

Conflict and Disdain: Sudanese Communities in Alberta and the Child Welfare System

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Studies Involving the Sudanese in Calgary/Brooks

Series of Studies

- ❑ Meeting the Multilevel Challenges of Sudanese Well Being and Social Integration in Canada (SSHRC)
- ❑ The Perceptions and Experiences of Sudanese Refugee Men as Fathers in the Canadian Context (SSHRC-CURA)
- ❑ Racism, Violence, and Health Study (CIHR)
- ❑ HIV/AIDS Services Delivery Systems and Calgary's African Newcomer Communities (CIHR)

Study Objectives

- ❑ To examine the similarities and differences related to the settlement experience between the three sites
- ❑ To understand Sudanese concepts of family and dynamics within Sudanese families
- ❑ To understand Sudanese concepts of health and well being

Study Objectives

- ❑ To examine the barriers limiting Sudanese integration in Canadian society
- ❑ To explore supports that are available and used by Sudanese in each community
- ❑ To identify service priorities with Sudanese community organizations and service providers

Contextual Information

- ❑ Sudanese started coming to Canada on a steady in the early 1990s
- ❑ Most left Southern Sudan as a result of the ongoing civil war (Ethiopia, Uganda, Chad, Kenya)
- ❑ 2 million people killed, more than 4 million were uprooted
- ❑ Thousands of children separated from their parents
- ❑ Region suffered from a series of droughts/acts of environmental destruction

Contextual Information

- ❑ Limited economic, health, and educational resources in the south
- ❑ Southern Sudanese women and children have been forced into slavery

Simich et al., 2006

Sudanese Society

Binary categorization has typically been used to describe Sudanese society

- *Geographic Region:* North versus South
- *Ethnicity:* Arab versus African
- *Religion:* Muslim versus Christian

Abusharaf, 1997; Deng, 1995

Brooks Context

- ❑ Small city in the province of Alberta, Canada
- ❑ 2006: 12,498 residents
- ❑ Increasing multicultural nature unlike other similar-sized cities in the province
- ❑ Large immigrant population of Africans/Middle Easterners
- ❑ Influx of individuals from eastern Canada
- ❑ Oil and meat packing are the major industries

Sudanese Community in Brooks, Alberta

- ❑ Brooks is home to approximately 1,500 Sudanese
- ❑ Employment is not a major problem – majority work at Lakeside Packers (a major employer in the area)
- ❑ Service providers report that the most serious social issues include alcoholism, gambling, and domestic conflict
- ❑ Increasing number of Sudanese experiencing post-traumatic stress and other psychological disorders

Calgary Context

- ❑ 4th largest city in Canada with a population over 1 million
- ❑ Very strong economy with the lowest unemployment rate of all major urban centres in Canada
- ❑ Calgary now attracts the fourth largest number of newcomers (immigrants/refugees) among the major cities in the nation

Sudanese Community in Calgary, Alberta

- Today, there are approximately 7,500 Sudanese (Wek Kuol, Sudanese Leader, 2007)
- Prior to 2000, the community was relatively small – propelled by two waves of migration (2000 and 2002)
- Sudanese community is now the largest African newcomers group in Calgary

Methodology

- Utilization of the pragmatic qualitative method as described by Patton (2002) & Creswell (2007)
- Use of strategies to collect and analyze data collected in the field

Recruitment Strategies

- ❑ Staff in immigrant-serving and Sudanese community-based organizations
- ❑ Posters describing the study in these organizations
- ❑ Presentations about the study at Sudanese community events
- ❑ Key contacts within the Sudanese community at each site

Profile of Participants

- Calgary 9 males 3 females
 Brooks 8 males 2 females
 17 males 5 females
- Age range Males: 19-41 years old
 Females: 23-34 years old
- Range Length of Stay in Canada: 10 months to 6 years
- Majority of participant at minimum completed secondary school
- Majority claimed their English proficiency was good
- Majority of Brooks participants employed at Lakeside Meat Packing plant

Data Collection

- 32 in-depth interviews (12 Calgary, 10 Toronto, 10 Brooks)
- 3 focus groups with service providers (1 per site)

Data Analysis

- Thematic analysis using *Atlas.ti* (Calgary/Brooks) and NVivo (Toronto)

Results

Core Sudanese Family Values

- Respect for elders, including parents
- Importance of education

Education

You want them to be successful children, wish them a good education and a better life

I will try my best to support them so that they can get a better education and get a good job when they finish their studies, not to work a physical job like what I am doing.

Este & Tachble, 2008

Importance of Respect

From the place I am from and the way I was brought up, I have to teach my children how to respect other people. I have to teach the children how to act with me and their mother. They should have to respect us, and if they give us respect, they respect other people. (Sudanese Father, Calgary)

Este & Tachble, 2008

Importance of Respect

. . . they [children] should show the respect to elders. For instance, in our Dinka culture, when a child is talking to elders, he or she should not look up to the face of elders. (Sudanese Father, Calgary)

Este & Tachble, 2008

Changing Relationship Between Sudanese Parents and Children

We are losing the respect that our elders are supposed to be accorded . . . we need to re-educate ourselves to be able to get the good values from our culture . . .

(Calgary Male Participant)

Changing Relationship Between Sudanese Parents and Their Children

You talk to your kids, they talk back at you. They talk to you, they look at your face. And to the elders it is a bad thing that the kids are no longer respecting them.

(Brooks Male Participant)

Changing Relationship Between Sudanese Parents and Their Children

It is difficult to be a father in Canada because all children are controlled by the government through child welfare and parents do not have the right to raise their children in the way they are used to.

Este & Tachble, 2008

Changing Relationship Between Sudanese Parents and Their Children

A challenge that I face here as a father is controlling your children . . . here you cannot discipline your children . . . it is a problem for us parents . . . you cannot say, "Don't do this, do this . . ."

Este & Tachble, 2008

Salient Issue

Apprehension of Sudanese Children by Child Welfare

- The biggest problem that I as a person has noticed is the breakdown of families and the involvement of child welfare with our children. Most Sudanese children have been taken away from their parents . . .

- Calgary Male Participant

- We Sudanese come here and we have lots of problems now with child welfare because whatever happens in families, child welfare came and took the children and separated families which we do not have in our culture.

- Calgary Female Participant

Apprehension

- . . . any simple method we use to discipline our children is interpreted as abuse and they are removed from the family.

- Sudanese Female (Community Forum I – Calgary)

- Thirty children have been taken away by social workers from Sudanese families. This problem is rampant in the Sudanese community. I will die emotionally if my children are taken from me.

- Sudanese Male (Community Forum I – Calgary)

Relationship with Child Welfare

- With child welfare, they have issues because of cultural misunderstanding. So that is a big issue.

- Calgary Female Participant

- Our community has so many difficulties, especially dealing with child welfare. Kids are being taken away from families . . . They [families and community] could have used the Sudanese way of solving problems.

- Calgary Male Participant

Relationship with Child Welfare

- Instead of coming in the house, interfering and then taking the kids or your wife away from you, they should ask the elders or leaders of the community.

- Brooks Male Participant

Recommended Solutions

- ❑ Collaboration with the Child Welfare system
- ❑ Sudanese staff employed by Child Welfare
- ❑ Child Welfare staff acquiring knowledge of Sudanese culture
- ❑ Use of Sudanese translators
- ❑ Provision of services in first language
- ❑ Community/family problem solving

Recommended Solutions

□ Collaboration with Child Welfare System

Well, the only way we can do it is if we can work hand-in-hand with child welfare. If child welfare can provide educational workshops for the Sudanese families, then our people can work in preventing child welfare from coming to take kids away from their parents. So we need at least some educational workshops from places like child welfare, family law, or even from the police.

- Calgary Male Participant

Recommended Solutions

□ Sudanese staff in child welfare system

Outreach workers are needed. They should go to the homes and see how we are living. How the children are being treated.

- Brooks Female Participant

Sudanese social workers with the social services, including child welfare. This may make it easier for the system [child welfare] to understand us. This huge apprehension would not happen again because there would be understanding and dialogue and bringing information forward . . . The system would be aware and create a program that response to their needs.

- Calgary Male Participant

Recommended Solution

□ Knowledge of Sudanese Culture

Child welfare workers have to understand our culture and the importance of respect . . . And that's a very important issue parents are facing here as our younger kids are starting to behave more Canadian. They do not have respect towards the elderly people.

- Calgary Male Participant

Recommended Solution

□ Use of Sudanese Translators

Sudanese translators who can translate English to their language to the people who do not know English.

- Calgary Male Participant

They should have some translators for child welfare, people who can translate the language, ethnic language.

- Brooks Male Participant

Recommended Solution

□ Provision of Services in First Language

We have many languages in Sudan . . . if services can be provided for the majority, for example, the Dinka, the Nuer, and Arabic.

- Calgary Female Participant

Recommended Solution

□ Community Solving Problem

The only solution for us to deal with the problem with child welfare is for the problems to be solved through the community, that is the only solution that the Sudanese can feel happy, can feel healthy.

- Calgary Female Participant

Family problems – we try to solve them by our community, not going to the government and making them more difficult.

- Brooks Male Participant

Conclusion

- ❑ There needs to be ongoing dialogue between the “community” and child welfare representatives
- ❑ Challenge: Who represents the Sudanese community
- ❑ Hiring of Sudanese as care aides as well as professional social workers may decrease the tension that exists between the two parties