Generational Differences Faced by Sudanese Refugee Women Settling in Australia

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Although a significant number of Sudanese refugees have migrated to Australia over the past decade, little research has been conducted to identify the experiences and problems they face while settling into a culture significantly different from their home culture. This exploratory study investigated the adaptation and acculturation experiences of 28 women from the Sudanese refugee community and explored a range of issues relating to intergenerational communication since their arrival in Australia. Most participants expressed the following as issues of concern: (a) disciplining and raising children in Australia, (b) relationships with teenage children, and (c) the influence of Sudanese culture on their child rearing practices. The following two key theoretical constructs have been identified for their potential relevance to our findings and future research on this topic: (a) Hofstede's cultural dimensions, and (b) the acculturation process.

There are various reasons why refugees are forced to relocate from their country of origin to other countries on humanitarian grounds. In some African countries, major reasons for such relocations include, but are not limited to, endless wars, famine, pestilence, and discrimination on ethnic/religious grounds. Such migration can be problematic as the refugees have to settle in a new place and assimilate into the new society and culture. In the process of settling in their new environment, many refugees experience culture shock which manifests in various ways such as homesickness, health, and psychological problems (Department of Communities, 2008; Queensland Health, 2008). Over time, migrants, including refugees, may become more accepted in their new culture, having adapted to their host country's values, ways of living, communicating, thinking, and being (see Kim, 2001).

There are a whole range of intercultural issues that arise when refugee families arrive in their host countries, including language and communication problems, inter-generational problems, and cross-cultural problems (see Foundation House, 2005; Poppitt & Frey, 2007; The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, 2007). The process of resolving these issues has been described in intercultural communication literature as acculturation. Kim (1995) draws on Shibutani and Kwan (1965) to define acculturation as, "The process of *learning* and acquiring the elements of the host culture" (p. 176).

Such difficulties affect family relationships and childrearing practices as family and relationship patterns can change due to relocation. Research shows that members of the Sudanese refugee community in Australia face acculturation problems, including language and communication difficulties, as a result of their settlement in a distinctively western culture (Department of Communities, 2008; Poppitt & Frey, 2007). Most, if not all, have lost family members, witnessed crimes and faced hardships in refugee camps with little or no time to heal wounds or learn about a new culture (Burgoyne & Hull, 2007). Some refugees have migrated as an intact family unit and others as single parents. In regard to the latter, the other

parent might be deceased or might have remained in Sudan in the company of children who were born in Sudan or they may have children born in Australia. Either way, Sudanese parents now contend with raising children in Australia who are being exposed to, and influenced by, a Western culture outside the home, while maintaining Sudanese culture and norms within their family and community environment (Puoch, 2006). Such dual upbringing environments can lead to a lack of or divided identity, where the children face the dilemma of not knowing where they belong as they are torn between two distinctly different cultures and societal norms (Martin & Nakayama, 2008).

This exploratory study examines various generational differences and acculturation issues that are experienced by Sudanese refugee mothers settling in Australia, a society which is significantly culturally different from their home culture. The following major sections include a discussion of: (a) Sudanese migrants in Australia, (b) the qualitative methodology, (c) findings outlining the major themes that arose through the data, and (d) potentially relevant theoretical constructs in relation to the findings**.**

A Brief Overview of Sudanese Migrants[1] in Australia

Since 2001, more than 22,500 Sudanese refugees have settled in Australia under offshore visa grants through the Australian Humanitarian Program (Department of Immigration and Citizenship [DIAC], 2008a). The most significant number of Sudanese refugee arrivals in Australia—5,654—occurred during the 2004-2005 year and has slowly reduced with only 1,018 refugees arriving in 2007-2008 (DIAC, 2008a). In the 2004-2005 year, 70% of refugees accepted in Australia under the Humanitarian Program came from Africa, with Sudanese comprising close to half of this number (Burgoyne & Hull, 2007). The number of African and subsequently Sudanese) refugees have fallen sharply since the 2004-2005 year, despite increases in the program's overall approval numbers for each consecutive year. Official plans for the 2008-2009 year included evenly distributed intakes from Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, with each receiving a third of the Humanitarian Program's quota (DIAC, 2008b). However, it is unclear precisely how many Sudanese will be included in this quota. The Australian government cites those in "need of protection" as a factor that influences approval of applications in addition to "the views of individuals and organizations in Australia" (DIAC, 2008b). It can be argued that although Sudanese refugees continue to be in need of protection, the views of those within Australia have had a significant impact on reducing the number of Sudanese refugees now being accepted under the Humanitarian Program.

There are a number of significant factors that underline the demographics of Sudanese refugees in Australia. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in 2007, the median age of Sudanese-born residents was 24.4 years; this was the youngest median age of any overseas-born residents (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2008). Furthermore, those born in Sudan had the highest representation of child residents with 25% of all Sudanese in Australia being under 14 years of age (ABS, 2008). Although Australian residents overall comprised approximately half male and half female in 2007, Sudanese-born residents comprised 120 males per 100 females (ABS, 2008). This places Sudanese-born residents in the top five countries with more males than females being represented in Australia behind such countries as Bangladesh and Afghanistan. This disproportionate number of males, and especially of young males, may have a significant impact on a diverse range of outcomes for

Sudanese people living in Australia, such as, how they are perceived in the community, the availability of social support services, as well as education and employment opportunities.

Between 10% and 15% of Sudanese adults have settled in the state of Queensland (Burgoyne & Hull, 2007). According to government sources, more than 3,100 Sudanese refugees are now estimated to be living in Queensland, predominantly in the south-east, including areas such as Logan, Brisbane, and Toowoomba, with a small number also living in the north of the state (Department of Communities, 2008).

Support Services Available to Sudanese Refugees in Australia

The Australian Federal Government's Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) offers refugees resettlement support for approximately six months from the time of their arrival (DIAC, 2008c). This program provides coordinated assistance to ensure that each individual's initial needs in relation to basic necessities such as accommodation, medical attention, food, and clothing are met (DIAC, 2008c; Australian Human Rights Commission [AHRC], 2008). Additionally, orientation plans are provided and newly arrived refugees are referred to other service providers in the community (DIAC 2008c; AHRC, 2008). Furthermore, the Settlement Grants Program provides additional services, following on from IHSS for up to five years for refugees if they are required (Department of Communities, 2008).

A number of other services, such as health and education, while primarily funded by the Federal Government, are delivered by state governments in Australia. According to the Department of Communities (2008), refugee children are provided with English language support and classroom assistance via the Refugee Support Program within the state school system in Queensland. Additionally, adult refugees are offered up to 510 hours of English language studies through the Adult Migrant English Program. Young adults (between the ages of 18 and 24) also have access to programs which offer an additional 1200 hours of English, literacy, and numeracy courses, as long as they meet criteria that hinder their ability to find employment (Department of Communities, 2008). Local governments as well as non-profit, religious, and community organizations provide additional support for refugees while in the process of resettlement (Department of Communities, 2008), although the type and availability of support may differ from area to area.

Methods

To ensure that we observed our university's ethical protocols for conducting human research, executive committee members and elders from the local Sudanese Association in Brisbane were consulted throughout the research. Their advice was respected and adhered to in order to build a level of trust and confidence between the research team and the participants. There are a few cultural issues associated with researching members of the Sudanese refugee community that we respectfully adhered to as part of our methodology[2].

A total of 28 women from the Sudanese refugee community in Brisbane participated in this study. Of this number, 12 were women studying English courses at a local campus for Technical and Further Education (TAFE), and 16 were women attending a weekly women's group at a local Brisbane school. They were interviewed during their lunch breaks in

September and November 2008. We sought their participation through the agreement and cooperation of local Sudanese community leaders. In addition, we received approval and assistance from TAFE in contacting potential participants. Building a respectful relationship with the Sudanese community has been an important facet of this study, as research shows that a sense of trust between researchers and respondents is an integral part of data collection relating to refugee experiences (Jacobsen, 2006). At the time of our study, these women lived in various suburbs of Brisbane, the administrative capital of the state of Queensland.

To elicit personal narratives from the participants who came from a primarily oral culture, we used qualitative research methods, as the aim of this exploratory study was to identify emerging themes rather than to confirm established hypotheses (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2003). Most participants had limited or no English language skills. The women who agreed to participate in the study took part in focus group interviews, wherein the questions and the time allocated by the researchers was very loosely structured to allow them opportunities to identify and expand on issues that were of more relevance to their experiences (McMichael & Manderson, 2004).

The focus group interviews were conducted in two common Sudanese languages—Dinka and Sudanese Arabic. We received the assistance of a Dinka interpreter (male) who was also a leader in the local Sudanese community. Most participants knew him well, and hence, they felt comfortable talking through him. We also hired the services of a female Sudanese Arabic interpreter who had previously assisted the Sudanese community when intercultural communication problems arose. The Sudanese Arab women felt very comfortable communicating with/through a female interpreter who was not only proficient in their language, but had also lived in that part of Africa. Hence, this interpreter related and bonded well with these women, thereby facilitating open discussion. Participants were informed about the objectives of our study prior to the focus group interviews. They were also informed that their identities would not be revealed at any time during the research process. Finally, the participants were informed that they were free to withdraw from the focus group interviews at any stage if they felt uncomfortable.

Interview questions covered a range of issues relating to generational communication issues since their arrival in Australia. The interpreters translated the semi-structured questions from the questionnaires which were written in English, and then interpreted the participants' responses back into English. The focus group interviews were audio-taped solely for transcription purposes. The data was transcribed by research assistants and the transcripts were crosschecked with the interpreters to ensure that the transcriptions made were accurate.

Open coding was employed in the analysis of the data. In this context, we did not assign any predetermined categories to the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). While we were careful to retain the participants' voices in the text, we also made minor grammatical corrections without which some of the quotes would be difficult to understand.

<div align="center">Findings</div>

There were many recurring themes that emerged in the interviews. Even though these themes seem to be inter-related, they are presented separately below for ease of understanding and for analytical coherence.

Disciplining and Raising Children in Australia

All the women said they migrated to Australia because of the on-going war in Sudan. They found upon their arrival that the Australian culture was quite different from the Sudanese culture. One such difference noted was referred to as "acceptable" norms, including how to raise and discipline their children. Sudanese mothers said they realized their children were challenging parental control as they learned about freedom and individual rights in their new environment. There was disparity between what Sudanese parents considered "acceptable" ways of raising and disciplining children and what was considered "acceptable" by Australian law and society.

It is important to put these views into cultural context. Discipline is important within Sudanese culture and adults use an instructional approach together with physical punishment when teaching children within the family (Ebbeck & Dela Cerna, 2006; Migrant Resource Centre North West Region [MRC], 2006). Appropriate behavior and conformity from the children is expected and highly valued. Whereas adulthood is related to age in Australia, Sudanese boys move from childhood to adulthood through the rites of initiation which is seen as a great honor and provides status and privilege for these young men and their families (Preston, 1996). Additionally, women dominate the private sphere in Sudanese culture and are responsible for running the home and caring for family members, and girls work alongside their mothers and other adult females until they marry and move to live with their husband's family (Wal, 2004). One woman gave an example of how difficult it was to raise a child in Australia:

> Back home [Sudan] you can direct your child, you can ask your child to do something while they are doing something else, but they stop, and do what you ask them. But here, now, you cannot ask your child to do something while they are doing something else, or they will tell you the consequences like, I'm not (won't), I shouldn't be doing what you are telling me, because I'm doing _____, I'm too busy with _____, and they have information that they're getting from the schools which can tell them exactly what their rights are. And you can't punish them. But back home, you can punish them in many ways that you want.

Now living in Australia, one mother explained, "If you try and slap your child, it's hard, yes. We've [Sudanese] considered that to be a part of discipline, but in Australia, it is child abuse." Another mother mentioned her lack of parental control, but as Aaron (name used to protect identity of interpreter) explained, "But is really very hard. They are having very, very, unlimited freedom. They don't listen to me anymore."

As the discussion on parenting continued, the interpreter explained that one of the mothers participating in the interview spoke to her children about this problem. The response was confronting. "They say that it's not up to me to control them when they are already 18 or yeah. Some of my kids say that 'Mum, I'm free to do whatever I want.'" Another woman also with a teenager at home said:

For all of us, it is very hard, because our kids have no respect for the parents when they talk with us. The kids can say anything, do whatever they want to do. Yeah, especially for me, I have an 18-year-old teenager. It's real hard.

One mother immediately commented on a perception in Australian society (see Foundation House, 2005) that Sudanese parents were "abusing" their kids (not disciplining them) by stating:

We have to get over the stereotype that Sudanese or Africans misuse [abuse] their kids. That stereotype is not there [is not true]. We punish them for a reason, we don't punish them because we don't like them, we punish them because we [want to] change [their] direction. Maybe some of them are going in a very bad direction toward their future so we want them to come back and go in the right direction. So punishment is also geared toward that one [correcting wrong behavior]. It's not because you don't like your kid or is not because you punish them or because you want to punish them. You punish your child for a reason.

Trying to rationalize their children's behavior and "misuse of freedom" as values they learn from their Australian peers from school, one mother said:

Some of them [children] are in school, and maybe when they talk to some of their colleagues, some of the colleagues explain life in Australia and what are you supposed to do or what are you not supposed to do, and then she [the Sudanese child] can also talk about her culture and that is the time maybe when they realize the difference and she thinks that she is really suppressed at home. So she [comes home and] says that "you know in Australia, you are supposed to behave this way. What the mum is doing is really not very good, she's really controlling." So they are learning through their peer group, either in school or somewhere [else].

The general view among the women was that there were more problems with older or teenage children than with younger children who could still be "controlled." One woman said:

I am really very happy for you coming here and asking such a question. I am really frustrated. We can't do anything to these children who are really grown up, unless you've got maybe other [young] kids that you can start with, that's where you can do something a little. But the grown up ones are really out of control. You can't control them.

This view was echoed by another woman who had similar experiences with controlling her children. As Aaron pointed out:

Some of the kids are not going to school. They don't go to work, they don't go anywhere [just loiter]. One day, I asked [her daughter] where you will be? She just jump[ed] up; she also misbehaved, she talked to me in a very rude language. And yet

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her parents ask her — they want to know where she slept last night, and what she was doing? She's not doing assignments, she's not going to work, what is she doing?

Expanding on the notion of children exercising their new found freedom and independence since arriving in Australia, one woman noted:

That's a problem because some of the parents they don't like their own kids to have (fall in) love or something like that. So what they [Sudanese adolescents] need [want] is to stay alone so that they [can] do whatever they want. Some of them for example, they like going to Western Australia, not because they want something in Western Australia, [but] just to loiter around or to move around. He/she doesn't have work in Western Australia, or is in school or something like that; [they] just get Centrelink [payment] and move around. They are abusing [independence/freedom in Australia], thinking that this is what we call "tourism." We [parents] feel that if tourism is done in a school time, it is not correct. [If] it is done in holiday time, it is done when you have money. You don't go for a tour when you don't have money.

All the mothers were happy about coming to Australia as it offered both themselves and their children a better chance to get an education, a good job, and a secure future. But one mother was despondent in saying that, "Some of the kids are abusing this right. Instead of going to school and getting [an] education, instead of going to work and getting money, some of them are getting really small money and going to club and maybe they are really abusing [their] right in Australia," while another mother lamented:

So we are expecting children to [be] educate[d] so that they can help the entire family as well as the whole of Sudan; they can even do something like that. So we are really very frustrated about what our children are doing at the moment because some of the Australian kids she mentioned, they [do not] know what they are doing. You [Australian youth] have a girlfriend or a boyfriend and also plan their own time to meet with a boyfriend or a girlfriend. They also frame their own time to go for leisure, and also plan time to go to school, but our [Sudanese] kids, they don't have that timetable, because it's something new to them. They are told that they have freedom. They are misusing it. They don't know how to use that freedom. Australian[s] do, but they [Sudanese] don't know.

Aaron further expanded on another issue that has been highlighted within the Australian media—the public's perception of Sudanese youths' involvement in crime. Lack of understanding of the value of freedom and independence seemed to differentiate the future of Sudanese versus Australian children. A mother explained:

Australian youths, they are really very good, they are doing well. And our youths are not doing well, it is the opposite. They are learning from Australian[s], yet Australian[s] are doing well and they [Sudanese] are not doing very well, so it is really the opposite. They're [Sudanese] supposed to do [behave] like Australian[s]. When you see Australian youths, they are in school, they are doing very well, they

know what they planned for their future, our kids are not doing that. You see a lot of them loitering somewhere, train station, everywhere, and Australian[s] are not—they are in school, they are at workplace.

Relationships with Teenage Children

The differences between Sudanese and Australian cultures also affect the mother-child relationship when the children befriend the opposite gender before marriage or without the permission of the parents. Traditional Sudanese family structures and practices are significantly different from those found in Australia, with kinship ties among the Sudanese being very strong (DIAC, 2007). For example, the male head of the extended family is involved in decision making for those within the family, including decisions about marriage partners (Wal, 2004). Families are supportive and protective of their daughters and their marriage traditionally provides the family with additional resources in the form of a dowry (DIAC, 2007; Preston 1996). Additionally, the marriage of both teenage boys and girls is considered fundamentally important as it will provide strengthened ties with other families or tribes (DIAC, 2007; Preston, 1996). One mother explained:

When you come to like [someone] between youth themselves, the way Australians conduct their love is different from ours. Culturally, you are guided by your father. When you are choosing your partner it is not up to you to choose your own partner, but you abide by normal cultural rules, which puts your partner in solidarity with your parent and the other relative. Also, you may not play or show love activity in a public place. That [behavior] is very different. But in Australia, you kiss your girlfriend, you kiss your partner anywhere you feel like, but that is not allowed in the Sudanese culture, especially in Dinka culture. So everything has to be done in hidden places, in a very convenient place designed for it [in the privacy of one's home]. You don't do it [in the open]. You don't let your mum know he is your boyfriend unless he's your husband. So they [Sudanese and Australian cultures] are very, very different.

Influence of Sudanese Culture on Child Rearing

The women said they would like to retain one aspect of Sudanese culture—the way they raise their children—even as they integrate into the Australian society. One woman said:

Culturally, it is not allowed for one's own daughter or own son to leave home and stay away because he's 18 years. No. A daughter can stay with her parents till she's married. That's one aspect we can't allow to change. We are ready to stay with our daughters and sons until they feel like [getting] married or they feel like going somewhere because of [a] job or because of changing places, not because they are 18 or something like that. As a matter of fact, they can stay with the parents till the daughter is maybe 30 years or 40 years, if she feels like it.

In Sudanese culture, gender roles dictate that the girls are trained to do housework such as how to handle utensils, how to maintain the home, and how to cook (Wal, 2004). One woman lamented what she described as a behavioral change with her daughters: "My girls no longer help around the house because they are studying all the time. I'm a widow and have no one else to help me, so I'm a little bit disadvantaged by that fact. "

An older mother was quite happy to hear about our research on generational communication issues affecting Sudanese refugee women in Australia. However, she was quite bitter about the issue of raising children, as in Sudan girls are viewed as a source of wealth, protected by the family, and are not allowed to have boyfriends (Wal, 2004). As the interpreter explained:

> For the most part, 'mama,' she is really very stressed and depressed, because she came with two daughters and one son. Now one daughter became pregnant by another young man somewhere, because she was not listening to her mum because she was told in the school that you are free to choose your own boyfriend, you are also free to go anywhere, you can go to Bundaberg or you go to Rockhampton with your boyfriend or you go to wherever you feel like and these are the disadvantages [of Australian culture] and yet these daughters, Sudanese girls, they don't even know how to control their periods. They can easily become pregnant. And it's really violent (painful) to the family because some of these young people are not ready for a family, and if she becomes pregnant and the other one [partner] is not ready for a family, she still comes back to mum. And mum is the one [who has] to take care of the child. And normally these people [parents] are very proud of their own [children]. If your daughter is married and somebody is ready for [starting] the family, you are really proud of it, you really feel that you are [a] responsible parent. So those are the only few things, like she is saying that she left some of the relatives back home and if she's asked "how are the kids" and all this thing and you say maybe one is pregnant, one is like this [out of wedlock], somebody might think that she [mother] is not a responsible [parent]. And that will not make her feel good. So she told me that she developed some sort of heart disease like diabetes and even sometime, hypertension — it's because of too much thinking [worrying].

Framework for Understanding Cultural Differences

The authors considered several intercultural communication theories and concepts which are capable of providing a conceptual frame through which to view the aforementioned experiences of Sudanese refugee women who have settled in Australia. In the next major section, we first offer potentially useful theoretical lenses and then integrate these into our research findings.

Pertinent Theoretical Lenses and Discussion

Communication between people from two countries is to a great extent influenced by their culture. Researchers define "culture" in diverse ways; for example, Martin and Nakayama (2008) define culture as, "learned patterns of perception, values, and behaviors,

shared by a group of people that is also dynamic and heterogeneous" (p. 28). With a significant rise in intercultural interaction across the world, understanding the "other" culture and learning skills to overcome differences and adapt accordingly becomes essential. Therefore, understanding differences between Sudanese and Australian cultures is a critical part of the sense making process. The next section briefly discusses Hofstede's cultural dimensions and the acculturation process.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Hofstede (1980) undertook a milestone study which examined key dimensions on which 67 national cultures differed and identified four main dimensions of cultural values including: individualism and collectivism (I/C), power distance (PD), uncertainty avoidance (UA), and masculinity and femininity (M/F). Typical traits of people in individualist cultures include ranking concern for themselves over concern for others, and placing a high value on independence and privacy (Hofstede, 1980). More collectivist cultures, on the other hand, place emphasis on loyalty to the group and a "we" consciousness (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

PD relates to the degree to which inequality is evident and accepted within a culture (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). PD may be based on institutional hierarchies or individual characteristics such as, age, gender, or social class. Consideration is given to the extent to which members of the culture believe this inequality is beneficial to themselves and their society, or alternately, the extent to which authority is challenged.

UA refers to a culture's tolerance for unpredictability and change and the extent to which there is anxiety associated with ambiguity and uncertainty (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). UA can be seen in societies by the extent to which rules, regulations, and rituals are in place to control behavior and avoid confrontation, and also in the extent to which diversity is accepted.

M/F refers to the extent to which a culture encourages achievement and assertiveness over supportiveness and quality of life choices (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Generally those cultures that fall closer to "femininity" on the continuum also favour gender equality and there is evidence of less defined gender roles within those societies. Later, a fifth dimension, long and short term time orientation, was added (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Each country in the study was scored on these five dimensions providing an empirical framework for understanding cultural differences.

Although Sudan was not included in Hofstede's work, or in subsequent replicative studies, we have used the scores and rankings of East Africa (Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, and Zambia) in our comparisons. East Africa's scores are applicable to our study for three reasons: (a) most participants spent significant time living in Kenya's refugee camps, (b) while most northern Sudanese are Muslim and geographically closer and culturally similar to Egypt (classified by Hofstede as Arab) with regards to culture, our study's participants are predominantly Christian from Southern Sudan and do not identify culturally with their compatriots in the north, and (c) geographically, Sudan lies in the eastern quadrant of the African continent (see Foundation House, 2005).

I/C and PD scores and rankings. The dimensions which are most applicable to our study are I/C and PD. Hofstede ranked 74 countries on an I/C Index from most individualistic

(score of 91), to most collectivist (score of 6). Australia ranked second with a score of 90, just behind The United States of America, and East Africa ranked 49-51st with a score of 27 (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). Given that 74 countries were ranked, this shows a significant disparity of approximately 50 ranking points between the two cultures, which means that Australia[3] is more an "I" culture and Sudan is more a "we" culture. Whilst Australian culture values such things as diversity, independence, autonomy, and privacy, Sudanese culture is more likely to reject those in favor of conformity, interdependence, loyalty, and belonging (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

With regard to PD, Australia has a low PD with a score of 36 (rank of 41), and East Africa has a high PD with a score of 64 (rank of 21-23) (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Therefore, Australian culture is more likely to encourage flatter hierarchies and greater equity at work, whereas East African cultures are more likely to see hierarchies as appropriate and accept that positions of authority come with power and privileges that should not be questioned.

Some scholars have criticized Hofstede's research since it was originally published. For example, McSweeney (2002) contends that Hofstede based his classification of national cultures on relatively few questionnaires administered to IBM employees in some countries and that IBM staff (or employees) may not necessarily be an accurate representation of specific cultures. However, in spite of critics (see Voronov & Singer, 2002), Hofstede's frameworks still provide a useful point of reference when analyzing intercultural communication problems and continues to be widely cited in the literature (see Baraldi, 2006; Burleson & Mortenson, 2003; Gallois, Giles, Jones, Cargile, & Ota 1995; Glazer, 2006; Gudykunst, 1997; Leonard, 2008; Triandis, 2004).

Influence of Individualism on Sudanese Collectivistic Culture

Findings from this study suggest that while traditionally the Sudanese culture and family structure has been collectivistic, the migration to an individualistic culture such as Australia has had an impact on child rearing practices. Disciplining and raising children in Australia was an issue of concern for parents as their children were displaying signs of being influenced by Australian culture; they seem to be more individualistic than the traditional collectivistic Sudanese culture. As Foundation House (2005) states, "cross-cultural tensions may occur as a result of changing roles and expectations, e.g., in Australia, Sudanese children are often described as having more freedom" (p. 4). Thus, when children resort to individualistic behavior and talk about their freedom and independence, the mothers found it very hard to accept and discipline them due to the varying disciplinary practices between Australia and Sudan.

The Acculturation Process

Acculturation research, as compared to acculturation, is the investigation of "the process of moving to, living in, and adapting to a culture different from one's country of origin" (Poppitt & Frey, 2007, p. 161). This process can affect individuals and groups, with its effects experienced by both the minority and dominant culture. This is demonstrated in Redfield, Linton and Herskovits' (1936) definition, which states that "acculturation comprehends those

phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups" (p. 149).

The complexity of the acculturation process is best reflected by authors who adopt a "multidimensional" approach (Berry, 2003, p. 22). One of the most widely cited works is Berry's (1997) study, which offers a conceptual framework for acculturation which can also be applied to relationships between psychological wellbeing and socio-cultural maintenance. Berry (1997) identified four categories of acculturation strategies used by individuals: (a) assimilation (rejecting original culture in favor of host culture), (b) separation (retaining original and rejecting host), (c) integration (maintaining both the original culture and participating in the host), and (d) marginalization (no sense of belonging to either culture). This theory is based on the assumption that individuals have the freedom to choose a method. However, as Berry (1997) states, the dominant group can often enforce a method. For example, integration can only be freely chosen when the dominant society is open and inclusive toward cultural diversity (Berry, 1997). Berry argued these acculturation strategies can also be predictors of psychological wellbeing, as "integration is usually the most successful; marginalization is the least; and assimilation and separation strategies are intermediate" (Berry, 1997, p. 24). A further study of immigrant youth found that allowing cultures to live separately within society was preferable to pushing them to assimilate (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). Also, Ward and Kennedy's (1994) study of New Zealanders on overseas assignments found "integrated subjects experienced less depression than assimilated ones" (p. 329).

This multidimensional approach has also been successfully applied to the context of Sudanese refugees in Australia. Poppitt and Frey's (2007) study of Sudanese adolescent refugees in Australia found that many utilized a form of integration acculturation technique, and could be further classified as "alternating bi-culturals" (Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997, p. 16). Whether this approach would result in long term positive effects is, however, unclear. Also note that there is a distinct lack of longitudinal studies and/or studies looking at the multidimensional approach which focuses specifically on refugees. Nonetheless, it provides a useful measure for methods and impacts of acculturation.

Bi-cultural Identity?

Identity is a concept which seeks to explore "our understandings of who we are and of who other people are" (Jenkins, 2004, p. 5) and is both inward and outward looking. Many aspects of identity are related to group membership and notions of belonging and can be considered from a collective perspective (Jenkins, 2004; Loewen, 2004; Weeks, 1991). Categories such as nationality, religion, gender, and profession, for example, provide us with a sense of connection to others with similar characteristics; yet they also give us a sense of who we are not. Following on from this, some categories of identity are dichotomous. For example, we can be either male or female but not both; while other aspects cannot be considered mutually exclusive, for example, we can be both mother (to our children) and daughter (to our parents), simultaneously. Identity therefore can be seen as "multiple and complex" (Loewen, 2004, p. 41) and also as being "contextual and fluid" (Colic-Peisker & Walker, 2003, p. 338) rather than static, over the course of one's life.

Notions of heritage and personal history also provide a strong basis for the reconstruction of identity. For example, identity can be closely linked to familial relationships, particularly during childhood and where family ties are of primary importance (Jenkins, 2004). Both refugee children and adults have found that closely identifying with their families and their ethnicity has provided a stable basis for beginning the arduous task of identity reconstruction (Candappa & Egharevba, 2002; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2003).

However, Colic-Peisker & Walker's (2003) research into Bosnian refugees in Australia also found that "forced migrants have thrust upon them an administrative or bureaucratic identity of 'refugee' which is almost always seen as undesirable and as an 'identity' to be shed as quickly as possible" (p. 338). Further, McMichael and Manderson (2004) in their study of Somali women in Australia found that an identity of "refugee" was used by the receiving society to "justify exclusion" (p. 95). These two studies highlight the notion that identity reconstruction for refugees relies not only on the characteristics and resources of the refugees themselves, but also on the institutional and informal interactions between the refugees and the receiving community (Colic-Peisker & Walker, 2003).

Conclusions

Significant findings from this exploratory study show that Sudanese refugee mothers are leaning towards separation (retaining original culture and rejecting host) while they believe their children are leaning towards assimilation (rejecting original culture in favor of host culture). Research suggests it would be more beneficial for both mothers and their children to lean towards integration by maintaining both their original culture and participating in the host culture (Berry, 2003). Perceived generational differences in acculturation strategies create tension within the family unit. When mothers lean towards "separation" and reject the "Australianization" strategy adopted by their assimilating children, they (mothers) find it difficult to distinguish between feelings of rejection towards the Australian culture, and feelings of frustration and disconnection from their children. As a result, family relationships are threatened because of incompatible acculturation responses. For example, mothers feel they are losing their parental authority and their ability to provide guidance and influence the social development of their children.

In terms of discipline, Sudanese refugee mothers feel that cultural dissonance deprives them of their right to discipline their children in culturally appropriate ways that they were used to in Sudan. Research evidence shows that discipline is considered important within Sudanese culture and adults use verbal commands along with physical punishment to discipline their children. The mothers who participated in this study expected appropriate behavior and conformity from their children and when this expectation was not met, they relied on physical punishment. The findings of this study show that mothers believe their authoritative position in the family has been undermined by their children's acceptance of Australian culture and hence their authority is being questioned. This could be attributed to the mothers' upbringing in the high PD culture in Sudan, and the childrens' adoption of the low PD culture in Australia.

This study also found, in terms of identity reconstruction, Sudanese mothers and children have taken divergent paths. While mothers identify with their home culture, the children identify with the host culture. Specifically, the mothers continue to primarily identify

themselves as "Sudanese," whereas they believe their children have abandoned their Sudanese identity in favor of an Australian identity.

Regardless of the theoretical constructs and methodological approach, future research should further investigate settlement issues faced by the Sudanese refugees in Australia from the perspective of all family members. Critical issues requiring further investigation include (but are not limited to): (a) examining the experiences of children, adolescents, and youths, (b) examining the experiences of fathers, (c) investigating the role that Sudanese community elders can play in counseling members of all ages within their local community, and (d) investigating strategies for resolving the issues and tensions within Sudanese refugee families in a multicultural society such as Australia.

Acknowledgement

Notes

[1] In this paper, we grappled with addressing the participants as "migrants" or "refugees." Even though all participants came to Australia as refugees, during informal discussions, they expressed that they were not refugees any more as they were now settled in Australia. How long would they be referred to as refugees when living in Australia, holding Australian citizenships?

[2] For instance, the women on our research team took a lead role in talking with the women participants as compared to letting the male researcher take the lead role. We were made aware that the Sudanese culture followed polychronic time and hence we were not perturbed when the focus groups started late, the women walked in and out of the groups, and the sessions lasted longer than we had planned for.

[3] These scores for Australia were also supported in a comparatively recent study by Teoh, Serang & Lim (1999).

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