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“I choose to do abortion because I wasn’t ready to take care of a child single-handedly”: Identity constructions in Nigerian women’s abortion narratives

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Abstract

While studies on abortion in Nigeria have argued about the criminality of abortion and the need for sustainable family planning method, little is known about the personal identity Nigerian women construct in their abortion narratives. This study examines varying identities Nigerian women construct for themselves when they narrate their abortion experience. It explores the overlapping social, cultural and religious perceptions about abortion embedded in the narratives. The data comprise 40 semi-structured interviews with women who had procured abortion in Nigeria. Their responses were analysed using the analytical tools of Baxter’s (2003) Feminist Post-Structural Discourse Analysis. Findings reveal identities such as moral transgressor, victimhood, responsible motherhood, proactive and certain, and shame in the narratives. Also, despite grappling with abortion stigma, Nigerian women own their abortion narratives and defend their choice. The study concludes that abortion is common place and essential to women’s freedom and functionality. (*Afr J Reprod Health* 2024; 28 [3s]: 110-120)

Keywords: Abortion, discourse analysis, narratives, identity construction, subjective positioning

Résumé

Alors que les études sur l’avortement au Nigeria ont débattu de la criminalité de l’avortement et de la nécessité d’une méthode de planification familiale durable, on sait peu de choses sur l’identité personnelle que les femmes nigérianes construisent dans leurs récits sur l’avortement. Cette étude examine les différentes identités que les femmes nigérianes se construisent lorsqu’elles racontent leur expérience d’avortement. Il explore les perceptions sociales, culturelles et religieuses qui se chevauchent sur l’avortement et qui sont ancrées dans les récits. Les données comprennent 40 entretiens semi-structurés avec des femmes qui ont eu recours à un avortement au Nigeria. Leurs réponses ont été analysées à l’aide des outils analytiques de Baxter (2003) Feminist Post-Structural Discourse Analysis. Les résultats révèlent des identités telles que le transgresseur moral, la victimisation, la maternité responsable, proactive et certaine, et la honte dans les récits. En outre, bien qu’elles soient aux prises avec la stigmatisation de l’avortement, les femmes nigérianes s’approprient leurs récits sur l’avortement et défendent leur choix. L’étude conclut que l’avortement est monnaie courante et essentiel à la liberté et à la fonctionnalité des femmes. (*Afr J Reprod Health* 2024; 28 [3s]: 110-120).

Mots-clés: Avortement, analyse du discours, récits, construction identitaire, positionnement subjectif

Introduction

Abortion is a highly sensitive and a taboo topic in Nigeria as a portion of the Nigerian population regard it as murder while some others consider it a way out of unplanned motherhood – people’s reaction towards it largely depends on their attitudes about it¹. Nevertheless, within the Nigerian law, abortion is considered a crime except when the pregnancy poses a threat to the life of a mother, or it is a product of rape or incest²⁻³. Despite the restrictive abortion laws in Nigeria and the negative

attitudes that some Nigerians have about it, several studies indicate⁴⁻⁵ that abortion is prevalent in Nigeria especially among young persons within the ages of 15 and 24, of whom, many often obtain the services clandestinely. Though Bankole *et al.*⁶ estimates the annual number of abortions in Nigeria to be at about 1.25 million, there are no exact national data on abortion, so it is difficult to ascertain the exact number of abortions or the percentage of illegal abortion in Nigeria⁵. However, illegally induced abortion is much more rampant than legally induced ones and it accounts for about eleven

percent of maternal deaths in Nigeria⁴. Studies^{5,7} have shown that women procure abortion for a number of reasons – socio-cultural norms about single-motherhood, financial difficulties, partner support, future career plan, etc. The reason for abortion notwithstanding, as a result of the Nigerian religious and sociocultural practices that expect women to maintain high moral values and remain sexually pure until marriage, women who are known to have had abortion are stigmatised and shamed⁸. Thus, females who have had induced abortion, whether legally or illegally are most often ashamed to own up to it; they, therefore, resort to keeping it a secret¹. Given that induced abortion has religious and social sanctions as well as legal implications in most contexts, most Nigerian women hardly ever share their abortion experiences, but when they do, they discursively construct varying identities for themselves in a bid to defend themselves and their realities⁶.

Identity is a sense of self, a person's quality shaped by their beliefs. It is conceptualised by Jaworski and Coupland⁹ as 'a series of choices made about oneself and life' shaped by one's relationship with other humans. Though fluid, identities are largely influenced by societal practices, thus, the societal and religious stigma, sanction and contestations associated with induced abortion in Nigeria contribute to the asymmetries in women's abortion experiences as well as their decisions to procure abortion. Consequently, narratives about Nigerian women's abortion experiences and their decision to procure abortion are sensitive sources of the nature of Nigerian women's reproductive justice.

The popularity of research on abortion notwithstanding, there is a paucity of research on Nigerian women's personal abortion narratives and how Nigerian women who have procured induced abortion utilise linguistic resources to (re)negotiate and (re)construct their identities when narrating their personal experiences. Thus, this study investigates the nature of identity Nigerian women construct for themselves when sharing their personal abortion narratives. It answers the questions: What is the nature of identities constructed by Nigerian women in their personal abortion narratives? What does this portend for Nigerian women's reproductive agency? This study is thus an empirical, discourse analytical investigation of identity (re)construction in Nigerian

women's personal narratives about their abortion experiences.

Identity construction and women's abortion narratives

Identity is the totality of one's self-representation and subjective positioning that shapes emotion, behaviour and perception¹⁰; it is a product of a person's experience, interaction and culture¹¹. However, identity is fluid as it accommodates multiple contexts of communication. Language is a transparent medium through which identities can be investigated since it is used to adopt, accept/resist and also reject various subjective positions¹⁰. Personal narratives are sites for the construction of identities¹²; within the context of communication, speakers take relational positions. With this positioning, identity construction changes and is shaped into both a point of view position and a speaking position on the topic of discussion. Taylor¹² posits that the analysis of what is said or written is one of the ways of investigating identity construction since what people say is direct evidence of their identity. Personal identity is an aspect of a person that gives meaning to their life.

Narratives are platforms for the discursive constructions of self; they are the major contexts within which personal identities can be analysed¹³. With narratives, people make sense of their experiences¹⁴ give meanings to their personal experiences and reflect on their life choices¹⁵⁻¹⁶. The implication of identity construction is significant in understanding how abortion laws and socio-religious attitudes about abortion shape individual opinion about their abortion experiences.

Despite the generally perceived silence about abortion, studies have shown that personal narratives about abortion provide the real platform for understanding the extent to which abortion affects women^{7,17-20}. Beynon-Jones⁷ for instance argues about the fecundity of investigating the negotiation of identities in women's account of their abortion and demonstrates that the use of discursive resources in personal narratives is how women make meaning of their abortion choices and experiences. Sisson and Kimport²¹ however argues that abortion narratives in popular media support negative, stereotypical and stigmatising socio-cultural ideas about abortion.

In personal narratives, women employ several strategies to defend their abortion-making decision and also resist social, cultural, legal and religious biases against abortion, which Hoggart²² terms "abortion stigma". As women's abortion experiences differ, that is how their attempts at resisting abortion stigma vary. The strategies take various forms: subjective positioning, discursive constructions, identity constructions, ideological constructions, etc.; they also portray how women negotiate and enact their reproductive justice and agency²⁰⁻²³. Dubriwny and Siegfried²⁰ assert in their study that American women's personal abortion narratives are geared towards making the public understand that they are good mothers. Cockrill and Nack²⁴ discovered in their investigation of abortion stigma in American women's account of personal abortion experiences that the occurrence of abortion stigmas in the narratives are the results of the women's acceptance of cultural valuations of abortion.

Studies on abortion in Nigeria have examined young Nigerians' perception of the practice^{1,6}; the implication of failed abortion among Nigerian women²⁵; the implication of unavailability of information about it in Nigeria¹⁴; etc. These studies provide empirical evidence that though reproductive justice is a vital aspect of a woman's reproductive health, it is almost non-existent in Nigeria as women often do not exercise their reproductive justice as a result of the legal, socio-cultural and religious biases and restrictions on abortion in Nigeria. Considering the fact that women's reproductive justice goes beyond acknowledging women's reproductive rights to understanding the social and cultural circumstances that shape women's decision to keep or abort a pregnancy¹⁸, this present study thus extends arguments on Nigeria women's abortion experiences by submitting that the identity women construct for themselves when sharing their abortion narrative explicates the nature of reproductive justice in Nigeria and the extent to which abortion stigma has been internalized by Nigerian women.

Methods

Data collection

The data for this study includes 40 personal narratives of Nigerian women who had procured

induced abortion. The data gathering method draws upon a qualitative method facilitated by semi-structured open-ended narrative-interviews of women who have procured induced abortion. Narrative interview is a form of interview that enables the respondents to tell their stories their own way with little intervention from the interviewer¹⁵. The data collection method encompasses WhatsApp generated responses solicited between September and December, 2022. The WhatsApp recorded narratives were solicited by the researcher through a post on her WhatsApp status and female-only-WhatsApp groups. The post encouraged women who have had abortion and were interested in sharing their experiences for research purposes, to contact the researcher via her WhatsApp number. Female friends and colleagues of the researcher were also asked to post the solicited information on their WhatsApp statuses and other female-only-WhatsApp groups. Electronic consent forms were sent to the women who indicated interest in participating in the research, after which they were asked to send their typed or audio-recorded story to the researcher via WhatsApp. The rationale for choosing WhatsApp is to hide the identities of participants considering the sensitivity of the research focus (abortion). With the use of WhatsApp, the respondents have the liberty to share their story however they like without any form of interruption. By sending their stories to the researcher on WhatsApp, the respondents had some measure of anonymity and they did not have to be embarrassed about being identifiable by the researcher. The limitation of Whatsapp lies in the fact that the researcher could not reach out directly to the respondents if they do not indicate interest. Thus, only the women who contacted the researcher and indicated their willingness to share their story were given consent forms and told the nature of the research. At the end of December, 2022, only 40 women responded to the WhatsApp post, so only 40 stories were analysed and used in this study. Ethical Approval for the research was got from the Ethical Review Committee of University of Medical Sciences, Ondo State, Nigeria. The date of approval is 20th December, 22 and the approval number is: NHREC/TR/UNIMED-HREC-Ondo St/22/06/21. The respondents are Nigerian females; their ages are unknown because there was no room for the researcher to ask them.

Method of data analysis

This study tried to evince the personal identities women (re)construct when sharing their personal abortion narratives. The voice notes were transcribed verbatim after which all the data were manually coded after close reading. In order to identify the prominent identities in the narratives, the study adopted Braun and Clarke's²⁵ Thematic Analysis. This was done by first reading the narratives; generating initial codes for the identities, and then searching for themes in the narratives. Names were assigned to the prominent identities recoded in the coding analysis. Insights from Baxter's²⁶ Feminist Post-Structural Discourse Analysis were used to carry out a discourse analysis of the narratives.

Baxter's Feminist Post-Structural Discourse Analytical Analysis (FPSDA) examines the interplay of subjective positions in speakers' narratives, that is, how women's voices are represented in discourse in ways that portray their gender identities. It addresses the transformation of social relations of gender, class and race in language. It seeks ways to break up social silences in order to crack all the ideologies that justify power inequalities^{26,27}. FPSDA is utilised in this study because it offers multiple perspectives and interpretations of women's voices in their personal narratives, which has the potential to challenge or reinforce dominant heteronormative discourses on abortion in Nigeria. The analytical lens of FPSDA also proffers a framework for understanding the concept of 'double voicing' in the discourse of abortion – a discursive strategy through which women position themselves as both powerful/powerless objects and subjects in their narratives²⁷. Through this positioning, women acknowledge their powerlessness/powerfulness in their abortion decision making and experiences.

Results

The use of various identities in the narratives provides a nuanced understanding of Nigerian women's reproductive justice. Identities are created by the women as strategies of resisting internalised abortion stigma. Thus, there are more positive representation of abortion in the identities embedded in the narratives than negative. However, as the women's abortion experiences differ, so do the

personal identities they construct about the experiences. The identities are explicated in details below.

Moral transgressor

The narration of their abortion experiences creates room for the women to resist, reject or accept subjective positions, which most often are the result of the Nigerian societal notions about abortion and women who procure it.

Extract 1: I felt horrible about myself. I felt like a sinner but I prayed to God to understand me and why I had to do it. I felt very bad, I never ever thought I would ever have an abortion.

Extract 2: After the process, mentally, I felt bad and guilty, especially when I see children playing around. I felt guilty that I had an abortion when people were praying to God for babies. But I chose abortion because I wasn't ready ... to have a baby.

As indicated in the extracts above, the women construct the identity of a moral transgressor when they categorise their abortion as an experience that made them feel guilty. The guilt is an indication of internalised abortion stigma. However, most of the women in the data are ambivalent in identifying themselves as moral transgressors. They are ambivalent in the sense that they overshadow the feeling of guilt with a plausible reason for procuring abortion. The projection of the plausible reason is an abortion resistance strategy.

The abortion procurement for the women with this identity is most often a deviation from their earlier fetocentric notions about abortion and the sanctity of human life. There appears to be a complex relationship between the women's position about abortion prior to their abortion experience and their choice to procure abortion in order to make their future a priority. By indicating that abortion was their only choice, the women construct the identity of defeat alongside immorality. Consider the extract below

Extract 3... With the third pregnancy, I was sad and destabilized... I wasn't ready. It was going to be another distraction. I was sad because I never had an abortion when I was single so having it as a married woman was heart breaking. It was a very painful

experience, ... I felt the baby was a part of me and I wasn't doing the right thing. ...

The participant in the extract above does not only consider the immorality of the abortion but also identifies with the foetus by referring to it as 'a part of me', indicating that the foetus is a person. This identity mirrors the polarised foetocentric notion of abortion in Nigeria – the foetus is innocent while the mother is guilty. Thus, with this, the participant portrays herself as guilty of murder. This aligns with Furedi²⁸ and Cleeve et al.'s¹⁹ assertion that women's pre-abortion opinion about abortion sometimes aligns with a country's policy on abortion.

The expression 'I was sad because I never had an abortion when I was single so having it as a married woman was heart breaking' also corroborates findings from Hoggart's study²² that suggest women who have procured abortion usually indicate that they had an opposing view about abortion until they had an unplanned pregnancy. With the identity of a moral transgressor, the women consider abortion as undesirable but necessary. The couching of abortion as a necessity is a counter narrative that is a poor attempt at resisting abortion stigma. It is also an indication of Baxter's²⁷ notion of double voicing, a strategy with which the women portray that abortion might not be so bad or immoral if it is a woman's only choice and if she has good reasons to procure it. With this, abortion is depicted as an agentic action that helps women gain control of their lives, thereby regaining power over their bodies. Unplanned pregnancy is a trap while abortion is a tool of female empowerment and emancipation from the trap²⁸.

Good, considerate and responsible motherhood

The choice of a good mother whose motivation is the welfare of her born and yet-to-be-born children drives the construction of the identity of considerate and responsible motherhood. The identity also contains the rhetoric of risks and responsibility – the risk of giving birth to a child the women cannot care for, and the responsibility of ensuring the already existing children are well-cared for. This is exemplified in the extracts below:

Extract 4: I did the abortion because I had too many children than I could cater for. I

already had five children and it was already difficult feeding them.

Extract 5: I choose to have it because I wasn't ready at that time. I was with a little child I had out of wedlock and couldn't fend for both.

Extract 6: ... I told him I would abort the pregnancy because I didn't have any domestic help. Moreover, our last child was 14months old. So I couldn't face the stress of having another baby.

In the extracts above, it is obvious that the construction of this identity suggests that the women are certain of the appropriateness of their decision. They consider it the right thing to do if they have to give the already existing child(ren) the best of motherly care. A good mother considers other children of hers and uses her sense of judgement to ascertain her ability to take care of more children. This resonates with findings from a similar study by Hoggart²².

For those who do not have children, the identity of considerate and responsible motherhood is constructed to demonstrate the importance of timing in childbearing and motherhood – it is the responsibility of a considerate mother to determine the right time to have a child. The timing may be connected to age, financial ability, emotional capacity, existence of a willing partner, a stable home, etc. Unplanned motherhood for most of them hinders the actualisation of their future plans. This is exemplified in the extracts below.

Extract 7: ... I had a fight with my husband which made me pack out and reconnected with my ex-boyfriend. We had sex for weeks before my husband came back to apologise. I forgave him and moved back into my matrimonial home. Shortly after, I realized I was pregnant, but since I wasn't too sure who the father of the pregnancy was, I decided to abort the pregnancy... I didn't want my child to have a complicated life neither did I want to complicate my marriage by making my husband raise a child that wasn't his.

In the above extract the participant considers her partner and the future of her unborn child. From her

perspective, the situation surrounding the pregnancy is not ideal for a child to be born into. This portrays women's perception of what has to be in place for them to be good, responsible and considerate mothers¹⁸.

The identity of good, considerate and responsible motherhood aids the women to reject unplanned and unwilling motherhood while portraying themselves as the sacrificial lamb – they sacrificed their health and their emotional wellbeing in order to prevent the birth of a child that will not be taken care of or live a happy life. This aligns with Dubriwny and Siegfried's²⁰ assertion that women's abortion experiences represent an "idealistic rhetoric of self-sacrificing maternity".

Victimhood

The identity of victimhood is constructed to show the effect of lack of male partner support on unplanned pregnancy. On the one hand, the identity helps the women to not only exonerate themselves from the abortion-decision making process, but also helps them position themselves as objects of victimisation and male disloyalty. On the other hand, the identity portrays on a not so obvious level, the mental and physical sacrifices women make in order to prevent a child from being born when he/she cannot be loved by both parents.

Through the identity of victimhood, the women present themselves as victims of their male partner's manipulation, inconsistency and unwillingness to support the pregnancy. This is portrayed in the extracts below.

Extract 9: I did the abortion because of the circumstances surrounding me. As at that time, my husband was having an extra-marital affair. My husband no longer loved me. ... He said he wanted to move on with his life by marrying his new found lover. I decided to abort the pregnancy when it was evident he no longer loved me...

Extract 10: I did the abortion because my partner mounted pressure on me. He said he wasn't responsible for the pregnancy because we weren't legally married. He had someone he was going out with and didn't want to marry me or have a child by me. ... I went to people that sell herbal mixture. They gave me some herbs to insert in my

vagina, which I did... It was an awful experience that almost took my life. I lost my womb in the process...

The narratives project the lack of reproductive justice through the construction of the abortion as an incidence that occurred as a result of the reluctance of their partners to accept responsibility for the pregnancy. Women who weave this identity into their narrative come off as heartbroken, defeated, weak and helpless against the power and strong will of their partner. Women with this identity explicate that they are victims because their partners forced them to procure the abortion either by withdrawing their love or by explicitly saying they did not want the pregnancy. Whichever way one considers it, the decision to abort is influenced by an unsupportive partner.

Proactive and certain

Some of the women articulate their abortion decision as a choice they were certain about. In most of the narratives, it is clear that they do not regret the decision to procure abortion except in cases where there were post-abortion complications. With the identity of proactivity and certainty, they portray themselves as being solely responsible for their choices, without any influence from their male partners, thereby making them influential and proactive in their decision-making process. This identity is constructed in some of the narratives in ways that refute the alternative to abortion – keeping the pregnancy. Consider the extracts below.

Extract 11: I couldn't keep the pregnancy because I already have a child out of wedlock. It will be shameful for me to have another child out of wedlock... I don't feel guilty I know I did what was best for me.

Extract 12: ... When I realized I was pregnant, I wasn't okay with ... the stress of pregnancy was something I was not ready to grapple with, especially the stress of the early stages of pregnancy and the likes. I just decided to remove it. When I am ready, if another one happens, I can keep it.

In the extract above, the women negotiate the identity of certainty by subtly indicating they were not in any dilemma about their choice. Through this identity, they resist the abortion stigma embedded in

the ideology of abortion as the taking of a foetal life. They also assert their certainty by explaining the process of the decision-making as a way of justifying their decision. The identity of certainty used alongside the strategy of justification affirms the assertion of Hoggart²² and Beynon-Jones⁷ that there is a prevalence of justification in women's account of their abortion. With the construction of the identity of certainty, the women position themselves as people with reproductive agency.

Shame

Fischer³⁰ asserts that shame is a constitutive element of women's abortion experiences. This assertion holds true in the data used for this study. Shame in the women's narratives represents evidence of moral failure, failure to live up to societal expectation about sexual purity. Abortion is thus an attempt to maintain societal expectations of morality, and eradicate the product of shame. The extracts below exemplify the identity of shame in the women's narratives.

Extract 13: I chose to have an abortion because I was young and being from a Christian background, my parents would be very disappointed with me.

Extract 14: I couldn't keep the pregnancy because I already have a child out of wedlock. It will be shameful for me to have another child out of wedlock.

Extract 15: I was glad I had gotten rid of it. ... Everyone was going to blame me for being pregnant, having sex without protection and not taking postpill. People are usually very judgmental about stuffs like that

Extract 16: I was not ready to have a baby and then my parents will disown me.

In the extract above, the participant identifies parental attitude, religious beliefs and societal perceptions as the reasons for procuring abortion. For an average Nigerian, parental influence is a deciding factor in the making of any decision. Parental opinion matters a lot as most parents are known to send their children out of the home when the child deters from expected behaviour. Thus, the shame and pain of parental rejection drives the abortion decision of the participants in some of the extracts above.

It is generally expected that religious beliefs would make one foetocentric or proceed with having a baby, but in this case of the participant in Extract 13 above, it influenced her decision to terminate the pregnancy. This is an indication that the fear of being identified as a sinner justifies women's decision to abort their unplanned pregnancy. Perceived stigma and the fear of the consequence of sexual irresponsibility in the extract above is a common factor in the narratives of the unmarried women, and a driving force that influences abortion decision making. Abortion is thus a form of protection against shame.

Independent and liberated

The need to be free from all forms of encumbrances is one major human trait. The identity of childfree, independent and liberated which the women constructed in their narratives demonstrates that women consider unplanned pregnancy and unplanned motherhood as occurrences that limit their freedom and peace of mind. The extracts below exemplify this:

Extract 17: Before the abortion, I wasn't myself, always feeling worried and depressed... was highly discouraged and disappointed in myself too... After the abortion I just had to accept my wrong, ... The state of my mental health after the abortion is fine... feel more relieved and back to life

Extract 18: Before the procedure I was so scared of the whole process... I felt the whole process might alter the inability of giving birth in the future but I felt relieved and had that feeling of saving my family from disgrace through my act.

For the women in the extracts above, unplanned pregnancy is a bondage and a cage they have to be liberated from. Abortion is thus a liberty from unplanned motherhood. The feeling of relief they felt after the abortion which is couched in the identity of freedom/independence, resonates with the assertion of Gilbert and Sewpaul³¹ that women's abortion decision is intricately connected to contextual realities. Women's abortion decision is shaped by their values and life exigencies – they make their decision based on their interest. The narratives suggest that abortion is common place and

essential to the women's freedom and functionality. The construction of the identity of freedom and liberation represents a form of positive representation of abortion to the extent of normalisation. This reiterates the claim of Biggs, Upadhyay, McCulloch and Foster³² that unplanned, unwanted and unintended pregnancies significantly impact women's life and mental health, and most often lead to the desire to abort.

However, some of the women who felt free after the abortion still owned up to experiencing depression, regret and trauma after the initial relief they felt, which demonstrate that independence does not always equate to happiness when it comes to procuring abortion. However, depression and regret usually occur when there is post-abortion complication, when they are unable to recover from the guilt of procuring abortion and when they feel they could have been able to manoeuvre their way around unplanned/unwilling motherhood. This is exemplified in the extract below:

Extract 20: ... I was unhappy and didn't have any reason to keep the pregnancy. I went to people that sell herbal mixture... It was an awful experience that almost took my life. I lost my womb in the process. It is by the grace of God that I am still alive. I didn't feel good. I regret everything. I regret having the abortion.

Extract 21: The pain was so much that I told myself that if I had left the pregnancy, the labour pain wouldn't have been that intense and prolonged. It was painful and I did not enjoy the initial relief I felt when the abortion was done the first time. Whenever I remember the abortion, I think of how old the child would have been by now.

With the identity of relief, the women position themselves as active agents who have control over their bodies, lives and career. It is obvious they have a measure of reproductive agency, albeit illegally. This aligns with findings from the study of Cleeve *et al.*¹⁹ on the reproductive agency of young women seeking post-abortion care in Uganda. Though the women in this present study portray their reproductive agency in the narratives, some of the narratives reflect abortion stigma and the apologetic narrative of a guilty woman who felt she did not utilise her reproductive agency morally. This resonates with findings from the study of Baird and

Millar¹⁷ where they identify autonomous choice as one of the features of women's narratives of their abortion experience. Autonomous choice in this present study is on the one hand a rejection of apologetic, stigmatising abortion narrative and on the other hand, it is a representation of internalised abortion stigma, replete with regret of the wrong utilisation of reproductive justice – the women express grief, sadness and regret about their abortion decision, which is evidence of their internalisation of abortion stigma. This is also a reflection of double voicing. With double voicing, the women portray themselves as subject of their decision as well as objects of their actions.

Discussion

This study has utilised insights from Baxter's (2003) Feminist Post Structural Discourse Analysis to analyse the nature of identity Nigerian women construct when sharing their personal abortion narrative. Findings from this study aligns with studies^{1,5} on abortion in Nigerians which have demonstrated that though Nigerians generally frown at abortion, Nigerian females are receptive to abortion. Abortion for the females in this study is much more beneficial than problematic. It is considered a relief from the encumbrances of unplanned motherhood rather than a shameful occurrence. It is considered as a pathway to freedom from unplanned pregnancies and an easy way out of unwilling/unplanned motherhood. It provides relief from the fear of bringing up an unplanned child, the presence or absence of a willing partner notwithstanding. However, in spite of the liberation that abortion proffers, women who have had abortion still project foetocentric and prolife notions about abortion. Abortion is highly regarded by these women as the taking of human life/murder and some of them still feel guilty even after enjoying the relief that abortion offers. The foetocentric projections about abortion are borne out of the socio-cultural and religious bias against abortion in Nigeria.

Nigerian women have access to reproductive justice, albeit illegally. From the narratives, it appears that the women are largely independent and did not mention relying on anyone for financial assistance to procure the abortion. This is indicative of the fact that abortion is either cheap in Nigeria or the women are financially capable of procuring it no matter the cost. It can be inferred that

financial independence influences women's ability to exercise their sexual and reproductive agency. It gives them power to make decisions about their bodies and influences their ability to access reproductive health care. This finding deviates from findings from the study of Oluseye, Waterhouse and Hoggart⁵, who demonstrate in their investigation of Nigerian women's narratives of their abortion-making decision that young women of child-bearing age in Nigeria do not have access to reproductive health services and reproductive justice.

Abortion is the result of unplanned and unwanted pregnancy and unwilling motherhood. However, some of the women who procured abortion owned up to procuring it more than once. It seems procuring it the first time makes it easier to procure it another time. From the narratives, it is evident that the absence of and/or the deliberate refusal of post-abortion care is a major contributory factor to having an unwanted pregnancy after having procured abortion. While some of the women did not receive post-abortion care, some of them were only given antibiotics to ward off infections that may arise from the abortion, yet, some of them deliberately did not go back to the abortion service provider after the procedure because they felt fine. Women in the last category only returned to the abortion service provider when there were post-abortion complications. In fact, one of the women who used herbal concoction to terminate her pregnancy ended up losing her womb because she reported at the hospital for post-abortion related complication late. This shows that the degree of sensitisation about abortion and post abortion care in Nigeria is still quite low, which reiterates the assertion of Oyeniran, et al⁸ that the restriction to access to safe and legal abortion in Nigeria has led to the unavailability of information about safe termination of unwanted pregnancies. A lot of Nigerian women need to be sensitised on the importance of not only procuring abortion from qualified health practitioners, but also advised on the cruciality of post-abortion care.

Findings from the study indicates that most of the abortions procured by women in Nigeria are illegal and clandestine. In fact, most of the women attested that they did not know that abortion was illegal in Nigeria, they only felt a lot of hospitals are just reluctant to offer its service. This suggests that abortion services are easily procurable in Nigeria

and most women know where to procure them without advertisement. Nigerian women seek abortion services from hospitals, pharmacy stores, herb sellers, medical practitioners, etc. It gives credence to Wekesah and Izugbara's⁴ assertion that illegally induced abortion is much more rampant than legally induced ones in Nigeria. In the quest for freedom from unplanned pregnancy and unwilling motherhood, they do not care about the environment where the abortion is procured. This is quite expected when one considers the fact that abortion is highly illegal in Nigeria. However, findings do not align with findings from the study of Arije, Ojo, Titus, Alaba, Adegbenro, Jah, Connolly and Onayade¹ who maintain that Nigerian women are ashamed of their abortion and resort to keeping it a secret. Most of the women in this present study are not ashamed to own up to their abortion experiences – they own their stories.

Conclusion

This study has analysed identity constructions in Nigerian women's personal abortion narratives. Insights from Baxter's (2003) Feminist Post Structural Discourse Analysis was used to investigate the subjective positions Nigerian women construct in their narratives about their abortion experiences. The analysis revealed the following identities: moral transgressor, good, considerate and responsible mother, victim, proactive and certain, etc. With these identities, the women attempt to resist internalised abortion stigma, albeit poorly. Through these identities, they defend their decisions to procure abortion, own their stories and demonstrate the extent to which abortion is essential to the procurement of their freedom and functionality. The study also demonstrates that while Nigerian women's abortion-making decision is influenced by sociocultural norms about premarital sex, motherhood, reproduction and single-motherhood, as well as their future and career plans, Nigerian females are receptive to abortion as a way out of unplanned motherhood. Abortion for the females in this study is much more beneficial than problematic, and considered a relief from the encumbrances of unplanned motherhood rather than a shameful occurrence. Through abortion, the women regain their freedom from all the possible ways an unintended pregnancy would have limited

their freedom. Future studies on Nigerian women's personal abortion narratives may investigate women's discursive construction of their abortion experiences as it has not been covered in this study.

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