, they really have the power to solve such kinds of problem.”

The following recommendations were made by the participants regarding religious institutions:

• Religious institutions should provide education about marriage and marital responsibilities
• Religious institutions should help couples to resolve problems using a spiritual context and be more aggressive
• Religious institutions should continue to provide counseling to couples in need and consider including more premarital counseling
• Religious institutions should network with the Ethiopian Association in Toronto and other institutions make referrals, as appropriate

The following were described as some of the shortcomings of religious institutions:
• Religious leaders are unfamiliar with Canadian methods of counseling and religious institutions shouldn’t mix culture and religion in dealing with problems of couples. For example,

...How many people are there who can counsel? For example, if we say the church is willing to do so are there really qualified people in the church to give counseling? Should they do it only with respect to the religion or consider the psychological and other part? And where can they get this support? Where is the resource? The resource is important (A 65-69 yr. old male participant)

In the first place, these institutions, the religious organizations, usually practice the religion, right? I don't think there are people who are trained the Canadian way in family affair. They don't know much. All that they can do is, "if you are afraid of God, marriage should not be broken. God is ----you have to stay". That is what they are going to tell you. They don't do it like in a professional way-meaning listen to the problem, give you advice. Like I don't think that they are going to say----for example, they are not going to say to the man "you have to chop onions". This is because they still hold on to that tradition-culture-themselves (40-44 yr. old female participant)

3. Self/Family/Friends
The majority of participants stated that they preferred to solve problems on their own rather than going outside for help. However, most of the study participants responded that they usually turn to family and friends when they need help. However, some concerns were expressed about the type of help they received from these sources. Some examples are provided here:

There was a concern that sharing problems with others might exacerbate the problem. As described by this 45-49 yr. old woman,

She shouldn't go around telling her problems to other people. She shouldn't say to other people that, "My husband has done this to me". -not even to your mother or father. This will make the issue bigger than what it is. It will exacerbate it. The solution I believe is, husband and wife should be able to talk to each other." If there is a problem, then they should try to solve it by themselves without a third party knowing about it.

There was also a concern that friends do not always provide helpful advice. As described by this 30-34 yr. old female participant,

What I see in Canada is that women marry and divorce soon after they come here and separate soon after. I can say most women here in Canada have problems. They don't advice you good. I have my own experience too. They told me a lot of things but I don't accept it. It should be me and it is up to me to make a decision when it is beyond my capacity. But I don't accept the advice of others, for example, they say now you are in Canada why don't you leave him? What I want is to change my husband and make him like
Finally, some participants felt that family and friends in Ethiopia could not offer helpful advice because they may not understand the reality of the situation in Canada. As one 40-44 yr. old woman described,

But in Canada there is nobody, nobody- Even if you try to discuss with the family at a distance, there are so many aspects that they can't see here. For example, if I tell them, being a woman, oh! I am so tired, there is a lot that I have to do and so on, they will say ehhe... aren't you a woman; do you understand (laughter). And therefore I can't consult them (laughter).

VII. Summary - Lessons Learned
The objectives of this study were to explore changing gender relations in the Ethiopian community in Toronto, patterns of adaptation to new roles, and culturally appropriate preventive strategies to reduce marital conflict and ultimately, partner abuse. Individual interviews and focus groups were conducted with 8 Ethiopian couples. Findings indicated strong evidence of change following migration, particularly in the areas of household tasks, work and relationships. Individuals within couples adapted to change in different ways, some of which seemed to be more functional than others. It was also apparent that the process of change was dynamic and individuals/couples may have experienced several different patterns of change during their resettlement period. The process of change was influenced by multiple factors such as age, gender and previous experience in a third country. All of the participants were concerned about the impact of change on Ethiopian couples and agreed that there was a definite role for community and religious institutions to help couples adapt to change and prevent marital conflict.

VIII. Data Limitations
Two major limitations to this study were identified:
The first concerns the representativeness of the study population. Since all of the study participants had been married in Ethiopia and migrated to Canada, the data collected may not have reflected some of the challenges that the newly married couples may face. It appeared from the interviews and informal discussions with community members that these individuals may need more intervention than other, more established, members of the community. Many of the study participants in fact admitted that the experience of migrating together and facing common challenges in Canada served to strengthen couples' relationships and increase marital resiliency. Since the study population did not include couples who were separated/divorced, it was also difficult to determine whether these couples experienced the same patterns of change and the extent to which changing gender relations contributed to their divorce/separation. The study sample also lacked representativeness with respect to religion and socio-economic status. All of the study participants with the exception of one couple (Protestant) were members of the Ethiopian Church. Extensive efforts made to recruit an additional Muslim couple were not successful. All of the participants were privileged in terms of their educational, occupational and living circumstances in Ethiopia and even though most had experienced
a drop in their standard of living in Canada, they could be considered success stories in terms of their adaptation to Canada.

The second limitation concerns causality. Although the study objectives and decision to focus on changing gender relation were arrived at in partnership with the Ethiopian Association in Toronto, we cannot conclude that there is a direct association between changing gender relations and marital conflict or partner abuse. The literature identified many other risk factors associated with partner abuse in immigrant communities and these were not explored in the present study.

IX. Recommendations
Based on study findings a number of recommendations were made by the research team. These recommendations are directed towards Ethiopian service providers but may be relevant to other immigrant service providers as well.

- Include information on changes in gender relations following migration in orientation programs (e.g., LINC) and materials
- Increase awareness of and capacity of religious and community leaders to address changing gender relations and prevention of marital conflict
- Increase community awareness about changing gender relations following migration and patterns of change
- Facilitate/support the formation of women's, men's and couples support groups
- Consider using established (senior) couples as a resource

X. Future Plans
Future plans include addressing research gaps and dissemination of findings.

To address research gaps identified by this study, a second research proposal was submitted to the Centre for Research on Immigration and Settlement (CERIS) to build on the present research by exploring changing gender relation with Ethiopian couples who have divorced or separated since arriving in Canada.

Dissemination plans include presenting findings to both academic and community audiences. To date, presentations have been made to academic research groups (see below) and to staff at the Ethiopian Association in Toronto. A manuscript has been submitted to the Canadian Journal of Nursing Research.

Presentations:

Papers:
Appendix I - Revised Research Questions

Instruction to Interviewers:
After the purpose of the interview is explained and informed consent is obtained, each participant is requested to complete a demographic information sheet (see attached). The interview is organized in 4 sections.

1. Background information/migration history
   - Tell me about how you came to Canada…
     Probes:
     - Who decided to immigrate to Canada?
     - How long did you and your partner know each other before you left Ethiopia?
     - Did you and your partner come to Canada together? When?
     - If not, how long were you separated? What was that like?

2. Gender roles
   - Now we are going to talk about the relationships between men and women in Ethiopia and Canada…
   - What was your role and what were your responsibilities as a wife/husband in Ethiopia?
   - What was your partner's role and what were his/her responsibilities in Ethiopia?
   - What is your role and what are your responsibilities as a wife/husband in Canada?
   - What is your partner's role and what are his/her responsibilities in Canada?
     Probes:
     - What types of activities did/do you and your partner do together?
     - Who made/makes decisions regarding finances? social activities?, housing/where to live?
     - Who made/makes decisions regarding children? (e.g., behaviour? discipline?) and does this change at different ages?

3. Relationships
   - Now tell me about if, and how, your relationship has changed since coming to Canada
   Probes:
   - What do you and your partner usually talk about?
   - Are there topics you and your partner can't or don't want to talk about or discuss?
   - What creates conflict for you and your partner?
   - What do you and your partner argue about?
   - Do you ever argue about your roles and responsibilities?
   - How do you and your partner resolve arguments and do you have any difficulty resolving arguments?
   - What would help you to resolve arguments?
     - What do you like about your relationship?
   - Is there anything you would like to change about your relationship?
4. **Helping**
- There are many changes that couples experience after moving to Canada. Now we would like to ask about ways to help couples better adapt to living in Canada.
- What do you think would improve relationships between Ethiopian men and women in Canada?
- If you knew a couple having difficulty adapting to life in Canada, what do you think would help them?
- What type of help/support do women need?
- What type of help/support do men need?
- To whom would you turn if you needed help in your relationship?
- Would you be interested in joining a discussion group for Ethiopian men/women?
- Is there a role for community and religious institutions to help couples adapt?

**Instruction to Interviewers:**
*End interview with:*
- What else should/could we have asked?
- Do you know other couples who we could interview?
Appendix II - Focus Group Questions

Welcome and thank you again for your participation in the first round of individual interviews and for coming today to the group discussion. We called you here today to further explore the themes and ideas that emerged from the individual interviews. We also want to learn from you about ways to help Ethiopian couples adapt to new roles and responsibilities in Canada.

**Preamble:** Many of you described very specific roles and tasks for men and women in Ethiopia.

- Has this changed since you came to Canada? How?
- Are there (still) tasks that you consider to be specific to men or women? Please describe.
- How do you decide who does what tasks?
- Probe to women: how free do you feel to ask your partner for help?
- Are you generally satisfied with how much your partner shares tasks?

**Preamble:** The interviews suggested that that in Canada men were sharing more tasks with women at home and women were contributing by working outside the home but the overall responsibility for inside matters remained with women while men were still taking more responsibility for outside matters.

- Let's discuss this…(If necessary: Do you agree or disagree?)
- What do you think about women working outside the home in Canada? (Probe to women: How willing are you to work outside the home?)
- What do you think about men helping inside the home in Canada? (Probe to men: How willing are you to help inside the home?)
- What helps couples adapt to new roles and responsibilities in Canada?
- What makes it more difficult for couples to adapt to new roles and responsibilities in Canada?
- Probe: Were there differences in how quickly you and your partner adapted to new roles and responsibilities? Who do you think had to change more?
- Probe: Do you think having children makes it easier to adapt?
Preamble: Several participants mentioned that they thought that women have special rights in Canada. Example: laws for women, single mothers receive government money.

- How does this affect your relationship in Canada?

Preamble: Many of you described your relationships as strong and resilient.

- What advice would you give to Ethiopian couples just arriving in Canada regarding how to adapt to new roles and responsibilities?

- How should Ethiopian couples be getting this advice?

- Is there a role for religious institutions to help? How?

- Is there a role for the Ethiopian Association to help? How?

- What other kinds of programs/activities are needed? Who should offer these?

- Is there a role for community leaders and elders to help?
Reference List


Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees in Canada (1988). *After the door has been opened: Mental health issues affecting immigrants and refugees in Canada* Ottawa: Ministry of Supply and Services Canada.


