

Acculturation challenges that confront Sudanese former refugees in Australia

Aparna Girish Hebbani, Levi Obijiofor & Helen Bristed

University of Queensland - Australia

Abstract

This study investigated acculturation challenges that Sudanese former refugees faced as a consequence of settling in South-East Queensland, Australia. A total of 28 females and 11 males participated in focus groups. The findings indicate that both women and men face acculturation issues relating to successful settlement. The women were particularly challenged by low English language proficiency and parenting issues, while the men faced challenges to their traditional gender role within the family, as breadwinner, and their role outside the home - at work and in the public sphere. Thus, the research offers important insights into acculturation issues faced by both genders.

Keywords: Refugees, intergenerational differences, gender roles, Sudanese, Australia, acculturation, cross-cultural adaptation, intercultural communication, parenting

Introduction

Over the past decade, Australia has accepted more than 22,000 Sudanese refugees through its Australian Humanitarian Program (Department of Immigration and Citizenship [DIAC] 2008). Of the total number of Sudanese former refugees now in Australia, approximately 10 to 15 percent have settled in the state of Queensland (Burgoyne & Hull 2007). According to government sources,[1] more than 3,100 Sudanese former refugees live in Queensland, predominantly in the south-east region (Department of Communities 2008). However, anecdotal evidence from local Sudanese leaders points to that number being much higher – closer to 6000 Sudanese migrants living in Queensland (Deng 2010).

Prior research has investigated settlement issues faced by the Sudanese from various disciplines such as psychology, sociology and education (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury 2003; Ebbeck & Dela Cerna 2006; Khawaja, White & Schweitzer 2008; Refugee Council of Australia [RCOA] 2008; Westoby 2006), with some researchers examining issues that affect the Sudanese community in Australia, as a result of their settlement in a distinctively Western culture (Department of Communities 2008; Hebbani, Obijiofor & Bristed 2009; Poppitt & Frey 2007).

Building upon such research, this qualitative study investigated acculturation challenges faced by Sudanese former refugees living in the South-east Queensland region of Australia, including the Brisbane, Ipswich and Logan areas. Data was collected through single-gender focus groups with men and women, and to the best of our knowledge, this is the only study in Australia that captured the voices of men and women in one study. The men and women were interviewed separately in recognition of Sudanese cultural values and on the advice of community elders. The study did not set out to uncover differences in the experiences of men and women, but rather to elicit data that related to the holistic experience of parenting whilst settling into a new and different environment as refugees. During the data analysis stage, however, it became apparent that significant differences in the experiences of men and women were emerging. These differences are therefore described and discussed in this paper.

The paper begins with: (a) an overview of relevant theoretical frameworks, (b) a brief description of Sudanese culture and customs, (c) an outline of the qualitative methodology employed, (d) emerging themes from both the female and male focus groups, followed by (e) a discussion of findings drawing upon the theories presented, and lastly (f) conclusions with limitations and recommendations for further research.

Theoretical Framework

The aim of the research was to examine acculturation issues faced by male and female Sudanese former refugees who have now settled in Australia. In particular, the challenges that they encountered in relation to their role as parents and family members were explored.[2] Several theories which serve as conceptual frames through which we can understand and make sense of the perceptions and experiences of Sudanese former refugees in Australia are presented below. The following section starts with an analysis of Hofstede's cultural dimensions.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions of individualism and collectivism (IC), and power distance (PD), are quite relevant to the study of families in the intercultural context.[3] Characteristic traits of members of individualistic cultures (such as Australia) include ranking concern for themselves over concern for others, and placing a high value on independence and privacy (Hofstede 1980), as compared to members of collectivist cultures (such as Sudan) who place emphasis on loyalty to the group and a "we" consciousness (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005).

High PD cultures such as Sudan accept hierarchies as appropriate and recognize that positions of authority come with power and privileges that should not be questioned (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005). This is in comparison to low PD cultures such as Australia, which encourage flatter hierarchies and greater equality. Hence, in high PD cultures, parenting norms emphasize that children should obey their parents (Hofstede 1994). Additionally, Australia, a low PD culture, favours gender role equality within a family unit as the norm (Goodwin 1999).

Acculturation and adaptation

Berry (1997) identified four categories of acculturation strategies used by individuals settling in an unfamiliar environment. These are: (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 concept assumes that individuals have the freedom to choose a strategy. However, it is important to note that both integration and assimilation can only be successfully achieved if the dominant society is open and inclusive toward cultural diversity (Berry 1997). In addition, Berry argues that these acculturation strategies can 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: 24). This is particularly important when considering family members who are living together, but are each engaged in the process of different acculturation strategies.

Berry's multidimensional approach has been applied to earlier studies of Sudanese refugees in Australia. For instance, Poppitt and Frey (2007) found that many Sudanese adolescents make use of an integration acculturation technique classified as "alternating bi-culturals" (Phinney & Devich-Navarro 1997: 16). However, it is unclear whether this resulted in long term positive effects. Berry's work continues to provide a useful measure for methods and impacts of acculturation.

Similarly, Kim's (2001; 2005) theory on cross-cultural adaptation conceptualizes adaptation as a dialectic process of "stress-adaptation-growth" that is dynamic and leads to better functional and psychological fitness of migrants into the host culture. Kim (2001) explains the stress phase as a generic response that occurs when newcomers find handling daily activities disruptive. Then during the adaptation phase, newcomers strive to assimilate into the host culture. As they work through the stress and adaptation phases, newcomers change and experience growth, creating new responses to circumstances as they arise. Certain factors, such as one's own competence and the host culture's interpersonal communication style and mass media response can, however, impede or facilitate adaptation. Success in acculturation can be predicted by characteristics such as similarity between cultures, personal characteristics and experiences and effects of the media.

Social Identity

Challenges in Sudanese refugee settlement can also be viewed through social identity theory which holds that membership in a social category (such as Black/White, minority/majority or male/female) is an important element of the self-concept (Tajfel & Turner 1986). This assumption is supported by Swan and Wyer (1997) who argue that when people encounter a social situation in which they are a minority with respect to gender or race, they become conscious of their identity as Black/White or male/female. For instance, Sudanese people may be more aware of their minority status in Australia due to (a) their visible difference (physical appearance) when compared to the majority Caucasian Australian population and (b) their identity as refugees, which is almost always seen as undesirable and as an 'identity' to be shed 'as quickly as possible' (Colic-Peisker & Walker 2003: 338). In fact, we refer to our participants as 'former refugees' for the same reason; during community forums, community members often asked for how long they would be referred to as refugees when they legally were Australian permanent residents and citizens. The Australian media has previously represented the Sudanese community as being problematic, gang-oriented, threatening and prone to committing violence which is considered to have a polarising effect (see *Journalism in Multicultural Australia* 2005; Roberts 2005). Negative representations in the media can also influence others in society and lead to an unwelcoming host culture as noted above. Subsequently, this can interfere with Sudanese migrants' efforts to successfully reconstruct their social identity.

Another equally important factor in acculturation and identity reconstruction is the inability to communicate effectively in English which can negatively influence the potential for refugees to, for example, find employment (Colic-Peisker & Walker 2003; Coughlan & Owens-Manley 2005).

Social Role Theory

Eagly's (1987) social role theory posits that gender roles are a product of the sexual division of labour and societal expectations based on stereotypes. The theory differentiates "communal" and "agentic" dimensions of gender-stereotyped characteristics. Women are most frequently associated with the communal role and are ascribed attributes such as nurturance and emotional expressiveness which are then linked with domestic activities. In contrast, men are most frequently associated with the agentic role and are said to possess attributes such as assertiveness and independence commonly associated with public activities.

Symbolic Interactionism and Gender Roles

Developed by Mead (1934), symbolic interactionism posits that, "by communicating, we learn who we are and what that means in the culture into which we have been born" (as cited in Wood 2005: 51). Gender roles significantly influence one's behaviour when one's culture sanctions and imposes expectations based on gender stereotypes. This then leads to a situation whereby men and women are evaluated on how well they conform to these traditional cultural and gendered stereotypes. According to Wood (2005), children learn gender roles and develop their own gender identity through communication with their parents. With this overview of the theoretical frameworks, we now examine briefly aspects of the Sudanese culture.

Brief Overview of Sudanese Culture and Customs

A significant cultural gap exists between Sudanese and Australian cultures. For instance, as mentioned previously, while Australian individualistic culture values independence, autonomy, flatter hierarchies, greater equality, and privacy, Sudanese collectivistic culture is more likely to favor conformity, interdependence, loyalty, belonging, and perceives hierarchies as appropriate and accepts that positions of authority come with power and privileges that should not be questioned (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005). As a result of such cultural differences, Sudanese parents are faced with many challenges and opportunities relating to resettlement in a new country and culture, as they and their children struggle to adapt to different cultural practices, language, traditions, and ways of being.

Gender roles and responsibilities in Sudanese families

While traditional gender roles in families have been affected in modern times by industrialisation (Lindsey 2005) and globalisation, much remains unchanged with regards to gender roles in Sudanese families. According to Wal (2004), the Sudanese family structure mostly follows traditional societal

patterns with families being patriarchal; men are considered to be head of the family and primary breadwinners (also see The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture [TVFST] 2007) while the women take care of the home, perform household duties, and look after the children. However, in clarification, Wal (2004) emphasizes that, "The segregation and subordination of women in Sudanese society should not obscure the fact that women dominate the household just as their men command public life. The home and the rearing of children are their domain, so long as they uphold male-oriented social norms" (p. 4). However, circumstances as a result of the prolonged war in Sudan have affected traditional family structures. Subsequently in some families women and men are forced to swap roles, with women becoming the breadwinner and assuming more responsibility in the public sphere (Wal 2004).

Effect of gender roles on parenting

As noted above, in most cases within Sudanese society, gender determines roles within the family. Men represent their family within the public sphere and women dominate the private sphere with responsibility for running the home, caring for the children, the elderly and others in need within the extended family (Wal, 2004). Hence, most Sudanese children are raised to follow such gendered roles, with boys learning from the men and working with the cattle and crops, and the girls learning from the women and working in the home. While both male and female children are considered very important (Wal, 2004), families are supportive and protective of their girls as their marriage is expected to provide the family with extra resources (in the form of a dowry) and to strengthen ties with other families or tribes (DIAC 2007; Preston 1996). Sudanese families also value their male children highly as they are expected to carry on the family lineage and traditions (Preston 1996).

Migrating to Australia and being in a culture and society that is quite egalitarian has resulted in significant changes to roles and responsibilities for members of many Sudanese families. For instance, according to TVFST (2007), many Sudanese men may feel their traditional role as the breadwinner and head of the household is diminished if they fail to find a job in Australia. Unemployment, therefore, results in feelings of reduced status within the family unit (Colic-Peisker 2009). In contrast, Sudanese women might gain status by receiving monetary assistance through, for example, Centrelink (the Australian Government Agency that assists people to become self-sufficient as well as supporting those in need), or by taking advantage of educational and subsequent employment opportunities. However, in Australia, many times the female is responsible for taking the children to school and bringing them back, due to lack of extended family support (RCOA 2008). In some cases, however, some women may seek education and work outside the house, but not all Sudanese men see this as appropriate or right as they believe that in Australia as in Sudan, women need to respect traditional Sudanese culture and stay at home (RCOA 2008).

Methods

This study, conducted in the South-east Queensland region, employed qualitative method of data collection and analysis to elicit narratives from participants from a primarily oral culture with regards to their acculturation experiences. Hence, semi-structured focus group discussions were conducted using open-ended and follow-up questions adapted from Masquefa (2003).

Participants

We recruited participants for the study through the cooperation of several key people within the Sudanese community, namely, local Sudanese community leaders with whom we had established collaborative academic relationship. The participants were identified, selected and recruited using a snowball sampling process (Bloch 1999) which was completed in advance of conducting the single-gender focus groups. Focus group interviews were conducted at three locations: (1) One female focus group was held at a local campus for Technical and Further Education (TAFE) (where refugees congregated to take government-funded English language classes), (2) Another female focus group was held at a Catholic education school community centre (where the Sudanese women and children met weekly), and (3) One male focus group was held at a community centre where the Sudanese Association members met regularly for meetings.

In late 2008, 28 women and 11 men participated in the study that comprised of one male and two female focus groups which averaged 90 minutes in length. At the conclusion of each focus group, snacks and refreshments were provided as a gesture of hospitality. We found it harder to recruit men as most were occupied during the day with either looking for employment or working in one or even several jobs. Recruiting women was somewhat easier as we were able to go to a location where they met as a group (such as a TAFE College or the women's group at a Catholic school). Additionally, the men were explicit in their sentiment about being over-researched by various academics and stated that they did not have the time "to do all these things". However, due to an existing relationship between the research team and Sudanese community elders, we were allowed access to the community to conduct this research, for which we remain grateful. Building trust between researchers and respondents is an integral part of data collection relating to refugee experiences (Jacobsen 2006).

The 16 women who participated in the focus group at the Catholic education school community centre have been in Australia for quite some time – from 8 months to 7 years; their ages ranged from 24 to 46 years. The 12 women who participated in the focus group at the TAFE campus had been in Australia for a comparatively shorter period of time (8 months to 4 years); their ages ranged from 34 to 58 years. The men who participated in this study had been in Australia for a significantly longer period of time ranging from 4 years to 12 years; their ages ranged from 24 to 52 years.

Procedures

We applied prior knowledge of, and experience with, Sudanese culture that might have an impact on the fieldwork process. For instance, focus group methods were adapted to fit Sudanese cultural norms where time is polychronic (Hall 1977), and therefore, the focus groups were informally structured; we started later than the scheduled time, with participants joining the session as and when they walked in. In addition, at the behest of community elders, the focus groups were held separately on the basis of gender, with the male researcher (Nigerian male) playing a primary role in facilitating the male focus group, and the lead female researcher (East Indian woman) playing a primary role in facilitating the female focus groups. As a result, we believed that most participants opened up to us, evidenced by grateful compliments at the end of the focus groups. The men and women shared their thoughts freely and at times the facilitators worked hard to keep them focused on the subject of discussion.

We made an informed decision to conduct all focus groups in the participants' native languages rather than in the English language, with the help of Dinka and Arabic interpreters. The decision to conduct the focus groups in the participants' native languages is supported by Semlak, Pearson, Amundson, and Kudak (2008), who found that some Sudanese female refugees in their US study had major issues with speaking in English, which was not their native language.

Comparing the women's and men's focus groups, we noticed a distinct difference in the levels of English proficiency among and between the two groups. In the main, the men who participated in this study had a good command of the English language. As a result, we did not require assistance from professional interpreters during the focus groups, as any issues of semantics that were encountered could be resolved within the group. Only one man did not feel particularly confident about speaking English in a public forum and others in the group immediately assisted him by translating on his behalf. This was in stark contrast to the women's focus groups, where, in the main, the women were only able to share their experiences with the assistance of interpreters. This may be due to the difference in employment status between the men and women; majority of men who participated were employed while a majority of women who participated were unemployed. Additionally, many of those who spoke English confidently had learned English prior to their arrival in Australia.

Data analysis

The focus groups were audio-taped for translation into English and the English transcripts were then cross-checked by Sudanese interpreters to ensure accuracy. In all focus groups, the open-ended questions allowed for the exploration of a wider range of issues relating to acculturation challenges since the Sudanese former refugees arrived in Australia. The transcripts were then uploaded to NVivo 8 software to facilitate coding; data analysis was completed by open coding; no predetermined categories were assigned to the data (Miles & Huberman 1994).

Emerging Findings

While there were many recurring themes[4] that emerged in the male and female focus groups, interestingly, even when both men and women were asked the same questions, the accounts from the focus groups were distinctly separated by traditional Sudanese gender roles within the family. Specifically, the women's narratives focused more on the issues they faced in their role as home-maker and primary caregiver of children, whereas the men's narratives focused more on the issues they faced in their role as the head of the family and as the breadwinner. Both perspectives are presented separately below.

Themes from the women's focus groups

The two themes that emerged from the women's focus groups were: (a) the impact that low English language proficiency had on their experience of settling in a new country, and (b) parenting/disciplining challenges they faced in Australia.

Language proficiency matters

The majority of women who participated in the focus groups were undergoing English language training offered by the local TAFE College as part of the Australian Government's Adult Migrant English Program [AMEP] that offers up to 510 hours of free English language tuition to eligible adult permanent migrants and humanitarian entrants. Low levels of English language proficiency (also witnessed during our focus groups) affected the ability of the women to successfully fulfil their gender roles in various ways. Differences in levels of English language proficiency within a family unit affected communication between the various family members. For instance, in many families, the children were more proficient in English than their mothers. One mother said, "First problem with children – [when] I speak to them [they say], 'Mum, you're speaking wrong English!" (Hebbani, Obijiofor & Bristed 2010: 51). Thus, many Sudanese mothers who are not confident or proficient in English depend a great deal on their children to communicate on their behalf in the larger society and hence, their role as elders was somewhat diminished with the children 'knowing' more than the mothers and therefore undermining the 'parental' role. Other women, whose children were born in Australia, noticed a language shift (see Hatoss & Sheely 2009), wherein their children had not learnt any Sudanese language but only spoke English. Consequently, these mothers felt that the children were losing their Sudanese identity and culture. However, another woman reported no problem when it came to language and communication within her home because although her English was poor, the children were adroit at code-switching (Giles, Coupland & Coupland 1991). Her children spoke the family's tribal language, *Achouli*, or English, depending on where they were, and whom they were speaking with (Hebbani et al 2010).

The lack of English language proficiency among the Sudanese women also hampered their communication with, and adaptation into, the mainstream Australian society. Simple tasks such as grocery shopping or communicating with neighbours became tedious, stressful, and sometimes impossible. A few women reported coming home empty handed from the grocery store as they could not speak English and therefore could not seek assistance when they needed it (Hebbani et al 2010). The women felt that once they improved their English language proficiency, acculturation would become easier.

Parenting/disciplining problems

As noted previously, women take on the domestic responsibilities and are considered the primary carers of their children in line with traditional Sudanese gender roles. However, upon moving to Australia, the women felt that their children were "becoming more Australian," and forgetting their home culture. Participants reported considerable disparity between what they consider "acceptable" ways of raising and disciplining children and what is considered "acceptable" by Australian law and society. These differences caused significant problems within the family unit, as the women's ways of parenting were challenged by their children. In addition, there was fear associated with the potential interference by the police if the child used his or her new-found "freedom" and "independence" to report their parents to the authorities. One woman explained, "If you try and slap your child, it's hard, yes. We've considered that to be a part of discipline, but in Australia, it is child abuse. But it is really very hard. They are having very, very, unlimited freedom. They don't listen to me anymore" (Hebbani et al 2009; 70). Hence, the

parenting skills and disciplining tactics the women knew and considered appropriate were no longer applicable and their culturally defined role as the primary caretaker was jeopardized.

Women with teenagers also experienced problems with parenting and ways of disciplining. In Sudanese culture, young people are expected to obey, respect, and to listen to their parents (RCOA 2008). Notions of privacy and confidentiality do not exist, and girls are not allowed to have boyfriends or intimate relationships before marriage (Wal 2004). This issue was discussed during the focus groups during which it was described how some girls within the Sudanese community took advantage of their newfound sense of freedom. These girls became involved with boys and in some instances they became pregnant before marriage. Often, when the relationship did not work out, the girls returned home to their mothers.

Living in Australia, adolescents were perceived to be inappropriately verbalizing and/or exercising their new found freedom and independence, which goes against the parents' wishes and reduces or negates parental authority and status. One woman whose daughter was over 18 years, said her daughter once told her, "Mum, I'm free to do what I want," while another woman commented (Hebbani et al 2009: 71):

It [childrearing] 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.

Behaviours such as those noted here are considered unacceptable by the women in the study as they are considered unacceptable in Sudanese culture. The women cited several instances where the children confronted their parents by stating that they knew their rights and that if they were mistreated they wouldn't hesitate to call the police. This type of behavior was considered irresponsible by the women and perceived as an embarrassment to the parents (Hebbani et al 2009).

Overall, from the women's perspective, we found that (a) they were struggling with learning a new language; (b) cultural maintenance is an issue that causes conflict between parents and children; and (c) the children are displaying what the mothers consider to be "antisocial behaviours." It appears that the women were in the separation stage of acculturation while their children were perceived to be assimilating into Australian culture (Berry 2003). This resulted in a significant disconnect between the first and second generations. There also appears to be disparity between what Sudanese parents consider "acceptable" ways of raising and disciplining children and what is considered "acceptable" by Australian law and society. In general, the women appeared to have a fundamental fear of failing to pass on Sudanese culture and values to the next generation.

Themes from the Men's Focus Group

Four major themes emerged from the men's focus groups. These were mainly concerned with issues outside of their homes (in the public sphere) as they relate to their cultural role as the head of the family and breadwinner. The themes include: (a) the role of English language proficiency in the acculturation process; (b) perceptions and assumptions made about the inability of Sudanese migrants to integrate into the larger Australian society (e.g. political, legal and social issues); (c) perceived discrimination/racism; and (d) misrepresentation in the Australian media about Sudanese migrants.

Language Proficiency Matters

With regard to language proficiency, the men noted that sometimes they felt they were being discriminated against when it came to seeking employment – not because their English was not of a high enough standard but because they did not speak English with an Australian accent. All men agreed that the 510 hours of English classes offered by TAFE was insufficient to become highly proficient in English for the purposes of gaining employment and that more help was needed, particularly for the women who may have no prior knowledge of English.

Only an educated minority of Sudanese speak fluent English (TVFST 2005), while there are approximately 100 different spoken languages in Sudan. One man talked about Sudanese people being discriminated against while looking for employment due to both appearance and accented English:

It is one thing [problem] because with their [young Sudanese] accent [speaking English], it is not easy. Even I personally, I'm saying this because I've taken some young people to workplace for interview. Unfortunately we went there, they were expecting [a White person], because they've got the European [Anglicized] names and they thought... And I personally called them. When we went there they looked at her, 'ah OK', you can see the body language. But, they say, 'Ah, OK, now the manager is not here, but when he comes we will let him know and we will call you.' Till now, no call, so I will leave it there.

Some participants directly attributed perceived discrimination they faced to their non-English speaking background as evidenced by this quote:

When I got here in 2001, me and my friend were walking just along Woodridge train station and we were talking in our own dialect, so two guys just passed, you know. As soon as they passed us, they used the 'F' word and said, 'Speak in English!' So, it really hurt me, you know. I'm proud of where I come from, I'm proud of my [Sudanese] language.

As mentioned before, while all Sudanese refugees are eligible for AMEP training, the men argued strongly that 510 hours of English language classes were insufficient to ensure successful integration.

Differences between Sudanese and Australian culture on political, legal, and social matters

In October 2007, the then Australian Immigration Minister, Mr. Kevin Andrews, alleged that Sudanese migrants were having problems integrating into the larger Australian society. He also claimed that Sudanese youths were involved in crimes. Specifically, Mr. Andrews was quoted as saying that the Sudanese community had a problem integrating into the Australian society which resulted in tensions between the Sudanese and Australian communities (e.g., Farouque, Petrie & Miletic 2007). The men in this study traced their troubles back to these statements and felt that the Minister's comments did not accurately represent the Sudanese community. Responding to the comment that Sudanese migrants were having integration problems, one man said:

How long does it take one to integrate? I mean any migrant or refugee, even the settlers or the convicts, it probably took them a long time to integrate. So you don't expect us just in a fortnight or two years time to integrate. It takes a while to adapt to the system, to the culture, to the food, to the environment, to the work ethics. You know, how to get jobs, transport and what have you.

The government was also seen as over-generalizing and stereotyping Sudanese involvement in crime. They attributed such stereotyping to a lack of knowledge and information about Africa among Australians. Essentially, they argued that every African or black man was not necessarily a Sudanese, and there were a number of Sudanese people contributing positively to the larger community. For example, one participant said:

Australians themselves need to know like, there's a lot of African people here, you know. They need to know that. And that's the point here, like, Australians themselves are confused. They don't know who is a Sudanese and who is a Nigerian and who is a Liberian, you know. Whenever they see you, they say, 'Oh, Sudanese' because they know [about] us, like they are the people who have a bad record now.

Relationship with the police

The men brought up the issue of police involvement as it applied to perceived discrimination in dealing with Sudanese youth (see also Westoby 2005). But, rather than viewing this as a negative concern, the men talked of collaborating with the police to reduce tension and problems with the Australian community. One of the participants said:

We've been doing the patrolling with the police so that we actually know what is there that is being said about the Sudanese because we don't see them [the youths] in our communities, we don't see them doing that. But they [the youths] do that [misbehaviour] in those private

places that we don't visit, yes. We need to be part of the team, patrolling and seeing what is happening there with these young people.

The men in our study saw the potential for a working relationship with the police in order to help the youth and the Sudanese community as a whole to repair their reputation in Australia.

Perceptions of discrimination/racism

As stated earlier, over the past decade, thousands of Sudanese migrants have settled in Australia. Individuals, as well as the Sudanese community as a whole, were seen to be targets of racist attacks by the men in this study. Many felt they were discriminated against because of their skin colour and country of origin (Roberts 2005; Upham & Martin 2005). One man was quite upset as he spoke:

I want to just speak on my own experiences in this country [Australia]. When I arrived here in 2004, yeah in the beginning everything looked perfect and good and what has been said, it's the best country, unique or whatever. But you know, the point of view differs from person to person. Before coming here, I've been in Egypt for almost three years. But I've never been thrown with an egg in Egypt. I have had eggs thrown at me twice in Australia here. Walking on the streets, I have been thrown with an egg. Imagine, what am I going to say about this country?

Most people from the Sudanese community are regarded as "visible" and stand out due to their skin colour and tall stature (see Bagnall 2006; Glanville 2007). Thus, the topic of Sudanese visibility (Colic-Peisker 2009) and its known impact on discrimination (Colic-Peisker 2009; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury 2003) came through as one man noted, "A lot of people talk about us who have not seen us and who have not talked to us. They just assume we are just a hard people to deal with, you know, because we are visible and a lot of that."

Role of the Australian media in stigmatizing/demonizing the Sudanese community in Australia

In the past, the Australian media has presented a biased and inaccurate portrayal of Sudanese settlement in Australia (Journalism in Multicultural Australia 2005; Roberts 2005). The men were in agreement that the Australian media was responsible for much of the negative image associated with the Sudanese community. Acknowledging that Australia was a country built by migrants, one man said:

When I first came, I got the impression about how media demonised other migrant groups. For example, since the Second World War when migrants came from Europe, the media targeted Greeks, afterwards media targeted Lebanese and Chinese and Vietnamese. And now it's our turn. So, if another community had problems, the media would move from us to that community. Yeah, what media is doing really is destructive and not helping.

Once again, in relation to the issue of visible difference, appearance was also seen as one reason why the media chose to focus on the Sudanese community:

I've been here since 2001, so I've seen so many cases, where kids, not only Sudanese, but white Australians as well who behave in an unruly manner. So that, because, as somebody said earlier, it's the media, the media also picks up on a particular case and then they tend to broadcast it. So, it kind of stigmatizes our society, but that's not true to say that our kids [are the only ones who] misbehave in the city.

One of the Sudanese men said, "Why don't they say it is a good thing if the Sudanese do something good and tell it to the Sudanese it is a good thing? But if it is a bad thing, they tell it to the Sudanese." Overall, the men perceived a bias in media reporting negative images of Sudanese people with few reports of successes or positive aspects of their activities in Australia.

Parenting/disciplining problems

In Sudanese families, even though it is primarily the women who take on the domestic responsibilities and are considered the primary carers of the children, the man is the head of the household in addition to

his role as primary breadwinner. Thus, the men in this study addressed the issue of parenting children and teenagers from the role of a person in-charge of the household and who should be listened to and obeyed. One participant commented that his young children were "under his control," but there were problems with raising adolescents as many have a proof of age card which enables those over 18 years to purchase and consume alcohol. Another man summed up the intergenerational differences by saying:

If I can put it [underlying problems with youth] in one word, it is a clash of cultures. So when two cultures come together you can expect, you know, eruption of something. So, our culture is different from the western culture. So when these kids try to adjust to the western culture, so obviously they fall into, you know, problems. Like you said before, socializing, hanging out with people, you know. Like bringing in boyfriends or girlfriends to your house, and trying to cosy up or something. This is unacceptable in our society. So, sometimes it creates tension between the young people and the parents.

Overall, from the men's perspective, this study found that Sudanese men (a) articulated issues at the political, legal and social levels as they affected their acculturation, (b) perceived discrimination as a barrier to gaining employment and felt that the media perpetuated this problem, and (c) believed that their position as head of the household and their ability to ensure cultural maintenance in younger generations was being threatened.

Summary and conclusion

The findings suggest that settling in a society with an individualistic culture such as Australia has affected child rearing and cultural maintenance for the collectivist Sudanese people. Sudanese parents are concerned about disciplining and raising children in Australia as the children begin to display signs of being influenced by Australian individualistic culture over the traditional collectivistic Sudanese culture. According to TVFST (2007), "Among African cultures, discipline is strongly associated with the authority of and respect towards parents and elders" (p. 43), and it is considered disrespectful for children to ask questions of parents or elders; in comparison, Australian culture encourages children to ask questions and express their thoughts, as this is considered to be a part of a child's learning. Divergence in values and attitudes of the two (or more) generations (Ng et al. 2004) leaves both male and female parents feeling devalued and their authority in dispute which can lead to significant tensions within the family. In addition, if the male in particular is unable to find employment the authority of refugee parents and their ability to serve as inspiring role models may also be threatened.

Based on the narratives from this research, the women appeared to be most closely aligned with the separation stage of the acculturation process (Hebbani et al 2009) and the men were actively moving towards the integration stage. This was clearly illustrated by mothers who felt that they were losing their parental authority, and their ability to provide guidance and influence over the social development of their children. In terms of discipline, Sudanese mothers felt that cultural dissonance deprived them of their right to discipline their children in culturally appropriate ways because their children are more accepting of Australian social norms (Hebbani et al. 2009). The men wanted to integrate by participating in the host culture, but felt that such integration was being hindered by difficulties in gaining employment, perceptions of discrimination/racism, and negative portrayal of Sudanese in the Australian media.

The participants reported that the children's behaviours on the other hand, seemed to indicate that they had embraced Australian culture and values, while neglecting or in some instances rejecting Sudanese cultural norms and values. Subsequently, being at different points in the acculturation process has resulted in conflict within the family unit.

In the context of this study, the Sudanese women appear to be carrying out the communal role within the family unit whereas the men appear to be carrying out the agentic role. However, due to the challenges faced as a result of settling into a significantly different culture, both were concerned with their ability to fulfil their traditional roles.

In sum, the findings from this study suggest that as a result of significant cultural distance, Sudanese former refugees coming from a traditionally collectivistic culture into a traditionally individualistic culture face an array of issues that negatively influence the acculturation process. While being thankful

for finding a refuge in Australia, male and female Sudanese former refugees struggle to maintain their traditional gendered, familial, cultural, and social roles, as they feel divided between two different cultures in a society and climate that have been sometimes perceived as being hostile and unwelcoming. Having said this, we are conscious of applying macro-cultural variables to a migrant group that is undergoing dramatic change, but our findings support such application to this particular generation (i.e., those who are still very Sudanese and are yet to integrate into Australian culture). A similar study with the younger generation might well exhibit more individualistic and "Australian" cultural behaviors.

Coming from a culture with rigid and traditional gender roles, Sudanese former refugees now face acculturation challenges due to resistance from within their family unit and sometimes exclusion from the host country. While daughters are the moral measuring stick in Sudanese culture, they are expected to be chaste and to help the family in carrying out domestic roles, whereas the boys are expected to stay out of trouble and become responsible as future heads of the family. Such intergenerational conflict is becoming more prevalent in the Sudanese community and this creates significant disharmony and unhappiness for all members of the family. When parents are able to successfully operationalize their expected gender roles and responsibilities, interpersonal and intergenerational conflict can be minimized within the family unit resulting in an amenable acculturation experience.

For refugees to integrate into the Australian society, the host culture too needs to play a welcoming role, resulting in a truly multicultural society (Berry & Sabatier 2010). As males, attempting to operate within their traditional roles, the Sudanese men are struggling with developing relationships with the larger society due to an unwelcoming climate. Perceptions and sometimes instances of negative stereotyping and discrimination affect their role as the family's breadwinner. In addition, insufficient language training and issues with accent result in unsatisfying cross-cultural communication. As a consequence, unemployment or under-employment threatens their role as head of the family and in the long-term, affects their self-identity and self-worth.

While our findings contribute to the literature on refugee acculturation, we acknowledge that the voices presented in this paper are those of individuals. While they are worthy and enlighten us about refugee acculturation from the standpoint of adult males and females, the acculturation experience of the entire family unit is worthy of study. Hence, future research needs triangulation to capture the views of the children on acculturation. Added to this, views from the Australian community with regard to Sudanese former refugee settlement would allow researchers to gain a more holistic view of this topic. Such research will add more depth and insight into the acculturation process as it is experienced by Sudanese former refugees living in Australia. Conducting a longitudinal study to explore the changes in the family unit and dynamic over time would also be worthy of a future study.

Endnotes

¹ DIAC records place of intended stay as part of their statistical data; hence, there is no accurate data about the exact number of migrants on the ground.

² Please see Hebbani, Obijiofor & Bristed (2009; 2010) for more detail.

³ Some scholars criticized Hofstede's work (e.g., McSweeney 2002) as his classification of national cultures. However, we still think that despite his critics, the dimensions provide a point of reference when analyzing intercultural communication problems across cultures and it continues to be widely cited in the literature (e.g., Kim 2005).

⁴ We made minor grammatical corrections to some direct quotations to ensure that meaning was not lost during the transcription process, as we were equally keen to retain the participants' 'voices' in the text. This method has been employed by other researchers as well (see Colic-Peisker & Walker 2003; Ebbeck & Dela Cerna 2006).

References

Bagnall, D. (2006, November 4). Out of Africa. *Bulletin with Newsweek*, 124 (6515).

Berry, J.W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 46(1), 5-68.

Berry, J.W. (2003). Conceptual approaches to acculturation. In K.Chun, P. Balls Organista & G. Marin (Eds). *Acculturation: Advances in Theory and Measurement*. (pp. 17-37). American Psychological Association: Washington.

Berry, J. W., & Sabatier, C. (2010). Acculturation, discrimination, and adaptation among second generation immigrant youth in Montreal and Paris. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 34(3), 191-207.

Bloch, A. (1999). Carrying out a survey of refugees: Some methodological considerations and guidelines. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 12(4), 367-383.

Burgoyne, U., & Hull, O. (2007). *Classroom management strategies to address the needs of Sudanese refugee learners: Support document – methodology and literature review*. Australian Government: Canberra.

Colic-Peisker, V., & Tilbury, F. (2003). "Active" and "passive" resettlement: The influence of support services and refugees' own resources on resettlement style. *International Migration*, 41(5), 61-91.

Colic-Peisker, V., & Walker, I. (2003). Human capital, acculturation and social identity: Bosnian refugees in Australia. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 13, 337-360.

Colic-Peisker, V. (2009). Visibility, settlement success and life satisfaction in three refugee communities in Australia. *Ethnicities*, 9(2), 175-199.

Coughlan, R., & Owens-Manley, J. (2005). Surviving war, starting over: Adaptation of Bosnian Refugees in Upstate New York. In P. Waxman & V. Colic-Peisker (Eds.). *Homeland Wanted: Interdisciplinary perspectives on refugee resettlement in the west*. (pp. 127-145). Nova Science Publishers, Inc.: New York.

Deng, J. (2010, June 11). Sudanese community profile in Queensland [PowerPoint Slides]. Lecture presented in Goodna, QLD.

Department of Communities (2008). *New Futures: The Queensland government's engagement with African refugees*. Queensland Government: Brisbane.

Department of Immigration and Citizenship (2008). *Settler arrivals 1997-98 to 2007-08 Australia States and territories*. Retrieved November 25, 2008 from: http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/statistics/settler-arrivals/settler_arrivals0708.pdf

Eagly, A. (1987) *Sex differences in social behavior: A social-role interpretation*, Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Ebbeck, M., & Dela Cerna, C. (2006). A study of child rearing practices amongst selected Sudanese families in South Australia: Implications for child care service selection. *Early Childhood Journal*. Retrieved August 27, 2008, from: <http://www.springerlink.com/content/xq50765w25236607/fulltext.html>

Farouque, F., Petrie, A., & Miletic, D. (2007, October 2). *Minister cuts African refugee intake*. Retrieved December 9, 2009 from <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2007/10/01/1191091031242.html>

Giles, H., Coupland, J. & Coupland, N. (eds.). (1991). *Contexts of accommodation: Developments in applied sociolinguistics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Glanville, B. (2007, January 16). *Refugee settlement program grows in Toowoomba* [Television broadcast]. Sydney: 7:30 Report Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

Goodwin, R. (1999). *Personal relationships across cultures*. New York: Routledge.

Hall, E. (1977). *Beyond culture*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Press.

Hatoss, A., & Sheely, T. (2009). Language maintenance and identity among Sudanese- Australian refugee-background youth. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 30(2), 127-144.

Hebbani, A., Obijiofor, L., & Bristed, H. (2009). Generational differences faced by Sudanese refugee women settling in Australia. *Intercultural Communication Studies*, 18(1), 66-82.

Hebbani, A., Obijiofor, L. & Bristed, H. (2010). Intercultural communication challenges confronting female Sudanese former refugees in Australia. *Australasian Review of African Studies*, 31(1), 37-61.

Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Hofstede, G. (1994). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind*. London: Harper-Collins.

Hofstede, G., & Hofstede, G.J. (2005). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind*. New York: McGraw Hill.

Jacobsen, K. (2006). Refugees and asylum seekers in urban areas: A livelihoods perspective. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 19(3), 273-286.

Journalism in Multicultural Australia (2005). *Reporting on immigrant communities– Sudanese immigrants in two regional centres*. Retrieved December 9, 2009, from http://www.reportingdiversity.org.au/cs_two.html

Khawaja, N., White, K., & Schweitzer, R. (2008). Difficulties and coping strategies of Sudanese refugees: A qualitative approach. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 45(3), 489-512.

Kim, Y. (2001). *Becoming intercultural: An integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kim, Y. Y. (2005). Inquiry in intercultural and development communication. *Journal of Communication*, 55(3), 554-577.

Lindsey, L. (2005). *Gender roles: A sociological perspective* (4th ed.). Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

McMichael, C, Gifford, S. M., & Correa-Velez, I. (2010). Negotiating family, navigating resettlement: family connectedness among resettled youth with refugee backgrounds living in Melbourne, Australia. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 2010, 1-17, iFirst article.

Miles, M. & Huberman, A. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: A sourcebook of new methods* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Ng, S.H., He, A., & Loong, C.S.F. (2004). Tri-generational family conversations: Communication accommodation and brokering. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 43, 449-464.

Phinney, J. S. & Devich-Navarro, M. (1997). Variations in bicultural identification among African American and Mexican American adolescents. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 7, 3-32.

Poppitt, G., & Frey, R. (2007). Sudanese adolescent refugees: Acculturation and acculturative stress. *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 17(2), 160-181.

Preston, C. (1996). *The Dinka of the Southern Sudan: A cross cultural study*. Retrieved December 5, 2009, from <http://www.ptc.nsw.edu.au/scansw/dinka.htm>

Refugee Council of Australia (2008). *Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program: Community views on current challenges and future directions*. Retrieved December 7, 2009, from http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/resources/submissions/2008-09_intakesub.pdf

Roberts, G. (2005, July 23). Refugees from Africa focus of hate campaign. *Weekend Australian*, p. 6.

Semlak, J., Pearson, J., Amundson, N., & Kudak, A. (2008). Navigating dialectic contradictions experienced by female African refugees during cross-cultural adaptation. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 37(1), 43-64.

Swan, S., & Wyer, R. (1997). [Gender stereotypes and social identity: How being in the minority affects judgments of self and others](#). *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin*, 23, 1265.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. (1986). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. In S. Worchel, & W. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 7-24). Chicago: Nelson- Hall.

The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (2007). *Raising children in Australia: A resource kit for early childhood services working with parent from African backgrounds*. Australian Government: Victoria.

The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (2005). *Education and refugee students from Southern Sudan*. Australian Government: Victoria.

Upham, L., & Martin, M. (2005, May). *Understanding Toowoomba's diversity*. Toowoomba, Australia: Lucid Consulting.

Wal, N. (2004). *Southern Sudanese culture*. Retrieved December 7, 2009, from <http://www.miceastmelbourne.com.au/documents/SouthernSudaneseCrossCulturalTrainingReport.pdf>

Westoby, P. (2005). *Sudanese refugee narratives of distress within the Sudanese community of Brisbane and Logan*. Retrieved December 9, 2009, from <http://espace.library.uq.edu.au/view/UQ:34513>

Westoby, P. (2006). *The sociality of healing engaging Southern Sudanese refugees resettling in an Australian context – a model of social healing*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Queensland, St. Lucia, Queensland, Australia.

Wood, J. (2005). *Gendered lives: Communication, gender, and culture*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

About the Authors

Dr. Aparna Hebbani is a Lecturer in the School of Journalism and Communication at the University of Queensland. She is an intercultural communication scholar whose research interests lie in examining issues surrounding refugee acculturation, employment, and family communication; representations of refugees in Australian media; using media to empower refugee communities.

Dr. Levi Obijiofor is a Senior Lecturer in Journalism at the School of Journalism and Communication, the University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia. He teaches postgraduate and undergraduate courses in journalism and communication and has successfully supervised PhD, Masters and Honours students. Levi was at various times Sub-Editor, Production Editor and Night Editor at The Guardian newspapers in Lagos, Nigeria. Between March 1995 and May 1996, he worked in the Division of Studies and Programming (BPE/BP) at the Paris headquarters of UNESCO where he edited the bulletin FUTURESCO and also coordinated the future-oriented studies program.

Helen Bristed (BA, University of Queensland) is a senior research assistant in the Research Centre for Population and Community Health. Helen's areas of interest include intercultural communication, migrant health, social determinants of health, transport disadvantage, and sensory ethnography and go-along interview methodology.

Authors' Addresses

Dr. Aparna Hebbani (Lecturer)
School of Journalism and Communication
University of Queensland

Joyce Ackroyd Building, Level 2 St. Lucia, QLD 4072, Australia
Tel: +61733468288

Dr. Levi Obijiofor (Senior Lecturer)
School of Journalism and Communication
University of Queensland
Joyce Ackroyd Building, Level 2
St. Lucia, QLD 4072, Australia
Tel: +61733468241

Helen Bristed

Griffith University
University Drive
Meadowbrook, QLD 4131, Australia

Journal of Intercultural Communication, ISSN 1404-1634, issue 28, March 2012.
URL: <http://www.immi.se/intercultural/>.