Transitions of South Sudanese Refugees: Reaching for a Better Life in America
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The learner will be able to:

1. Describe South Sudanese former refugee migration and resettlement in the context of situational transitions theory.
2. Discuss a grounded theory describing the process of “reaching for a better life” among former refugees from South Sudan.
3. List two implications of study findings for nursing practice and nursing research.
Transitions

• Situational migration with geographic relocation precipitates radical social and environmental change (Meleis, 2010)
• Former refugees in United States from South Sudan
• Transitions during resettlement
• Limited research
Current Understanding

- Vulnerable to health problems (Willis & Nkwocha, 2006)
- Child-rearing differences and adjustments (Ebbeck & Dela Cerna 2006)
- Resettlement affects health and well-being (Baird, 2009)
- Importance to maintain family ties (Lim, 2009)
Current Understanding, cont.

- Poverty, under-education, limited preventative services access (Willis & Nkwocha, 2006)
- Traumatic experiences with distress during the pre-migration, transit and post-migration resettlement phases (Khawaja, White, Schweitzer, & Greenslade, 2008)
- Mental health problems increased with pre-migration trauma (Schweitzer, Melville, Steel, & Lacherez, 2006)
Cross Cultural Adjustment

- Honeymoon
- Culture shock
- Adjustment
- Mastery

(Gautam & Vishwakarma, 2012; Lee, 2006).
Research Question

What is the situational transition experience of former refugees from South Sudan who have resettled in a community in the American Midwest?
Methods

- Grounded Theory (Corbin & Strauss 2008)
- Speak English, 18 years of age
- Exempt status approved by South Dakota State University Human Subject Committee IRB
- Gift card
- Three focus groups
  - “What is it like to transition from being a refugee from South Sudan to being resettled here in America?”
Participants

- 10 men, 8 women
- 28-67 years of age
- Varying Sudanese ethnicities
- 10 different languages and tribal dialects
- 13 married, 14 had children
  - Additional people live in the home
- Education: High school-trade school-advanced college degree
- Employment (14) - interpreter, physical habilitation assistant, examiner, welder, food industry worker, store owner, packer, support professional, producer, and housekeeper
Arrival

• 1980’s $n=6$
• 1990’s $n=6$
• 2000’s $n=1$
• Journey took 1-15 years
• Lived in up to six other countries
Results

• Core process of Reaching for a Better Life in America
Brought
Hopeful
Expectations

Brought Abilities

Brought Beliefs

Arrival:
Encountering
New Realities

The Clash

Being Understood

Understanding

Resources from Others

Gain

Loss

Reaching for a Better Life in America
Antecedents

• Brought hopeful expectations
• Brought abilities
• Brought beliefs
Upon Arrival: Encountering New Realities

• Brought Hopeful Expectations
  – Positive outcomes
  – Land of freedom, land of hope

• Brought Abilities
  – Previous knowledge and skills
  – Education

• Brought Beliefs
  – Mores, values, ethics
Brought Hopeful Expectations

• Assumptions that resettling in a new community will have positive outcomes
  • *Living in a utopia*
  • *Like when I come here, I think I can get all of my dream*
  • *So we come here for next generation to build our back home better for what we didn’t have before*
  • *When we are coming here, we believe the land of freedom, the land of democracy, the land of hope, the land of opportunity*
Brought Beliefs

Salient, deep, bedrock belief structure of interrelated internal convictions, perceived truths, and personal subjective realities
Brought Beliefs About Others

- **Extending Sudanese-like welcome**
  
  We need to know our neighbor. We love our neighbor to know us. This is our culture, we want it.

- **Rules for accepted touching and physical contact between persons**
  
  Somebody spanking a man? Don’t bring that kind of nonsense to a Sudanese person and start touching them inappropriately. You gonna get killed.
Brought Beliefs About Family

- You don’t just live with a man because you love them and then you’re not married. What do you call them? Are they husband and wife? No! Boyfriend? We don’t even have that word in our culture
- They <parents> don’t kiss in front of their children
- Like an insurance policy, having children. It’s kind of like that. If you grow them, they’ll grow you. We do not have nursing homes at home
In our culture, we put the education is the most important thing. Nobody will go to school and just drop out, you don’t have electricity, just you catching up with the sunlight to do your homework.
Brought Abilities

- Describe previous knowledge and skills spanning varied life and work experiences, linguistic ability, and formal education

Not all of us from South Sudan are illiterate, or don’t have any education, language, and employable skills

Many of our people have experience—they’re supposed to be doctors in Sudan, and lawyers, and high professors
Encountering New Realities

Resources from Others:
Formal
• Resettlement agencies
• English classes
• Employment assistance

Resources from Others:
Informal
• Friends
• Other Sudanese
Resources from Others

• Formal assistance from people and institutions responsible for helping new arrivals

• Examples: basic needs for housing, food, household goods, English language classes, and employment assistance services

• Informal assistance developed by the refugee after arrival

• Examples: serendipitous friendships, relationships, and networks
Encountering New Realities

Resources from Others: Formal
• Resettlement agencies
• English classes
• Employment assistance

Resources from Others: Informal
• Friends
• Other Sudanese
Encountering New Realities
Encountering New Realities

• Being Understood
  Describes outcomes if context-intended communication content and meaning is successfully conveyed to others

• Understanding
  Describes conditions and outcomes if context-intended communication content and meaning is successfully conveyed to the recipient
Car Example?
Encountering New Realities: Gains

perceived advantageous changes and positive consequences in interactions between resources from others, being understood, and understanding.

Examples: living in a safe environment without war, owning cars, earning an income, and living in modern houses with conveniences like indoor plumbing and electricity
Encountering New Realities: Gains

- Perceived advantageous changes and positive consequences in interactions between resources from others, being understood, and understanding.

- Safe environment - without war
- Owning cars
- Earning an income
- Live in modern houses with conveniences (indoor plumbing and electricity)
Encountering New Realities: Losses

Negative consequences when *resources from others, being understood, and understanding* interact destructively and desired outcomes are not achieved.

**Examples**: inability to discipline children, failing in school, fractured intergenerational ties, altered family roles and relationships, physical stress-induced ailments, personal property loss, and blocked advancement and employment prospects.
Encountering New Realities: Losses

• Negative consequences when resources from others, being understood, and understanding interact destructively and desired outcomes are not achieved.

• Inability to discipline
• Failing in school
• Fractured family ties
• Altered family roles
• Stress-induced ailment
• Personal property loss
• Blocked advancement
• Blocked employment prospects
The Clash

• conglomeration of dissonance between antecedent “broughts” after encountering new realities in the new home

• persist in a interactive zone as more new realities are encountered

• Results in second looks at the “broughts’’

  Life [here] has not become smoother
  being brought into town and just left without directions

Soon after you put your degree away, you hide it or you send it back home for display. But I am not qualified here.
The Clash

- Conglomeration of dissonance between antecedent “broughts” after encountering new realities in the new home
- Persistent interactive zone as more new realities are encountered
- Results in second looks at the “broughts”
Shifts in Hopeful Expectations

• We sacrifice
• Life [here] has not become smoother
• Paying bills – nothing is for free
• Some of our people just give up, work in a [physical labor job] even they have certificate and he just work, and he just say OK nobody’s listening,
Battling the Brought Abilities, Gains, Losses Fit

• not a prideful <people> … assume that whoever saw you or whoever you work with they will know
• Underqualified then overqualified for the same job

Soon after you put your degree away, you hide it or you send it back home for display. But I am not qualified here
Battling the Brought Beliefs, Losses, Gains Fit

• Non-Sudanese welcome
• Being brought into town and just left without directions
• Discouragement, unhappiness, not being accepted or liked, being prejudged and avoided by neighbors, wanting to quit trying
Formal Resources from Others

- Declines over time
- Primarily short-term startup help
- Less responsive to refugee’s “Ask us our need” for mentors and adjusted assistance over time
Informal Resources from Others

• More like the Sudanese-like welcome than the formal resources

• Others
  – include neighbors, other Sudanese refugees, friends
  – Share a language, culture

• Help examples
  – Employment
  – Enrolling in classes
Losses Regarding the Children

- In jail
- Become pregnant
- Use drugs
- Fail in not completing high school, attending college, or earning credentials for ‘good’ jobs

Unacceptable manners

- Selfishness
- disrespectful towards adults and visitors
- Immodest dressing *pants all the way down*
Gains

• Require strategy development
  – to assure understanding and being understood
  – Reading and responding to new situations
• Persistence
Discussion

• Earlier models claiming migrant transition and adjustment occurs in predictable, distinct stages was not supported
• Transition begins at arrival and persists
• Safety nets are needed for successful transitions
• Utopia is not the end product of Researching for a better life in America
Recommendations

• Inform providers regarding:
  – perceived obstructions and blocks in understanding and being understood
  – Non-linear nature of their needs
  – The refugee voice that wants to be part of the solution
Future Opportunities

- Learning the language
- Parenting in a new culture
- Navigating the legal system
- Existing safety nets
We want America to take time to listen to our community.
The Clash

- *Life [here] has not become smoother*
- *Being brought into town and just left without directions*
- Soon after you put your degree away, you hide it or you send it back home for display. But I am not qualified here.
References


