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# **SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW :**

## **SUDANESE WOMEN AND FAMILY WELLBEING**

# Background

- Sudan is in 6th place among source countries for refugees in Canada.
- Over 20,000 Sudanese reside in the Toronto and surrounding areas



# Conditions of forced migration

- Political conflict since 1956 rooted in northern economic, political and social domination of non-Muslim, non-Arab southern Sudanese
- Since 1983, war and famine have led to more than 2 million deaths and over 4 million people displaced

# Two community-based studies

## Study of Sudanese Settlement

Citizenship and Immigration

- Survey of Sudanese who arrived in Canada 2000 to 2003 in seven Ontario cities
- Identified settlement needs, service gaps and recommendations

## Multilevel Challenges of Wellbeing

(SSHRC/Canadian Heritage)

- In-depth qualitative study to follow up on issues that were difficult to investigate using survey methods

# Settlement needs study methods



# Members of the research team



# Settlement challenges

- The greatest challenges reported in first year
  - Worry about family not in Canada (68%)
  - Being unable to find a satisfactory job (67%)

Overall, 48% of respondents expressed disappointment in the standard of living

## *Women tended to report...*

- Lower levels of education
- More difficulty in getting around and communicating
- More difficulty finding work due to language proficiency
- Less knowledge of where to go for help
- Lower use of settlement services
- Less perceived discrimination

# Family-related issues


- Worry about family back home
- Changing marital relations
- Coping with possibility of family dissolution in Canada
- Differences in social status and gender roles due to differential employment
- Understanding cultural expectations of schools and parenting

# Study outcomes

- CIC enhanced refugee reception and services for Sudanese across Ontario
- New life skills orientation programs and hiring of Sudanese workers
- Community advocacy led to United Way funding for Sudanese women's program, "Women Assisting Women"
- A new Sudanese-managed community centre has opened

# First Graduation Ceremony of “Women Assisting Women”





# Meeting Multilevel Challenges of Sudanese Wellbeing in Canada

- Dr. Dave Este, Co-investigator, University of Calgary
- 3 sites: Toronto, Calgary, and Brooks, Alberta
- Ecological systems theory and strengths-based analysis
- 30 in-depth interviews to explore concepts of family and health and wellbeing
- Knowledge transfer and exchange meetings with service providers to identify issues and priorities

# Concepts of family

**Sudanese family is all about the bond, the closeness to each other. It's not just the nuclear family, it's the extended family of aunts, uncles, grandparents, ... and there is a strong bond between.**

--Sudanese woman in Toronto

# Feelings about being in Canada and family separation

..... For me, if I knew before that it's going to be like this, I wouldn't have come. Even if life in Sudan is not really good, I could have stayed and been happy a little bit. I could find a little job. And seeing the parents beside me can make me happier even.

--Sudanese woman

# Family roles & responsibilities

We have very clear roles. The mothers stay home... my dad was the "bread winner." **He was working and taking care of seventeen people in the house.**

-Sudanese woman

The woman is appointed to take care of the children and to account for the family, so that if there is any problem, **she has to show up to solve that problem.**

--Sudanese man

# Decision-making roles

Back home women don't have a part in decisions, but it depends on the family....

**In some families you can't talk, but you put it [in terms of] "respect."** You have to respect your husband. If he says something, you say yes, even if you know it's not good.

**... But it's not good for us here.**

--Sudanese woman

# Conflict resolution

**People usually call uncles, aunts and elders from both family sides who come together and sit down and listen to both stories on both sides about where the conflict arose and how to try to resolve it.**

--Sudanese woman

# Impact on families

There are a lot of issues that people are dealing with and **they are quiet about them. They can't seek help,** and some of them have resulted in breaking down the families and marriages.

--Sudanese woman

# Alcohol misuse

A lot of alcohol abuse is happening in families and among men there is fighting due to alcohol drinking. If he comes home, he starts making a lot of problems, fighting the wife and the kids and ...then ends up in jail. And because the woman called police to pick up the man, even if that issue is resolved, it becomes an issue inside: that you called police because you don't want me.

...That situation repeats itself again and again. **Instead of looking for a permanent solution and the cause of drinking, they look at other things instead.**

--Sudanese man

# Searching for solutions

The way to get help would be having a workshop for men and women to make them understand that, when there is an issue, people have to go about it to find the solution. If **someone talked about someone else's problem** it doesn't mean that is being against helping that person.

--Sudanese woman

# Knowledge exchange meeting participants

- **Citizenship and Immigration Canada**
- **Family Services Association of Toronto**
- **Toronto Public Health**
- **Canadian Mental Health Association**
- **United Way**
- **City of Toronto--Access and Equity Office**
- **COSTI Reception Centre**
- **Settlement Workers in Schools**
- **Children's Aid Society**
- **Police--Community Mobilization Unit**
- **Toronto District School Board**
- **Sudanese Settlement and Community Services Organization of Toronto**
- **Sudanese Women in Action**