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Adaptation of Sudanese Refugees in an Australian Context:
Investigating Helps and Hindrances.

by

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RUNNING HEAD: Helps and hindrances for refugees

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Abstract

The present study investigates the experiences of Sudanese refugees by exploring the themes that characterise participants' experiences in Sudan, en route, and at their Australian destination. In particular, the research identifies several factors that may be seen as 'helps' or 'hindrances' to Sudanese refugees' adaptation. Participants were 12 Sudanese refugees aged between 19 and 40 years who had been residing in Australia for five years or less. A qualitative phenomenological approach to data collection and analysis was employed. Examination of the interview transcripts revealed that all participants identified both 'hindrances' and 'helps' toward adaptation and indicated that positive adaptation is not only possible, but probable for Sudanese refugees in spite of their past experiences of trauma and present resettlement difficulties. Several practical implications were elicited from the research including a need for programs that actively promote refugees' adaptation by encouraging the broadening of social networks.

KEYWORDS: Refugees, adaptation, trauma, resilience, assistance, acculturation, Sudanese

Sudan is the largest country in Africa comprising 29 major ethnic groups, the largest of which (40%) is the Arab people (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR] 2000). The majority (over 60%) of the Sudanese people are Muslim. The civil war in Sudan has raged intermittently since 1955 and continuously since 1983. It is generally understood to represent a struggle between the non-Muslim, black African rebels in the South and the Muslim Arab dominated government in the North (Coker, 2004; US Committee for Refugees [USCR] 2004). By the end of 2003, the war has resulted in an estimated 2 million deaths and the displacement of approximately 5.5 million Sudanese people – 600 000 of which have left Sudan to become refugees and asylum seekers (UNHCR, 2000; USCR, 2004). Reflecting the nature of the war, these refugees comprise black African people from the south of Sudan, many of whom identify as Christian.

During 2003-2004, Australia granted 13,851 refugee visas under its Humanitarian program, the largest proportion (44.4%) of these to persons born in Sudan (Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs [DIMIA] 2005a). As is the case in other countries such as the UK, refugees arriving in Australia are dispersed to various states through joint arrangements made between DIMIA and the various State governments. Sudanese refugees arriving in Australia are likely to have fled serious human rights violations and experienced significant trauma including deprivation, loss of family members, rape, torture, and exposure to open warfare (Muhwezi & Sam, 2004; Paardekooper, de Jong, & Hermanns, 1999). Many refugees, including children, have been separated from family members for long periods of time (Rousseau, Said, Gagne, & Bibeau, 1998).

Coupled with past traumatic experiences and the stress of involuntary migration, refugees arriving in Australia are also faced with the challenges of acculturation (Muhwezi & Sam, 2004). Acculturation challenges include the need to adapt to differences in language, customs and norms for social interaction, rules and laws, and general lifestyle (Muhwezi &

Sam; Organista, Organista, & Kurasaki, 2005). The enduring stress of acculturation may reduce an individual's chance of successfully adapting to a new culture (Berry et al.; Organista et al., 1992) due to factors such as social isolation, unemployment, discrimination, poverty, and intergenerational conflict resulting from children adapting to the new culture more quickly than their parents (Beiser & Hou, 2001; Berman, 2001; Fenta, Hyman, & Noh, 2004; Howard & Hodes, 2000).

Previous research investigating the experiences of African refugees who have resettled in Australia includes ethnographic research conducted with Somali women in Melbourne (McMichael & Manderson, 2004); interviews conducted by Udo-Expo (1999) within several African communities and quantitative research into the factors affecting the mental health of resettled Sudanese refugees (Schweitzer, Melville, Steel, & Lacherez, 2006). In his book *The Africans in Australia*, Udo-Expo (1999) details several aspects of African experience in Australia. The process of migration represents a momentous transition that often has deleterious psychological effects; this is especially true for refugees (Udo-Expo, 1999). Many African migrants and refugees interviewed by Udo-Expo believed that they had experienced racism and racial discrimination in the form of social exclusion, denial of jobs, verbal abuse, and violence. Further, 84% of respondents had experienced great difficulties in finding work in Australia.

Schweitzer et al. (2006) investigated the effects of pre-migration trauma, post-migration living difficulties and social support on the mental health of resettled Sudanese refugees. All 63 participants had experienced at least one of the 16 categories of trauma assessed and 54% of the sample had experienced five or more categories of trauma. In addition to pre-migration difficulties, almost 20% of participants had experienced some form of racial discrimination while in Australia (Schweitzer et al., 2006). All three of the variables under investigation; pre-migration trauma, post-migration living difficulties, and social

support, were found to be significant predictors of mental health outcomes (Schweitzer et al., 2006).

Schweitzer, Kagee, and Greenslade (in press) conducted a qualitative study with Sudanese refugees in Queensland, Australia, using semi-structured interviews ($N=13$) and subsequently identified several themes relating to both stress and resilience. Themes identified as 'stressors' in Sudan included the loss of, or separation from, family members due to the war, beatings, torture, and deprivation of basic needs such as food and shelter. Coping and resilience themes for life in Sudan included family and community support, religious faith, and personal qualities such as acceptance of the situation or determination to survive (Schweitzer et al., in press). During transition from Sudan the deprivation of basic needs such as food and safety, exposure to violence, and exposure to racism in the form of both physical and verbal abuse were stressful whereas themes regarding family and community support, religious faith, and individual personality attributes such as hope for the future and inner strength promoted resilience (Schweitzer et al., in press). Once in Australia, participants reported stressors associated with adapting such as 'Social isolation', dealing with discrepancies in 'Cultural values' between Australia and Sudan, 'Concern for family' that included a sense of financial responsibility for family in Sudan and 'Racism'.

However, the refugees in Schweitzer et al's. (in press) research also identified coping and resilience themes that enabled them to deal with the stress of resettlement in Australia. 'Religious faith' encompassed the support obtained from both prayer and church attendance. 'Support from family, the Sudanese community, and Australian friends' assisted participants in adapting by providing a forum for discussion of problems and a distraction from stressors. The study concluded that while all participants had experienced significant traumas, none described their current experiences in terms corresponding to PTSD symptomology. Further, participants were able to identify several coping strategies they had used to cope with the

stress of adaptation to life in Australia highlighting the limitations of previous research that has focused entirely upon trauma and psychopathology. Their findings indicate that positive adaptation in the wake of trauma and upheaval is possible among resettled refugee communities.

Research where the focus has not been on the potential for pathology in refugee populations is scarce and at this stage there is no published research that prospectively aims to identify factors that help as well as hinder the adaptation of Sudanese refugees. Therefore, the aim of the presented study was to (1) explore the experiences of Sudanese refugees resettled in Tasmania (2) identify the factors that have helped the process of positive adaptation and the factors that have hindered this process and (3) to discover the needs of Sudanese refugees in order to inform public policy that aims to promote successful adaptation.

Method

Participants

Participants were 6 female and 6 male Sudanese refugees aged between 19 and 40 years who had lived in Australia for between 1 and 5 years. All participants identified themselves as Christians, originated from the South of Sudan, and were able to converse in English. Nine were children when they fled from Sudan and four of these were unaccompanied minors at that time. The participant's profiles were varied from being parents of up to 6 children to young single university students thus ensuring a wide surce of experience and opinion. Participants continued to be recruited until the point of thematic saturation (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

Procedure

Participants were recruited through the Migrant Resource Centre in Launceston, Tasmania and the Colony 47 – J-PET program in Hobart, Tasmania. These organisations were supplied with information about the research and a letter of invitation to be passed on to

potential participants. Participants were also advised of the study through placing advertisements around the university. Those who wished to participate in the interview then made contact with the researcher. All of those who contacted the researcher completed interviews. The interview schedule used to conduct the semi-structured interviews was developed for this study and was an adaptation of the Refugee Stress and Resilience Interview Protocol (Schweitzer et al., in press). Schweitzer et al. (in press) compiled their protocol from information elicited from focus groups with members of the refugee community. Themes were groups into life before leaving Sudan, en route, and once the participants has arrived in Australia.

Following receipt of consent, all participants either chose or were assigned a pseudonym in order to ensure confidentiality. Participants were formally interviewed on a single occasion that lasted between 45 minutes and 1.5 hours depending on the participant's wishes. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Although the interview protocol contains guiding questions (see Schweitzer et al., in press), the interview was informal and permitted the interviewee to freely share any aspect of their experiences at their will. All interviews were completed by an Anglo-Australian (an author) who had an existing relationship with the third parties used in the recruitment of participants. As such, there was an existing sense of trust and respect which may have helped the easy flow of conversation. Following completion of the data collection process, a morning tea was held for participants to thank them for their time and provide an opportunity for informal discussion about their experiences and the research.

Data was analysed via the method of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith & Osborn, 2003). According to Smith, Flowers, and Osborn (1997, p. 69), IPA is a phenomenological approach "in that it is concerned with an individual's personal perception or account of an object or event as opposed to an attempt to produce an objective statement of

the object or event itself'. Five stages comprise the IPA process: reading and re-reading of a single transcript; patterns of meaning (themes) are extracted from the text; a list of all the themes identified is made; connections are made and organised into hierarchies of superordinate and constituent themes; a summary table of the structured themes, including quotations that support each theme is created; a master summary table of superordinate and constituent themes across all cases is produced (Langdrige, 2004; Smith & Osbor, 2003).

The use of a qualitative research methodology in order to investigate the experiences of Sudanese refugees is appropriate for at least three reasons. Firstly, the collection of psychological data across cultural divides is an exercise fraught with the potential for misunderstandings and misinterpretations (Rousseau et al., 1998; Ryen, 2001). In particular, the use of standardised questionnaires developed in Western English-speaking countries for the collection of quantitative data is problematic (Fontes, 1998). Secondly, psychological theories that have been developed and empirically tested solely within Western cultures may not be validly applied to all other cultures (Fontes, 1998; Berry et al., 1992). Qualitative research allows investigations of previously unresearched topics or people groups to be carried out without the imposition of preconceived ideas, in order to contribute to the process of theory-building. However, it must be noted that as a previously developed interview protocol was used in this instance, there were some pre-existing guidelines for the interview and hence, an idea of the potential for certain broad themes to emerge namely, that issues raised would pertain to reasons for leaving the Sudan, life en route to Australia and life in Tasmania.

The third reason this approach is suitable in this instance is that the focus on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder displayed by the majority of research projects that have been carried out among refugee populations has been criticised by some authors. These critics maintain that the diagnostic category of PTSD is based on the Western notion of

individualism and ignores the importance of family context to many refugees, and that it fails to capture the full range of the refugee's perceptions and interpretations (Berman, 2001; Fantino & Colak, 2001; Schweitzer, Buckley & Rossi, 2002; Weine, 2002). In contrast, qualitative methodologies allow participants to share both their adverse experiences and their auspicious experiences without limiting them to categories and meanings pre-defined by the researcher (Massey, Cameron, Oullette, & Fine, 1998).

Results

Individual summary tables representing the superordinate and constituent themes endorsed by individuals were produced for all 12 participants. Master summary tables were constructed from the individual summary tables in order to capture the emergent themes for all 12 participants. Superordinate and constituent themes were identified within the following three categories, which correspond to the three sections of the interview schedule: Life in Sudan, life en route, and life in Tasmania. Both 'negative' and 'positive' themes were identified in each of the three categories. It should be noted that all participants mentioned both 'positive' and 'negative' themes, often within the one sentence and in reference to the same experience or entity.

Life in Sudan

Adverse experiences/reasons for flight. While speaking about their lives in Sudan, participants described a number of negative experiences, events and entities. The following themes were explicated from their accounts: 'War and its effects', and 'inequity between the North and the South'. Within the broader theme of 'war' were issues such as the Close proximity to open warfare, the nature of involuntary flight, the human rights violations that participants were witness to, separation from/loss of loved ones and the lack of survival needs.

All participants talked of the negative impact the civil war in Sudan had on their lives, the lives of their friends and family, and on life in Sudan in general. Almost all participants had experienced first-hand the terror of open warfare, including bombing, shelling, and shooting in the streets. Many described being ‘pursued’ by the war as they fled from one place to another within Southern Sudan, and others described witnessing the destruction of villages and the killing of innocent people.

The words used by several participants to describe their flight from Sudan conveyed the involuntary nature of their escape from their own country. For example: “...*I had to also leave the country, otherwise they will also kill me...*” (‘Poni’), and: “...*cause of the war, yeah, we couldn’t stay there, we had to leave*” (‘Annie’). For these respondents it was not a matter of seeing an opportunity to move to a better place, rather they were confronted with gunfire and/or the threat of arrest and execution – they were forced to leave in order to avoid almost certain death. The experience of involuntary departure from Sudan has an impact upon refugees’ experience of the challenges and difficulties they face in adapting to life in their new countries, such that discrimination and unhelpful attitudes become harder to deal with.

Several participants suffered (or witnessed others suffering) human rights violations perpetrated by both the government and the rebel forces. These violations included arbitrary arrest, interrogation, imprisonment, beatings, starvation, rape, torture, executions, and forced military service (often involving the abduction of children). Of most concern to the participants was the separation of families; children losing their parents due to the spontaneous scattering of people that took place during bombings or street-fighting. One woman told how being separated from her husband was *‘worse than the war itself’*.

Resources. In addition to their descriptions of adversity, most participants mentioned sources of assistance and resources for survival within their accounts of life in Sudan. The

following themes were identified: ‘Friends in high places’, ‘family and friends’, and ‘personal resources’(such as faith in God).

‘Friends in high places’ referred to the access which some participants had to contacts within the government, the army, the rebel forces, or the church. For example, one woman (‘Violet’) described how a Catholic Bishop had rescued several young girls from a rebel camp after he heard that they had been abducted while fleeing from the war. Another woman’s brother arranged for her to flee the country incognito with her five children after she escaped from a government prison and another participant’s uncle arranged for him to begin working with the Red Cross while still a teenager in order to protect him from being forcefully recruited by rebels. Table 1 provides a synopsis of the superordinate and constituent themes that emerged from the data regarding ‘Life in Sudan’.

Insert Table 1 approximately here please

Life en route

On the journey from their homes in Sudan to resettlement in Australia, 6 participants spent time in Kenya, 3 in Uganda, and 3 in Egypt. The majority spent long periods of time (up to 15 years) in the one refugee camp or displaced within Sudan’s borders. Those who arrived from Egypt tended to spend less time en route than those who came through Uganda or Kenya.

Adverse experiences. Adverse themes identified within participants’ accounts of their journeys regarded the conditions in refugee camps and conditions for refugees in Egypt. Within these areas emerged a lack of survival needs, disease and the lack of security and safety. In relation to the conditions for refugees in Egypt were racism and racial discrimination as well as a lack of protection and assistance which is discussed further below.

The 9 participants who came to Australia via Uganda or Kenya spent time in refugee camps. Most came to these camps with nothing and found themselves thrown together with

hundreds of others in similar circumstances but from different tribal and cultural backgrounds. Problems caused by the lack of survival needs took the form of shortages of food, water and firewood. Such shortages caused more sinister problems by exposing refugee men and women to violence when they ventured into the bush in search of firewood and vegetables. Overwhelmingly, refugee camps were conceived of as perilous and insecure, sometimes raided by rebel groups or robbers. Refugees were often raped or killed by natives when they strayed outside of the camp and fighting also occurred within the camp between refugees of different tribes and nationalities. The three participants who arrived via Egypt described very different, but no less distressing, experiences. Participants shared threatening, humiliating and frightening experiences of racial violence and vilification in Cairo. They discussed the difficulties faced there as a consequence of remaining 'unrecognised' by the Egyptian government. There are no refugee camps in Cairo and refugees receive no protection or official assistance. According to these participants, Sudanese people living illegally in Egypt must work long hours in order to pay high rents, and are only able to secure domestic labouring jobs, regardless of their qualifications.

Resources. Ten of the 12 participants also spontaneously identified positive aspects of their experiences en route and resources that helped them to endure the difficulties they faced. The following themes were explicated from participants' transcripts: 'Work', 'social support', 'protection, advocacy, and assistance', and 'personal resources'. Several participants reported that being able to work enabled them to earn some extra money and supplement the UNHCR ration – this made life more bearable. Participants also cited 'social support', in the form of reunions with family members and assistance from others, as a source of hope and endurance while en route. Others reported that they had received protection and representation from community leaders, the UNHCR, and other organisations. Finally, 3 of the participants revealed 'personal resources' that helped them to get through the time they spent en route.

These resources included refraining from retaliating against racism in Egypt, an accepting attitude, and hope for the future. For example: *'It was the hope that, you know, that you are not staying here, you are leaving for a better life...'* (*'Julie'*).

Life in Australia

During this section of the interview, participants were asked to describe their current lives. Ten participants made positive comments regarding their lives in general such as *'life is good'*, *'I'm happy'*, and *'I feel safe'*. Only two participants indicated that overall, they were *'not so happy'* to be here; both were experiencing some degree of social isolation at the time of the interview. Table 2 presents the superordinate and constituent themes regarding life in Australia providing an overview of the *'hindrances and helps'* to positive adaptation that were reported. Further detail is noted below.

Insert Table 2 approximately here please

Hindrances to Adaptation. Within their accounts of their lives in Australia, 100% of participants identified some *'hindrances'* that had made life harder for them. Broad themes extracted were: *'Homesickness and separation from family'*, *'acculturation difficulties'*, and *'obstacles to participation in Australian society'*. Within the category of *'acculturation difficulties'* were difficulties with language and communication, making social connections, the law, parenting and gender roles and independent living/social isolation. Obstacles to participation included disadvantage relative to Australian-born counterparts, racism and racial discrimination, employment difficulties, financial difficulties, and inadequate/inappropriate assistance.

Ten participants expressed a sense of loss and longing in reference to their homeland and/or their family in Africa. For example, *"I miss Africa because I got some family still in Africa...but generally I'm still missing Africa, because your country is your country...like,*

your mum is your mum, or your dad is your dad, so, Africa is my homeland...I got the citizen here, you know in Australia, but I still, you know, missing Africa...” (‘Ricardo’).

Ten participants identified difficulties with the English language as a problem for refugees attempting to adapt to life in Australia. Language difficulties were portrayed as limiting refugees’ ability to express and assert themselves, resulting in feelings of powerlessness and disadvantage. For example: “...*it is very hard, like to communicate or to, to tell your concerns or problems, with the language problem...when I go to the Real Estate I can’t talk like Australian, to tell your concerns and talk really like very strongly...*” (‘Poni’). Although language and communication difficulties were endorsed by both older and younger participants, some younger (or better educated) participants mentioned that coping with learning the English language, and the task of acculturation in general, was harder for older (or less well-educated) people than it was for themselves.

Six participants reported difficulties adapting to Australian laws (rules and regulations that are essentially Western in nature). These difficulties related primarily to driving laws and laws regulating the discipline of children, as the following example illustrates: “...*some children...are being taken away from the parent by social worker...There is also issues with the driving...it’s always depend whether you drink and then you have problem with police...*” (‘Dan’).

Refugees’ problems with the laws relating to domestic violence and the discipline of children both contributed to and were compounded by broader cultural difficulties associated with parenting and gender roles. Parents expressed concern about losing control of their children, and experienced a sense of impotence due to the protection of children’s rights by the Australian government. For example: “...*because they say that, um, there’s children right, you find that our children take that right...our children take this western culture, they ignore our culture...Sometimes this brought us as a parent into a big hurt...*” (‘Lillian’).

While ‘acculturation difficulties’ originated from the pre-existing cultural differences between Sudanese society and Australian society, ‘obstacles to participation’ were conceptualised as factors that *caused* needless problems for refugees. Participants reported hindrances to their adaptation in the form of obstacles that prevented them from taking part in the Australian way of life relative to their Australian-born peers. The implication was that refugees are not on an equal footing with native-born Australians, and therefore should not be expected to compete with Australians on equal terms. A lack of positive discrimination to redress this imbalance was seen as a form of discrimination against refugees, as they are further handicapped by the lack of special assistance available to them.

Six participants reported experiences of racism and racial discrimination recounting incidences of verbal abuse, physical violence, and denial of access to services. These experiences caused feelings of exclusion, fear, and regret. For example: “...*we fear maybe these people sometimes they can have their own way, they can kill us...*” (‘Bob’). Racial discrimination was also seen to interact with language difficulties in making it harder to find a job: “...*if you’re a migrant, you know, you don’t have much opportunity to get a job, because they will consider you... your English is not appropriate, your English is not good, your English is not excellent...*” (‘Ricardo’). Regarding employment difficulties, 8 participants identified the lack of jobs for refugees as a serious problem compounded by language difficulties and racial discrimination.

Helps toward positive adaptation. All participants identified ‘helps’ that had made the process of adapting to life easier for them. Participants’ accounts were grouped into: ‘Australian society’, ‘financial and settlement assistance’, ‘social support’, and ‘personal resources’. Social support included friendship and emotional support, acculturation assistance, settlement assistance and contexts for making social connections. The notion of

personal resources included the having hope and goals, a positive attitude, prayer and faith and perceptions of growth and strength.

Most participants referred to positive aspects of Australian society and several participants did so within the framework of a comparison to life in Sudan. This theme represents the gains realised by refugees in coming to Australia, and their recognition of the advantages of living in a relatively peaceful society. The receipt of financial and settlement assistance from the government and various other agencies was also mentioned. Many participants reported that assistance with living expenses, accommodation, study, and job-seeking contributed to their adaptation to life in Australia.

Social support was endorsed in some way by all participants. Eleven endorsed the theme of ‘friendship and emotional support’. This kind of intimate social support was viewed as extremely important to positive adaptation as the following quotes illustrate: “...*making a friend...that’s whereby you feel like you’re, you’re really in, in this country...*” (‘Ricardo’), and: “...*if you are in a community you don’t feel you are lonely, even if you are missing your family ... they could make you laugh – that is the most important...if you have that kind of life that people who are supporting you socially...*” (‘Julie’) and: “*I didn’t actually myself have a huge...problem because I, I got people that I was with and people supporting me, um, I did not have, like, kind of the, ah, desperateness and feelings...*” (‘Dan’).

Participants reported receiving friendship and emotional support from family members: “...*you can share something in common...they’ll advise you, give you some company...Makes life a bit easier...*” (‘Greg’), from other Sudanese people: “...*emotionally they’re really helpful, they’re helpful, spiritually, emotionally, they’re helpful...*” (‘Lillian’), from other Africans: “...*so many different people came from Africa...we become brothers, so everything we just cooperate together...*” (‘Sam’), and from Australian-born people: “*Also I have good friends from Australia, or from Tasmania, so it makes it easy now, life is actually*

very easy than it was...” (‘Bob’). Many participants cited friendship and emotional support as being supplied within the context of churches or volunteer support groups.

All participants identified ‘personal resources’ that had positively enhanced their experience with 10 articulating future-focused hopes and goals for example: *“I am going to start a new chapter...I’m going to lay a good foundation – for me, for my children, for my family...our future will be bright.”* (‘Sam’). Seven participants displayed attitudes that would aid positive adaptation. Some expressed a desire to adapt to the new culture and move on with their lives for example: *“...we don’t wanna apply our culture here...here we got different culture so we, we have to get used to this culture...”* (‘Ricardo’). One woman expressed an accepting attitude towards the difficulties faced by her and other refugees, stating that such problems are simply *“part of refugees’ life”* (‘Lillian’). Others displayed what may be described as a ‘Do-it-yourself’ attitude to acculturation for example, *“Some other things it needs you to do by yourself, not somebody ...”* (‘Sam’). Many participants reported that they had learned a lot and grown stronger as a result of their past experiences, so that they were better able to face the challenges of adapting to life in Australia. Lastly, four participants acknowledged ‘prayer and faith in God’ as a factor in bringing them safely to Australia, and a resource to draw upon. For example, *“I will thank God because God accepted my prayers...”* (‘Lillian’), and: *“I’m praying rather than just get sad...”* (‘Dan’).

Discussion

The present study has offered a rich descriptive account of the experiences these Sudanese participants’ have endured and has offered a voice to these events and the accompanying feelings and thoughts. Participants shared their positive and negative experiences within three categories: Life in Sudan, life en route, and life in Tasmania. Experiences in Sudan and en route were overwhelmingly characterised by suffering and adversity, including proximity to open warfare, torture, the loss of loved ones, and racial

violence. However, the vast majority of participants also identified survival resources and positive aspects of their journeys such as social support and positive attitudes. The adverse pre-migration experiences reported by the current sample of refugees are comparable in type and incidence to those identified in previous studies of refugee populations in Australia and elsewhere (Coker, 2004; Muhwezi & Sam, 2004; Paardekooper et al., 1999; Schweitzer et al., 2006; Schweitzer et al., in press) such as the exposure to the heinous crimes of war, separation from loved ones and the involuntary nature of departure from ones homeland.

Likewise, the resources mentioned as sources of assistance in Sudan and en route are consistent with the coping and resilience themes identified by Schweitzer et al. (in press) among the Sudanese community in Queensland. For example, in spite of the wide range of traumatic experiences reported by the present sample of Sudanese refugees, their accounts did not include references to psychopathology such as mention of the symptoms associated with depression or PTSD. The absence of such discussion may be an accurate reflection of the mental health of this particular sample or may be due to other things such as a tendency not to focus on the self with regards to relating the refugee experience or that such complaints are not salient within this cultural context. Results that have indicated psychopathology in samples akin to this one (e.g., Schweitzer et al., 2006) may be due to a number of reasons including a reflection of using culturally inappropriate measures or a self-report bias including fulfilling a faithful subject role. More research needs to be done in order to adequately address such questions. The majority of participants described themselves as happy with their current lives in Tasmania, and reported being involved in social and study activities. Together with the findings of Schweitzer et al. (in press), the results are evidence for the likeliness of positive adaptation among Sudanese refugees resettled in Australia, despite their experiences of stress and trauma.

Regarding their experiences since arriving in Australia, all participants identified both 'hindrances' to their adaptation and 'helps' toward their adaptation, therefore the second aim of the study has also been achieved. Hindrances to positive adaptation to life in Tasmania included: 'Homesickness and separation from family in Africa', 'acculturation difficulties' (such as problems with the English language), and 'obstacles to participation in Australian society' (such as racism and employment difficulties). Helps toward adaptation included: 'Australian society', 'financial and settlement assistance', 'social support' (including friendship and acculturation assistance), and 'personal resources' (such as hope and goals). Overall, the hindrances and helps identified by the present study concur with the resettlement difficulties and protective factors highlighted by previous investigations of refugee communities in Western countries (Beiser & Hou, 2001; Berman, 2001; Fenta et al., 2004; Howard & Hodes, 2000; McMichael & Manderson, 2004; Silove et al, 1997; Schweitzer et al, 2006). Interestingly, the majority of participants in the present study reported coexistent homesickness for Africa and appreciation of Australia, and some explicitly stated their 'mixed feelings' in this regard. This pattern of theme-endorsement indicates the existence of what may be termed 'divided loyalties' among the Sudanese community, and echoes the reports of the Africans in Australia interviewed by Udo-Expo (1999), who expressed their sense of ambivalence in terms of 'straddling two cultures'.

'Homesickness and separation from family' was cited as a hindrance to adaptation by the majority of participants. This result is in concordance with previous research that has found 'concern for family overseas' to be a common problem for resettled refugees in Australia (Cunningham & Cunningham, 1997; Silove et al., 1997; Udo-Expo, 1999). Previous research has also found that refugees living in Western countries face various challenges associated with the task of acculturation (Beiser & Hou, 2001; Cunningham & Cunningham; McMichael & Manderson, 2004; Schweitzer et al., 2002; Schweitzer et al.,

2006). Consistent with these previous findings, all participants in the present study reported being hindered in their adaptation efforts by ‘acculturation difficulties’ of some kind. In particular, the majority identified difficulties with language and communication as a major problem for Sudanese refugees. Language difficulties were experienced even by those who spoke English as a second language, and were portrayed as having far-reaching effects in terms of limiting social interaction and employment opportunities. Many participants also reported having difficulty making social connections and problems with independent living in Tasmania. Considering the importance placed upon social support as essential to the adaptation of resettled refugees, and the importance of intimate extended family relationships to the Sudanese in particular, problems experienced by participants in this area should be regarded as significant.

‘Obstacles to participation in Australian society’ in the form of relative disadvantage, racism, employment and financial difficulties; were experienced by the vast majority of participants in the present study. These same factors have been previously identified as post-migration stressors among resettled refugees by several researchers (e.g., Berman, 2001; Cunningham & Cunningham, 1997; McMichael & Manderson, 2004; Schweitzer et al., 2002; Silove et al., 1997; Udo-Expo, 1999). The relative disadvantage of refugees stems from their refugee status itself. Refugees, by definition, flee their homes involuntarily and arrive at their unintended destinations with nothing. Sudanese refugees do not arrive in Australia ready to enter into the Australian way of life on equal terms with Australian-born people. Even those participants with good English skills did not feel confident expressing and asserting themselves.

A lack of special assistance for refugees in terms of access to education, employment, and other services further handicaps this already disadvantaged group. Also within ‘obstacles to participation’, several participants reported problems with racism, lack of employment, and

financial strain. These three hindrances, along with language difficulties, tended to interact in the lives of Sudanese refugees, such that each intensified the adverse effects of the others. For example, some participants attributed their difficulty finding paid work to a combination of racial discrimination and a lack of exemplary English skills. A lack of paid work was in turn viewed as a cause of financial difficulties, and a lack of finances caused problems with transport and training, which in turn resulted in limited employment opportunities.

Regarding helps toward adaptation to life in Australia, the majority of participants in the present study identified certain aspects of Australian society as conducive to positive adaptation. In comparison to life in Sudan, participants saw Australia as a peaceful and safe place to live with a fair and just system of government. This theme relates to the coping and resilience theme ‘comparison to others’ identified by Schweitzer et al. (2002), which referred to a sense of hope and a recognition that things could be (and had been) much worse. In the present study, all participants reported that social support had aided them in the task of adaptation; a result that concurs with previous research (e.g., Beiser & Hou, 2001; Fenta et al., 2004; Muhwezi & Sam, 2004; Schweitzer et al., 2002; Udo-Expo, 1999). Not only has social support been established in the literature as a facilitative factor, it was also explicitly identified by several participants in the present study as necessary to positive adaptation and a safe-guard against stress and desperation. Participants in the present study also revealed several ‘personal resources’ – such as hope for the future, positive attitudes, prayer, and inner strength. This finding is consistent with previous research that has identified ‘positive attitudes towards acculturation’ and ‘religious faith’ as helps toward positive adaptation (Beiser & Hou, 2001; Schweitzer et al., in press).

Recommendations and practical implications

At the close of their interviews, in keeping with the third aim of the present study, participants were asked to make recommendations regarding factors that would make it easier

for refugees to settle in Tasmania. An interpretation of these recommendations include (1) a need for programs that actively promote refugees' adaptation to life in Tasmania. Such programs could include organised social events to facilitate the broadening of social networks, a one-on-one mentoring system, and special-interest clubs designed to improve members' English skills outside of a classroom environment (2) a need for positive discrimination in terms of special assistance for students, special consideration for refugees seeking accommodation, and the creation of jobs especially for refugees. Many participants stated that job schemes and job networks for refugees would help them to break into the workforce and prevent them from becoming lonely and 'stressed' (3) it is recommended that the Australian-born community receive more comprehensive information about the nature of refugee status, Australia's commitment to refugees, and ways in which they can help refugees to adapt to life here. This aim could be achieved through avenues such as the media, the internet, and closer working relationships aiming to disseminate information between community institutions such as university, adult education, the migrant centres and churches. Although public education can be the catalyst for change and acceptance of positive discrimination policies, it is often only effective in those open to such notions in the first place. There is much that needs to be done to combat inertia in attitude change among those less willing to learn about the necessity for such an approach.

Strengths and limitations of the present study

There have been a number of advantages of the current methodology as a means of exploring the experiences of Sudanese refugees in this Australian community. First, problems with the validity of data collected cross-culturally using standardised questionnaires have been avoided. Second, the qualitative methodology has allowed the investigation of the experiences of a very particular group of people without imposing preconceived and culturally-inappropriate theories upon their accounts. Third, participants' were able to share

the negative and positive experiences that were important to them, without being limited to certain categories of trauma and post-trauma outcomes.

However, the results of the current study are limited in their generalisability to the entire Sudanese population in Australia. The current sample, while displaying good balance in terms of age and gender, may be non-representative of all Sudanese people in this community due to the use of a non-random sampling procedure.

Directions for future research

There is a need for further research with refugee populations in Australia in order to add to the current understanding of refugees' concerns and adaptation processes. Future qualitative research, together with the previous findings of qualitative studies, may contribute to the development of culturally-appropriate quantitative instruments for the measurement of adaptation levels among larger samples of refugees. Such research may result in the identification of specific factors that contribute to more or less successful adaptation processes as well as shed light on culturally specific constructions of stress and trauma.

Concluding comments

The results of the current study suggest that Sudanese refugees are succeeding in the task of adaptation in spite of the difficulties they face. All participants identified equally both 'hindrances' to adaptation and 'helps' toward adaptation. No individual participant or group of participants appeared to be less well-adjusted than the others, and no participant identified many 'hindrances' and few 'helps'. Most participants reported experiencing some difficulty adjusting to life in Australia due to homesickness, separation from family, problems with the English language, lack of employment, and financial problems. However, participants described many sources of help that had contributed to their adaptation and counteracted the effects of the aforementioned hindrances. Most participants indicated that financial assistance from various agencies and organisations, a feeling of safety, and social support had been

beneficial. While all participants had experienced serious traumas in Sudan and en route, none referred to PTSD symptomology when describing their current experiences. Taken together, these findings indicate that positive adaptation is not only possible, but probable for resettled Sudanese refugees, who appear to be well able to locate and utilise the resources they require in accomplishing this task.

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Table 1
Life in Sudan: Adverse Experiences/reasons for Flight and Resources

Superordinate theme	Constituent theme	Quotations
War and its negative effects 100% of participants	Close proximity to open warfare' Involuntary flight Human rights violations Separation from/ loss of loved ones Lack of survival needs	<p><i>"I think the worst thing is the war, the fighting in Sudan is like, making everything else difficult..." (Annie)</i></p> <p><i>I had to also leave the country; otherwise they will also kill me..." (Poni)</i></p> <p><i>"Of course, nobody wants to go away from her country...we doesn't come here because we want to, but we come here because of war situation, like, you know, I cannot go back, and I cannot stay in that situation of Kenya...it's war that force us to come here" (Lillian).</i></p> <p>[See text]</p> <p><i>"...in Sudan when the children go to school, you will worry until when they get back...When...they start to bomb the town, and your kids are not with you, definitely you're going to be separated with the kids..." (Poni).</i></p> <p><i>"...you can't eat...there's not enough food, so you have to struggling very very hard to survive..." (Ricardo).</i></p>
Inequity between the North and the South		<p><i>"You cannot tell price for your own property. Person that coming from north can tell you that... 'I can buy with one dollar'. You don't have choice to say...pay me 10 dollars..." (Sam).</i></p>
Resources	Friends in high places Family & friends Personal resources	<p><i>"...my uncle...was able to go and see these people...in high government, to let us leave the country..." (Julie).</i></p> <p><i>"I went with my uncle, if it was me alone I could not manage because I was too young" (Bob)</i></p> <p><i>"God help me to reach to that station where I want to" (Lillian)</i></p>

Table 2
Life in Australia: Hindrances and Helps to Positive Adaptation

Superordinate theme	Constituent theme	Quotations
<p><i>Hindrances: (100%)</i> Homesickness and separation from family (100%)</p> <p>Acculturation difficulties (100%)</p> <p>Obstacles to participation in Australian society (92%)</p>	<p>Language & communication</p> <p>Making social connections (50%)</p> <p>The law, Parenting and gender roles Independent living/social isolation (50%)</p> <p>Disadvantage relative to Australian-born counterparts</p> <p>Racism & racial discrimination & employment difficulties (67%), Financial difficulties (50%)</p>	<p>“...you’re still thinking about your people back home...you know that you’re not here completely...” (Julie)</p> <p>“I miss Africa because I got some family still in Africa... because your country is your country...like, your mum is your mum, or your dad is your dad, so, Africa is my homeland...I got the citizen here, you know in Australia, but I still, you know, missing Africa...” (Ricardo).</p> <p>“...it is very hard, like to communicate or to, to tell your concerns or problems, with the language problem...when I go to the Real Estate I can’t talk like Australian, to tell your concerns and talk really like very strongly...” (Poni).</p> <p>“I don’t have somebody that makes me close either to see a house or be together with, except those of ah, support group that ah, when I arrived here. But even their houses I didn’t reach...” (Sam).</p> <p>“...because they say that, um, there’s children right, you find that our children take that right...our children take this western culture, they ignore our culture...Sometimes this brought us as a parent into a big hurt...” (Lillian).</p> <p>: “...it is very hard for man who came with these conservative beliefs, to change these overnight...” (Bob).</p> <p>“...because the refugees are put together with the Australians, like, to access the childcare, the payments and all these things, yes and for us it’s really hard, because when we come here we have nothing completely...” (Poni)</p> <p>“I feel like, um, I, I shouldn’t really even come to Australia, should’ve stayed, I could’ve stayed in Africa, even dying of hunger...” (‘Annie’).</p> <p>“...if you’re a migrant, you know, you don’t have much opportunity to get a job, because they will consider you...somebody who is not like a human being...due to the fact that, ah, your English is not appropriate, your English is not good, your English is not excellent...” (Ricardo).</p>
<i>Helps: (100%)</i>		

Australian society (83%)		<i>"...back home you worry about this little thing – is what you're gonna eat tomorrow...will you be alive tomorrow... but in Australia you just worry about, you know, what's going to happen to me in 10 years time, what will I be?" (Julie).</i>
Financial & settlement assistance (83%)		
Social support (100%)	Friendship & emotional support	<i>"...making a friend...that's whereby you feel like you're, you're really in, in this country...but if you got no friend you feel that you're like nothing..." (Ricardo),</i>
	Acculturation assistance Settlement assistance (83%)	[see text]
Personal Resources	Contexts for making social connections	<i>"...you can share something in common [with other Sudanese]...they'll advise you, give you some company...Makes life a bit easier..." (Greg), "...emotionally they're [other Africans] really helpful, they're helpful, spiritually, emotionally, they're helpful..." (Lillian) "...so many different people came from Africa...we become brothers, so everything we just cooperate together..." (Sam) "Also I have good friends from Australia, ... so it makes it easy now, life is actually very easy than it was..." (Bob)</i>
	Hope and goals	<i>"I am going to start a new chapter...I'm going to lay a good foundation – for me, for my children, for my family...our future will be bright." (Sam).</i>
	Accepting attitudes	<i>"Some things it needs you to do by yourself, not somebody ..." (Sam).</i>
	Prayer and faith	<i>"I will thank God because God accepted my prayers..." (Lillian)</i>
	Growth and Strength	<i>"I'm praying rather than just get sad..." (Dan).</i>