The Settlement Challenges Facing South Sudanese Refugee Community in the Western of Suburbs of Melbourne

Author: William Abur 2012

Contact Email: williamboldeng@yahoo.com

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to explore the settlement challenges facing the South Sudanese refugee community in the western suburbs of Melbourne. The refugee community from South Sudan that resettled in Australia are among the country’s most disadvantaged and vulnerable community groups. The critical settlement situation of the South Sudanese community is due to many issues, including a lack of sufficient support services for the community and vulnerable families. This article discusses settlement related challenges facing the South Sudanese refugee community from their perspective with an aim of sharing findings with an audience that may have no real life experience of being a refugee or resettling out of their comfort zone. The settlement period has been extremely challenging for the South Sudanese refugee community in many ways. Since resettling in Australia, the community has faced settlement difficulties like making certain adjustments to the Australian way of life.

The South Sudanese refugee community in Australia come from a difficult background of a long civil war which has affected this community in many forms; the community are going through a recovery process from past traumas and sometimes it is difficult for individuals and families to forget past experiences of conflict and move on with their new lives. Refugees often lose the opportunity of independency due to conflict and overstaying in refugee camps as not enough services are provided to help them gain relevant skills and education. People struggle with daily survival issues rather than investing in long-term life skills. The lack of sufficient skills and education related to the western world’s way of life has impacted on families and individuals that resettle in Australia. Settlement issues hamper many families and individuals within the South Sudanese refugee community. The struggle to understand a new culture and people, a new system and related bureaucracy is extremely problematic to people when they are settling. Due financial hardship and the chronic lack of employment, this community tends to have a higher risk of experiencing problems like homelessness, family breakdown, social isolation, financial hardship, poor health, drug and alcohol abuse, gambling problems, unemployment and young people’s involvement in criminal activities such stealing and robbery. Stereotyping refugee community groups in a new culture, like the South Sudanese community, increases the risk of young people becoming socially disconnected from the mainstream community by dropping out of school. The needs of individuals and families tend to be different based on their level of education and experiences in refugee camps. Depending on their understanding and expectations, different generations have differing experiences of settlement issues.

Key words: Settlement challenges, South Sudanese, Refugee community
Introduction

The South Sudanese refugee groups are one of the newly emerged disadvantaged communities in Australia. Regardless of their minority status within Australia, their issues are very much visible in the media as many people within this community are struggling with settlement issues. This article is part of a study done for Victoria University’s Master of International Community Development. The overall aim of this research is to inform service providers, governments and the wider community and to provide a voice for the South Sudanese refugee community on the common settlement issues. Secondly, it contributes to the existing literature on settlement and refugee issues in a broader context. In order to reshape settlement policy, it is fundamentally important to understand refugees’ social conditions and historical, cultural, economic and political backgrounds and difficulties encountered during the settlement period. The South Sudanese community is one of many refugee communities that were forced to leave their homeland because of civil war, cultural oppression and the denial of the basic human rights, including social and economic rights. While settling in Australia, they are faced with enormous settlement challenges including housing, employment and cultural adaptation. In Australia, among the challenges that refugee and migrant settlers find pressing is a struggle to adjust to the new culture and integrate into mainstream services. For the South Sudanese refugee community and other African refugee groups, it is even worse when compared to other refugees and migrants in Australia. This is because the practices and values that are being reflected in their new environment are sometimes inconsistent with the African communities’ values and traditional way of engaging community groups. African refugees that are resettled in higher income counties like Australia face certain challenges, such as family breakdown, parenting, unemployment, racism and discrimination (Renzaho 2011). The high costs in the Australian housing market have brought significant consequences to the economically and socially disadvantaged South Sudanese community and other minority ethnic groups (Atem 2011). The study focuses on settlement experiences and the community’s understanding of settlement challenges. This study has raised critical challenges issues around settlement for refugee communities. Significant issues such as unemployment, housing, racism and discrimination are discussed from the community’s perspective.

The South Sudanese community

Due to a long civil war in Sudan between the Southern Sudanese and the Northern Sudanese, many people from the South Sudan region were displaced and forced to seek refuge in other countries around the world, including Australia. Currently, it is estimated that more than 24,000 South Sudanese are living in Australia and the majority of this population came between 2001 and 2006 (Atem 2011). Many South Sudanese families chose to live in Melbourne. Adjusting to a new culture is one of the most pressing challenges facing many South Sudanese refugee settlers. The experience of a new culture, new system, and the lack of language acquisition are impeding refugee families and individuals. The war between the North and the South of Sudan has claimed an estimated two million lives, with many millions more homeless and displaced (Coker, 2004). The roots of this war lie in long-standing ethnic and religious hostility between the lighter-skinned Arab-Muslim rulers of the North and the mostly Christian ethnic groups in the South, fuelled by the discovery of oil in the southern provinces (Deng, 2005). As a result of this devastating conflict, the South Sudanese refugee group entered Australia between 2002 and 2005 under the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (the Refugee Convention). During this period Sudan was at the top of the Australian Humanitarian Program. Many families decided to settle in Melbourne’s western and eastern suburbs because of rental affordability and community
The experience of migrating and resettling can significantly disrupt a refugee’s social world. Their social relationships become lost or fragmented while the social network crumbles and remaining families become dislocated. The past social world has vanished while a new economic, political and cultural context is formed. The refugee’s war-related suffering is reinforced by challenges and losses that are migration-related (Westoby, 2008). During the period of transition and settlement, the community is faced with many social issues and problems on top of what they have already gone through before their arrival to Australia. Past suffering includes traumatic life experiences in conflict zones and in refugee camps, displacement and separation of family members (Tipping, 2010).

Generally, refugees in camps start their resettlement processes with help of the UNHCR as well as Australia’s Humanitarian Program that visit camps and conduct interviews. Conditions in refugee camps are often unbearable as UNHCR only provides for basic services that are needed for survival (Tipping, 2010). Upon arrival in Australia, refugees face considerable challenges in adapting to a new life, a new system and a new culture. Time is needed for them to adapt to the new environment, culture and language. Their experiences from past conflicts and refugee camps have eroded the skills and abilities of refugees. Although these experiences have been reinforced by their settlement difficulties, community members have tried their best to support one another during difficult times (Commonwealth of Australia, 2007). However, there are many barriers and limitations for South Sudanese community members to provide consistent help to families and young people who face a higher risk and are more vulnerable to the challenges of settlement. The South Sudanese community members tend to live in different suburbs far apart but despite this challenge their community’s social fabric still brings them together to celebrate cultural events (VFST, 2006).

**Refugees and UNHCR**

Recently in Australia, there have been many discourses about refugees, including “bad” refugees and “good” refugees, due to the significant increase of asylum seekers by boat. Although none of the South Sudanese refugees have arrived by boat, they are treated as “bad” refugees because of their visible settlement related challenges. Refugees from the South Sudanese community came to Australia through genuine processes from the UNHCR. Those whom the UNHCR have identified as refugees are allowed to apply for a status of refugee to those countries that signed the Refugee Convention. As a result of an increasing number of refugees and humanitarian entrants, the United Nations (UN) established the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 1950. Since that time, the UNHCR has been mandated by the UN General Assembly to assist and protect refugees, asylum seekers and internal displaced people (IDP). Its mandate is to lead and co-ordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide, and its primary purpose is to safeguard the rights and wellbeing of refugees (Tipping, 2010). Australia is one of the countries that has signed the convention and has resettled many refugees. The majority of the South Sudanese in Australia arrived through the help of the UNHCR in refugee camps; the process itself is very difficult for the refugee. They experience a high level of homesickness and isolation and this is aggravated by a culture shock that further hinders their ability to begin their life in Australia. The impact of integrating into a
new society can often cause high levels of stress and anxiety for refugees (Refugee Council of Australia, 2011). Besides a shared traumatic past, many refugees have experienced poverty, poor quality or total absence of formal education, and may have low or no levels of English language knowledge. If they were living in a refugee camp prior to their arrival, they may have no concept of interacting with society and its institutions such as banks, hotels, etc. These are some of the reasons that refugees in a country like Australia struggle with unemployment, English language barriers, post-traumatic disorders, general health and cultural issues (Harte et al, 2009).

Research methodology

This study used a qualitative study method, and explored critical issues that are taken for granted by some and yet are pressing issues for refugee community groups. Six families were recruited for the study and the head of each family was interviewed in two parts. The first part was about their personal experiences of settlement related challenges and second part was about their families and other close community members experience in Australia. Participants were engaged in a semi-structured interview in which their views were scripted and analysed as findings. Pseudonym names have been used in this study, meaning the names given to participants in this research paper are not reflecting real names of people who were interviewed. Participants were engaged in a flexible and respectful method to enhance their confidence and ensure full participation in the interview. This was done by allowing participants to choose a closed and convenient venue for the interview; time was arranged according to their availability and personal information was coded anonymously (Boyce and Neale 2006). The qualitative research method is commonly used in many fields, including fields of community development and refugee studies. This qualitative method involved conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation. Participants can share their experiences and thoughts about program operations, processes and outcomes, and their concerns (Boyce and Neale 2006). Qualitative methods are very effective and provide a relaxing atmosphere in which information can be collected easily through conversations. People may feel more comfortable having a conversation with a researcher about their program as opposed to filling out a survey (Cynthia woodsong et al 2005).

Findings and discussions

As one of the newly emerged communities in Australia, the South Sudanese refugee group has experienced a number of settlement issues. This research has discussed settlement related challenges from the South Sudanese community’s perspectives, particularly members who are currently living in the western suburbs of Melbourne. The experiences of the South Sudanese community in this region also relates to other regions of Australia where the South Sudanese refugee group are settling. There is no doubt that newly arrived refugee community groups are experiencing substantial challenges although some government funded programs are available to provide support services (Gifford et al 2007). Common settlement challenges facing the South Sudanese refugee community include unemployment, language barriers, housing issues, discrimination and racism. There are numerous factors that affect refugees’ settlement into Australia. These factors are based on their capacity to adjust, level of education obtained and the life skills a person acquires to adjust in new environment. Settlement is understood as a transformation process of helping refugee community groups to settle in a new country. Settlement is the period of adjustment that occurs following a migrant or refugee’s arrival in a new country, as they become established and independent in their new society (Richmond, 2011). This means that refugee community groups that have been in
Australia for over five years are still facing settlement issues for a number of reasons including language and cultural barriers. A refugee community member from South Sudan speaks of the difficulties and complexity of defining settlement due to the many issues surrounding it:

*Settlement is a broad thing you cannot define it in sentence or in paragraph because it is continuum and endless. There is no yearly stick of measuring the South Sudanese community’s needs of settlement as these or that. But what I can say is that our people from the South Sudanese community do need orientation and support services. You could see that people are not well oriented and that is why they are struggling with issues related to settlement. I think there is no end to settlement but there is a beginning. If there are no proper services provided, people cannot settle. Social issues can continuously emerge from time to time* (Samuel)

The above statement is reinforced by the fact that social support can influence immigrants’ and refugees’ feelings of belonging or isolation. Refugees are facing social issues in their host country, which intensifies problems with integration and their social relations may be either disrupted or de-valued in the host country. Being an immigrant or refugee can impact on each community member’s role, expectations, and can increase conflicting values within families. For refugees, social support services can enable them to access information and services in the host society, and help them maintain a link with their homeland (Stewart et al, 2008).

“I think settlement is when you are successful in new life or in new country. It is enabling, integrating people and I think the aim is to enable people or to allow people to reach a point where they can be self-sufficient and well integrated in the community. It is very much about understanding the system of new culture in new country, navigating yourself to know the ways of life in new environment and stimulating in new culture. I don’t think that settlement is about taking someone’s life comprehensively. It is about enabling someone; provides knowledge, skills and opportunity to be able to help them self within certain community” (Monica)

The settlement period is a difficult time for refugee community groups in many ways and can be a dramatic experience for families and individuals. This period requires sufficient support services for refugee community groups because of constant social issues striking refugee families and individuals, including financial hardship, family breakdown, intergeneration conflict, social isolation, cultural shock, home sickness, unemployment and discrimination.

“My parents were overwhelmed by the many responsibilities with children and financial pressure. In the community generally, people who are older are facing many challenges of because of the responsibilities and things that they wanted to do but could not do because of language barrier. For example they could not get jobs to help themselves and they only depended on welfare payment. They could not help their relatives and family members who were left overseas. It is so difficult and frustrating to people who do not understand English as they are unable to help themselves” (Adeng)

Parents and young people appeared to experience settlement issues differently; perhaps parents or adults tend to have higher expectations of wanting to get jobs and earn money to support their family members and relatives either in Australia or overseas. Young people have less responsibility and do not have the same level of expectation to get a job. However, the reality is that adults’ high expectation of gaining employment within a short time after settlement is unachievable due to many employment barriers. For example getting
a job is a challenging process for someone who has a very little or no English. The process of getting a job is competitive in Australia; and people with low English level struggle to get jobs in a competing process.

“My experience was difficult. There were many challenging things that we faced in between. My family was struggling to get things rights in Australia including learning language. Yet we were hammered by culture shock, home sick and social isolation. There were also discrimination attitudes that we faced from here and there at different places” (John).

Beside the common settlement issues facing families from the South Sudanese refugee community, parents are facing difficulties in raising children in two different cultures. Young people have some familiarity with Australia’s systems and are receptive to Australia’s lifestyle. However, parents are still holding their traditional and cultural ways of parenting in South Sudan, which is completely different to Australia’s way of parenting. Parenting is one of the challenges of arriving in a new country. In the South Sudanese expression, “parenting in new culture is not a glass of water to drink” - meaning this is not an easy task and cannot be underestimated when working with refugee communities.

“We live in a country where young people see their ways and young people tend to be smarter than parents and parents are still holding traditional parenting style. This is one of the causes of family conflict. Family can easily breakdown as a result of continuous tension and distressing situation if there is no understanding” (Monica).

4.3 Lack of continuing support services after five years for refugee communities

The Australian government funds settlement services agencies to deliver settlement support services to newly arrived refugee families and individuals. Agencies are mandated by the government to work with refugee community groups and individuals by delivering casework, community development, orientation, advocacy, housing and accommodation and so forth, depending on the requirements of newly arrived clients. However, these settlement support services are only delivered within a specified timeframe from a refugees’ arrival of up to five years. This is often hard for families and individuals that have passed the five years mark and are still struggling with settlement issues. One of the participants speaks of her family not being supported by social workers from agencies while struggling with housing issues.

“I think we had bad settlement experiences when we came here, we didn’t have social worker to help us. We did things alone, we struggled to get government housing which I think everyone who is new struggles to get and to make matters worse we are still struggling to get government housing. We are already six years in Australia which means we cannot receive any services in settlement area. But the ironic part is that we have not received any services or any help at all from the start” (Monica).

Refugee community groups that are struggling with settlement issues require intensive support services including community development initiatives.

“I think organisations fail to engage refugee community groups actively to address their needs through community development group. There is lack of accountability; organisations should be accountable to newly arrived community groups. Although there is this notion of helping refugee community groups to settle. Sometimes, refugee families don’t get enough support as much as family’s needs are concerned” (Samuel).
Language issue

Refugee community groups that come from non-English countries and settled in English-speaking countries are constantly faced with language difficulties. It is not easy for adults with many other responsibilities to learn the language quickly, and it takes time for refugee adult groups to learn English and to understand the system fully. People must be supported to improve their levels of education in literacy and numeracy, as these skills are crucial for employability (DIAC, 2012). The problem is that newly arrived refugees and migrants are only eligible to take free English lessons for 510 hours provided by the AMEP. Extending refugees’ learning support services is important in improving their English skills in writing and communication. Education services provided by AMEP assists newly arrived refugees and migrants to learn English but this learning support service is only provided within the specific timeframe of up to 510 hours after arrival. One of the participants has indicated that 510 hours is not enough for community members from South Sudan to learn English.

“510 hours for refugees’ education support is not realistic, especially for those who come from a non-English background and oral culture such as south Sudanese group. In South Sudan, people never even learn how write and read in their own language. It is challenging for them. I do think that it is not good idea to classify people in one boat by making them learn English within 510 hours. Learning is depended on personal basis; some people require more or less hours to learn.” (Monica).

Unemployment

Employment is an important part of supporting refugee communities to settle better in a new environment. When people gain employment and have a stable income, it reduces the stress of financial problems and they feel accepted and respected in society. However, refugee communities usually struggle with many social issues that affect their ability to secure employment in their new country (DIAC, 2012). The South Sudanese community is one of the groups of refugee communities facing social issues and isolation in the employment area.

“Getting employed is very important. It means lots, you integrate easily by understanding system and cultures by having other people work with you. People need employment, but it seems to be hard for many refugee groups particularly we South Sudanese community members in Melbourne” (John).

Gaining employment is essential; it is critical for material welfare and identity. It is clear that many refugee people from an African background find it difficult to gain employment since they have no locally acquired skills and experience. However, some of the problems are unrelated to lack of skills but relate to racial discrimination. Discrimination plays a role in keeping Africans unemployed or underemployed, even when they have got Australian qualifications (Australia Human Right Commission, 2009).

“Discriminating people not to have jobs is disempowering and this makes people to depend their lives on government’s welfare benefits. It is not good enough for someone who wanted work and get out of welfare dependency. Many young people are looking for jobs but no way for them gets jobs quick, it is frustrating and stressful to attend many interviews with no luck or applying for many jobs and no call for interview. This is a real situation for the South Sudanese in Australia” (Monica).
The unemployment problem is associated with several factors including limited schooling and discriminatory attitudes in workplaces. People from refugee backgrounds are often confronted by difficulties in the labour market which cannot be explained alone by poor English language skills, occupational skill deficiencies or the recentness of their arrival. Refugees face greater adjustment problems in settlement, possibly as a direct consequence of the traumatic events leading to their arrival. Refugees from African backgrounds are suffering from excessive unemployment, inactivity, non-employment, disguised unemployment and under-employment (Atem 2008).

Refugee communities are dealing with complex issues during the settlement period. The South Sudanese community appear to lose their confidence and ability to look for suitable jobs because of discriminatory attitudes of employers. The community’s situation has constantly deteriorated due to a lack of support provided from settlement organisations. As a result of people losing hope, they remain helpless and struggle with unemployment issues. There are many young people who are looking for employment but it is difficult to get jobs because of high competition and the lack of available jobs in the market. Furthermore, unemployed parents cannot have a choice about where to live and where to educate their children as the lack of financial stability is daunting for refugee families who are depending on welfare payments. Paul Atem (2008) argues that racial discrimination is one of the major impediments in gaining employment as some employers tend to dislike hiring black Africans in their workplaces.

**Housing**

Obtaining affordable housing for families of a larger size is stressful and challenging process in many parts of Australia. The Australian government is attempting to address the housing shortage but a lack of resources to build affordable housing for everyone has made it hard for the government to address housing and homelessness issues in a large scale way. Families from refugee communities are struggling to get accommodation or housing because of the number children in the family; two or three bedroom flats or houses cannot accommodate families in some situations (Atem 2009). On top of this, landlords are fearful to rent their properties to families with many children because of the likelihood of property damage. This makes it harder for families with many children to be accepted into private renting. It is widely acknowledged that people of African backgrounds encounter significant difficulties accessing adequate and appropriate housing in Australia. These difficulties need to be understood so that strategies can be developed to assist African Australian families to meet their accommodation needs. It is also necessary to explore structural and systemic practices that prevent African Australians accessing suitable accommodation (Australia Human Right Commission, 2009).

Access to appropriate and affordable housing is very important and is a fundamental human right (Australia Human Right Commission, 2009). Getting affordable accommodation is one of the issues facing unemployed families from the South Sudanese community. During their settlement period, families have been struggling to find suitable accommodation for their family. “John” speaks of getting a house for a single mother with low income and a number of children as difficult.

“Getting a house for single mother with low income and number of young children is very difficult in Australia particular with real estate agents. Families are denied based on their incomes and number of children they have, this made difficult for many families from South Sudanese community to access private rents. It is also difficult to get government...”

Key words: Settlement challenges, South Sudanese, Refugee community
African migrants in Australia are facing difficulties in the housing sector due to their larger family size, lack of personal transport; lack of financial and social capital; racial discrimination; limited English language skills and lack of knowledge in dealing with public and private sectors. The traditional family structure of African migrants appears to differ from other migrant groups in Australia. Africans often have larger family sizes than those of non-African households making the traditional Australian housing designs not suitable to meet the African migrants’ housing needs (Atem 2009).

As a result of financial hardship, families are forced to live in high-rise accommodations that are not suitable for raising children. The South Sudanese families that live in high-rise buildings are there because they cannot afford to pay the market rent of houses. Families with children are fearful that the wrong group will influence their children (Atem 2009). The South Sudanese refugee community would ideally like to be placed in suburbs where accommodation is affordable and there are amenities such as public transport, public hospitals and schools. Every person has the right to an adequate standard of living, which includes the right to adequate housing. Whether housing is adequate depends on a range of factors including legal security of tenure, availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure, affordability, accessibility, habitability, location, and cultural adequacy (Australia Human Right Commission, 2009).

Racism and discrimination

Australia is a country of many nationalities. The many people that make up Australia’s population have an overseas connection in either the first, second or third generations of their family backgrounds, except indigenous-Australians. According to the Australian government policy, Australia is a diverse nation that has embraced multicultural policy in which no individual is discriminated against. Nevertheless, racism and discrimination are still outstanding issues when it comes to newly arrived refugees. African–Australians want to build their new life and contribute to the Australian society but many of these newer arrivals have been confronted by numerous barriers including accessing employment, housing and racial issues (Australia Human Right Commission, 2009).

“Racism and discrimination is something sensitive to be discussed openly in Australia. You find that the whole institutions completely either ignore intentionally or are uninterested in such issues or they just find it insignificant, yet it is something essential to be addressed as the way you see yourself as an Australian. So I do think racism is a big factor at schools as well as employment sector. At schools for example, there is a number of young people from South Sudanese background that dropout at schools because of racist attitudes toward them. If you talk to young people, some of them will tell you that they are called monkeys at schools, things like that can be constituted as racism. Young people are supposedly to spend 80 per cent of their day at schools, there is no way you can spend such time as a human being in an environment where you feels unsafe, un-respected or treated as you are person who has somewhere to go” (Achol).

Common barriers faced by African-Australians are visible differences, access issues related to English language skills and local experience in the employment arena. These and many more barriers are often linked to discrimination and barriers maintained by professional bodies (Australia Human Right Commission, 2009). The Australian government’s multicultural policy position is that racism and discrimination are unacceptable in Australia. It is unlawful to discriminate against people based on their skin colour, nationality, faith and social status including disability, for example. However, it is one of the sensitive topics that
many people do not like to discuss in public and it still exists in many forms. Refugee community groups are experiencing racial attacks and discrimination in different forms including comments made by prominent politicians against refugee community groups. In 2007, the former Minister for Immigration, Kevin Andrews, publicly announced that African migrants had failed to integrate into mainstream society. As a consequence of such comments, media groups including channel 7, 9 and 10 in Melbourne targeted the ‘Sudanese’ issue and reported negatively on African refugee community groups for their commercial interests (Due, 2008).

As a consequence of such comments from politicians in the media, refugees from the South Sudanese community end up being the victim of discrimination and racial abuse. Atem (2011) argues that African refugees face discrimination related to Australia’s narrow perception of them. This translates into discrimination in the labour market and health, education and housing sectors.

“You have all these groups of young people, myself is included, who sometimes faces other avenues in which one would feel different forms of discrimination. Sometimes I felt that I’m totally discriminated against and this is also applied to many young people that do go out with me. Yet we have nowhere to go and address our grievances about awful feeling of discrimination” (Monica).

People can be unsettled in some cases when they are still struggling with feelings of being unsafe, discrimination at the workplace and racial comments on the street or from neighbours. For example, a refugee child may feel unwelcomed at school because of comments made about his or her skin colour. Communities generally feel unsafe in such situations; people want to move to a better location where they feel welcomed, respected and treated fairly. Families and young people from the South Sudanese community have experienced confronting issues of racism and discrimination. Due (2008) describes political representation in Australia as hegemonic with one dominant power since the time of the White Australia policy. This has reinforced the attitudes of some people who are still holding negative views towards migrants and refugees.

“My brother was constantly threatened at school which was horrible, eventually we have to move out, and particularly we cannot cope to live there anymore because it was not safe for us. As consequences of living in that area before, my brother is struggling with school. The South Sudanese young people are struggling to find their ways of belonging in of term identity in Australia. This is due to constant issues confronting people in many places, and these issues includes racism and discrimination at workplaces, schools and other public areas” (Monica).

The experience of discrimination by African immigrants in Australia has been noted by major studies on African settlement in Australia. Some of the literature indicates that racism has a significant impact on health due to stress and has both physiological and social consequences (Due, 2008). At the physiological level, stress has adverse effects on our health and at the social level, it reduces our chances of accessing vital resources such as employment, education, housing and recreational amenities. Discrimination and the resultant stress depend on other factors including previous experiences, personal resilience and the availability of social support. Young men from the South Sudanese community find themselves being constantly threatened by police and being named ‘gang groups’ because they are walking in a group. In the South Sudanese culture, it is common to travel in groups as young men and young women as part of socialisation. This part of the culture is not being understood in many contexts; it is the reason many of these young men are being stopped randomly by police (Mungai, 2008).
Recommendations

From the results of the study’s findings of settlement issues facing the South Sudanese community in the western suburbs of Melbourne, the author of this article is recommending that refugees’ issues need to be understood based on the level of education obtained in their previous countries of origin, time spent in refugee camps and the types of services provided in these particular camps. Service providers need to improve their delivery of services in areas of employment, racism and discrimination, social isolation as well as early intervention services. There is also a need to create culturally appropriate services to help the community in addressing past trauma related issues and settlement issues in a way that is appropriate to their culture and experiences. This could be an effective intervention strategy. Without effective intervention strategies and alternative engagement, there is going to be continued risks and challenges facing families and individual members regardless of how long this community spends in Australia. Some of the risks facing members of the community include problems that are interrelated such as unemployment and the continual dependence on social security support as main source of income for families. Social isolation and the effects of discrimination and racism can affect people’s abilities and can make them vulnerable throughout their lives resulting in the cumulative effect of being economically and socially excluded from Australia’s mainstream society.

There are some important steps that need to be taken seriously by the government when settling refugee community groups into the mainstream community. Firstly, settlement can be successful when there is a strong connection between refugee community groups and local community groups. Therefore, it is vital that refugee community groups are helped through a connection with local services and to local people. The second step is to create awareness and educate the local community to avoid some tensions and prejudicial ideas of why refugee families are settled in a particular local area. There is also a need to inform the local community to accept refugee families in their neighbour centres, schools and workplaces without discrimination and negative stereotyping.

Conclusion

There are many issues that block refugee communities from accessing mainstream community services. These issues include racism and discrimination that people choose not to talk about openly and yet is something that exists on many levels. A second issue is a lack of appropriate cultural services from the mainstream agencies, leading to a misunderstanding between clients from refugee community groups and mainstream agencies. Refugee families and individuals find it difficult to cope with their settlement issues. Housing, unemployment, language barriers and discrimination are overriding issues. There is also a concern that 510 hours of learning English is not enough for refugee groups from a non-English speaking background to acquire adequate English skills. According to the South Sudanese refugee community, they cannot master the English language within such a short period of time. Some people who have no education background from their previous countries end up finishing their free 510 hours within a very short time without gaining sufficient English skills.

The community has also identified a lack of sufficient engagement between refugee community groups and settlement services agencies due to insufficient resources. Furthermore, the refugee community finds it difficult to gain employment due to low English proficiency, lack of skills in labour as well as discrimination in workforces that affected refugee members with qualifications. Large families are similarly struggling to find suitable...
homes and accommodation as most houses built in Australia are mainly between two and four bedrooms. Settlement challenges cannot be underestimated; refugee community groups need enormous support services to rectify their settlement issues and to help them assimilate better in the mainstream community.

The settlement period can be a difficult time for refugee families and individuals. Therefore, without a good connection between local services and local people, refugee families and individuals can be struck by social isolation, feelings of confusion and helplessness due to a lack of understanding as well as direction. Even when there is support and connection, people still struggle with feelings of homesickness, isolation, culture shock, unemployment and discrimination. Refugee community groups like the South Sudanese community that came from a long civil war background require time for rehabilitation because people that come from such situations are usually deprived of social skills. Ideally, refugee communities are looking for more support to help them address settlement issues. It is extremely frustrating for refugee families and young people to live in crisis and instability in relation to unemployment as well as accommodation. This research identified significant settlement challenges facing the South Sudanese community and these included: unemployment, housing issues, language barriers, trauma issues, general health issues and discrimination. People’s ability to start a new life and integrate successfully into the mainstream community is impeded by these settlement issues.

The South Sudanese refugee community are very much a disadvantaged group due to the lack of resources and support services to help families and young people address their settlement issues. Some of these families and young people have experienced difficult issues prior to their arrival in Australia. Young people have trouble coping with the education system in Australia because many of these individuals arrived in Australia without basic education due to the fact that there was no stability in refugee camps for education. Parents and adults are also struggling with many issues; some find it hard to get jobs or to understand the existing bureaucracy system in Australia. The quality of their lives is critically endangered by common settlement issues namely language barriers, unemployment, discrimination, financial hardship, social isolation, stereotyping, housing issues and difficulties in parenting children in a new culture.

Acknowledgement

The postgraduate research project in which this paper is written was supervised by Dr Julie Fletcher and Dr Siew-Fang Law at Victoria University’s Faculty of Arts, Education and Human Development. I acknowledge and give thanks for their guidance in this project.
References


Key words: Settlement challenges, South Sudanese, Refugee community


Mungai, N, (2008) Young Sudanese men experiences of racism in Melbourne, Monash


Refugees, UK, Published by Blackwell Publishing Ltd, International Migration Vol. 46


Key words: Settlement challenges, South Sudanese, Refugee community
William Abur


Tipping, S. (2010) Meaningful Being: The experiences of Young Sudanese-Australians, PhD research, University of Melbourne


Westoby, P., (2008) Developing a community-development approach through engaging resettling Southern Sudanese refugees within Australia, Oxford University, Community Development Journal Vol 43 No 4
