

Poverty as Common Denominator Trauma: Financial Behavior of Nigerians Living in the UK

Izuchukwu Precious Obani

University of Derby, Derby, United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

This paper explores how poverty functions as a form of psychological trauma among Nigerians living in the United Kingdom. Drawing on recent data, migrant testimonies, and sociological theory, it examines how trauma rooted in economic scarcity manifests in financial behaviors such as hoarding, hyper-saving, and guilt-induced spending patterns. These behaviors, often misunderstood as irrational or excessively cautious, are reframed as survival strategies shaped by a legacy of systemic insecurity, economic precarity, and intergenerational transmission of scarcity consciousness.

How to cite this paper: Izuchukwu Precious Obani "Poverty as Common Denominator Trauma: Financial Behavior of Nigerians Living in the UK"

Published in International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development (ijtsrd), ISSN: 2456-6470, Volume-9 | Issue-4, August 2025, pp.613-614, URL: www.ijtsrd.com/papers/ijtsrd97299.pdf



Copyright © 2025 by author (s) and International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development Journal. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>)



INTRODUCTION

Migration is often framed as a linear progression from scarcity to abundance. However, for many Nigerians in the UK, poverty is not left behind; it is carried across borders and embedded into daily financial life. Experiences of economic instability, both in Nigeria and in the UK diaspora context, have created what may be termed poverty-related trauma: a deep, chronic fear of financial collapse that influences behavior long after material conditions improve.

This trauma manifests in hoarding, saving, and remittance behaviors that function not merely as cultural habits but as adaptive mechanisms grounded in survival. Understanding these responses requires a trauma-informed and culturally contextual lens, one that integrates both psychological insight and economic sociology.

Cost-of-Living and Economic Marginalization

Recent data underscore the material pressures faced by African immigrants in the UK. A 2023 report by BHM UK found that 44.5% of African migrants, including Nigerians, had borrowed money to afford basic living expenses, while more than half had

skipped meals or reduced energy usage in their homes to save costs (BHM UK). Such financial strain, though occurring in a developed country, replicates patterns of scarcity experienced in Nigeria, compounding existing trauma rather than alleviating it.

In early 2025, UK inflation spiked to 3.5%, intensifying financial insecurity among immigrant groups (Obienyi). Migrants often face higher rent, job precarity, and limited access to public welfare. These systemic stressors do not merely cause hardship; they retrigger financial trauma rooted in prior experiences of economic volatility.

Remittance Obligations and the “Black Tax”

A significant share of Nigerians in the UK sends regular remittances to family members in Nigeria, often under pressure to be the “successful” one abroad. A 2024 survey by OhentPay found that 46% of remittance transactions from the UK were for family upkeep, typically ranging between £100 and £500 per month (“UK-Nigeria Remittance Report”).

This phenomenon, colloquially termed the “Black Tax,” transforms money into a moral and familial obligation. It is not merely economic assistance but a cultural mandate, one that carries emotional weight and can lead to conflicted financial priorities, particularly when the migrant must choose between personal stability and communal expectations.

Trauma-Informed Behaviours: Saving, Hoarding, and Guilt

Nigerians in the UK often exhibit what may appear as excessive saving, financial hoarding, and guilt-based avoidance of self-care spending. For instance, a professional may resist replacing worn clothing or avoid heating their home adequately in winter, not because of true financial incapacity, but due to psychologically ingrained frugality; a remnant of past poverty.

These are not isolated behaviours. They are forms of hypervigilance, a known response to trauma, particularly when the trauma is chronic and tied to basic survival (Ikuomola). The internalised belief is that economic stability is always temporary and must be protected at all costs.

Working Multiple Jobs: The Need for Financial Control

One of the clearest expressions of this trauma is the relentless pursuit of income. In 2024, a widely shared case study documented a Nigerian student in the UK working more than 80 hours per week in various gig roles to survive (Hau). This level of overwork often leads to burnout, isolation, and academic decline, but it is driven by a deep fear of insufficiency and a desire to build a financial safety net.

Intergenerational Transmission of Scarcity

Financial trauma is often transmitted intergenerationally. Children of Nigerian migrants are taught, explicitly and implicitly, to avoid waste, prepare for emergencies, and view financial independence as a moral imperative. Proverbs like “Cut your coat according to your cloth” reflect a cultural codification of scarcity logic.

As a result, even second-generation British-Nigerians; raised in relatively more stable environments, may carry financial anxiety and guilt disproportionate to their circumstances. This reflects not pathology, but

cultural inheritance of caution, deeply informed by the migrant generation’s trauma.

Conclusion

The financial behaviours of Nigerians in the UK; hoarding, hyper-saving, under-spending, must be understood within a trauma-informed framework. These are not irrational habits, but rational adaptations to prolonged economic instability, compounded by migration stress, systemic marginalisation, and family obligations.

Understanding poverty as trauma shifts the narrative. It allows for empathy, cultural sensitivity, and more effective social policy, particularly in financial planning, mental health support, and community outreach.

“When you have known real lack, even abundance feels temporary.”

Works Cited

- [1] BHM UK. *Cost-of-Living Crisis Report: African Immigrants in the UK Struggle to Pay Bills*. 2023. *The Guardian Nigeria*, <https://guardian.ng/issue/report-shows-african-immigrants-in-uk-struggle-to-pay-bills-as-cost-of-living-crisis-intensifies>.
- [2] Hau, Iulia. “The Unseen Struggles of a Nigerian Student in the UK Gig Economy.” *RPublic*, Mar. 2024, <https://rpublic.com/february-march-2024/nigerian-student-in-the-uk>.
- [3] Ikuomola, Adediran Daniel. “Unintended Consequences of Remittance: Nigerian Migrants and Intra-Household Conflicts.” *SAGE Open*, vol. 5, no. 4, 2015, doi:10.1177/2158244015605353.
- [4] Obienyi, Chinwendu. “UK Inflation Surges Deepen Financial Pressure on Nigerians Abroad.” *The Sun Nigeria*, Jan. 2025, <https://thesun.ng/uk-3-5-inflation-surge-deepens-financial-pressure-on-nigerians-abroad>.
- [5] OhentPay. *UK–Nigeria Remittance Report: ‘Black Tax’ Accounts for Nearly 50%*. *The Condia*, 2024, <https://thecondia.com/uk-nigeria-remittance-report-2024>.