To be a Family:

Changes experienced within south Sudanese families in Australia

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Abstract

This research focuses on changes to family as experienced by men and women from south Sudanese backgrounds who have resettled in Melbourne. The study investigated factors that have influenced change, documenting experiences that are unique as well those common amongst participants. Concurrently the study investigated experiences of accessing community and government services for assistance with family related difficulties and sought the opinions of participants on how services could be improved to better meet the needs of families from south Sudan living in Melbourne.

The findings reveal how gender, age and personal agency each contributes to how family is experienced by individuals. Although some experiences were shared by participants within gender and age groups, others were not, demonstrating the importance in non-essentialising all people from the same ethnic or cultural background in research and community service development with refugee groups. The findings illustrate three factors influencing change; interactions with Australian social environments, transnational ties to kin and concurrent south Sudanese culture in Africa and interactions within the local south Sudanese ‘community’ in Melbourne. These influences impacted on how participants understood and participated within their families in Australia, placing them in unique and often conflictual situations, which are mostly unrecognised by Australian service providers.

The community-based collaborative research approach undertaken for the study models the practice approaches suggested in the findings; namely, the importance of working both with refugee ‘communities’ and within their existing structures, which may sit outside traditional service sectors and research settings. If researchers, policy makers and service practitioners adopt collaborative approaches to practice, they are more likely to establish positive working relationships with people from refugee backgrounds, ultimately leading to service provision that is more appropriate and therefore more helpful.
Declaration

This is to certify that

(i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the Masters,
(ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,
(iii) the thesis is 33,000 words in length, inclusive of footnotes, but exclusive of references and appendices.
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Acronyms

AASW  Australian Association of Social Workers
AHRC  Australian Human Rights Commission
AMEP  Adult Migrant English Program
CALD  Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CMY   Centre for Multicultural Youth
DHS   Department of Human Services
DIAC  Department of Immigration and Citizenship
DIMIA Department of Immigration, Multiculturalism and Indigenous Affairs (former name of the DIAC)
ESL   English as a Second Language
FaHCSIA Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
HSS   Humanitarian Settlement Strategy
MIC   Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne)
MRC   Migrant Resource Centre
MRCNWR Migrant Resource Centre North West Region
PAR   Participatory Action Research
PLS   Plain Language Statement
RAP   Refugee Action Program
SERMRC South East Region Migrant Resource Centre
SGP   Settlement Grants Program
SHP   Special Humanitarian Program
RCOA  Refugee Council of Australia
UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VEOHRC Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission
VFST  Victorian Foundation for the Survivors of Torture
VMC   Victorian Multicultural Commission
WA    Western Australia
Introduction

In recent years, men and women from Sudanese backgrounds have been publically criticized for their failure to adjust and adapt to ‘Australian’ ways of life. Although several studies have previously documented settlement challenges, there has been little investigation into how changes within families have been experienced and what has influenced and prevented change. Similarly, whilst migration research focuses largely on settlement experiences, there is less emphasis on experiences of migrants and refugees with the service sector or investigations of how service providers can better assist.

This research aims to document how men and women from south Sudanese backgrounds have experienced changes to family since arriving in Australia. It focuses on what has influenced and prevented change, alongside investigation of how community and government services can better support former refugees from south Sudan with family related difficulties. The research does not attempt to understand nor explain the position of all men and women from south Sudan living in Melbourne. Instead, it recognises the diversity of lived experiences amongst participants, alongside acknowledging experiences reported as common within the local south Sudanese ‘community’. This approach aims to minimise essentialism by recognising what is unique and what is shared in the experiences of men and women from south Sudanese backgrounds in Australia.

The research adopted a community-based collaborative approach, including south Sudanese community leaders as collaborative partners in the research process. This allowed the research to be conducted alongside some of those being researched, whilst respecting existing structures present within the south Sudanese ‘community’ in Melbourne. The success of this approach illustrates its benefit for conducting future research and developing effective community services alongside refugee ‘communities’.

Background

Between 2001 and 2007, the majority of refugees accepted for permanent resettlement in Australia came from Sudanese backgrounds (DIAC 2007). Years of civil war in the Sudan saw thousands of men, women and young people forced to flee their homes, livelihoods and homeland.
Several studies have been conducted to investigate resettlement experiences of former refugees from south Sudan. These studies focus on integration measures such as accessing appropriate housing, employment and educational opportunities (Simich et al. 2006; Harte et al. 2009). Others investigated individuals’ mental health, including impacts of living with trauma in Australia (Schweitzer et al. 2006) and how people from refugee backgrounds have coped and found resilience as they adapt to a new society (Goodman 2004; Khawaja et al. 2008).

These studies each reveal the differences in ideological understandings, cultural and social practices of Africa compared with those of Australia. Despite mentioning that changed family structures and gender roles impact upon resettlement experiences, there are no studies to date that document experiences of change within families from south Sudan. Studies investigating family changes in other refugee and migrant groups reveal significant patterns indicating how change is experienced differently by men, women and young people. It is unknown if these patterns are similar amongst those from south Sudanese backgrounds in Australia.

Few studies comment on how service providers can better work with south Sudanese men and women to assist with family changes. Excluding the perspectives and understandings of south Sudanese men and women in service development means service models based on ‘best practice’ approaches are grounded in western understandings of what it means to be a family and to receive help and support. These approaches have been previously criticized for having little relevance to those from south Sudan (Ling 2004; Wani 2008; Westoby 2008).

Consequently, programs and services are developed on knowledge bases grounded in experiences of other refugee groups, or people from western backgrounds. Adopting this ‘one size fits all’ approach essentialises all people from refugee backgrounds as necessarily the same, ignoring differences and assuming all require the same service intervention. Consequently, gathering an understanding of how men and women from south Sudanese backgrounds experience and reconstruct family in Australia will assist service providers to implement best practice approaches. Documenting how men and women from south Sudanese backgrounds have experienced service intervention in
Australia and gathering their suggestions to improve it will provide a knowledge base for future service development and intervention.

**Definitions**

McDonald-Wilmsen and Gifford (2009) observe the difficulty in defining ‘family’, which is influenced by cultural understandings and experiences. The findings similarly reveal the way that family is understood and experienced by participants is different to assumptions about families within Australian policies and service sectors, which largely assume nuclear constructs. Therefore, instead of providing and thus prescribing a definition of family, the findings have been presented to illustrate how participants themselves understand and experience family, and how this definition has changed for them since resettling in Australia.

The findings similarly reveal how men and women from south Sudanese backgrounds construct and conceive of ‘community’, including where it is and how they interact with it. Their explanations point largely to the definition used by Westoby (2008, p. 484) in his study conducted alongside former refugees from south Sudan in Queensland, namely, “…a network of relations that contribute to a sense of belonging and connection”. This definition is thus used in defining ‘community’ throughout the thesis.

Although participants used the term repeatedly, the assumption of a necessary ‘community’ amongst refugee diasporas is problematic, as it fails to acknowledge individual experiences and denies personal agency (Cohen 2004). It similarly unfairly attributes uniform characteristics to all individuals from the same ethnic background, assuming homogeneity and creating generalisations within mainstream media, academic literature, public policy and community service sectors (Robbins & Aksoy 2001; Mahler & Pessar 2003; Cohen 2004; Zeleza 2005). The term will subsequently be used in inverted commas throughout the thesis for emphasis of this fact.

The UNHCR defines *refugee* as one, who

“...owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself
of the protection of that country or return there because there is a fear of persecution...

(UNHCR 2005)

Whilst all participants were found to be refugees by the UNHCR, the term refugee is not attached to participants. This is because previous research suggests its negative and unrepresentative implications, which can position individuals as necessarily vulnerable, ‘other’ (Due 2008; McKinnon 2008). Subsequently, participants are referred to as former refugees or those from south Sudanese backgrounds.

**Study Overview**

The first chapter outlines the research problem and introduces the field of study. This includes a brief history of the Sudanese civil war, an outline of Australia’s Humanitarian Program and the arrival of men and women from south Sudan in Australia. The second chapter reviews the literature on experiences of family change and models of best practice for working with refugee groups. This reveals vast gaps in research undertaken on family change amongst men and women from south Sudan. It similarly reflects the need for further investigation into models of best practice to work effectively with families from south Sudanese backgrounds. The third chapter outlines the methodology for the study, providing a rationale and explanation of the research processes taken. It reflects on the success of the community-based participatory approach taken for the research and outlines the study’s strengths and limitations.

The fourth chapter presents the findings from interviews and focus groups. The findings have been presented in five key themes; 1) Moving from collectivist to individualist structured societies, 2) Changes to domestic duty roles, paid work and hierarchical family positions, 3) Transnational influences on families in Australia, 4) Ties to the local south Sudanese ‘community’ in Melbourne, 5) The role of the community and government service sector. The findings focus on the voices of participants, allowing the reader to gather insight into participants’ changed experiences and understandings of family since arriving in Australia.

The fifth chapter provides a discussion of the findings in light of relevant literature, highlighting the unique social space men and women from south Sudanese backgrounds
occupy in Australia. This chapter centres on three influences of change – impositions of Australian social environments, transnational ties to kin and concurrent African culture and membership to the local south Sudanese ‘community’ in Melbourne – each shaping how men, women and young people individually and similarly experience and understand family in Australia. The chapter concludes that to effectively assist south Sudanese families in Australia, service providers must work both alongside and within ‘communities’ themselves. This approach respects existing ‘community’ structures and culturally relevant approaches, whilst providing an opportunity to challenge western ethnocentric assumptions that can underpin service provision in Australia.
Chapter 1 - The forced migration of south Sudanese men and women

Sudan’s civil war – The emergence of south Sudanese refugees
In 1955, a year away from independence, the first phase of civil war began in the Sudan (Nasong’o & Murunga 2005). British-Egyptian rulers had divided north from south Sudan, attempting to cordon off the south to maintain traditional African culture. The creation of an independent government in the north to rule both north and south sparked clashes that spiralled into a decade of bloody warfare (Nasong’o & Murunga 2005).

The Addis Ababa Peace Agreement signed in 1972 created an interval from conflict, however, clashes resumed in 1979 when oil was discovered in the south. Hostilities amplified in 1983 at the implementation Shari’a (Islamic law) across the country, imposing Islam over the largely Christian and Animist southerners, igniting what has become known as the second civil war in the Sudan (Nasong’o & Murunga 2005; Jok & Hutchinson 1999).

Under the leadership of John Garang, southern Sudan’s Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) was formed and began fighting northern government forces (Randolph 2002). Conflict occurred largely in the south, with government militia sweeping through southern towns and villages in brutal and bloody displays of power. Thousands of southerners were murdered and millions were displaced. Hundreds of women and girls were raped, kidnapped or taken as slaves to the north and entire villages were burned to the ground (Deng 2008; Randolph 2002).

While the second civil war officially ended with a peace agreement signed in 2005 the devastation created still resonates with all Sudan’s people. In January 2011, south Sudanese nationals (including thousands resettled abroad) voted on whether to become independent from the north, reigniting debate over oil in the south and rekindling violence and conflict in southern regions (Boswell 2011).
Life in Flight
During the conflict thousands of south Sudanese were forced to flee their home towns and villages (Edward 2007). Families became separated as individuals ran into the bush, often without time to check who was with them. Thousands walked in groups to neighbouring countries, including Ethiopia and Uganda, where makeshift shanty towns became permanent refugee camps, many of which still exist today (Randolph 2002). Lack of communications infrastructure hindered efforts to locate relatives and friends, survivors spending years not knowing whether family members had survived (Randolph 2002). Men, women and children thus found themselves as refugees.

Many from south Sudan who are now in Australia lived in Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps in Kenya or in Gambella in Ethiopia (DIAC 2007). Others lived in camps in Northern Uganda (DIAC 2007). Most people who came to Australia via these countries spent several years in refugee camps, without sufficient food, water or clothing and with limited education, training or employment opportunities (Jansen 2008; DIAC 2007).

Others sought refuge in Egypt, where people lived in the wider community, but in impoverished conditions. In 1978 the Wadi El Ni Treaty granted Sudanese nationals the right to live and work freely in Egypt, however conditions were harsh and those who could find work were often subject to demanding work conditions and long working hours for little pay (Edward 2007; Hassan 2000).

During this time Sudanese-born men and women could register with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to request permanent resettlement in the west. In 2000, eleven years after the outbreak of the second civil war, the UNHCR began resettling the first Sudanese refugees from Kakuma refugee camp to the USA, Canada, Europe and Australia (Jansen 2008).

South Sudanese refugees arrive in Australia
Between 1997 and 2007 approximately 20,000 Sudanese-born people arrived in Australia, 98% arriving through Australia’s offshore Humanitarian Program (DIAC 2007; SERMRC 2007). Under the offshore Humanitarian Program individuals register as refugees with the UNHCR and if granted a visa, are entitled to permanently settle in Australia and to apply for citizenship after four years (DIAC 2009a). Those who apply onshore have their
applications processed by the DIAC in Australia. In 2010/2011 Australia allocated 13,750 places for refugees, split across the two programs (RCOA 2010a).

From 2001 to 2007 Sudanese-born individuals comprised 40%-70% of Australia’s offshore Humanitarian Program (DIAC 2007). Of these, 74% arrived under the Special Humanitarian Program (SHP), a subcategory for people living outside their country of origin by who have, “…suffered substantial discrimination amounting to a gross violation of human rights in their home country and who had family or community ties to Australia” (DIAC 2009b, p. 38). This dropped to less than 4% in 2009/2010 when the DIAC re-assessed priorities and committed to increased refugee intakes from other countries (RCOA 2010b). The small number of visas currently allocated to south Sudanese-born individuals has meant longer waiting times for those in Africa to join relatives and friends in Australia (McDonald-Wlimsen & Gifford 2009).

The 2006 census revealed 36% of Sudanese-born Australians live in Victoria, the largest population of any Australian state or territory (DIAC 2007). The majority of those in Australia are Christian (83%), with smaller populations identifying as Muslim (12%) and ‘other’ (5%) (DIAC 2007). This indicates the majority of Sudanese-born Australians originated from the south, where Christianity and Animism are predominant religions (Shandy 2002).

Most people from Sudanese backgrounds (50%) arrived as part of a family group of three or more people, whilst 20% arrived as part of a family with six or more people (DAIC 2007). A further 37% arrived alone, reflecting the dispersion of family members due to war.

Entering Australia on a Humanitarian Visa entitles men and women access to specific support services to assist their resettlement. The DIAC funded Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (HSS) provides intensive case management support upon arrival. This includes social and geographical orientation, support to set up social security payments¹, bank accounts, applying for Medicare, assistance in school and childcare enrolments and

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¹ Humanitarian entrants are usually entitled to a social security payment through Centrelink (DHS 2010).
general information and support (DIAC 2009a). Humanitarian entrants are also entitled to 510 hours of free English (ESL) classes.

After the first six months in Australia, humanitarian entrants are entitled to access Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs) for up to five years (DIAC 2009). MRCs are located in different geographical regions around Australia and are funded largely through DIAC under the Settlement Grants Program (SGP). The SGP is aimed at assisting refugees to, “…become self reliant and participate equitably in Australian society as soon as possible after arrival” (DIAC 2009a). This includes services such as settlement casework, information sessions, social support, therapeutic and educative groups for men, women and young people (DIAC 2009a).

State governments also provide programs for humanitarian entrants. In Victoria the Refugee Minor Program, administered through the Department of Human Services (DHS) provides intensive case management support for young people under 18 years who arrive unaccompanied by an adult. Other state programs include the Refugee Action Program (RAP) implemented by the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC) and the Diversity and Social Cohesion Program. These programs each offer community development projects which are often short term and community-driven, focussing on specific needs of different refugee ‘communities’ (VMC 2010).

Recognising the strain that resettlement can place on refugee families and relationships, in 2004 the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) implemented a funding stream to provide family relationship programs and therapeutic services for humanitarian entrants (RCOA 2010a). The program, which continues to be funded in 2010/2011, provides, “…family relationship counselling, adolescent mediation and family therapy, men and family relationships services, and specialised family violence services” (FaHCSIA 2009).
Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Despite several studies focusing on instances and influences of family change amongst migrant and refugee groups, there are significant gaps in the literature investigating those changes as experienced by former refugees from south Sudan. Several studies of south Sudanese men and women focus largely on experiences of early settlement, investigating participation in labour markets, education and housing. Others look at mental health and correlations between resettlement measures and psycho-social well-being. However, these studies fail to explore how men and women have experienced changes to family and the impact this has on gender roles, individual responsibilities and power positions within families. There is a similar lack of literature documenting experiences of these individuals with the family service sector, revealing the need to build a knowledge base to assist service providers develop and implement appropriate programs to assist families from south Sudan as they experience change within their families in Australia.

Family changes – the separate experiences of men and women

Researchers have recently encouraged the field of migration studies to recognise gendered experiences of migration and integration within host societies (Moghissi 2003; Mahler & Pessar 2006; Binder & Tosic 2005; Hyndman 2010). Traditionally, migration literature focussed largely on experiences of men, positioning women and children as mere companions (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1999; Dion & Dion 2002; Mahler & Pessar 2003; Qin 2009).

To counter such bias studies were undertaken to document specific experiences of women (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1999; Duany 2001; Darvishpur 2002; Dion & Dion 2002; Lee et al. 2002, Hopkins 2010). Studies suggest that women experience greater difficulties than men during resettlement, increased depression (Noh et al. 1992) and psychological distress (Schweitzer et al. 2006). Consequently how family is experienced post-migration must also be considered from the different perspectives of men and women, if researchers are to gain relevant insight into experiences of family migration (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1999; Menjivar 2000; Moghissi 2003; Hyndman 2010).

The importance of analysing family change from the perspective of men and women separately becomes apparent when considering families from south Sudan. South
Sudanese families are traditional patriarchal, with men (who pay a dowry upon marriage to the woman’s family) at the ‘head’ of the family, responsible for providing for the family and maintaining order in the home (Deng 1980; Duany & Duany 2001; Dei Wal 2004; Springvale Monash Legal Service 2007; MIC 2008a). Wives are expected to be subservient to men and obey their husbands at all times. Women’s responsibilities are in home duties and child rearing (Duany 2001; Dei Wal 2004; SERMRC 2007; Springvale Monash Legal Service 2007; MIC 2008a). Although this construction appears to position women in subordinate family positions, Darvishpour (2002) notes that women within patriarchal marriages should not be contextualised or theorised as necessarily so, as this fails to recognise their abilities and agency within this structure.

But what does the literature say about how these structures and roles have changed for families from south Sudan? When analysing family change amongst migrant and refugee groups in host societies, researchers have suggested there are a number of influential factors. Foner’s (1997) framework for family change suggests five factors: external forces within host society environments (including social institutions, cultural norms about family relationships and gender roles and reception by the host society and legal systems), pre-migration experiences, migrant group demographics in the host society and personal agency. Boyle and Ali (2010) have recently built upon Foner’s framework, suggesting the importance of continued connections to people and culture overseas – transnational influences – which can similarly influence how migrants and refugees experience changes to family within a host society.

When south Sudanese families arrive in Australia, they are faced with a new social environment, into which they are expected to integrate. This illustrates the first of Foner’s (1997) suggested influences of family change – external forces within host societies.

The abolition of the *White Australia Policy* in the 1970s brought with it new waves of migrants and refugees from Asia and later Africa (DIMIA 1999). The shift similarly brought with it an immigration policy that abandoned the necessary assumption that all migrants should assimilate into the mainstream, abandoning their culture of origin in favour of becoming Australian (Spinks 2009). Today Australian immigration policies focus on *integration*, defined as, “…the ability to participate fully in economic, social, cultural and
political activities, without having to relinquish one’s own distinct ethnocultural identity and culture” (Valtonen 2004, p. 470). But how does this ‘integration’ affect refugee families?

For migrants and refugees entering contemporary Australia there is an assumption they will achieve settlement goals, which will lead to their ‘successful’ integration (DIAC 2009a). These include securing employment, accessing health, social and welfare services, gaining English literacy and forming social networks (Dhanji 2009; DIAC 2009a).

Studies of former refugees from south Sudan focus largely on these measures. Research has investigated employment experiences (Fanjoy et al. 2005; Simich et al. 2006), language and communication skills (Perry 2009; Hebbani et al. 2010), experiences in undertaking education (Warriner 2007; Turner & Fozdar 2010) and child rearing practices (Ebbeck & Cerna 2007). Others explore experiences of young people, including challenges of acculturating into new social environments, navigating education systems, social and peer groups and discrimination (Cassidy & Gow 2005; CMY 2006, 2007; Poppitt & Frey 2007; VHREOC 2008; Nunn 2010).

These studies reveal the difficulties in achieving integration ‘successes’. Khawaja and colleagues (2008) found the greatest settlement challenge amongst former Sudanese refugees in Australia was acquiring skills to navigate and understand society. There is often a lack of appropriate and meaningful jobs available; access to retraining is limited, non-recognition of skills and overseas qualifications is widespread and language barriers and racism are substantial (Perry 2009; Spinks 2009; Hebbani 2010; Hatoss & Huisjer 2010; Olliff 2010).

Studies illustrate widespread racism experienced by migrants and refugees in Australia, US and Canada, ranging from social and economic exclusion to overt abuse (Simich et. al 2006; Cosmiro et. al 2007; VEOHRC 2008; VEOHRC 2010). Even enduring a ‘refugee’ label itself was found to have negative implications on newcomers (Colic-Peisker & Walker 2003). This was particularly poignant when former Australian Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews publically claimed that individuals from Africa and particularly Sudan, “...don’t seem to be settling and adjusting into the Australian way of life” (Collins 2007, p. 2). Such experiences can lead to feelings of social exclusion and failure in resettlement (Fanjoy et al. 2005; Harte et al. 2009; Hatoss & Huisjer 2010).
Shakespeare-Finch and Wickham (2010) found increased acculturation stress amongst Sudanese men and women in Australia who had difficulty finding work, appropriate housing and difficulties in the education system. Some participants viewed this as the Australian government’s discrimination against refugees.

These studies illustrate how host society reception, structures and environments can impact upon former refugees from south Sudan (Foner 1997; Boyle & Ali 2010). Although Foner’s (1997) framework suggests these factors similarly influence change within families, the studies undertaken of these measures amongst those from south Sudan offer little insight into the specific effects upon families. Nevertheless, investigations of host culture influences on family change amongst other migrant and refugee groups reveal recurring themes within the literature, which provide a framework for analysing family change amongst those from south Sudan.

The RCOA’s (2010a) consultation of humanitarian entrants in 2010 revealed that one of the greatest settlement challenges amongst refugee groups was the significant impact of change in family power dynamics. Studies repeatedly reveal that when women gain employment within host societies and men do not, traditional breadwinner roles are disrupted, shifting gendered responsibilities amongst husbands and wives (Kibria 1994; Lim 1997; Menjivar 1999; Darvishpour 2002; Dolo & Gilgun 2002; Babou 2008; Hyman et al. 2008; Mungai & Pease 2009). Earning an income may provide women with access and control of family economies for the first time, which can provide them with a greater opportunity to influence decisions within the family (Darishpour 2002; Dolo & Gilgun 2002; Shimoni et al. 2003). This shift in gender roles can sometimes mean a simultaneous shift in power positions within families (Darishpour 2002; Mungai & Pease 2009).

Donaldson and Howson (2009) explain how migrant and refugee men arrive in host societies with established beliefs and practices about what it means to be a man, including roles and responsibilities they attribute to themselves within the home. Imposition of the host society’s laws, cultural norms and social institutions can mean men lose the ability to undertake these responsibilities, challenging identities and constructions of manhood (Shimoni et al. 2003; Donaldson & Howson 2009; Pease 2009). Studies illustrate how this is particularly true of men who are used to patriarchal family structures or who previously
occupied breadwinner roles, causing feelings of disempowerment and hostility (Dolo & Gilgun 2002; Shimoni et al. 2003; Pease 2009; Boyle & Ali 2010).

Studies suggest that when host societies are perceived as unwelcoming, migrants and refugees are more likely to reject host societal norms and culture (Berry 1997; Popkin 2001; Mungai 2007; Due 2008; Dhanji 2009; Farrugia 2009). Pease (2009) explains how this can lead to migrant men feeling alienated by ‘the system’ which they interpret to favour women.

Women’s exposure to human rights and gender equality ideologies in western host societies can influence departures from traditionally patriarchal family systems (Darvishpour 2002; Dolo & Gilgun 2002; Babou 2008; Boyle & Ali 2010). Access to support services that condemn violence towards women and having increased economic agency similarly provides women with the opportunity to separate from partners, an option unavailable for many women in their cultures of origin (Darvishpour 2002).

Pease (2009) reflects on Kandiyoti’s (1988) notion of the patriarchal bargain, the domestic division of labour, economic contributions and decision making abilities of spouses. The theory suggests that as migration shifts responsibilities between husbands and wives, it similarly shifts the bargaining power for women to negotiate for personal desires in the household and relationship. Qin (2009) observes that women’s access to resources can elevate their status both in society and in the home.

However literature also suggests these changes are not always empowering for women. Studies reveal examples of men who refuse to relinquish family decision making power or undertake new domestic responsibilities in the home, even when their wives are working long hours in paid employment (Babou 2008; Pease 2009; Boyle & Ali 2010). Illustrating men’s rejection of host culture environments, these studies describe how men try to reassert power within families, becoming controlling and abusive towards their wives (Hojat et al. 2000; Babou 2008; Pease & Rees 2008; Boyle & Ali 2010). As a result, some women face increased burden within families, becoming solely responsible for both paid and domestic work duties (Babou 2008; Pease 2009; Boyle & Ali 2010).
It thus becomes evident that along with experiences of migration, experiences of family change are similarly gendered (Tosic 2005; Mahler & Pessar 2003; Moghissi 2003; Dion & Dion 2001; Binder & Hojat et al. 2000). Moghissi (2003) observes that the different ways men and women respond to host societal norms, culture and laws can consequently influence changes within migrant families. However, many studies (Duany 2001; Donaldson & Howardson 2009; Este & Tachble 2009; Grabska 2009; Hopkins 2010) investigate family experiences of one gender group in isolation, failing to capture the subsequent experiences and understandings of other family members. Although important and often necessary to highlight the experiences of particular gender groups in isolation, this limits studies to one-sided representations of changed experiences and relationships within resettled families, providing scope for future research that includes both men and women.

So are these patterns true of men and women from south Sudan? Whilst studies investigating the changed experiences of family roles, responsibilities and power positions are noticeably absent in the literature, studies focusing on other areas of resettlement indicate some examples of family change.

Investigating experiences of Australian educational settings, Hatoss and Huijser (2010) found women faced barriers to accessing education where men did not, due to women’s increased childcare and domestic responsibilities in the home. Participants explained how this increased experiences of social isolation amongst women and meant they had limited employment prospects in the future.

Contrastingly, Este and Tachble’s (2009) exploration of the role of Sudanese fathers in Canada revealed men’s increased participation in parenting responsibilities since resettlement. The study explains that men were supportive of their wives’ employment and participation in educational opportunities, assisting their wives with domestic work in Canada for the first time. Whilst this study contradicts the majority of literature illustrating migrant men’s resistance to undertaking ‘women’s work’, it excludes the voices of women, who may explain this arrangement differently. It similarly focuses on parenting responsibilities alone, offering little insight into how this has altered other aspects of family life.
Studies investigating employment experiences amongst former refugees from south Sudan reveal the difficulties in finding employment, however they do not mention if or how this has affected family dynamics, power positions or relationships (Fanjoy et al. 2005; Simich et al. 2006). These studies investigate experiences of both gender groups without recognising gendered experiences of migration and family, which may impact upon experiences and understandings and reveal important insights into changed family roles, relationships and power positions.

Studies revealing the most significant findings of family change amongst men and women from south Sudan are buried in unpublished documents and reports. Lejukole’s (2008) PhD thesis focuses on settlement experiences of former refugees from south Sudan in Adelaide. In discussing marriage relationships Lejukole (2008, p. 241) describes a, “…gender role reversal which has in turn contributed to the reshaping of the relationships between men and women, and in particular, of the power relations that has [sic] existed between them”.

Lejukole’s findings thus mirror patterns of spousal change evident in studies undertaken with other refugee groups. Lejukole explains how access to social security payments has increased power positions for women, who consequently seek opportunity to participate in family decision making and encourage husbands to help with housework. For men, this has fostered feelings of resentment towards women, and Australian cultural norms. While this study therefore illustrates examples of family change, discussions of family comprise only one section of a larger study on general settlement experiences. Subsequently, the influences of change and how this has affected different members of families is not thoroughly investigated.

Nevertheless, similar findings have been reported by community service agencies in Melbourne. Evaluating a discussion group for south Sudanese men, the Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne) (MIC) (2006) explains how women’s access to social security payments has been interpreted by men as the Australian government taking over their traditional role as family providers. The men thus felt undermined at being denied the opportunity to be financially responsible for their families. They felt the government policy that provides payments to women challenges their role as the powerful family ‘head’.
Broadway (2008) similarly describes a clinical practice scenario at the Ecumenical Migration Centre (EMC) in Melbourne. A male client from south Sudan drew two genograms\(^2\) depicting the change that had occurred within his family since arriving in Australia. The first genogram illustrates his family in Africa. The client depicts himself as a large circle at the top of the page, arms sweeping down and around his wife, who sits directly beneath him, and their children depicted as much smaller circles below. The contrasting image representing his family in Australia consists of a vertical line of small circles. The children sit at the top of the page, the wife beneath them, a dog beneath her and then himself, a tiny circle at the bottom of the page.

Reflecting the MIC findings, Broadway observes this man’s hierarchical construction of family has been inverted in Australia. Broadway describes the client’s consequent feelings of disempowerment and his perception that Australian society is biased towards children and women over men. These reports consequently illustrate how Australian social environments and social policies such as providing social security payments to women have led to a perceived shift in previously hierarchical family structures.

While these reports are leaders in revealing changed experiences of family amongst former refugees from south Sudan, there are limitations evident within them. Each report focuses almost exclusively on changed power positions within families, exploring changed access to resources such as incomes and legal systems, which uphold human rights and condemn men’s violence against women. This excludes investigation of changes to particular gender roles and responsibilities and how this has affected family relationships. The MIC and Broadway reports similarly explore only those changes experienced by men, excluding the voices of women and young people.

Despite clear gaps in literature on changed marriage relationships amongst former refugees from south Sudan, some studies explore changed relationships between parents and their children. Whilst not mentioned in Foner’s (1997) framework, Benson (1994) suggests intergenerational change can similarly influence family change. Studies reveal

\(^2\) A genogram is a pictorial representation of a family, often used by social workers and health professionals to assist in visualising family and medical histories, and relationships between family members (McCullough-Chavis 2004)
how this holds true, describing instances of young people asserting independence in the household, challenging parents’ instructions and thus their own traditionally subordinate family power positions (CMY 2006, 2007; Puoch 2006; Qin 2006; Ebbeck & Cerna 2007; Poppitt & Frey 2007; Hebbani et al. 2010).

Puoch (2006) describes how intergenerational change is evident within Sudanese refugee families, particularly when children adapt to a new a culture and way of life more quickly than their parents. Children’s family roles and responsibilities might subsequently change assist parents with interpreting or navigating of social systems, giving them increased responsibilities in families. Hebbani et al. (2010) draw on Puoch’s work, suggesting a ‘conflict of cultures’ between older and younger members of Sudanese former refugee families, where adoption of host society norms by children can be viewed as a rebellion against traditional Sudanese culture and practices by older family members.

Foner’s (1997) framework for family change similarly suggests changes in family or migrant group demographics can create change within families, illustrated by an example of a migrant community where men greatly outnumber women. The scarcity of eligible wives subsequently increases power for women within spousal relationships and the community at large.

Studies undertaken with former refugees from south Sudan illustrate that this may be true for some. Hebbani et al. (2010) explain that in traditional Sudanese culture parenting is a collective responsibility, often undertaken by extended kin and community elders. Ebbeck and Cerna (2007), Este and Tachble (2009) and Hebbani et al. (2010) each reveal the difficulty in fulfilling this parenting role in the host society, given the absence of extended kin to assist. Although this reveals important insights into changed responsibilities within families, these studies investigate only child rearing practices, without investigation into other responsibilities kin traditionally performed and how families in host societies have adapted to fulfill these in their absence. Notably, none investigate traditional family compositions and how individual responsibilities, family dynamics and relationships have been altered with changed family configurations within host societies.

Ebbeck and Cerna’s (2007) study similarly reveals difficulties for parents in wanting to teach their children Sudanese culture while living in Australia, illustrating ongoing ties for
participants to their culture of origin. Researchers have recently called for policy makers and service practitioners to recognise the continued influences of migrants’ and refugees’ cultures of origin over their lives in host societies (Kivisto 2001; Wahlbeck 2002; Levitt & Glick Schiller 2004; Hatoss & Huijser 2010). Recognising these influences acknowledges the importance of abandoning measures of integration which position individuals within host cultures alone and ignore transnational influences (Mazzucato 2008; Boyle & Ali 2010; Hatoss & Huijser 2010). Boyle and Ali (2010) suggest family change frameworks should thus consider the influence of transnationalism – refugees’ continued participation within home cultures.

Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc Szanton (1992, p. 1) define transnationalism, “…the process by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement”. Participation in social, economic, and political activities in home societies places migrants and refugees in transnational social fields which span across both national borders (Al-Ali et al. 2001). Portes et al. (1999) distinguish transnationalism from assimilation or integration, by recognising migrants’ continued connection to people and culture of the sending society.

The existence of transnationalism is generally based on assumptions that interactions with a culture of origin must be regular, sustained over a substantial time period and take place across national borders (Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Basch et al. 1994; Portes et al. 1999; Faist 2000). However, researchers have constructed differing conditions for its existence.

Studies have suggested refugees’ emotional attachments to home cultures are increased through the forced nature of departure (Faist 2000; Lim 2009, Sherrrell & Hyndman 2006). Boyle and Ali (2010) argue refugees have stronger connections within their culture of origin due to the forced nature of their departure, distinguishing their experiences from those of voluntary migrants. For example, refugees may participate more actively in sending society politics due to past injustices experienced (Faist 2000; Al-Ali et al. 2001; Hyndman 2010), or feel intense guilt and obligation towards those left behind (Riak Akuei 2005; Lim 2009). It is these transnational connections that Boyle and Ali (2010) suggest influence refugee family change.
Although Foner’s (1997) framework suggests pre-migration experiences can influence family change, she neglects the ongoing connection to these experiences through transnationalism. Similarly, whilst studies have explored the kinds of transnational connections refugee families maintain post-migration, few explore how transnational connections influence changes within these families. Nevertheless, some observe the challenges for migrant families who send financial remittances to support kin overseas (Shandy 2002, 2006; Riak Akeui 2005; Stoll & Johnson 2007; Johnson & Stoll 2008; Lejukole 2008; McDonald-Wilmsen & Gifford 2009; Lim 2009; Al-Sharmani 2010).

In her study of Sudanese families in the US, Riak Akeui (2005) describes the unrealistic expectations placed those resettled by family ‘back home’. Working poorly paid and unskilled jobs, Riak Akeui describes the financial insecurity and emotional distress experienced when individuals are unable to fulfil expectations to support kin. Riak Akeui describes a single mother in the US, who used welfare payments to cover her sibling’s rent in Cairo, only to have her own electricity shut off due to unpaid bills. Lim’s (2009) study revealed similar findings of refugee families who find themselves in stagnant socio-economic positions in host societies, after sending large portions of their incomes overseas.

Nevertheless, Johnson and Stoll (2008) found that sending remittances to kin overseas allowed men from south Sudan resettled in Canada to enact their traditional breadwinner role across continents, fulfilling cultural obligations. This study thus reveals the importance in participating in home culture society and the continued influence of the home culture on those resettled.

These studies offer important insights into the presence and prevalence of transnational connections and interactions of former refugees from south Sudan. However, these studies focus on familial relationships amongst kinship groups across national borders. How these relationships subsequently affect experiences and changes to family amongst those resettled within host societies remains largely unknown. Consequently, the current study aims to fill this gap within the literature, documenting the changed experiences of family amongst men and women from south Sudan in Melbourne.
Cross Cultural Social Work Practice
Researchers have recently observed the gap in migration research exploring experiences of settlement services amongst refugee groups (Westoby 2008; Fanjoy et al. 2005). Without adequate exploration of these experiences and service users suggestions to improve them, ‘best practice’ approaches documented in the literature may be inappropriate for former refugees from south Sudan. Programs and services subsequently developed and implemented based on this literature might similarly fail to meet individual needs. This highlights the need to explore experiences of participation within services as well as suggestions to improve them.

Social work literature, policy documents and models of best practice for working with refugee groups often use the terms cross-cultural practice, cultural sensitivity and cultural competency. But what do these terms actually mean and how are services based on these approaches experienced by those who access them?

Inconsistent definition of these terms has created varying understandings and interpretations of them amongst workers in the field (O’Hagan 1999; Gallegos et al. 2008; Yan 2008). Studies have also shown how this creates varying approaches to practice (Yan 2008) and leaves workers feeling unskilled, ill-prepared and lacking direction to work effectively with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) clients (Okitiki & Aymer 2003).

In 2010 the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) included an amendment to the Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards to include a ‘Statement of specific cross-cultural curriculum content for social work qualifying courses’ (AASW 2008). The statement offers a definition for cross-cultural practice, describing it as, “...practice where there is a diversity of traditions and intergenerational issues; ideologies, beliefs and religions; and race and ethnicities... work acknowledging other diverse identities such as sexual, political, professional and organisational”.

Despite offering little practical direction, the accompanying values, attitudes and knowledge requirements listed alongside this definition aims to equip graduating students with appropriate skills and knowledge for cross-cultural work. Pawar et al. (2004) and later Tesoriero (2006) suggest cross-cultural learning is necessary, “…to develop cross-cultural sensitivity with regard to diversity of beliefs and practices” (Pawar et al. 2004).
But is this enough to ensure those from CALD backgrounds receive effective and meaningful service in the community, especially when not all who work with CALD clients are necessarily social workers? Graham, Bradshaw and Trew (2009b) observe that while developing skills in working with CALD clients is important, it similarly places the onus and responsibility of cultural competency directly on individual workers, who, as Okitiki and Aymer (2003) have shown, may not actually feel terribly well prepared.

There are a variety of approaches and skills for professionals working with people from CALD backgrounds. These include anti-oppressive approaches such as defending and advocating for vulnerabilities and cultural rights and recognising and fighting against potential discrimination towards individuals and groups (Hausermann 1992; Turner 2006; Graham et al. 2009a). Others encourage workers to acknowledge continued impacts of trauma upon clients (Duany 2001; Schweitzer et al. 2006; Lejukole 2008). Some studies similarly acknowledge past experiences necessary to validate clients' stories and understandings (Kovacek & Shute 2004; Abdulahad et al. 2009). Within these frameworks, there are particular practice techniques such as narrative approaches (Schweitzer et al. 2007; Blackburn 2010; Palmer 2010) and strengths-based practice (Weine 2000). These approaches value the uniqueness of individual experiences and assist client groups to recognise and make positive changes in their lives.

While these approaches are certainly useful and widely utilised within mainstream services, western therapeutic interventions can have little relevance for former refugees (Westoby 2008; Wani 2008; Hatoss & Huijser 2010). Counselling and other therapeutic approaches have been criticised for medicalising experiences and failing to recognise that these are unfamiliar within clients' cultures of origin (Al-Krenawi & Graham 2001; SERMRC 2007; Wani 2008; Westoby 2008; Abdulahad et al. 2009; Graham et al. 2009b; Hatoss & Huijser 2010). Therapeutic interventions can position individuals as vulnerable recipients of welfare, denying personal agency, knowledge and traditional coping mechanisms (Westoby 2008; Hatoss & Huijser 2010; Palmer 2010).

Alternative approaches recognise the importance of valuing and validating clients' stories and understandings, acknowledging diverse cultural constructs, identities and perspectives (George 2002; Turner 2006; Ife 2008; Wani 2008; Abdulahad et al. 2009;
Waldegrave 2009; Palmer 2010). Others encourage workers to critically reflect on their own social and cultural position and preconceived ideas about ‘refugees’ or ethnic minority groups, to identify potential bias or stereotyping (Suarez et al. 2008; Blackburn 2010). Workers lacking these approaches may create barriers to service utilisation for clients who can feel misunderstood (Keller & Brennan 2007; Wani 2008; Graham et al. 2009b).

Hatoss and Huijser (2010) criticise services for ignoring transnational influences upon resettlement experiences. Marlowe (2009) suggests that without positioning individuals’ experiences within appropriate social, historical and political contexts, practitioners, researchers and policy makers can fail to understand it.

Recognising these criticisms, authors have called for reassessment of the epistemological foundations upon which western social work and community development practice is based (Ling 2004; Pease & Rees 2008; Westoby 2008; Graham et al. 2009b; AHRC 2010). Identifying then abandoning western assumptions could create space for alternative practice approaches to be explored and developed (Ling 2004; Ebbeck & Cerna 2007; MIC 2008a; Westoby 2008; Graham et al. 2009b; AHRC 2010; Hatoss & Huijser 2010).

Further, Pease and Rees (2008) claim western frameworks fail to recognise the intersection of forced migration experiences, cultural ideologies and other social positions of disadvantage. In their example of refugee women who experience violence, Pease and Rees claim acknowledging these experiences and positioning individuals within intersectional spaces can assist workers to better work alongside them. This similarly reveals how gender could potentially impact on experiences within settlement services.

However, few studies investigate the experiences of former refugees within service systems, and fewer ask for their input in how services could be improved. In 2008 the MIC (2008a) implemented an action research project to develop new, ‘culturally appropriate’ family violence intervention and prevention programs for men and women from south Sudanese backgrounds. The project aimed to understand the ideological perspectives of men and women separately, then to develop and implement effective programs to assist both gender groups. This collaboration provided opportunity for ongoing dialogue, valuing
knowledge and problem solving skills of participants, which led to the development of effective service interventions.

The inclusion of clients as active participants in worker-client relationships has similarly been encouraged by researchers of service provision amongst CALD groups (George 2002; Cassidy & Gow 2005; Mitchell et al. 2006; Alam 2008; Connolly & Ward 2008; Westoby 2008; Krumer-Nevo 2009). Practice examples, including that of Mitchell, Kaplan and Crowe (2006) and Westoby (2008) describe the difficult but important process of allowing refugee groups to drive and direct projects, even at the discomfort of workers, who are used to being in control. The interventions consequently developed by the above practitioners each proved effective and were well utilised by clients.

Cassidy and Gow (2005) acknowledge the importance of utilising existing community networks, structures and problem solving techniques. This means abandoning processes and procedures that may be inherent within service agencies but have little relevance for refugee clients. Such approaches create space for service users to become active participants within service development, drawing resolution to issues affecting their lives (Krumer-Nevo 2009). Intercultural collaborations with community members and/or bilingual workers similarly respect diverse understandings and can bridge knowledge gaps between workers and clients (Owen & English 2005; Pitaway & Muli 2009; Harris & Nyoun 2010).

Assisting families from south Sudanese backgrounds as they resettle in Australia thus requires both comprehensive understanding of how individuals – both male and female separately – experienced family life in Africa and how these experiences have changed since resettling in Australia. Similarly necessary is an investigation into how services have been experienced by men and women when they require assistance for related difficulties and how they believe these could better meet their needs in Australia. The current study thus aims to fill the literature gaps by investigating how men and women from south Sudanese backgrounds have experienced changes to family since arriving in Australia, alongside an investigation of experiences in the family service sector, seeking suggestions on how they believe it could be improved to better meet their needs.
Chapter 3 - Methodology

Research Approach
A community-based participatory approach was adopted for this research. Whilst there are differing definitions of what constitutes research as necessarily ‘participatory’, central to this approach is positioning those being ‘researched’ as active partners, creating reciprocity between researcher and researched (Titterton & Smart 2006; Harrell-Bond & Voutira 2007; Maiter et al. 2008). This allows for mutual exchange of information, rather than treating those who contribute like ‘subjects’ (Titterton & Smart 2006; Harrell-Bond & Voutira 2007; Maiter et al. 2008).

Some researchers suggest participatory approaches should specifically aim to empower the oppressed and ‘give voice’ to individuals and communities (Taylor et al. 2004; Khanlou & Peter 2005; Titterton & Smart 2006). Others focus on implementing action and social change as part of the research itself, using methods such as Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Wadsworth 1998; Maiter et al. 2008; Krumer-Nevo 2009).

For the purposes of this project, it seemed unhelpful and misrepresentative to position former refugees from south Sudan as necessarily ‘oppressed’ or without ‘voice’. Similarly, whilst PAR projects can achieve positive social, structural and organisational change within practice settings, the constraints of undertaking research as a Masters student in a University meant I did not want to raise false expectations amongst participants about the potential outcomes of the research.

No study can ever be without power imbalances between researcher and researched (Heyenes 2003). However, conducting research with rather than on people from refugee backgrounds respects and values participants’ capabilities, knowledge and skills and abandons the idea of the researcher as necessarily expert (Gifford et al. 2007; Maiter et al. 2008; Westoby 2008; Krumer-Nevo 2009).

Consequently, a community-based participatory approach was adopted, whereby south Sudanese community members were active partners in the project. This has been defined
as, “…the active participation of community members and which involves the mutual exchange of skills and knowledge between researchers and the community” (Titterton & Smart 2006, p. 54). It similarly contests Australian political and social contexts which often constructs refugees in positions of disempowerment whilst excluding their participation in areas of society which could lead to structural change (Pyett 2002; Fanjoy et al. 2005; Due 2008; Harte et al. 2009).

Emergent literature suggests research with refugee groups should abandon western assumptions and methods in favour of approaches that hold greater meaning for people from refugee backgrounds (Ling 2004; Rogers 2004; Harrell-Bond & Voutira 2007; Harris & Nyoun 2010). The participatory research approach does this by questioning where knowledge resides, challenging the assumption that quantitative data necessarily generates more reliable and relevant knowledge than other research methods (Beresford 2000; Rogers 2004; Krumer-Nevo 2009).

It similarly highlights the need for researchers, policy makers and service practitioners to value the meanings people from refugee backgrounds attach to their experiences (Schweitzer et al. 2007). Abandoning necessarily western assumptions about what constitutes knowledge could thus create a shift in how information is collected and what kind of information is considered valuable. It similarly challenges the often western understandings upon which ‘culturally appropriate’ social work practice is based (Ling 2004).

To implement this research approach, the importance of developing rapport and trust cannot be overstated (Rogers 2004; Miller et al. 2004; Gifford et al. 2007; Mackenzie et al. 2007; Schweitzer et al. 2007; Westoby 2008). Refugee experiences can leave individuals feeling vulnerable and disenfranchised due to past experiences of war and difficult acculturation experiences (Harrell-Bond & Voutira 2007; Mackenzie et al. 2007). Refugees may consequently mistrust researchers or misunderstand their intentions (Hynes 2003; Rogers 2004; Harrell-Bond & Voutira 2007; Gifford et al. 2007; Schweitzer & Steel 2008).

Including those being researched as active partners in the project thus sought to build trusting, positive relationships between the south Sudanese ‘community’ and the
researcher. It also meant community members could have direct input into how the project was developed and implemented.

**Research Design**

Rogers (2004, p. 48) suggests the best way to undertake effective research with refugee groups is for researchers to ‘hang out’ or develop, “…informal, interpersonal and ‘everyday’ types of encounters” with refugee communities. Forming these relationships Rogers claims can foster positive research environments necessary to generate reliable and representative and data that quantitative methodologies cannot.

Immediately prior to undertaking this research, I worked on a PAR project with former refugees from south Sudan within a community organisation in Melbourne. My work on this project involved facilitating community consultations and collaborating with community members in developing programs over several months. This meant I had several established relationships with men and women from south Sudanese backgrounds before embarking on this project.

In south Sudanese culture, interpersonal relationships are highly regarded (Duany 2001; Lim 2009; Turner & Fozdar 2010). Having interpersonal relationships within the ‘community’ I planned to research thus meant I could informally engage with the target group from the project’s inception.

The first stage of the participatory process began when I discussed the research with two south Sudanese community leaders known to me. Whilst collaborating with community leaders excludes other community members who do not hold the same power positions, I was similarly aware of the importance of respecting and working within existing community structures (Al-Krenawi & Graham 2001; Mitchell et al. 2006; Westoby 2008; MIC 2008a).

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3 There are several south Sudanese community Associations and representative bodies currently operating in Australia. Leaders of the Associations are elected by members of the community, recognized and respected for their skills in social orientation and cultural awareness and their ability to provide leadership, dispute resolution and support to create positive resettlement experiences in Australia. Some elected leaders are also elders within the community, respected for their wisdom and traditional roles occupied within families and communities in Africa (MRCNWR 2006; Lejukole 2008; MIC 2008a; Springvale Monash Community Legal Services Inc. 2008).
The leaders I initially spoke with suggested I contact two others, who were also known to me and leaders of different community and tribal associations. Together, the four formed the project’s reference group and were consulted regularly throughout the project.

Including community members meant we could share knowledge from the beginning. A meeting was arranged whereby the leaders explained current problems within ‘the community’, which they believe needed redress, while I shared my interest in researching families and gender roles, and my knowledge of gaps within the academic literature. Further meetings assisted in refining research questions. The research questions were eventually defined as follows:

1. **How have men and women from south Sudanese backgrounds experienced changes to family since arriving in Australia?**
2. **What has influenced change within families?**
3. **What has been the role of community and government services?**
4. **How can services better assist south Sudanese families as they make these changes?**

The research design was similarly developed alongside the leaders. Data collection processes included two-stages: 1) semi-structured interviews and; 2) focus groups. The semi-structured interviews aimed to answer the first two research questions. The focus groups provided opportunity to review the first two questions in more general terms, and then focussed on the latter two. Sixteen semi-structured interviews took place between January and March 2010. Two focus groups were held in April 2010; one with interview participants and the other with reference group members.

**Recruitment**

Purposeful snowball sampling was used to recruit participants. Purposeful sampling aimed to reflect and value diversity within the community and varied experiences and understandings of family. Variables were gender, age, marital background, tribal background, village/town/city of origin in the Sudan4, experiences in flight and refuge and place of residence in Melbourne.

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4 It has been observed that those from rural villages in the Sudan may have more traditional views on gender and family roles than those who lived in towns and cities (DIAC 2007).
The reference group members provided four separate entry points into the south Sudanese community that I used for snowball sampling. Reference group members were informed about the purposeful sampling technique and approached those who fitted the selection criteria. Once consent was attained, the potential participant’s phone number was given to me and I phoned to arrange a time for an interview. In the later stages, participants were also used for recruitment, following the same procedures as reference group members.

During recruitment, I was sometimes challenged by the participatory methodology. I often received phone calls from reference group members who had recruited new participants and organised interviews at short notice without confirming my availability. This process also precluded a phone conversation between me and the participant prior to interviews. However, I endeavoured to be flexible and make myself available for interviews (and continued to phone participants before meeting them regardless). Clearly, more discussions with reference group members about recruitment processes could have been advantageous.

Semi-Structured Interviews
Following discussions with community leaders, interview questions drew on the south Sudanese tradition of communicating histories orally through storytelling (SERMRC 2007; Perry 2008; Wani 2008; Kasidis 2009). Harrell-Bond and Voutira (2007, p. 291) suggest storytelling allows refugees, “…an opportunity to try to make sense out of senseless experiences of uprooting, large scale violence, individual torture, and traumatized pasts”. The storytelling approach thus provided an opportunity for participants to share knowledge and recount family experiences using a familiar practice.

Three open-ended interview questions were initially developed alongside a series of ‘prompts’, following a semi-structured interview format (Alston & Bowles 2003). Semi-structured interviews were used to allow for discussions to flow freely, whilst focusing on eliciting stories, observations and experiences of family change.

The first question encouraged participants to describe their experience of family in the Sudan. The second question gathered information about family composition, family
migration history and refugee experiences. The third asked participants to consider their experience of family in Australia and differences between Australia and Africa. Prompts aimed to generate more specific information, focusing on household life and family composition, including paid and domestic work, household economies, gender roles and family norms.

Initial questions developed were:

**What was your family life like before you came to Australia?**

Prompts:
- Who was in your family/household?
- How was household and paid work divided (who went to work, cooked, cleaned, looked after/disciplined children)?
- Did your family life change from Sudan to the camp/first country of asylum?

**When did you come to Australia?**

Prompts:
- Who was with you when you arrived?
- Are there relatives who didn’t come with you?

**What has changed within your family since you arrived in Australia?**

Prompts:
- What is your household life like in Australia?
- Who lives at your house?
- Do you have contact with relatives who no longer live with you?
- What sorts of things did you do in Sudan within your family that you can’t/don’t do in Australia?
- What is different for you as a woman/man in Australia?

Two reference group members participated in pilot interviews. The first pilot interview revealed that direct questioning about personal family experiences from the beginning of the interview seemed intrusive and sat uncomfortably with both myself and the participant. The pilot interview participant avoided revealing too much personal information initially and instead spoke broadly of “families”.

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Like Cohen (2004) in his study of Latin American families, this revealed the safety in speaking about families generally rather than focusing on the participants’ family. This similarly supports studies which observe that discussing family issues outside the kinship group is inappropriate amongst Sudanese men and women (Foundation House 2006; Mitchell et. al 2006; Keller & Brennan 2007; MIC 2008a).

Framing the interview questions about changes that had occurred within “south Sudanese families” proved a better approach during the second pilot interview. The safety in discussing cultural changes more broadly provided space for the pilot interviewee to use examples from his personal experience, which he did without hesitation. Interview questions were thus altered, starting broadly and moving into more personal questions (see Appendix 1). This approach worked well and participants often used personal examples prior to reaching the questions asking specifically about their experiences. The final interview questions were:

**What was family life like in the Sudan?**

Prompts:
- What were the roles of men/women/young people in the family?
- How were these decided/divided?

**What was your family life like before you came to Australia?**

Prompts:
- Who was in your family/household?
- How was household and paid work divided (who went to work, cooked, cleaned, looked after/disciplined children)?
- Did your family life change from Sudan to the camp/first country of asylum?

**When did you come to Australia?**

Prompts:
- Who was with you when you arrived?
- Are there relatives who didn’t come with you?
What are some of the changes that have occurred within south Sudanese families in Australia?

Prompts:
- What have been the biggest changes for men/women/young people?
- Have these changes been difficult/created problems?

Have these things changed in your family since you arrived in Australia?

Prompts:
- What is your household life like in Australia?
- Who lives at your house?
- What sorts of things did you do in Sudan within your family that you can’t/don’t do in Australia?
- What is different for you as a woman/man in Australia?

Wanting to be as flexible as possible, interviews were conducted in venues chosen by participants. Nine interviews were conducted at participants’ homes, three in community service agencies and four in cafés. All interviews occurred in Melbourne – eleven in the Eastern suburbs, three in the South East and two in the West. Participants were offered interpreters (in a language of their choice); however, all chose to speak English.

Interviews took between thirty minutes and three hours. Most interviews were between one and two hours. I allowed participants to speak for as long as they felt comfortable and was unrestrictive about ‘wrapping up’ interviews. This proved a successful technique as it allowed for participants to guide interviews and disclose as much or as little as they felt comfortable with. It also provided sufficient time to discuss all relevant issues. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by myself as the researcher.

Although this provided a flexible and welcoming environment for interviews, which participants appeared to feel comfortable within, limitations of this approach were similarly evident. For example, whilst interviewing a young man Deng⁵, his friend James⁶

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⁵ (Pseudonym)
⁶ (Pseudonym)
wandered into the café we were meeting in, sat down and began participating in the conversation. Deng appeared happy with this, introduced me to his friend, explained to James the topic of our discussion and continued with his story. While I could have abandoned the interview at this point, asked James to leave or suggested I interview him later, the two friends appeared completely unbothered by James’ appearance, content to participate in the interview together. Hence, after a brief discussion about the research and with both Deng and James’ consent, the interview continued.

Although such incidents meant incidental changes to the methodology, discarding ethnocentric assumptions about how research should be conducted allowed participants to participate in ways they felt comfortable and take ownership of the process. It also meant data gathered from this interview was particularly rich, as the friends debated and discussed ideas in what seemed like a completely natural manner.

**Focus Groups**
When undertaking research with refugees, repeat conversations with the same participants can assist in building rapport and trust and eliciting further information (Schweitzer & Steel 2008). Conducting repeat interviews was considered in the research design, however, south Sudanese problem solving techniques traditionally entail people coming together, holding community meetings to discuss issues and seek solutions collaboratively (SERMRC 2007; Lejukole 2008; MIC 2008a; Springvale Monash Legal Service Inc. 2008; Turner & Fozdar 2010). Community services have documented the existence of this process within south Sudanese communities in Australia, illustrating its contemporary relevance (Mitchell et al. 2006; MIC 2006, 2008a; Springvale Monash Legal Service Inc. 2008). Including group discussions as part of the research design was similarly suggested by reference group members.

Focus groups subsequently provided a culturally appropriate research method to review influences of change, generating further discussions on issues raised during interviews. Focus groups also provided an opportunity to investigate participants’ experiences of community services gathering insight into how agencies could improve practice to better accommodate south Sudanese families. Focus group questions were:
What has influenced individuals and families from south Sudanese backgrounds to make changes in their families in Australia?

How have services assisted individuals and families from south Sudanese backgrounds to make changes in their families?

How can services better assist individuals and families from south Sudanese backgrounds to make changes within their families to lead happy and healthy family lives in Australia? (See Appendix 2)

Data analysis from the interviews meant I had already determined some themes indicative of influences of family change. Nevertheless, including a question specifically addressing this allowed participants to articulate their thoughts and opinions for themselves. This also allowed me to check that I had not made assumptions or misinterpreted participants’ stories. The findings revealed that participants’ responses to this question largely matched my understandings from interview data analysis. Having this as the initial question similarly encouraged participants to reflect on topic, providing a good opening discussion point. It similarly led into discussions of social systems and structures, which included experiences of services such as Centrelink, police and Child Protection. From here, the discussion could flow on to experiences of other services and suggestions for their improvement.

One focus group was held with interview participants, after the interview phase. Participants appeared comfortable during the discussion and it was evident that they had participated in discussions or meetings of this nature in the past, illustrating the appropriateness of this technique. The discussion was lively and lasted for two hours. Although all focus group questions were discussed and given sufficient time, to investigate the focus group topics further, a second focus group could have been useful. This could have allowed for greater investigation into experiences within services other than Child Protection, which was the main topic of conversation within the participant group.

Initially, I had planned to hold two participant focus groups, split by gender. This was to allow women to speak openly, challenging their sometimes subordinate social position which can prevent them from speaking out in the presence of men (MIC 2008a).
However, reference group members and participants (both male and female) agreed that focus groups should be inclusive of both genders, representing all family members in discussions about families.

The two women who attended the focus group participated well in discussions; however, they certainly spoke less than the men. Although this could have been illustrative of the women showing ‘appropriate’ public behaviours (being quiet, reserving opinions), it may simply have been the mix of personalities in the room. Nevertheless, if the study was repeated, validity in responses of women could be increased by including focus groups segregated by gender as an interim step, between interviews and mixed gender focus groups.

A second focus group was undertaken with three community leaders (one female, two males) who formed part of the reference group. The leaders who attended appeared to enjoy the opportunity to give their interpretations and opinions, adopting the role of ‘expert’. Both focus groups were held at the Town Hall Hub in Box Hill7, in meeting rooms. This venue was selected as it was known to most participants.

Working within Sudanese community and tribal associations gave the leaders a different perspective on the issues being discussed. Their position as leaders meant they had experience in developing and implementing solutions to community ‘problems’ and knew the challenges in doing so. The leaders’ focus group thus gave the research increased grounding, as issues were examined from a different perspective, providing opportunity to triangulate data (Mathison 1988; Kopinak 1999; Ruben & Babbie 2009).

The leaders were acutely aware of commonly held beliefs, assumptions and misunderstandings within the ‘community’. Consequently, a summary of key themes and findings from interviews and participant focus group (which had been de-identified) was given to reference group members prior to the focus group.

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7 The Town Hall Hub is a community space which accommodates community and not-for-profit organisations and public meeting rooms.
This approach potentially skewed data as discussions in the leaders' focus group followed a similar direction of the participant group. However, it also meant the leaders could provide insight, interpretation and explanation of data from a ‘south Sudanese’ perspective, alongside their own opinions. Studies have revealed the value in workers and researchers from cultural backgrounds different to the target group working with bi-cultural individuals to interpret cultural information (Owen & English 2005; MIC 2008b). Discussing findings with reference group members thus provided an alternate perspective and insight of the data allowing me to check I had not made incorrect assumptions. Both focus groups were conducted in English and were audio recorded and transcribed.

Holding focus groups as well as conducting interviews proved to be a good research strategy. Including reference group members in a focus group was a successful way to triangulate data, whilst including them in the research process and demonstrates the appropriateness of the community-based participatory approach, which could be replicated in future studies.

Participants
Whilst the research sought to capture experiences of south Sudanese men and women who are newly arrived in Australia, it similarly did not want to replicate studies which focused on early settlement experiences (Fanjoy et al. 2005; Harte et al. 2009; Marlowe 2009). Consequently, those who had been in Australia for less than four years were excluded. As the DIAC provides settlement services for Humanitarian Entrants for up to five years after arrival (DIAC 2009b), this exclusion criterion was selected to gather the views of those nearing the end of this period. This approach meant participants were in a position to reflect on their experiences of family change and were able to engage well with the topic. It also positioned participants as pioneers for those more recently arrived, which participants adopted earnestly as they gave advice and suggestions for others.

The purposeful sampling methodology was similarly useful, producing a sample reflective of diversity within the south Sudanese ‘community’ in Melbourne. The individual characteristics and demographic details of each participant have not been presented in order to help maintain anonymity.
Seven women and nine men participated in the interviews. Two women and three men from this group attended the participant focus group. Participants were aged between eighteen and forty-six years, with a mean age of thirty years at the time of data collection\textsuperscript{8}. Although the age range of participants is broad, the study has excluded the views of people under eighteen years. It could be useful for future research to investigate how young people experience family and traditional family roles in Australia, particularly when they may have spent formative adolescent or early adult years in Australia.

Participants are from Dinka, Nuer, Nuba and Anok tribes and came from Bor, Juba, Nuba Mountains, Akobo, Malakal and Nasir. Although not all south Sudanese tribes were represented, the sample was sufficiently diverse to capture different cultural family traditions. It also includes several participants from Dinka and Nuer tribes, the largest groups represented in Melbourne (DIAC 2007).

Eight of the sixteen participants lived in towns or cities in the Sudan before the war. Four lived in villages. Six participants stated they do not remember the Sudan, having left when they were too young to remember. Data analysis based on area participants originated from did not reflect the assumption that those from villages hold more traditional views on gender and family. Nevertheless, the representation of people from villages was small. Future studies could investigate specifically, differences in settlement challenges and maintenance of culture amongst people who originate from towns as compared to those from rural areas and villages.

All participants spent time – between six and fifteen years – in another African country before arriving in Australia. Thirteen participants lived in Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya, while three lived in cities in Egypt and Kenya, not in refugee camps. This is reflective of the south Sudanese diaspora, many of whom lived in Kakuma, but several of whom also lived in neighbouring countries (DIAC 2007).

Participants arrived in Australia between 2001 and 2006. All arrived as part of family groupings, however, three younger participants were accompanied by relatives who were

\textsuperscript{8} The relatively young sample reflects the age demographic of Sudanese Humanitarian Entrants in Australia. Between 2001 and 2006, 62% of Humanitarian Entrants from Sudan were under 24 years on arrival (DIAC 2007). Some participants did not know their exact age, so guessed an approximate age.
not part of their immediate family. Ten participants were married at the time of data collection, nine of whom lived with their spouses. One participant’s husband was on an extended visit in the Sudan during data collection. Whilst still in regular contact with her husband, she did not know how long he would be there. All married participants had between one and seven children. The six remaining participants had never married. One unmarried participant had one child.

In Melbourne at the time of data collection, ten of the sixteen participants lived in nuclear family households with no others in the home. Within these families, nine were parents and one was an adult child. Two participants lived with nuclear families that were not their own family of origin, but who were related to them. Two others lived households comprised of single adults, some of whom were cousins. One participant lived with three adult siblings and two nieces. Eleven participants lived in the Eastern Metropolitan Region, three in the South East and two in the West.

The diversity of familial experiences within the sample was broad, effectively reflecting the full picture of diversity within the south Sudanese ‘community’ in Melbourne. Nevertheless, there were limitations to this approach which could be altered if the study was repeated. More participants who had deviated from traditional south Sudanese family and marriage practices could have been specifically recruited, including co-habiting couples, older participants who have never married and those who are separated or divorced. This could have given more depth to the study, allowing analysis on transnational influences on those who have clearly rejected some traditions.

Alternatively, greater comparisons between participants’ understandings and experiences could have been drawn if participants were all in similar family constructs or occupied similar roles within families. For example, recruiting only those who were married before they arrived in Australia or only mothers could have explored different experiences of family change amongst a common demographic of individuals. This could allow for greater validity in the findings through analysis of comparisons amongst participants’ responses. Targeting a specific demographic could similarly instigate the development of community programs for one sub-section within the south Sudanese ‘community’, such as programs for south Sudanese mothers, for example.
The leaders who formed the reference group consisted of three males and one female. Other demographic information about the leaders has been excluded to maintain their anonymity. Working alongside community leaders who formed the reference group was the greatest strength of the study, providing insights, interpretation and input into the process. This demonstrates the importance and success of community-based participatory approaches when working with refugee communities.

**Ethical Issues**

Whilst the snowball recruitment method provided access into ‘the community’, I was aware of its potential biases. Studies suggest having multiple ‘gatekeepers’ in recruitment increases entry points into a community, decreasing their ability to influence the process (Hynes 2003; Farrugia 2009; Bloch 1999). Nevertheless, I was conscious that individuals may feel pressured to participate by community leaders who formed the reference group. I consequently re-iterated the voluntary nature of participation in initial phone conversations with participants and again when signing consent forms.

The sensitivity involved in discussing families outside kinship groups (Foundation House 2006; Mitchell et. al 2006; Keller & Brennan 2007; MIC 2008a) similarly meant that reference group members may have carefully selected individuals to portray positive or desirable images of family. For example, no participants recruited were divorced. I wondered whether this was intentional, as divorce is traditionally stigmatised and leaders may have consequently felt it inappropriate to recruit divorced men or women to discuss family in Australia (Dei Wal 2004; MIC 2008a).

Similarly, confidentiality as understood from a western perspective lacks comparison in traditional south Sudanese culture (Dei Wal 2004; Keller & Brennan 2007; MIC 2008a Lim 2009). Although reference group members had become familiar with the concept in Australia, I feared participants may withhold information or decline participation, assuming I would share their information with reference group members or others. Confidentiality was thus discussed with potential participants during initial phone calls, making sure people understood their information would be de-identified and kept private. This was reiterated when I first met participants.
The lack of familiarity and value placed on western approaches to research was similarly evident when explaining the Plain Language Statement (PLS) (Appendix 2) and Consent Form (Appendix 3) to participants. Despite both documents having been translated into Juba (Sudanese) Arabic⁹ and offered to participants in either Arabic or English, few participants read it. Some asked me to explain what it said; others seemed disinterested and just asked where to sign.

Further, in designing the research, I was mindful that participants may become upset as they recall experiences of war, flight, separation from relatives and distressing experiences in Australia. Whilst western counselling techniques have been deemed sometimes inappropriate for refugee groups (Wani 2008; Westoby 2008), the consent form included a space for participants to write the name and phone number of a friend or relative they could speak to if they became upset. Few participants completed this section. Most laughed at its inclusion, telling me it was unnecessary. Others appeared uncomfortable about it. Consequently, participants were not mandated to complete this section.

No participants became visibly upset during the interviews. Many appeared to enjoy the discussions about cultural differences and most thanked me for meeting with them and listening to their stories. However, as a precaution, at the conclusion of each interview, I asked participants if they wanted to speak with anyone about the interview process or how they were feeling. All declined.

This illustrates the importance of being aware of how western approaches to research are not always relevant for refugee groups. The participatory approach consequently allowed me the opportunity to discuss these things with reference group members and then reflect on my own assumptions about research processes. For future research with individuals and groups from refugee backgrounds, I would consequently have a very short PLS and consent form, possibly only a few lines long.

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⁹ The decision to translate into Arabic over numerous other south Sudanese tribal languages was made upon consultation with reference group members. I was advised that Arabic would cover the largest number of people and translation into one tribal language over others could potentially exclude people and may raise suspicions over ‘special’ treatment of one tribal/language group.
During some interviews I became aware that participants were censoring the information being disclosed. Stigmas associated with expressing opinions deviant from what is considered ‘appropriate’ family behaviour may have been the cause of this. Whilst interviewing a female participant at her home, her brother walked into the room and sat close by for the duration of the interview. Although he did not say anything and preoccupied himself with a magazine, it was clear that he was listening, potentially monitoring our conversation. His entrance, about fifteen minutes into the one hour interview changed the body language and amount of information the participant was disclosing. She began to answer questions briefly and avoided questions about her absent husband. However, when I asked if she wanted to stop the interview or reschedule for another time, she declined.

Similarly, some participants initially withheld information and then disclosed it later, contradicting themselves. For example, a young woman initially referred to her parents as happily married, then later indicated that they were separated. Another young man told me he considered dating girls before marriage completely inappropriate, but later mentioned an ex-girlfriend and showed me her photograph.

Self-censorship through disclosing only partial facts or embellishing information is what Miller (2004) describes as ‘front-stage’ responses. While this may be true for respondents of all research, Miller suggests having strong and positive rapport with refugees who participate in research can enhance access to the true or ‘backstage’ responses. As all participants were introduced to me by reference group members or other participants, I had some affiliation with ‘the community’ prior to interviews. However, the brevity and constraints of the interview process did not allow sufficient time to develop strong relationships with all participants.

Whilst it can never be known exactly how much individuals embellished or excluded the truth, participants seemed genuinely engaged. I relied on my social work skills and experience in working with former refugees to approach participants in a sensitive manner. Participants similarly seemed to ‘warm’ to me as we spoke, revealing backstage responses. This was evident where opinions were inconsistent with traditional beliefs and practices or participants revealed more about themselves throughout the interviews. The inclusion of the focus group was similarly successful from this perspective, as participants
were more familiar with me during focus groups and appeared less reserved in their participation.

Disclosing private information revealed the importance of maintaining anonymity for participants. Pseudonyms were thus used. Pseudonyms were chosen at random based on common south Sudanese names, representing a mix of names from different tribal groups as well as Anglo-Christian and biblical names, which became popular in south Sudan during colonisation (Hecht 2005). Due to the small number of participants who participated in focus groups, pseudonyms were excluded within findings to help maintain anonymity. The ages and gender have been included in focus group findings however, to assist in interpreting the data. The summary of key themes and findings presented to reference group members was completely de-identified, excluding pseudonyms and ages.

Data Analysis

*Nvivo 8* was used to store and organise data. Audio-recorded interviews and focus groups were transcribed into word documents. The transcripts were then de-identified using pseudonyms and imported into Nvivo 8.

Interviews were analysed individually through use of coding under topic headings or ‘nodes’. Participants’ stories of family experiences often jumped between life in Africa and life in Australia to illustrate differences. Although the story-telling approach thus gathered rich data as participants reflected on family experiences, it also meant the stories collected focused on specific changes and were therefore not chronological.

Subsequently, instead of presenting linear stories of change in the findings, describing experiences of family in Africa then experiences in Australia, the data is presented under themes. Themes were identified based on common explanations, understandings and observations of family change as well as in repeated topics, where participants’ individual experiences and understandings often differed. Topics repeatedly discussed were ideological understandings and social constructions of gendered family roles and responsibilities and hierarchical family structures. Analysing the data under these themes created rich comparisons in the findings, illustrating both commonalities and differences amongst participants in their experiences of family change.
Focus group discussions were coded under responses to each question. Themes and emergent ideas were then grouped together. A summary of key themes and ideas from the participant group was then created and made available to leaders who formed the reference group.

The leaders' focus group transcript was similarly analysed using coding under each focus group question heading. Other ideas and common themes were also identified, as the transcript was coded. Key themes and ideas from the leaders’ focus group was then analysed alongside those identified in the participant focus group to look for commonalities and differences. The findings from the leaders group are therefore presented alongside those of participants, and responses are organised under each of the three questions.

Themes generated from both interviews and focus groups were then considered in light of the research questions. The discussion in Chapter 5 is presented to highlight changed experiences of family, factors that influence these changes, experiences of Australian services, and considerations for practice.
Chapter 4 - Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the study; firstly, the findings gathered from interviews and then those from the focus groups. Findings from the interviews are presented according to the four themes identified during the data analysis. The first highlights the influence of Australian social environments and social institutions upon south Sudanese families in Australia. This section draws upon participants’ reflections of their former lives in Africa where shared understandings, visions and daily routines - collectivist social norms and environments - were common, contributing to participants’ sense of belonging. Participants discussed how this appears somewhat absent within the more individualist or nature of Australian societies, where participants observed a relative lack of interaction and shared understandings amongst individuals and groups.

The second section focuses on how these changes have impacted on individual gender roles, domestic responsibilities and power positions within families. The influence of transnational connections to kin and concurrent south Sudanese culture in Africa upon men and women in Australia is then presented, demonstrating its prevalence and importance amongst participants. The final section exhibits participants’ connection to the south Sudanese ‘community’ in Melbourne.

The focus groups were held to review in general terms the main factors influencing changes within families from south Sudan and also to discuss how service providers can better respond and support these families. The focus group with interview participants were held separately from that with community leaders but the findings are presented in tandem to illustrate the variances and similarities in responses between the two groups.
Interview Findings

Moving from a collective to an individualist society – implications for families in Australia

The experiences of family in Africa as described by participants were underpinned by descriptions of their former societies and communities, which were based on systems of collectivism.

In Sudan, people live as a collective community who live together... whoever is in the community is taking care of the community. – Bol

The individualist nature of Australian society was evident to all participants, who commented on how this has impacted on their experiences of family.

...it’s changed because there’s no communal thing [in Australia], there’s individuality. – Choul

When I came to Australia, I find that individualism is being practiced in Australia, of which people look for themselves, looking to their own issues, so it make it hard for those who were brought up in the collective society. – Bol

...there’s a real search for independence here, which was not the case in Sudan. – Majok

Many participants had trouble speaking about themselves in the first person, using generalist or absolute language when discussing experiences and understandings, speaking as though these experiences were necessarily common to all.

[In Sudan], we didn’t talk about yourself, no! But here, people are asking and we talk about it. – Nyadol

Participants described their former household lives and communities in the Sudan, illustrating how they developed this perspective.

Take for example that I am home in southern Sudan in my home village. All people who are living surrounding me here in this suburb, many of them are my blood related relatives, because I can’t go to live in a society where I am not related to people. So this house will
be my home area, next door is my real uncle, over there is my other uncle who married to another society because we don’t marry relatives, so all these people all around would be my cousins. So every evening, we sit down, talk. – Dau

Although not all participants came from villages or communities as intimate as this, many described communal household experiences in Africa, comprised of several relatives and kin.

In Sudan, we [women] have to live with the husband’s family and relatives, our in-laws. So I had my brother in law and his wife and my husband’s mum. Sometimes my sister and her kids came to visit... I had my mum living near me. – Akon

Participants explained how this created reciprocity amongst kinship groups and within communities.

We are very socially connected.... In everything that we do in the community, you need these people around here, because they are your pride. That’s what we do, so we need extended family. Every decision that you make, you are there and relatives are there. – Joseph

Sometimes, you don’t have many things but you can get from your neighbour. Then later, neighbour can get from you – we share all things together. – Abraham

All participants contextualised their changed experiences of family life within the context of forced migration. Most participants described becoming separated from family during attacks on their towns and villages, which has changed their family experiences eternally.

...when we run to Kenya, [my family] ran to a different country. I only get my mum in 2007 to talk with her. They tell me that they are fine and they are looking for me... Then I start to cry because I heard my father has died... – Esther

In 2001, I went to Egypt with my four kids. My husband sent us there, but he stayed in south Sudan and continued to do his work... so we went alone. I had no other relatives there... I was scared; I had never been living by myself before. – Akon
Despite widespread loss and separation from kin, many participants shared similar experiences of living with some members of their family during flight and refuge.

_We lived with my grandma and my parents and brothers and sisters and my dad’s sisters and brothers and they also have kids, so there were lots of kids and lots of adults in the house._ - Monica

Choul, a twenty year old University student had a different experience. After becoming separated from his family during an attack, strangers found and cared for him as they sought refuge in Ethiopia.

(...)the situation was really scary, whereby attack can just come... you just have to run. So, I end up losing my mum and I end up losing everybody... So I survived not with my relatives but because of the generosity of other people I met. So they just say, ‘Oh look there’s a kid’, and they take me and I just stayed with them and they know that I am not their kid, but they have to take that responsibility because they can’t let me go, otherwise they would be blamed. Because as a community you have a sense of taking care of others and that’s what they exactly did, and that’s how I made it.

Choul’s story illustrates the collective responsibility community members had for one another. It also depicts the continuation of these systems during flight.

Other younger participants share similar stories. Majok, who guesses his age is twenty-nine, was separated from his parents when he was about three years old. He grew up with other unaccompanied minors in makeshift ‘communities’ within refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya. Upon arriving in Australia ten years ago, Majok was sent to boarding school, then to live on campus at University. Two years ago, Majok moved to Melbourne to live with an aunty and five cousins; this was his first ever experience of family life.

_It’s a great change now because all what I might have been worrying about, I’m not actually worried about here. I’m with a family who can ask, ‘Where are you?’, and all this. And that’s good because what human beings need is just someone to care about you. And this is what I found here._

While Majok has found comfort in living with relatives in Australia, other younger participants describe the distress of being separated from their immediate family.
I come with one of the relatives, they’re not close family, but they’re relatives... you worry about the family and you need to be close to the family... you don’t want to be gone, live away while they are alive. Yeah that’s really hard for me. – Deng

The life is good here, not like in Kenya and Sudan, but something is not good is to live without your parents I feel.

For many, loss and separation from parents and siblings has created overwhelming grief.

...when I get [my mum] on the phone I am crying because we need to be together. I never see my mum since I left. I have five years in Kenya, again I have seven years in Australia. Long, long time I never see my mum, but I want to see her and she want to see me also. Yeah, because I have 5 kids now and she hasn’t ever seen them. – Esther

I haven’t seen my parents for almost twenty-two years. I heard my dad died during the war. [long pause] And then my sisters were in Uganda, of which I haven’t seen them. I heard they all married. – Bol

I’ve never seen my mum for all this long, since I was seven years old until today. I never had a chance to see her but I just managed to talk.... I first learned that she was there, just the last two years. It’s really sad.... – Choul

The dispersion of family members across the globe has created indefinite separation of kin.

We had relatives [in Kakuma], but they left there when we came here. Now they are in Canada, America and some returned back to Sudan. – Nyadol

Reunion is made increasingly difficult by Australian immigration procedures, as Rebecca discovered.

...the [immigration] process started from us [siblings], just four of us and my sister’s two daughters. My mother, she don’t want to come at that time. But now, she wants to come, we try but [the visa is] rejected all the time, so... it’s too hard. – Rebecca
Being without extended kinship networks and systems of collective reciprocity has made Australian social environments based on individuality and small family units seem different and unusual.

In Sudan, we live as, you know, communal people. Not just immediate family, but extended family. We come to this country and that way of life is not really here. – Majok

Australia is a very closed society. Like I don’t know my neighbour’s name and he don’t know me, I just say hi to him in the morning... But in Sudan, it is very open, like if you are my neighbour, I can know your relatives in Canberra and I can know your Grandma in Perth. When I go to Perth I can visit them... but here, you don’t have that extended relationship and it makes it hard to trust your neighbour. – Joseph

Participants describe the subsequent changes to experiences of household life.

In Sudan, I can live with ten people or fifteen people in my home, husband’s relatives and all relatives too. They don’t have money so I keep them with my money... and the ladies they help you. They support me in the house.... and everything I can do for them. But here, me and my kids are at home only. – Nyadol

...here the only people you have in the house is your brothers and sisters. I mean sometimes we have our cousins in the house, but they just visit, they don’t live with you, you know? So, it’s different, kinda boring, not as fun you know? – Monica

Social isolation was a consequence experienced by many.

Here, it’s hard, because I don’t have my relative here, so I get it very hard. – Esther

There is a big difference [in Australia] because I miss my family. Yeah I really feel lonely. It’s hard because if you don’t know somebody and you’re at home, it’s hard. Sometimes you don’t know how to handle and just have to handle. – Rachel

Several participants described the loss of interactions with neighbours and relatives in the household and local area and how this has changed what they previously considered ‘normal’ household and family life.
In Australia you can’t talk with your neighbour, but in Sudan, you can talk to your neighbour and your neighbour come to your house and you talk together. – Esther

[In Sudan], we get the families, all the neighbours around here, we come in the evening and eat and share together... But here, only you go together with wife and kid and look at TV and so and so and don’t feel happy, arguments start. Because when you sit just with wife and kids every day, not good. Better to go to see neighbour, sit with them, talking, laughing, and so you come back and you are happy. But no neighbours here to talk to, I don’t know my neighbours actually. – Abraham

...here, it’s hard, you can’t leave the kids with your neighbour or someone like that. But in Africa, you can leave kid with your neighbour or relative and someone to look after them and you can go to work, but no one here. – Rachel

Some participants described the barriers to finding appropriate accommodation close to relatives and friends, which has altered family relationships and regularity of interactions with kin in Australia.

...in Australia here, we have encountered some difficulties in finding houses for renting... there is little chances of being accepted for renting for us. So some cannot find a house close to their relatives, they have to live far away... – John

I am living here, but all my relatives and friends live there in Dandenong. I don’t know the people living here. And my wife, she cannot drive, so she has to use the bus to visit relatives, but it takes a long time to go there. – Dau

Australian social environments and cultural norms based on small nuclear families have similarly created practical difficulties, dictating changes to family lifestyles and household arrangements.

With my family, we are too many and we need five bedrooms or six bedrooms, but with renting, too expensive, we can only have four bedrooms. That is why situation is hard for us because the children are growing up and that is a bad situation. They say, ‘I want my own room’, but we can’t get it. – Abraham
Like me, we have five years with a small car and we are eight people. Only eight people with five seats. Then, later on the children grow up and five seats not enough! If we have to go somewhere, I have to take some, then come back and take more or someone remains at home, so very hard. – John

I tell [my children]... ‘You are making us unhappy with all that noise’. Because in our culture, children play far away from home, in the community, they don’t play when they are in the house. But in Australia here, they play in playground or if there is no one to take them to playground, then they play at home and they make noise. So the family is always interacting... you are always with children! – John

Participants repeatedly described how ‘the community’ in Africa helped maintain the social order by ensuring individuals behaved appropriately. Several participants used the example of child-rearing to illustrate how changed social systems have impacted upon their families in Australia.

In Sudan, child is presumed public ...relatives feel like if this child is not well disciplined, he will or she will spoil the name of that particular family later, if he misbehaves in public later. So training is not something only done by parents but is communal. Because for instance, you as an adult now... you are serving the entire society.... So the discipline depends upon the public also. – John

The role of the community is greater than the role of the parents... We find it hard here because [in Sudan] a child is brought up by the community. There was a saying that we practice... ‘a child who is not taught by their family will be taught by the community’. – Bol

Participants similarly explained how collective social systems assisted in suppressing rebellious behaviours, as all community members were equally responsible for ensuring children learnt how to behave appropriately.

...in my culture, when I hit my child, he will run to the neighbour or maybe the aunty or uncle. When he gets there they will let him sit down and then will ask him, ‘What happened?’ He will say, ‘This, this, this, this’, then when he calms down, they will get him and take him back. And if he says, ‘No I am not going, my mum she is bad!’, they gonna tell him, ‘That thing that your mum doesn’t want, me too I don’t want it!’. Then the kid will just be good because no-one will support him. – Akon
Minimising shame and upholding family reputations were similarly paramount.

*If a stranger asks [a child] to do something and they do not act properly, then it sets a bad image for the family. People will say, ‘Oh, they didn’t bring up this kid properly’. – Deng*

*If anyone finds a child misbehaving, he can call that child and talk to him or her, and if that situation demands that the child be disciplined, he can, without asking the parents. So this how we do it. – John*

Participants explained their experiences of child-rearing in Australia, reflecting on how this has changed from life in Africa.

*In Australia, if you interfere with someone else’s child and you beat that child or you tell him or her some harsh words, I think it would be interference to the law. We don’t do that here, because in this culture, it is quite different from ours. – John*

*[In the Sudan] We set the mind of the kids, tell them how to do things and how to be good people, they learn from everyone. But it’s hard here, no one hits kids. We want them to be better, but in Australia, they think we are strict. – Rachel*

Although most participants understood that extreme physical punishments are unlawful in Australia, there was confusion between what constitutes discipline and what is abuse, revealing uncertainty amongst parents of appropriate punishments and parenting approaches.

*The problem is here we cannot beat the children, but you know your child is doing wrong thing and you don’t know how to stop it. – Akon*

*We are now in a dilemma of disciplining our kids in Australia… because if we discipline too much, like what we did overseas… we believe that this Department, they can take away your kids, they gonna give them to someone else. – Joseph*

The dilemma over appropriate discipline and the threat of having children removed appeared to cause confusion about the role of police and Child Protection.
[Parents] are asking, ‘Why is the government is trying to overlook each and every house in Australia? Where are the roles of the parents?’ This is the concern being put across. It is like the government is now is like a husband and wife who is overlooking the children and there is no absolute role and responsibilities of the parents. – Bol

Here is hard sometimes because the kids don’t listen to you and the government tell the kids who are sixteen or seventeen, if they want to go out of the house you can go. – Rachel

Changes to gender roles, domestic responsibilities and hierarchical family structures in Australia
Participants explained how collective kinship and social systems in Africa impacted on their experience of family life. Marriage was repeatedly described as a union between two families not two individuals, meaning kinship groups make collective decisions about who their young family member should marry.

Yeah, not really choose [my husband], but I said it’s ok. My family and relatives decided that he was the good one... I have to do what my family decide because then everybody will be happy with me. If I refused, they will be very angry with me. – Grace

If family says no we do not want this girl, then can’t marry. Because you marry for the whole family, not for yourself. – Abraham

Participants explained traditional courtship practices.

...in our culture, if you need to get married, you don’t usually have boyfriend first. If the boy likes you, he can come to your house and talk to your parents first and don’t talk to the girl first... And then if they agree, then he can marry your daughter. – Esther

Our system of boyfriendship or girlfriendship, it’s not the same as you do it here... [in Sudan] If you are not married, you are permitted to make friendships, but there are boundaries that you cannot reach sexual relations. But you can talk, you can discuss whatever you need to discuss, but if you finally decided to marry one another, then the marriage first, before anything else. – John
Participants explained how collectively made decisions made about marriages meant individuals lacked choice in selecting partners and entering into relationships. Some female participants described being forced to marry.

...in Sudan, you do not have boyfriend, no. The man come and pay the money or the cow and he buy you or pay a lot of money or cow and take you, not just go for nothing and nothing you can do, yeah. – Nyadol

...when I am married, I am not happy with my husband. He is a bit older and I don’t love him when he married me ...but my parents they said, ‘Yes we would like for him to marry you’. – Esther

Some men had similar experiences.

So [your parents] will study that girl and if they study, they will come to you say, ‘The mother and the father are good people and we need a good relationship with them and you are the one to bring that relationship’. – Bol

However, marriage was not always experienced negatively. Participants explained how marriage was viewed by society as a symbol of maturity, making it attractive to young people.

When [children] become mature a little bit at the age of 18 to 20, they can say something about family affairs. But below that, they are presumed to be not decision makers. They receive instructions and if they want to contribute, they contribute something little but not commanding. Only when they get married can they really contribute. – John

To be responsible is if you are married. – Bol

Participants explained how the marriage becomes ‘official’ when a dowry is paid from the husband’s family to the wife’s family.¹⁰

¹⁰ The dowry was traditionally paid in cows, goats, pigs, crops or cultivating equipment from the husband’s family to the wife’s family. In recent times, dowries are often paid in money and can total sums of AU $10,000 - $20,000 (MIC 2008a).
In our culture, if the man wants to marriage, he has to give the wife’s family the dowry. So my husband paid the dowry to my family in Africa. Then they did a big celebration. After this one finished, you can go to your husband’s house. – Grace

Participants explained how dowry wealth is shared amongst the bride’s kin.

Like when girls in the family get married and your family gets dowry, they divide it between everyone like cousin and nephew and so on for all the family, they divide it... they give it to you, all sharing. – Abraham

The dowry similarly represents an exchange for subsequent children resulting from the marriage.

...we pay the dowry and we know that even if we get divorce or separation, those children are gonna belong to me. – James

Most participants described divorce in the Sudan as unacceptable.

But in our rule, and we put this rule, if you marry, no divorce. – Abraham

Yeah we don’t married to get divorced; not our upbringing. – Rebecca

Others explained how extended kin assisted husbands and wives to resolve conflict.

It is not a simple thing to easily divorce. The biggest priority is that when there are problems in the relationship, relatives jump in, settle this with a very comprehensive way of settling it. – Dau

Several participants described the social expectation to follow these practices within their families and communities in Africa.

...in Sudan when you grow up as a girl in the house, you are definitely going to get married by dowry – cows, goats, money. My people pay gold and cows. You have to get married. If you run away without getting married, we think that you will have a bad life. It is also not good for the parents, people will talk about your family like they are not a good family. – Akon
Grace was the only participant who was married after arriving in Australia. She described the importance of following the wishes and practices of her parents and relatives in Africa, even though she was in Australia.

*Like, if you do that, like just got married [without the involvement of family], your family will not be happy with you. All the family would tell you that you betrayed the family. So they have to do this one. If your father goes and talks to other man’s family like this, then he’s proud with you. So this is so important.* – Grace

Although Grace felt the need to follow south Sudanese traditions in Australia, other unmarried participants’ responses reveal the difficulties in living between two cultures.

*Yeah the [marriage] system here is good anyway... We prefer the new one, but our parents, they don’t like the new one, because they want some money or something.* – Rebecca

*I want to marry the traditional way, I know my parents will want this, so it’s ok... But things will be different because we will be equal. I want to be able to choose my husband, or if not even choose, I want to get to know him first.* – Monica

Unmarried participants describe the conflict in wanting to have relationships before marriage, but not wanting to upset their parents.

*...hanging around with a girl is not allowed for us, and you will offend the family of the girl if you do that... I’m doing it now though but I do it illegally, I’m not allowed to do that. I just call girls, but I don’t call them out, to meet out, that’s the line I don’t want to cross. I don’t want to say, ‘Can’t we meet, can’t we go to movies?’, I don’t want to do that... because I have to respect their family and I don’t want to offend anybody...* – Choul

*I don’t know where I am going to marry... and I don’t know what kind of girl. Maybe I’m gonna like a white girl or whatever first, I don’t know...* – Deng

*For my mum, it is difficult for her to understand the fact that it's alright for me to have a boyfriend... When guys ask me out, I don’t know what to say, because of my mum... the average [south Sudanese young] person, they are doing like, ‘Mum I’m going out’; ‘Who
with?’, ‘My friend. Bye.’ (laughing). You just say you’re going with a friend and he is your friend, so you’re not really lying. – Monica

Participants’ stories revealed a variety of opinions of parents, on the future marriages of their children.

We cannot force them [to follow traditional practices], no don’t do like that. If they say they have a friend and want to make a marriage, up to them... If they want Sudanese marriage, we can do like that. No force... If they say no, I cannot force them, because later on, it will be consequence to me. – Abraham

One of my [south Sudanese] friends... she is getting an arranged marriage and she totally hates the guy! ...There were two of them and [her parents] picked that one. She didn’t like both of them, but they just picked that one... All the other girls tell her, ‘Tell your mum you don’t like him and you don’t want to marry him or run away’, stuff like that. But she doesn’t want to upset her parents, so... – Monica

Although most participants described ‘traditional’ marriage processes in general and absolute terms, several revealed that they themselves deviated from these practices.

In Sudan, you can have a boyfriend, but you don’t tell your parents, you just say that you have a friend. – Akon

Ah, [my marriage] is not completed, I’m actually going to do part of it here, just recently now, maybe in one month or two months, because I have to pay it. We keep practicing that here, so, yeah, I will pay it soon. – Dau

I got married illegally. Because I didn’t go in the church... well I got pregnant with my friend and we hoped to live together, so I left school. Because he was student and I was student and we were young, so no money. – Rachel

Some participants who broke from tradition appeared uneasy about this and were apprehensive about sharing this information. Bol was noticeably uncomfortable about discussing his relationship, initially claiming he was not married and lived with a friend. Later he revealed he had three children with this friend who was also his partner of 12 years.
My parents were not there [in the refugee camp]… So her parents they say, ‘Ok this boy he is the son of Mr X, we know him, let him go with our girl until we meet with his parents’. So this is what happened. So yeah, so until then I was given the girl and still I am not yet married. – Bol

**Gender roles, responsibilities and power positions within families**

Participants described how they experienced family in Africa by repeated reference to gendered domestic and paid work roles, responsibilities and power positions. Participants repeatedly explained how dowry payments position men at the ‘head’ of the household, a position socialised from childhood and maintained by collective societies in Africa.

...the order of the family in Sudan is man first in the hierarchy of authority, and then the woman, and then children. – John

In our traditional way, people are happy when wife gives birth to a son, not a daughter... If you are a boy then they know very well that you are the backbone of the society because you will take care and protect that society. If you are a girl, they know husband will come from a different society and bring wealth, but the only important thing that will be brought by that girl is the relationship between the community. – Bol

Some participants understood this patriarchal system by reference to the Bible.

Well they are very biblical society, so they believe in the hierarchy of the family. – Dau

...it is even in the creation book, the Bible, that man is the head of the family – Bol

All participants described how men were primary breadwinners and responsible for family decision making within their families. Women were responsible for childrearing and all household chores. Although not largely discussed by participants, there is an emerging body of literature indicating that over the past decade, it has become more common for women to undertake paid work outside the home in Sudan, particularly in cities and towns (Duany & Duany 2001). Most participants in this study however have not lived in the Sudan for over ten years, when they escaped to neighbouring countries to seek refuge from the war. Consequently, participants may not have experienced this social change first hand and thus not consider it ‘traditional culture’.
Underlying participants’ explanations of gendered responsibilities were assumptions of unquestioned male authority within families.

*In my culture, the man is the first to rule the house. They go and they work and the wife she looks after the children.* – Abraham

...*in the Sudanese traditional way of life, the role of the husband is to do other things rather than to do the household jobs. My role in the house is to work... It was only [men] to decide for the family, because they said in Sudanese way of life the decisions of the wife are much involved with emotions, of which there might be some disadvantage.* – Bol

*Most of the house duties were for the ladies... because in our culture, you can’t let a man cook or do anything.* – Grace

*In Sudan, [men] don’t touch anything. Even though the woman cook the food and leave it here in front of him, he has to wait until she come back and she can give him food.* – Rebecca

The assumption that men are sole breadwinners meant that most female participants ceased their paid employment after marriage.

*I worked in Sudan before I got married, I was a primary school teacher, but I stopped when I got married because I started to have children.* – Akon

This was similarly true for women who saw themselves as progressive.

*For me, my mother didn’t know how to read, so she stayed at home and my father went out to work. But for me, because I grew up in the city and lived in the city, I could go to school... so I was working before I married my husband.* – Rachel

Some participants viewed the gendered division of household responsibilities as directly linked to power positions within families.
...when we talk of responsibilities and role, we mean if you take for example the husband is the head of the family. And when anything happens in the house, he is responsible for that. – John

In Sudan, the man is the head of the house. He looks after the money and gives everyone money if they need some money. – Akon

In Kenya, when I worked... all my money I bring home and give to my husband to keep it, but for me, I can't keep money, I have to give it to my husband to keep it. – Esther

For others, the gendered division of household and paid work were seen as a necessary allocation of duties, without reference to hierarchical or patriarchal family structures.

When they are two of us then automatically the role is divided. It's not said, but it's something known... There must be a role. There must be a division of duties. A husband has to know his work, the wife has to know her work. – Bol

...with husband and wife, everyone got roles in Sudan, this is the role of the man of the house and this is the role of the woman... The setting up in Sudan, the man is responsible for going out and bringing food home and the woman has to stay home and look after the kids. – Joseph

Participants described how their fear of social deviance within their communities in Africa helped reinforce gendered role divisions within families.

She will be the one to decide what to buy in the market for food, because she is the one who knew what is in the market, she will manage that money. But if you come and get involved, then people will not be very happy with you, especially men, they will call you a bad name and even the women will not be very happy with you too. – Dau

...women don't want to see their husband working, doing the housework. Because if other women come it will be shame. She will think, 'This woman is lazy, she doesn't work! Why would she allow her husband to work?'... Same thing on side of men. If another man comes he will say, 'You stupid man, what are you doing?'. – James
The absence of several relatives within households or trusted neighbours nearby has also created huge changes in experiences of normal family life. Childcare duties, previously shared amongst kin (and the wider community), has become the sole responsibility of parents in Australia, altering family life. Participants describe how this has created barriers to studying, securing employment and participating in social activities outside the home.

It was really hard when I first came here because it was just me... It was always me, me for everything! I couldn’t study, just looking after the kids all day. – Akon

...looking after kids don’t used to be an issue back home because you always had relatives. ...But now it has changed because it’s just me in the house, me with my two daughters and my wife. – Dau

All the time I’m upset because when I need to go somewhere and my husband needs to go somewhere... and I can’t take my kids, then I have to sit at home, because nobody here. I can’t leave my kids with anyone. And I can’t work too, because my daughter, she turned four now and when I go to try to find a job, they reject me because I have to look after small kids. – Rachel

...if I was to go with my wife somewhere, then I have to look for the childcare to keep my children before I go anywhere. If there is no childcare, then we have to sacrifice and either one of us will have to remain at home and one go. – Dau

In Africa, if you have neighbour, they can look after your kids and you can go to work. And if your neighbour needs to go somewhere… they can leave their kids with you. But here, no one. – Esther

Most female participants discussed the increased responsibilities in domestic duties with the absence of other adult women in the home.

When I was in my family in Africa, we make the duties like today is my duty and I do everything, but tomorrow maybe I got free day. And like if I cook, everybody comes together and eats together, and then we play. So we really enjoy it. But here, just two of us. You just cook and eat and go to bed or one goes to work and it’s really boring. – Grace

It’s not hard because if you are at home [in Sudan] and you need to cook, because you are a big family you have four people to cook, all help. They going to do that, you’re not going
to do that by yourself. But here I’m going to do the cleaning by myself, do cooking, everything by myself. – Rachel

Here, only one person in the kitchen. Seven kids and only one person doing all these things. Very hard! Very different! – Esther

Male participants described how new domestic routines in Australia have meant they have taken on new responsibilities within their families.

But if the situation arise that you are working and she is working, it is definite, you have to help…Take example of shopping, if I was in Sudan I can’t do it. But now, here I can do it. I do. – Dau

Sometimes here I can do my wife’s work; in Sudan I can’t do it. But here I have to do it, because she might be out for a job, so I have to do it. I have to do that as a part of my participation as well. – Joseph

So if man is not working and woman is working, the man in fact should still do the housework. He cannot just be sleeping when there is a lot of work to be done in the house. He cannot just be sleeping when there is a lot of work to be done in the house. – Majok

Female participants explain the significance of men undertaking ‘women’s work’.

...sometimes, he helps me with the kids, does the shower for the kids, does the shopping sometimes. So he changed. Sometimes, he takes the tea or water by himself... I never saw him do anything like that before! Big change. – Rachel

But looking after kids, he can do it. If there is one thing he can do this is it. He can drive kids to school... So we are sharing like that. – Esther

...now, if the woman go to say something, the man they try to do a little bit things. But in Sudan, they don’t touch anything. – Rebecca

However, not all men have made these changes. Joseph explains how some men he knows refuse to undertake duties they do not consider ‘their role’.
...some people, like they got zero tolerance for a woman saying, ‘Look can you take care of the baby while I’m doing this?’: No, they can’t do this. Even the wife cannot ask them for something like this, they’re gonna get angry straight away ...if I said to a group of men, ‘You need to help your wives, like taking care of kids and wife has to go out of house’, like this, well, it’s something strange, no one gonna accept that.

For others, the absence of kin has meant individuals fulfil several kinship roles simultaneously.

Now [my wife] is my sister, is my mother, is my wife. Because now, she have no family, I have no family. – Abraham

Participants explained that some domestic duties are less negotiable than others. Several male participants described their absolute unwillingness to cook, explaining the challenge it poses to their traditional power position.

...some young men like me are being forced, direct or indirect to break their male ego. Something that is not there among Sudanese is for a man to cook... I’m not asked to cook, because it’s culturally taboo... Yeah, if I was asked, I would say no and if he or she insists, I would tell him that he is really easily attacking my male ego, my manhood, and I will not tolerate that. – Choul

...if my wife is willing to teach me how to cook, I would love to help her, we can do it together. But if there is someone coming to the house, I don’t want to see myself cooking... they might think that your wife is on top of you, she is actually the person who is the head of the family, still telling you to do everything... They will say, ‘Look at this man, he has allowed his wife to be the head!’: – James

I do hear that some women need to shift the role, ‘Why not men cooking, take turns?’, I do hear that. But I think it is use of fun and humour, it’s not something actually meant. – John

Nevertheless, there were some shifts in attitudes amongst unmarried participants.

Because male inside is not meant to know how to cook anyway. But if you know how, well that’s well, you are lucky to know... If I could, I should, yeah! If I know, I should do what I can, and help them out, yeah. – Majok
Several male participants suggested women did not want men to cook in Australia.

...our women sometimes they don’t want it, even if you know how to cook. It is considered like down-grading you. – Dau

Because traditionally or culturally, it is not advisable for men to cook. You would even be despised if you let your husband cook. – John

Despite this interpretation, most female participants described a desire for their husbands assist with cooking and other household work.

Like in Australia, I see that men can do everything, even cook and cleaning up. But Sudanese man, they do nothing and it makes it hard for us. – Esther

I do everything, me in the house, cleaning and cooking, everything. So sometimes, it’s hard to change the culture. – Grace

[My husband] can do cooking, but doesn’t like it. Not the culture. – Nyadol

Others have had different experiences. Although Deng does not perceive cooking as threatening, the act of him cooking signifies the absence of his family and kinship community in Australia, reminding him of the different family lifestyle he is experiencing.

I am not thinking about cooking, but thinking about my family, you know? I don’t mind cooking and you don’t think, ‘Oh if my family were here, I wouldn’t have to cook’, you just start thinking about them and realise that you are not together. – Deng

A similar shift in gendered responsibilities between spouses was evident in discussions of household incomes. Male participants explained how they have experienced a shift in breadwinner responsibilities within their families. Participants repeatedly described how women have become breadwinners in Australia due to Centrelink providing larger payments to wives rather than husbands, as parenting payments go directly to mothers rather than fathers.
...men has not become the main provider here, because if the man is not working, the woman must work or Centrelink is paying her the money so... he has that responsibility, but that is not here.  – Choul

Among the Sudanese… the money must be under responsibility of the man. Doesn’t mean that the man is too greedy to take everything, but as the manager of the house, he has that responsibility. But that is not here, Centrelink give the most money to the woman.  – Bol

Some male participants described barriers to securing employment in Australia, denying them the ability to maintain the breadwinner role.

Well the thing I didn’t like is looking for the job, because I did two certificates now…and I didn’t get the job.  I am just looking, looking but no job and I’m not happy with that because I have a kid and I want to work to support myself and support them.  – John

Some they have no education, they have no experience for work…You need to have experience… If you go to get job, they need resume and many other things but this is very hard for me.  I cannot provide for my family.  – Abraham

Having an income has meant some women have participated in family economies and decision making in Australia for the first time.

...in the Sudan, where every family decision has to be made by the man. But here, you must consult. If you make a decision without your wife’s knowledge she might say no and that would result in conflict. – Deng

[in Australia] you can agree together, have discussion and say your opinion. Yes you can do it… One choice only, not good. Yes system in Australia is better… – Nyadol

Many participants experienced the shift in gendered responsibilities as shift in family power positions. Some participants described how Australian systems that provide larger Centrelink payments to women and allow them to occupy breadwinner roles have repositioned women at the powerful family ‘head’. Male participants explain their frustrations.

[Women] feel like they have that power, they become the head of the family now, in
Australia, of which the men are complaining because they feel like their role has been violated... And now it is like upside down... – Bol

This is the confusion; when people came here, the men feel overpowered. They came and created a notion that this is a country of women, women only have the power. So everywhere you go, you get them talking and they say, ‘No, we don’t have power, our power has been taken by women’. – Dau

Losing the ability to maintain breadwinner roles and power positions within families has meant some men have resorted to control and abuse of their wives.

...some [men] are still conservatives, how people behave at home. So if they see the women are changing their attitudes and behaviour, they resort into suppressing them by applying violent means, because this was normal, a thing that was happening at home. Wives are beaten in our culture a little bit if they misbehave. But this is not in accordance with the rule of the law in this country. – John

Women especially sometimes become victims of this one because if they have the parental payment benefits, then men think women have all the money, better than them and they let the wife pay for all the bills. – Dau

If you work it’s your money but you will be afraid, because it’s your husband. You just work and you give him money but if you need to buy something, you tell him. You tell him and he can go with you and you can go to buy, but with yourself, you don’t have choice. – Esther

However, not all male participants hold this view.

One thing that I like about the culture [in Australia] is that everyone is equal and that is good... not like it was in the Sudan, where every family decision has to be made by the man. – Deng

Although Deng’s opinion was unpopular amongst male participants, most women agreed. Female participants describe their experiences of discovering ideas of women’s rights in Australia.
The woman is down in Sudan. No government support for woman. If the man do the bad thing, nobody to see them, to go to them and say, 'Why did you do that?', no, no. Here, the government they can ask, 'Why to do that?', this is the right. Everyone here they have your own right and you can say what you like. – Nyadol

It's good for the woman. It's better because they do what they like, but in Sudan, they couldn't do anything. If the man say, 'It is wrong', the woman can't say anything. – Rebecca

Several female participants describe how they have implemented ideas of rights within their relationships in Australia.

If I want to buy something I can use my own money, money that I have saved away a little bit. – Akon

Life is different… you can make a choice, whatever you want. But Sudan, for the woman, you can't have a choice. Like my husband he send money there now and we don't have enough money here. So I said to him, 'You can go there to work there and support them', but if I am in Sudan, I can't talk to him like that, he would tell me to go out! – Nyadol

Although most female participants welcomed Australian laws and cultural norms that uphold women’s rights, they have experienced difficulties in utilising these in their families.

Yeah they become angry, the man. Because it looks like you break the culture – Nyadol

But I think there are some Sudanese people they leave their culture and they need to take the culture from here. If husband hit wife they are running away. But here I am afraid, because I don't have relatives here. – Esther

Some women found the subject contentious and difficult to talk about.

We will see in the future anyway. Like if you disobey your family, it's not good...That's a big problem. – Grace

Female participants also discussed how they have experienced men’s responses to women’s rights in Australia.
Yeah the man they understand about this here, but they are not happy with this law... They want to be up. But here, everyone the same size, no high, no low and they didn’t like it. But the women, they are really happy with this law here. And it is good because everyone has a choice. – Nyadol

So I think that’s the good thing for the woman, but the man, they don’t like that system. – Rebecca

Most male participants discussed women’s rights in terms of ‘freedom’, comparing women’s family roles and responsibilities in Australia to those held in Africa.

For some women... freedom is too much here, that is the problem. – James

So women, they misuse the human rights of Australia... they think if they are free from a man, you can get everything. What I mean is you can have your community house maybe and you have freedom to make budgeting, have freedom to do wherever you think. – John

Some women, they just take things and change the culture... the women have freedom here and can take advantages. – Deng

...men are much feeling about their rights being violated by putting more rights for women than men. They are even claiming, ‘There are child rights there are woman’s rights where are our rights?’ – Bol

Some male participants explained this as women unjustly challenging patriarchal family structures and power positions within families.

Women are abusing their rights. They even don’t respect their husbands. They feel like they have that power, they become the head of the family now, in Australia, of which the men are complaining because they feel like their role has been violated... And now it is like upside down, the wife is ignoring it and has much responsibility and much rights than the man, so this is another problem now. – Bol

....[women] feel like they have that power, they become the head of the family now in Australia. The men are complaining because they feel like their role has been violated. – Dau
The law of this country is on their side. They do what they choose… I cannot tell them, ‘Do this!’, only if they feel like it. – Choul

Several male participants shared this view, explaining that women ‘take advantage’ of Australian laws, phoning police and falsely claiming abuse in order to shift hierarchical family structures.

It is when their wives are not listening to them, not respecting them. The husband say, ‘Why don’t you respect me? I am this and that’... and if they end up quarrelling, then the wife will call the police automatically and this is oh, problem. – Bol

...when we come to a system that seems to give women that power and they know it, they tend to abuse that system by trying to make use of it as a means of revenge from the past, against their men. Let’s say if you married back in Sudan and with your husband you came here. The way you lived back in Sudan, your husband used to beat you up and these sort of things. So when you come to Australia, where you have freedom and you can exercise your freedom, you now try to use the past to humiliate your husband here. That’s what I mean. – Majok

Some female participants agreed.

[women] think, ‘Yeah this is the freedom country, I can live without husband, I don’t need him in my life, I can live without him’. Even without any reason, they can fight and just kick him out. Yeah, there are some like this. – Akon

Joseph had a different opinion of women falsely claiming abuse.

I don’t think that is going to be true. In Australia here, if your wife decides to go out of your house, she doesn’t need to call the police on you, she can just do it you know... so this is really a very low argument. There must be something happened, and this is definitely why they call the police... Mostly the men here are unfair. He is really treating his wife with no fairness. You really need to treat you wife as it is here. – Joseph

Despite several men holding these views, they were not true for all. Some participants described how despite a change in gender roles and responsibilities in Australia, they continue to follow traditional family practices.
In Australia, now it’s different. Woman can have a choice herself, not the husband. Because government give us money from Centrelink and you can buy anything you want. But I am still using my culture. I give him the money and if I need something I go with my husband. – Esther

Similarly, most unmarried male participants appeared comfortable with the idea of their future wives engaging in paid work, revealing possible intergenerational shifts. However, there were clear patriarchal assumptions underlying participants’ explanations.

...if I am working in the factory and I have my wife, I won’t like her to work in the factory, because the factory work is hard and I don’t want a woman to do the hard work. I just want my wife to do the lighter jobs…, maybe customer service or office job, easy one for woman. – James

I will do the housework and cooking, cleaning and things but I want to work too. He can help with the housework as well, because we’ll both be working… But he will still be the head. – Monica

The women can go to work and I think it is good for the Sudanese women to earn their own money and make their own decisions… but when you say, ‘Look my wife, you gonna do this, you gonna do this’, that will make a good family. If a woman say, ‘Nah I’m not gonna listen to the man, I’m just gonna do what I want’, then won’t make you feel good. – Deng

These interpretations illustrate how some men continue to use Sudanese cultural frameworks to understand and navigate Australian social environments, while others do not. Participants shared their opinions on shifting away from traditional gender roles and domestic responsibilities in Australia, revealing divided opinions on how and why this occurs.

It’s hard for some people because it’s against the traditional. They keep thinking about what their mum did for them. They don’t cook or do this stuff, and they keep that mind, thinking about past… if you start cooking when you’ve already grown up you’re gonna think, ‘Oh what happened to me. If I was back home I would not have done this’ like shame you know. – Deng

The traditional way of thinking should be let go, because environment is different, yeah. So
where we are is not the same as where we came. – Majok

Ah well if your wife is employed and you’re not, you can take turns with looking after children. That is obligatory. Is something not to be discussed, it’s reality... because what the husband is doing is for the benefit of the family and what the wife is doing is for the benefit of the family. So, it is a shared duty which has no disagreement. – John

Possibly [those who refuse to change] haven’t been in touch with the towns, and possibly there is not a big amount of education and that is why they just stick in that place, they stick in that tradition. They are not changing it, even until now… it’s become like a religion and they can’t change it. – Joseph

Children and young people

Participants explained how in traditional south Sudanese culture, children ‘belong’ to their father, as this is included in the dowry price. Male participants subsequently described their confusion of child custody arrangements in the case of marital separation.

...[men] pay the dowry and we know that even if we get divorce or separation, those children are gonna belong to me. What happens in Australia if there is no dowry? I don’t really understand because the children always go to the mother, but who do the children really belong to? – James

...[in Sudan] if you divorce, the children will go to the father but not to the mother. But the children go to the mother in Australia. That is why there is confusion with Sudanese. Because if you divorce here, the rules say no, the children don’t belong to you, they belong to the mum. But you pay a lot of dowry to your wife’s father and her family. – Abraham

If we see the rate of divorce from Sudan to Australia, there is a sharp contrast or difference. Is it because you don’t pay wealth, dowry when marrying? – John

When discussing changed experiences of parenting, several participants explained their experiences of Australian social institutions, which many believe give children unprecedented power within families.

...my son, Centrelink gave him money. They say your son has become eighteen years, so he is adult, we will put money to him. Now if we say to him, pay some money for the renting, he refuse. – Abraham
I have my cousin who is sixteen and Centrelink sent a letter, now that you are sixteen, you are eligible to earn your own money, you know, you can have your own [bank] card. At the age of sixteen you are not old enough, in my culture, to look after yourself. – James

Sudanese feel that husband and wife, feel that their responsibilities have been robbed by the government, because they don’t feel like they have these responsibilities... The government gave the power to the child... – Bol

Like assumptions about women, some participants explained their belief that children and young people phone police and Child Protection services to assert power within families, rather than because they are experiencing abuse.

…the child may run to child protection services, say, ‘My parents have abused me’, but which the child was not abused, he was advised, ‘Don’t do that’, or, ‘don’t walk with the wrong people’... the parents feel as if they have been disassociated. – Bol

They go to school and learn about rights and then try to use this to get what they want at home. The child goes and tells the police things, they make the police believe that something has happened that they are telling the truth. But if I want someone to believe me, I will say things that are not completely true until you believe me, so this is what some of the young people are doing. It makes the parents look bad. Then Child Protection can take the kids away. – Akon

Some younger participants agreed.

You know but here you just think you’re free, you got power, you gonna call cops, triple zero, ‘Oh you know my mum is beating me up ohh’, and all this. Even if it’s not true, some they do that. – Deng

So if you, the parents, say things like, ‘Don’t do this’, they say, ‘Oh well then I’m gonna call the cops’. There [in Africa], you just have to shut up, but here you have a voice to talk because you have a brother here, the cops. – James

Participants experienced this shift as a challenge to traditionally subordinate roles of children in families.
[In Australia] If you tell the younger people, ‘Do this or do this’, they say, ‘I don’t care. Let me do what I like. This is a free country!’ But in our country anyway, it’s not good to give the children freedom, because if you give the child freedom, that child will not become successful. – Rachel

And the role of the children in their house, first one is to respect their parents and this one is not involved in this new culture... they are not respecting what their parents are telling them. – Bol

[In the Sudan] you not even talk, you just listen. Parents, relatives gonna yell at you, they gonna do this, but you listen, you don’t respond back. – Deng

Children, they feel as if they are Australian. But the older people, they feel as if they are not an Australian and this is where the problem arises sometimes. – Dau

Some participants observed faster acculturation and social navigation of children over parents, which has contributed to shifts in family responsibilities and power positions.

Sometimes the kid is in the family where the parents don’t speak English, so the kid becomes the interpreter for them. So they get advantage of interpreting and they know everything better that their own parents. – Dau

Contrastingly, many younger participants described their respect for their parents and traditional family and cultural norms.

...me and my [older] brother and sister, we want that little culture that we remember from Africa here. We kind of understand what our culture is so we try to follow it at home. – Monica

I do what [my relatives] think is good for me... because they are big, they are responsible, they know how to take care of me. – Choul

Participants who are parents describe conflict experienced with their children due to differences in cultural understandings.

...we don’t understand each other. My child says, ‘Oh, my father did not want to give me money’, and if you say, ‘No money’, the child cannot understand because he goes to
school and sees the other children, they have a lot of things like Playstation and so and so. They say, ‘I need this and I need that’, there is confusion... The children think, ‘Oh they did not want to give us things we want’! – Abraham

You tell them something and they say, ‘Dad I know this, don’t tell me’. So they even become a problem for their parents here. – Dau

Younger participants describe such conflicts from their perspectives.

...my mum is really strict... she wants to see who that person is who I’m meeting, where I’m going, what time I’ll be back. And every ten minutes she’ll be calling! – Monica

[My aunty and uncle] even have responsibility on the way that I dress! If they don’t like my clothes they say, ‘Hey, hey, don’t wear those clothes and go out’... So I say, ‘Alright’, and I go back and change clothes and then I say, ‘Ok, do I look ok?’, and they say, ‘Yeah ok, you can go out now’. – Choul

...the family doesn’t have the power to retain the kid. They try to restrict them, but they just say, ‘I’m going here, I’m going here’. If the family does not allow them, then someone is definitely gonna be hurt. – Deng

Some parents wanted to teach their children more about traditional family practices, hoping this would bridge misunderstandings.

I plan, like when my son is about fifteen years, I will take him back to Sudan to see how the life there is good. – Grace

Kids here have a lot of rights... they think we are strict. But we want our kids to be like us, to know our way. – Akon

Others saw the benefits of making changes to fit Australian social environments.

They can choose their own way. You can’t interfere a lot, you can just say, ‘Hey look guys, this is how we do our thing’. If they’re gonna say, ‘Look, we’re not going that way’, then (laughing) you’re not going to convince them anymore. – Joseph
For my kids, our culture, they will not take it. They will learn from Australia because they grow here, so they will take Australia culture. – Esther

Yeah, we apply a little bit our own ways of life, and a little bit of Australian ways, because they are growing up in this culture, so they should be geared towards this culture but not neglecting where they come from. – John

They don’t know much about my culture. Even though I tell them, it’s like stories, not practical. – Bol

Transnational Influences
Participants repeatedly described how despite being physically separated, many maintain regular contact with kin in Africa. A continued connection with kin overseas illustrates ties to concurrent Sudanese culture which can influence experiences of family in Australia.

Twenty-three year old Grace spoke extensively of the important connections she maintains with relatives overseas. During the interview, Grace presented several VHS tapes from her recent wedding in Kenya, depicting hundreds of relatives dancing, eating and celebrating. Despite the celebrations, there was one anomaly – the bride and groom were not present.

Grace and her husband could not afford the trip to Kenya, so remained in Australia during the celebrations, while their relatives made a video of the event. Grace explained how several of her husband’s relatives (many whom she has never met), and her own family had attended the celebration to show their approval of the marriage.

Amidst the celebrations, relatives on the video speak directly to the camera, offering advice to Grace and her husband in Australia. Grace interprets.

This is my husband’s relative. She is talking to my husband. She is saying if your marriage gets some difficulties, how to handle all those problems. She is saying that I should be a good wife, I cannot go with other men. That would be shame.

This is my husband’s other relative; his mother’s, cousin’s wife. She is saying that she is very annoyed at my husband because she didn’t know about the marriage until this celebration, so she is not happy with my husband. She is angry! (laughing)
That is my father. He is saying that I should have eleven children; he thinks that is a good number.

This example reveals the cultural expectations placed on Grace through maintaining connections with family overseas. The obligation Grace feels to fulfil these expectations illustrates how these ongoing connections influence her experience of family in Australia.

Other participants maintained similar connections with kin overseas, receiving advice and feeling obligated to respond appropriately.

What my elder people in Kenya tell me is what I’m doing. They tell me to go to school, study and get degree, that’s the first thing. Because when I came here I was told, ‘Go to Australia, don’t do anything bad, go to school, get a degree, then later get on, after Masters, get married...’. So I said, ‘Yeah that’s good’. – Choul

You know I was actually talking with my aunty yesterday – that’s another aunty in Juba now... She asked me, ‘Why are you not having a wife?’ – Majok

...my family [in the Sudan], yeah they’re thinking, ‘We’re gonna see if there is a lady here [in the Sudan] for you’, because they said, ‘We know something good’. Even my sisters they call me and tell me, ‘Oh look we got a girl here for you, she is very nice, very kind’, and this... Oh I say, ‘Not now, but wait and I’ll see’. – Deng

Most participants sent regular remittances to kin overseas, illustrating the continued connection and participation within reciprocal collective kinship networks.

...you come to Australia and you have a bunch of relatives back home. You have a little bit that you are getting, whether you are working or it is social security, but there is someone dying there. And if you give them fifty dollars, it will be very helpful to them. – Dau

...I send them some money. This is the responsibility of anybody who is here, yeah. You have not just only your relatives; friends, people you know, people you don’t know, they all ask you. – Majok
The expectation from overseas kin to receive financial remittances impacted on family and individual lives in Australia.

*They also expect much, because you are in a different world here abroad. If you let them die, your relatives there because not enough food, your age mate will say, ‘Last time, you let your people die in Sudan, so what are you?’ It’s a big shame. You are someone who has failed.* – Deng

*Yeah you feel guilty. You don’t even want to show yourself to your people. If you saw them in a café, they would say, ‘why are you coming to talk to us, the other day you just let your uncle die of hunger and you were there, such a big mistake’... So I just have to send $130 to my cousin, for school fees and the other fortnight, I have to send the $200 to my uncle, I also have friends and if they ask me, I send.* – James

*If I’m working and saving something instead of sending the money back there to help people, well you feel guilty... so you see the possibility of me having a shop is too far, it’s not gonna happen.* – James

For some, sending remittances overseas means their families in Australia are left in financial hardship.

*...it is hard sometimes because we support our mother, and pay the rent and pay the bills. Like, if I want to pay [my mother] a lot of money and then I want to buy some book or something and then I cannot, then I will not be happy. This is the same with my brother, the same with my sister.* – Rebecca

**Ties to the local south Sudanese ‘community’ in Australia**
Participants revealed strong connections to others from south Sudanese backgrounds living in Australia. Many described interactions with other people in the south Sudanese ‘community’ in Melbourne.

*Sometimes, we have cultural events. This year we had a traditional dance... The community comes together and we remember our culture.* – Dau
...sometimes we organize ourselves. Like I have a neighbour here, Sudanese lady from my community, and she has a little boy. Now she went to Footscray so she left her son with me. Another day, I can leave my daughter with her, like that. – Nyadol

Several participants used ‘we’ constructs in describing experiences of family change. At times, this appeared to represent the continued influence of collective social frameworks used perhaps subconsciously by participants when reflecting on life in Australia. However, it similarly became evident that the ‘we’ represented a connection within the south Sudanese ‘community’ in Melbourne. Repeated descriptions of how ‘the community’, viewed and experienced family change illustrated how it has particular cultural expectations for its members.

[My aunty and uncle] don’t need me going out and bringing shame to the family. Because amongst Sudanese, we talk about it. We talk behind other people. So if you do something bullshit, it will not go away from you. It will be saved for ages and ages. – Choul

…and if a child starts doing bad things, people are not going to be involved in your house, we stay away. That’s what I am worrying about now. – Esther

…and you have to be in the line of the community, you are culturally forced not to do something that your age-mates are doing... So I avoid some of the things that my friends are doing and when I marry I will be given a big credit from the community, I will not be refused a wife because of my behaviours. – Bol

Several participants’ used the example of young people moving out of home to illustrate how ‘the community’ dictates what is considered ‘appropriate’ family behaviour.

If you go to uni and live somewhere… leave the parents and live as independents, move out of the family, this is not one of the things that Sudanese can allow. – Majok

…it’s not good to move away from the family, against the culture, but here, it’s the culture... I wonder what is their thinking, coz if it is me, I can’t move away from my family. I can’t until I’m married, you know? – Deng

It’s hard because no one can leave their son or daughter to go away, move out of the house at this time, we cannot allow it. – Rachel
Although participants were clearly united in opinions on some issues, for others, opinions differ, revealing variance within ‘the community’. Participants’ diverse explanations of sexual relationships before marriage illustrate this.

No one will ever marry that girl and it can cause shame. It will definitely be the girl who will suffer, because what if she has kids with that guy and she is not married? Then he can just go and get another girlfriend and have another kid and take those kids. We cannot do this.
– James

...in our culture, it is allowed um, having a child out of wedlock is considered a marriage, it is not a crime. – Dau

Despite these two opinions differing, each is presented in absolute terms, projecting the speaker’s opinion onto the entire community. With such divergence in assumed rules of what is allowed within ‘the community’, other participants appear to have become confused in trying to appease the somewhat divided collective. This was evident as Rebecca explained how she became pregnant to her boyfriend in Australia. Although she now wants to live with her partner, she felt this would bring shame to her family.

I feel shocked sometimes because I want my boyfriend, but my boyfriend he didn’t have the money [to pay the dowry required to get married]. So I don’t like this sometimes, because I wanna go and stay with my boyfriend, but my parents said ‘No’.  

This indicates how Rebecca has followed one ‘acceptable’ practice in wanting to wait until marriage before living with her partner, despite having rejected another which some participants described as unacceptable within the community.
Focus Group Findings

Focus groups provided an opportunity to further discuss experiences of change in family life as well as experiences of participants within community and government services, to identify how services could better respond to conflicting pressures within families.

Pressures for change in family life

The first focus group question was: What has influenced individuals and families from south Sudanese backgrounds to make changes within their families in Australia? Participants suggested that some changes were motivated by a perception that making changes would be advantageous to their families Australia.

It’s changing because we are trying to adapt to this life... You are not going to go back soon, so it is better to understand yourself as husband and wife and work to support yourself better. These are the valuable changes. – Participant group (Male, 34)

...the way of life itself tell us that you have to do this so that your life goes well. So there is a pressure of the surroundings that dictates that we have to change, so we are changing a little bit. – Participant group (Female, 39)

Others explained how environmental factors dictated by Australian social environments, institutions and laws have imposed unwanted change.

...at the end, the rules are the rules and the laws are the laws and you have to go with what it is. And you can’t get away from abiding by the law, and this is where it came to my mind that I have to adjust as well. Not because I’m happy with that, but just um to cope with the life in Australia.... – Participant group (Male, 34)

...I will be afraid of my new wife, because if she does something wrong, you’re gonna be afraid to tell her, ‘This is wrong, you are not supposed to do this’. You are afraid because you think she’s gonna involve police, and that’s not good for me, police might take you away. – Participant group (Male, 23)

In Australia, everyone is busy... Lots of things [to do]... so the whole day is going to finish and you don’t know what is going on. But in the Sudan, not busy like this one. So we change now. – Participant group (Female, 33)
Leaders explained their belief that adapting family roles and structures to fit Australian social environments generally benefits families in Australia.

*It’s good that most of the families change or adapt to the Australian way of living. Not because we like that way too much, but because it is the only way to be successful here in Australia.* – Leaders group (Male)

*Generally speaking, it’s good to change.* – Leaders group (Male)

Despite the perceived benefits of some changes, participants explained the difficulties of abandoning familiar family practices.

*But it’s hard to change your culture and your custom and all that; that is very hard.* – Participant group (Male, 34)

Wanting to maintain cultural identity was important for several participants, who described subsequent resistance to change.

*It’s hard for some people when it’s against the traditional. They keep thinking about what their mum did for them. They don’t cook or do this stuff and they keep that mind, thinking about past.* – Participant group (Male, 23)

*It’s holding them back a little bit because I know people who got ten years here and they are still like people who have just arrived yesterday… in terms of adapting to the system here. Because they are still thinking about Sudan, thinking that they are gonna go home tomorrow.* – Participant group (Male, 45)

*...if man is not working and woman is working, the man in fact should still do the housework... But that’s not the case at the moment, because there is that rigidity that I see with the Sudanese men.* – Participant group (Male, 23)

Leaders similarly explained family conflicts they have observed where one family member resists change.

*...there is a lot of time that [families] spend arguing about doing things wrong, ‘You did this wrong, if you didn’t do this, we wouldn’t be involved in this problem’. And this kind of*
instability, it creates a lot of burden for kids, it can create a burden to wife and it can create a burden to husband. – Leaders group (Male)

...still a lot of women are really struggling to participate in the community as a woman. And not because they don’t want to participate but because there is not really any kind of understanding at home. Um, it’s an area that we really need a lot of people to work on, but it’s not... a very easy thing to do. Up until now, they can’t understand this. – Leaders group (Male)

Barriers to making changes were positioned alongside explanations of incongruity between traditional south Sudanese understandings of families and Australian social environments. Leaders reflected on the findings summary from participant focus groups and interviews to explain.

...everything you have put down here is true regarding the Sudanese community. And according to the roles of men, women, exactly the conflict that are happening, you have mentioned every single point here... [In Sudan] everything is done in terms of the rules of a man and a woman. No equality like here. A man have right to do this and this, and whole society has to follow... So the Australian culture itself, I think people don’t get it. – Leaders group (Female)

Yeah, I think that when we talk of misunderstanding of culture, that exists in the community... Awareness should be created among the community... to cement that gap of understanding between Australian culture and Sudanese culture. – Leaders group (Male)

...there is often a lot of conflict with our culture. Some find that some of the things in Australia are not fitting in within the culture. – Leaders group (Female)

The experience of services and suggestions for enhanced practice
The second question explored participants’ experiences of community and government services: How have community and government services assisted individuals and families from south Sudanese backgrounds to make changes in their families?

Participants described how information and support received from settlement services assisted families when they first arrived in Australia by providing necessary information.
After I arrived here, we been invited for a [information] session. And that was 2004 and there were a lot of activities going on about harmony relationships and about violence and about family life.... And from that, I picked that we are in a different part of the world and possibly people can be flexible with your ideas and can accept sort of what you’re saying. – Participant group (Male, 45)

...we got a lot when we come here. We learn Australian rules and Australian laws and everything. And even here at the Migrant Centre, they really taught us a lot of things when we first come! They bring all the organizations, the police, the health, even the Child Protection they come to teach us. – Participant group (Female, 39)

Participants’ responses illustrate their safety in utilising services for issues general to resettlement and cultural awareness. However, they similarly describe resistance to access services to discuss issues relating to family change.

In order to be helped as a person, you have to accept that there is something wrong going on ...the community here sometimes don’t respond to what is available. There is help, but they don’t respond. – Participant group (Male, 34)

I think people presume they are already aware of their environment, which is totally wrong thing and they are putting themselves into a big headache. – Participant group (Male 23)

Leaders explain that poor service utilisation for assistance with family related issues may reflect the low value placed on the information individuals expect to receive.

We the workers think that they need information but, they themselves think that they don’t need it, that’s the problem. – Leaders group (Female)

This is really very strange to get to people to come and participate. To my belief, they are not valuing the information. And when people are not valuing the information, it’s hard to get them involved ok? And this is why they get all these things misunderstood and this is why they mess up a lot, because they can be faced with a problem, but they don’t have the clues to solve this problem. If they force themselves to come down for just two hours, they might be having some skills to solve this problem. – Leaders group (Male)
They think, ‘Okay, I am going to go to that session, but what will be the benefit that I am going to get from that discussion?’ And if they think it is not worth that ten dollars [for transport costs], they will think, ‘Okay, I better save this ten dollars and not go to that session’. – Leaders group (Male)

Participants revealed other barriers.

…it’s pride, thinking, ‘If I ask this, I will feel I don’t know, like I am more stupid’... So if you ask, go, listen, attend the meetings, you will always get the right message, get something new. – Participant group (Male, 23)

...if you go and ask them again the reason of not attending, it become another issue. Some don’t have transport to come with, some don’t have, like their husband is working and their child is at home and nobody is remaining with this kid... So they will have lots of genuine reasons why they cannot attend, but here is a good thing for them. – Participant group (Male, 34)

Leaders explain their observations that the lack of service utilisation, mixed with community gossip can sometimes lead to misunderstandings of services’ intentions for families.

_The community are seeing it like Australians, or service providers, want you to abandon your total culture, this is the feeling. And in this case, they are thinking, ‘No, we can’t abandon our culture!’; so they don’t attend._ – Leaders group (Female)

_Some of them say, ‘When we arrived here, women listened to us, but after they get exposed to all this kind of orientation [at community services], they change’... so they say to their wives, ‘Look, I’m not trusting these guys, so you are not going’._ – Leaders group (Male)

_They’re not listening... Because really, [if] they came down here, they listen, they get educated, and they raise their profile up. But us, we don’t. We are assuming that we know everything and this is where we got lost._ – Leaders group (Male)

Discussions during the participant focus group demonstrated these perceptions. Participants explained their understandings and experiences of police and Child Protection
services. Reiterating the beliefs expressed during interviews, participants explained how these services unfairly undermine traditional family roles and structures.

_The police support the kid, because when they run into the service or the government and they call the police, they support them. They say yes and if they don't want to go back home, no problem, they can support everything she want to do! But that one is really a big problem to have, because you want to sit with your kid._ – Participant group (Female, 39)

..._here, if the kid call Child Protection, they just come straight away. By that, Australians have that process, you just come and take the kid straight away, before you see what’s happening and that one doesn’t show the research for our culture you know._ – Participant group (Male, 23)

..._the government supports them to be bad kids. Because when they run to the police... they can come to me and say, ‘You didn’t treat him in a good way!’_. But he’s my child! How can I treat him badly? – Community group (Female, 33)

Leaders explained these were common misconceptions within ‘the community’.

..._they misinterpret some things... and think that Child Protection workers just come and take children from their families without any reason, which is obviously not true. They don’t take child from the parents without a reason._ – Leaders group (Female)

_They don’t understand that this is because of the violence, and they think that [Child Protection] are just taking [children] because they want to promote their jobs.... But in actual fact, it is because of the life which is of concern._ – Leaders Group (Male)

..._some people they think that the kids refer themselves to Child Protection so that they can be free from their family and to do what they want, but unfortunately, that understanding is wrong._ – Leaders group (Female)

Leaders similarly described their observations of parents using traditional ‘south Sudanese’ understandings to interpret Child Protection interventions in Australia.
They say, ‘No I am not going to mistreat or beat my child to the point of killing’. Also to the legal point they are saying, ‘If I am not going to kill my child, why should my child be taken away?’ – Leaders group (Male)

They think [Child Protection] are targeting how they are living their life, how they treat their children. People are not happy; they don’t understand that it’s the rules. – Leaders group (Female)

Participants’ discussions similarly reveal feelings of being persecuted.

I agree with the Child Protection agencies when there are abusive parents. Like take for example the parents that are drinking on both sides.... and also if there is evidence of an intensive abuse to a child, then there is no way a Child Protection agency would be prevented from taking any action. But for the cases of a child who the parents have a good intention for them, well... – Participant group (Male, 34)

Participants described their frustration at being targeted for parenting programs and information sessions, believing children, not parents require redress.

If you need something, my concern is with the kids, not the parents! We don’t need anything, we are ok... we have everything but the problem is our kids. – Participant group (Female, 39) years)

...I’m very happy if there is a program now for the children. We don’t like the kids when they run away without mum and dad. – Participant group (Female, 33)

They don’t understand what freedom is, especially no proper education for these kids about the freedom. – Participant group (Male, 35)

Leaders commented that increased knowledge for both parents and young people could assist in reducing intergenerational conflict.

I think the kids and the parents both need the parenting sessions so they can both understand the system. Because they think that the upbringing and parenting in Australia is just spoiling kids, giving whatever they want. – Leaders group (Female)
So, in fact I can say the kids are vulnerable because they don’t know what they are doing. The parents also don’t know what they are saying because they assume things about the system that Australian people are working within. – Leaders group (Male)

Leaders similarly described the difficulties that resettlement has on all family members, sometimes straining family relationships.

...when we came from Africa, we got our culture and the culture is the one with rules to guide the child... But here when we come to Australia, things have changed, culture has changed. Like the boys are not allowed to go to kitchen in our culture but here in Australia the boys are expected to contribute... which is opposite to our culture, we don’t want our boys to go to kitchen, so it’s contradicting. Here, Australian girls, their mothers are the ones who do the work. But in our culture, our girls from age of twelve, she must know how to cook, clean the house and she can even mind her brothers and sisters. – Leaders group (Female)

Some kids misunderstand the law and think that because we talk of rights and young people have rights, they think this overrides the power of the parents. This means that there are a lot of kids misbehaving. – Leaders group (Male)

Participants expressed their views on services for women and children who experience family violence and how these have altered family constructs and traditional gender roles in Australia. Participants repeatedly discussed cultural collisions between some service interventions and traditional family dispute resolution practices.

For us, we just go to the relatives to solve the [marital/family] problem and if it’s a big problem, go to the court. But here, just go straight away to police, to court. But in our culture, talk to relatives first, before you go... but not here, the cops are now the relatives! – Participant group (Male, 23)

...your problem with your wife, that does not need to go out [of the family]. Because if you have a problem, solve it inside [the family]. But the moment they cross to other people outside, then you become helpless to the society, he says, ‘What can I do? I don’t have the power to control my wife anymore’... – Participant group (Male, 34)

These comments illustrate how participants view family service intervention, particularly laws preventing violence against women, as unnecessary ‘interference’ within the
previously private family sphere. Participants explained how this clashed with traditional family roles and conflict resolution processes.

*Intervention Orders is a good document that can protect any person who is in danger, but they don't go with the culture of the Sudanese.* – Participant group (Male, 34)

Leaders explained their observations of men inhibit their wives from being exposed to women’s support services and information about human rights.

*There is a rumour in the Sudanese community saying that the people who oriented the women... are educing them about their freedom in their houses, so when they get home, they’re gonna talk about it; “This is my right and I have to do this and I have to do that”, this is where the argument between wife and man started. So this is their belief and this is why some people are not sending their women down. They believe that they are gonna be taught something different than what is expected at home.* – Leaders group (Male)

*They think that if the police is following up with court and all this, they think that they are being mean to them, they don’t understand... Like when they take the man out of the house [following an Intervention Order]. In my culture, they took the woman out of the house, not the man.* – Leaders group (Female)

Participants’ comments reveal how assumptions, rumours and gossip about service agencies and their intentions can thus spread throughout ‘the community’.

*People say this is a woman’s country, I heard that. Woman’s country with her kids.* – Participant group (Female, 33)

*They thought that the law favours women and they are saying, ‘Hey everything favours women!’ and they become unhappy!* – Participant group (Male, 34)

*Everyone is assuming. And we are perceiving the culture according to the way we did it and this is the conflict. The parents, women need to learn something, the fathers need to learn something, the children need to learn something.* – Leaders group (Female)

*...we always need to make a bigger thing from a smaller thing, and that is where we got lost. We do not deal with the realities. The reality is if I got a single case, I do not have to generalize it...yes there is kids who have run away, yes there is a lot of things going on ok?*
But if you take the average of these kids, it is less than 3 per cent of the whole community, so... – Leaders group (Male)

These findings illustrate the confusion and subsequent mistrust of some services, particularly when interventions appear to undermine traditional family structures.

Suggestions for service providers to better meet the needs of individuals and families was explored in the third question, How can community and government services better assist individuals and families from south Sudanese backgrounds to make changes within their families to lead happy and healthy family lives in Australia?

Both participants and leaders group members unanimously recommended community and group based interventions from service providers, rather than suggestions for improved work with individuals. Increasing awareness of Australian laws, social norms and the intentions of services was repeatedly suggested by both interview participants and leaders.

...for the service providers to work effectively with the community, I think first of all the service workers should create awareness within the community so that they are aware of what is really the law of Australia. Because if they don’t know the law of Australia, it will be very, very difficult for them to live like that. – Leaders group (Male)

What I can suggest for the working providers is to raise awareness within the community, to let them know about what is going on, because someone can say no to something if they don’t know or they don’t understand about what is going on. But if they get a session and they got trained and they been taught about this, they can understand and they can respond – Leaders group (Female)

The Australian law does not mention anywhere that the country belongs to men or the country belongs to women. But the law says, ‘See one another as humans. Recognise her as a human and she has rights’... this is the training needed. – Participant group (Male, 34)

Participants suggested increased cultural awareness training to educate Child Protection and community service workers about traditional south Sudanese family roles, responsibilities and structures, suggesting this could assist to bridge understandings and build trust of services within the community.
...we should be together, the parents and the government or the police or whatever. We should be together and then teach them. Like my child, he will come to you and say, ‘My mum, she does this and this’. You have to say, ‘No, this is your mum. Whatever she does, she wants you to be good boy or good girl. Your mum will never not love you, she will always love you! She just wants you to learn this and this and this’. They should just tell them that. – Participant group (Female, 39)

Some young people, they call up youth agency and they say, ‘Oh my mum did this’, and what they should do is that they have to listen to parents first before they receive the young person. You don’t have to just come and take them, because if they take them, maybe he’s lying, you don’t know... But Australian people, maybe agency and the police department, they really need to consider that maybe they’re lying alright? And they have to see exactly what their family situation is, they have to see what is between the child and the parent, they have to see what is the gap and what is lacking there you know? – Participant group (Male, 23)

Despite abandoning the predominant view that Child Protection removes children ‘for no reason’, leaders agreed that increased cultural awareness for service providers could be beneficial.

The services need to be aware of the issues and of the culture which we have come from, because this is still our motivation and this is what some people are thinking here in Australia. – Leaders group (Male)

Leaders similarly explained how this could improve practice approaches and services’ relationships with the south Sudanese community.

...what I understand with the service providers is that some are very rigid in the way of their thinking. They say this is what they expect the community to do. But the community has their own way of thinking, own way of looking at things. So I think it would be better if they could be a bit more flexible. Thinking, ‘Okay, this is what the people want, how can we try to go about it?’ Not like, ‘No, you must do it like this and like that’, so they need a bit of flexibility. And if we can develop that flexibility among the service providers and the community, then the work can be a success. But if we say, ‘This is black and white that you have to follow’, then it becomes very difficult to work together. – Leaders group (Male)
I think also the service providers themselves should from time to time, come together to share their experiences... because I am sure that among service providers, there are some who are very good at interacting with the community and with working with them to get them participating in programs. But other service providers I know find it difficult to interact, because of their approach. The way you approach people matters a lot and some of them lack that skill. So then they find it difficult to interact with the community. – Leaders group (Male)

Participants suggested using existing community structures to do this.

So I would recommend the best way to train now is using our churches, using our community meetings... encouraging them through community things like excursions or cultural events, and then allow people to speak there will always be the best thing to help with. – Participant group (Male, 34)

...you can meet the ladies, like during the meeting of the group that we have here on Tuesdays. You can pick one of those days [to attend], because we come here every week. – Participant group (Female, 39)

Leaders agreed that this was a useful approach, so long as service providers recognised some rules.

...it’s the people who have to identify the problems... So usually the community identify their problems in a community meeting... they say, ‘Okay here are the problems, how can we solve it? Can we invite experts to talk about it?’ And they will say, ‘Oh yes, I think this is good for us to have experts to talk about it’. Then this is whereby when the experts come in, everybody will thank you and everybody will participate very actively. So I know the right thing to bring up in the meeting, which may need to be addressed. – Leaders group (Male)

...you can make it clear before the meeting session, on the timetable. Say, ‘We are going to talk about this and this and this’. Then if there are any service providers coming, then we need to put in the agenda that they are coming and the topic that they are going to talk about. This is what you have to put here... Because if you say later, ‘Can we give time for the service providers to speak?’, they will say, ‘What, why? Waste of time!’ – Leaders group (Male)
I think the thing is, for people to come [to a session/program], you have to tell them, what you are going to talk about. So if they know that the topic that you are going to talk about is interesting for them, they come. If it’s not interesting, they don’t come. So for the service providers, the topic they put on must be interesting for the community. – Leaders group (Male)

The importance of working not only within the community, but within its structures, boundaries and rules are therefore evident.

These findings reveal the plethora of different experiences of family men and women from south Sudanese backgrounds have lived through both before and since arriving in Australia. Similarly illustrated are the different experiences and barriers to accessing community and government services that can assist families due to misunderstandings of service intentions and approaches. The next chapter will discuss these findings in greater depth, highlighting the importance of service providers working both alongside and within south Sudanese ‘communities’.
Chapter 5 - Discussion of Findings: Recognising influences on families and adopting collaborative approaches to practice

The findings illustrate how men, women and children had different experiences of family in Africa, based on cultural constructs which determined gendered and age-related roles, responsibilities and power positions within families. How family is experienced within Australia is dependent on how past experiences and relationships are reconstructed and changed within the new social environment. This chapter further considers the three major factors revealed in the findings which influence change within families – interactions with Australian social environments, transnational connections with kin and concurrent south Sudanese culture in Africa, and interactions within the local south Sudanese ‘community’ in Australia.

This chapter goes on to consider what this study highlights about service provision with men and women from south Sudan living in Australia. It concludes that workers and service agencies need to be aware of their clients’ conflicting experiences and seek to understand them in order to bridge misunderstandings. It similarly suggests that working alongside ‘communities’ to develop new services would create more positive working relationships and ensure programs are better able to assist men, women and young people as they reconstruct family life in Australia.

Australian social environments, social institutions and cultural norms – influences on individuals and families

Frameworks developed to assist in analysing experiences of migrant and refugee families suggest external forces within host societies can influence family change (Benson 1994; Foner 1997; Boyle & Ali 2010). The findings suggest living in Australian social environments and interacting with Australian social institutions has created great shifts away from how men, women and young people from south Sudan experienced family in Africa. Western assumptions underlying social policy and institutions have reconfigured south Sudanese families into nuclear constructs. This alters who can claim membership to a family, shifts family role expectations, restructures gendered responsibilities in the
home and overturns traditional hierarchical family structures. Consequently, this new way of life is incongruous to previous understandings and experiences of family.

For participants, the assumption of small nuclear family constructs within Australia has imposed practical changes to household experiences. Homes and cars are not generally built to accommodate large families. Participants described difficulties in finding rental properties that appropriately cater for all of their children. Others described being forced to accept rental properties in suburbs away from relatives and friends. Previous studies suggest that in private rental markets, refugee families can face discrimination due to their low socio-economic status and large numbers of children (Higgins 2009; Spinks 2009; Davis 2010; RCOA 2010a). This has meant participants’ families can struggle to secure private rental homes, and may be pushed into outer suburbs away from relatives and friends, making reconstruction of communal living arrangements comprised of several kin impossible.

McDonald-Wilmsen and Gifford (2009) found families, as understood by former refugees from Africa living in Australia (including those from Sudanese backgrounds) are not reflected in current immigration policies. The DIAC policy that only recognises those in nuclear configurations to register as ‘families’ for resettlement has meant some participants have indefinitely separated from kin. Studies suggest separation between resettled refugees in Australia and their relatives overseas is prolonged by the limited number of Family Reunification Visas issued yearly, for which applications to the DAIC far exceed those allocated (RCOA 2009; McDonald-Wilmsen & Gifford 2009). For participants this has led to grief and anguish, evident in their longing for reunification with relatives. This reflects previous findings suggesting separation from family during resettlement can cause extreme emotional distress (Shakespeare-Finch & Wickham 2009; Hebbani et al. 2010).

Being physically separated from kin in Australia has similarly created a shift from collective, interdependent family households to independent and individualistic living arrangements. These findings reflect family change frameworks which suggest changed demographic compositions of families can influence family change (Kibria 1994; Foner 1997; Boyle & Ali 2010).
The absence of extended female kin in the home has meant the majority of housework and childcare responsibilities have fallen on mothers and wives alone. Female participants described the consequent loneliness, social isolation and increased workload, changing experiences of everyday life. Some explained the inability to regularly participate in activities outside the home. These changed responsibilities of women was shown to create barriers to attending English classes and participation in further study, which can also mean lack of employment opportunities in the future.

For men, a new social environment that does not enforce nor condone patriarchal family structures means their traditional and previously advantageous gender role has been lost. Male participants described shame associated with undertaking household responsibilities in Australia traditionally considered ‘women’s work’. Participants explained how in Africa, men were ridiculed for entering kitchens or participating in housework and childcare duties. In Australia however, time constraints, women’s employment and social pressures have meant some male participants now undertake some domestic chores.

However, others explained their unwillingness to accept this change. Some male participants described the suggestion of undertaking responsibilities traditionally assigned to women insulting, laughable even, refusing to take on new responsibilities. Reflecting the findings of earlier studies, this has severed identities for some participants, crushing pre-conceived ideas of what it means to be a husband and father (MIC 2006, 2008a; SERMRC 2007; Broadway 2008; Lejukole 2008). Participants’ stories thus reflect how pre-migration experiences of family continue to influence life in Australia, illustrating factors Boyle and Ali (2010) and Moghissi (2003) suggest influence family change amongst refugees.

Australian immigration policies which entitle humanitarian entrants to social security payments have exacerbated these shifts in gendered responsibilities within households. Participants discussed how the policy that automatically allocates Centrelink parenting payments to mothers rather than fathers, means women are likely to receive higher payments and hence occupy family ‘breadwinner’ roles. While parenting payments allocated to women are underpinned by ideals of women as primary child care-givers, participants explained how many men perceive this as positioning women at the powerful family ‘head’. It similarly means that while women can maintain their traditional role
undertaking household chores in the home, men are not allocated the payment for the family, meaning their traditional role as breadwinner becomes lost.

Unemployment of men in the study has exacerbated this experience. Participants cited numerous barriers to attaining employment in Australia, which increased feelings of shame and helplessness amongst men. Echoing findings of earlier studies, participants in the current study discussed how limited English, interrupted education, lack of Australian work experience and references and unrecognised qualifications have created barriers to securing employment (Higgins 2009; Spinks 2009; AHRC 2010; Hebbani et al. 2010; Olliff 2010).

Studies have similarly found that without employment, men can feel a sense of failure in resettlement, significantly decreasing their sense of achievement and wellbeing (Valtonen 1998; Colic-Peisker 2002; Fanjoy et al. 2005). Several men in the study certainly felt disempowered by their inability to fulfil the traditional breadwinner role, to which unemployment was a contributing factor. Facing barriers to undertaking what were traditionally considered male responsibilities have subsequently changed experience of family amongst men in Australia.

For some women in the study, having an income, mixed with gaining knowledge about human rights frameworks has positioned them in favourable ‘bargaining’ positions within marriage relationships. Female participants explained how they have been able to make decisions in their families and buy things for themselves, without asking their husbands. Some explained their appreciation of Australian social institutions and laws that condemn violence against women and make men accountable for poor treatment of women. Most female participants looked favourably on their new role and increased agency; some overtly stated their preference for “Australian culture”.

These findings reflect those of Baird (2009), who found that Sudanese women who had access to incomes in host societies similarly experienced a shift in self-perception, moving from a dependent or inferiority construction of self to one of independence and ability. Other studies suggest that access to human rights frameworks can similarly provide opportunities for refugee women to challenge dogmatic patriarchal family structures (Hondagneu-Stoelo & Messner 1994; Darvishpour 2002; Dolo & Gilgun 2002; Baird 2009).
This was similarly evident in the findings, as some female participants described having increased agency to challenge authority in their households.

These findings illustrate how the ‘patriarchal bargain’, as proposed by Kandiyoti (1988) and Pease (2009) has shifted in some women’s favour amongst participants. However, this was not the experience of all.

Male participants and some female participants described women and children as having “too much freedom” and “taking advantage” of laws and social institutions which support women in Australia. These claims possibly reflected the difficulty men face in adjusting to a society where they are denied absolute authority within their families. Some participants described instances of family violence they had observed in “other families”, perpetrated by men as a means to regaining their authoritative power position within the family. Participants explained how some men sanction women’s Centrelink payments, take control of bank accounts and refuse to pay for household expenses.

Similar instances of south Sudanese men using violence as a means to regain authoritative power positions in families have been previously reported within the service sector in Melbourne (MIC 2008a; Kasidis 2009). These findings similarly reflect Moghissi’s (2003) observation that men’s and women’s separate experiences of resettlement can influence family change.

Concurrently, the findings similarly suggest different experiences and understandings of family between parents and their children. Participants who are parents described instances where their children assumed to know better than them or challenged their authority at home, causing frustration and anger. Most participants similarly assumed that children and young people abused Child Protection and police systems to gain power in the home. Conversely, young people describe frustrations at having to follow “Sudanese” practices at home, when they would rather do the same things as their Australian-born peers. This was particularly evident when young people discussed dating and going out with friends.

The misunderstandings between parents and young people discussed by participants support literature which suggests young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds
often adapt more quickly to new host society environments than their parents (CMY 2007; Poppitt & Frey 2007). In a study of Sudanese families in Dandenong, the SERMRC (2007) suggests that as young people acculturate into Australian societies, parents can feel disempowered, interpreting Australian systems to specifically damage family hierarchies. This was similarly evident amongst participants’ experiences in the current study, confirming Benson’s (1994) family change framework, which proposes intergenerational change as an influencing factor.

The different ways that men, women and young people each experience and interpret aspects of the host society influenced how changes were implemented within participants’ families. For some however, it seemed as though they were unable to shift from traditional cultural understandings and practices. This may have been due to ongoing ties, to concurrent Sudanese culture, brought about through transnational connections.

Transnational influences – living between two cultures
Transnationalism is most commonly defined as sustained interactions and participation in culture, communities and/or politics across national borders (Basch, Glick Schiller & Blanc-Stanzon 1994; Portes et al. 1999; Al-Ali et al. 2001; Kivisto 2001). Participants’ regular interactions with kin in Africa illustrate the presence and importance of transnational relationships and sustained ties to traditional culture. However, the ease and speed that these communications occurs through telephone, internet and video means former refugees living in Australia are able to quickly connect with kin overseas. Through these communications, those in Australia are continually reminded of how things are done ‘back home’.

This was exemplified by the young woman whose relatives had completed her marriage ceremony in Africa (which neither herself nor her husband attended) and sent her several hours of video of the event. The relatives offered her direct ‘advice’, overtly communicating cultural expectations, giving her instructions on being a ‘good’ wife. The marriage ceremony itself similarly symbolised the expectation that the woman’s marriage and family life would follow traditional south Sudanese practices, even when living in Australia. Transnational ties therefore provide an opportunity for kin overseas to communicate cultural expectations about family, representative of concurrent Sudanese culture.
All participants were found to have examples of how transnational relationships influenced experiences of family in Australia. Several younger male participants, for example, described relatives ‘wife-hunting’ for them overseas. This conveyed three cultural expectations; firstly, that it was time for these young people to get married; secondly that the process of marriage should involve kin, and thirdly, that marriage should only take place with women from the same cultural background.

Whilst some of these participants described their willingness to follow these traditional courting and family practices, others felt torn. On the one hand, they described the benefits of adopting Australian practices, yet on the other, they felt guilty abandoning expectations of kin. These findings reflect Boyle and Ali’s (2010) proposal that transnational ties influence experiences of family change amongst refugee groups. Boyle and Ali similarly suggest that ties to kin overseas are strengthened by the refugee experience, heightening a sense of obligation to fulfil cultural expectations.

Most participants regularly send money to kin overseas, creating another commonly experienced transnational relationship. As previous research suggests, this can create an avenue for communicating cultural expectations and re-enacting traditional kinship obligations across national borders (Kivisto 2001; Riak Akuei 2005; Shandy 2006; Stoll & Johnston 2007; Johnson & Stoll 2008; Lim 2009; Al-Shamani 2010). Participants describe how they sent remittances to fulfil traditional kinship roles and duties which incorporate collective sharing of wealth (Riak Akuei 2005; Shandy 2006; Johnson & Stoll 2008; Lim 2009).

This consequently allowed men to fulfil ‘breadwinner’ roles within transnational family constructs amongst kin (Riak Akuei 2005; Shandy 2006; McDonald-Wilmsen & Gifford 2009). However, this could have negative repercussions for those in Australia. This was evident as participants described the marital conflict that sometimes ensued when one spouse sent money overseas without the knowledge of the other, or supported overseas kin above those in Australia. In some instances, this practice resulted in financial hardship amongst resettling families and meant some men struggled further to fulfil breadwinner roles in Australia. Others felt they could not justify starting businesses or investing capital in their own education or career, for fear of breaking obligation towards kin overseas.
The influence of transnational relationships was therefore shown to make the necessary adoption of ‘Australian’ family values and practices difficult. These findings support the observations of Faist (2000, p. 190), who suggests, “…transnational ties may work against melting into the majority core”, revealing the ongoing influence of transnationalism upon resettling families.

**The south Sudanese ‘community’ in Melbourne and its influence on families**

Studies suggest diasporic ‘communities’ can influence how individuals who identify with them participate within host societies (Vertovec 1999; Faist 2000; Hopkins 2010). The findings reveal how this was true for many participants. But can we necessarily consider all former refugees from south Sudan in Melbourne a ‘community’?

Whilst the problems with assuming the existence of ‘community’ amongst former refugee groups have previously been mentioned, participants repeatedly discussed their experiences in collective terms, using ‘we’ language and often making explicit reference to ‘the community’. This indicates participants’ construction of ‘community’, to which all participants appeared to feel membership. The safety in discussing family change in general rather than personal language similarly meant the research collected several individual opinions of ‘community’ experiences, peppered with personal stories. The construction and experience of ‘community’ by participants must therefore be acknowledged.

Previous studies reveal how similar identifications with diasporic Sudanese ‘communities’ within local host society settings can help shape personal identities. Turner and Fozdar (2010) for example, found that Sudanese men and women in Western Australia (WA) position themselves within three levels of ‘community’ - tribal and kinship groups in Africa, mainstream society in Australia and; south Sudanese ‘community’ in WA. This construction similarly appeared true for many participants as they described interactions and experiences within three different ‘communities’.
Previous studies reveal the benefits of associating with the local ‘community’ amongst Sudanese men and women in Australia. Schweitzer et al. (2006) found that participation in local Sudanese ‘communities’ increases well-being, whilst Schweitzer et al. (2007) and Khawaja et al. (2008) found a positive correlation between interaction with Sudanese ‘communities’ and coping strategies in host societies. Other research illustrates how increased social capital with others from Sudanese backgrounds can aid positive resettlement experiences (Schweitzer et al. 2007; Baird 2009; Hatoss & Sheely 2009; Shakespeare-Finch & Wickham 2009; Turner & Fozdar 2010) and protect against depression, stress (Goodman 2004; Shakespeare-Finch & Wickham 2009) and psychological distress (Simich et al. 2006).

Although the current research did not measure the strength or implications of affiliating with the local south Sudanese ‘community’, most participants positioned themselves within it. Participants often used ‘we’ constructs when discussing their experiences, revealing a connection to a larger group. For some, this may have been intentional, having had positive experiences from this affiliation as the literature suggests. For others, it may be reflective of transnational influences which embody collective social constructs.

If we accept the existence of a local south Sudanese ‘community’ where is it and how do people interact with it? Unlike earlier waves of refugees in Melbourne, people from south Sudan arrived in an era with limited public housing availability (Higgins 2009, Spinks 2009; Davis 2010; RCOA 2010a). The subsequent push into private rental markets has caused dispersion of ‘the community’ across Melbourne (Higgins 2009, Spinks 2009; Davis 2010; RCOA 2010a).

Although areas such as Flemington, Footscray, Dandenong and Noble Park do have more south Sudanese residents than other suburbs (DIAC 2007), their recent arrival mixed with a lack in capital to start businesses means there is not an established south Sudanese community ‘hub’ in Melbourne, as yet. Consequently, although men and women certainly congregate and socialise in local shopping strips and public spaces, as do all Australians, the south Sudanese ‘community’ is not essentially geographical.

South Sudanese tribal, ethnic and regional Associations operate at state and national levels around Australia (MRCNWR 2006; SERMRC 2007; MIC 2008a; SCAA 2010),
providing leadership on social and resettlement issues. The elected leaders hold meetings, distribute publications, operate websites and are called upon for assistance in family disputes. Despite this being one way to group together, communicate ideas and exchange information, this was not necessarily what participants referred to as they discussed ‘the community’.

Participants referred to attending ‘community’ events and gatherings such as organised dances, weddings and church events, which provide opportunity to celebrate shared history and culture. Others described the importance of visiting friends who speak their language, sharing child-care duties with others who have similar child-rearing ideas or meeting with those who understand the difficulties they face in resettlement, having experienced it themselves. Hence, participants’ construction of ‘community’ seems to come from different kinds of personal interactions and felt connections to others in Melbourne who share similar understandings, culture and history.

The findings similarly indicate how ‘the community’ itself can influence individual behaviours and attitudes within families. Vertovec (1999) suggests shared understandings create a ‘collective consciousness’ within diasporic communities, which can influence individual actions. Hopkins (2010) observes this is due to transnational influences upon members of diasporic ‘communities’, which are subsequently transferred onto those who interact within it. Hopkins distinguishes direct from indirect transnational connections, the latter illustrative of individuals who do not necessarily have ties outside the host society but who are influenced by those within the diasporic ‘community’ who do. Consequently, aspects of traditional culture are reproduced in the host society without necessary contact overseas, making this act itself transnational (Vertovec 1999; Golbert 2001; Hopkins 2010).

The presence of indirect transnational influences appeared true for participants, as they discussed the expectations communicated by the ‘community’, which influenced behaviours and experiences within their families. For example, several participants described men’s cooking in Australia as inappropriate in the eyes of the ‘community’. This was exemplified by James, who reported he would happily help his future wife with cooking, except when others within ‘the community’ might see him. Similarly, another young man, Choul, was ‘secretly’ dating girls, so that he would not breach the cultural
expectations communicate by ‘the community’, which stated he was not yet of marrying age. Participants’ construction of themselves as part of ‘the community’ consequently creates an expectation to follow the behaviours it deems appropriate (Vertovec 1999, Golbert 2001; Hopkins 2010).

Anthropological studies suggest that diasporic groups often create a new ‘syncretised’ culture, one that alters cultural traditions from ‘home’ to accommodate host society norms and cultural environments (Foner 1997; Faist 2000; Greenfield & Droogers 2001). Hopkins’ (2010) study of Somali women in London and Toronto found that interactions with local Somali ‘communities’ allows individuals to reconstruct personal identities, illustrative of both the old and the new. She argues, “…the shifting bounds of the group may be argued to aid resettlement as it permits the migrant to absorb aspects of the receiving society without risk of losing their ethnocultural identity” (Hopkins 2010, p. 534).

This was true for participants, who explained how adapted family roles created new ‘acceptable’ behaviours within families in Australia. For example, participants described how time constraints and lack of extended family in the home in Australia have meant that it is acceptable for men to care for children and take them to school.

Lejukole’s (2008) study of south Sudanese families in Adelaide gathered similar results, finding men were more likely to participate in some household duties (childcare, driving children to school and gardening duties) than others (cooking, serving guests and changing nappies). Lejukole suggests this is due to the continued stigma associated with the latter duties within ‘the community’ in Australia. Similarly, other studies found women’s participation in paid work in Australia (a non-traditional practice for women) common and acceptable, whilst leaving unhappy marriages was not (SERMRC 2007; MIC 2008a; Baird 2009).

The findings in the current study similarly suggest how ‘the community’ appeared to agree on some issues, evident through participants’ unanimous understandings and articulations of acceptable family behaviours. However, not all were so clear. There was significant variance in participants’ opinions of acceptable relationships and courting practices before marriage. Discrepancies were also apparent in discussions of parenting, child discipline and attitudes towards women, particularly in relation to ‘freedom’ and ‘rights’. The
disparity in responses gathered from the community leaders who participated in the focus group compared with other participants was similarly illustrative of vast inconsistencies within ‘the community’.

Consequently, although participants often constructed their opinions in collective and absolute terms, the absolutes of one were not always those of all. The problem of assigning ideals, rules and culture to the ‘community’ subsequently becomes apparent. Instead of defining behaviours within ‘the community’, it therefore seems more appropriate to position individuals within a social space that recognises its influence upon them.

**Personal agency**
The findings reveal a great amount of personal agency and choice in decisions to implement change within families. For some participants, the perceived benefits of consciously shifting away from traditional family structures and practices appeared to outweigh the loss in abandoning them. As previously suggested by Mungai and Pease (2009), motivating this choice was a belief amongst some participants that adopting Australian family practices would lead to ‘successful’ lives in Australia. Examples of this were male participants who undertake household duties or encourage their wives’ decisions to work or study. Individual choice and personal agency are thus paramount in influencing family change.

Foner (1997) suggests the interplay between culture, structure and agency necessarily influences migrant and refugee family change in host societies. This was similarly true for participants. The findings reveal how family change is influenced by Australian social environments, transnational ties with kin and concurrent south Sudanese culture overseas, and interactions with the south Sudanese ‘community’ in Melbourne. Concurrently, individual experiences of family differed due to gender, age and position in the family construct, revealing the influence of culture and structure on these experiences. How individuals choose to respond within this social space similarly influenced how families changed.

For example, while some female participants have chosen to assert opinions and participate in family decisions in the home, others have not. Acknowledging this social
space therefore recognises the distinct experiences of individuals, the influences upon them and their own personal agency as they navigate life in Australia.

South Sudanese families and experiences of the community and government service system in Melbourne

Ingamells and Westoby (2008) observe that without explanation of host society laws and social systems, refugees can become disenfranchised and disengage from services. This was true for participants, whose explanations of service systems during focus group discussions revealed numerous misunderstandings. Centrelink and housing service systems, which configure families as necessarily nuclear and assume equality between men and women, were seen by participants to undermine gendered identities, by challenging traditional responsibilities and roles of men and women. Similarly, participants widely believed Child Protection services removed children ‘for no reason’, and interpreted family violence laws as Australia’s bias towards women over men.

Earlier studies similarly reveal how men from south Sudanese backgrounds feel threatened and undermined, as it appears their traditional role is being challenged by Australian systems and services (SERMRC 2007; MIC 2008a). Others suggest that community services themselves are incongruous with the cultures of many refugee men and women and are consequently misunderstood or avoided (Wani 2008).

Observing these misunderstandings, the RCOA (2010a, p. 66) recently advocated for increased community education for humanitarian entrants about, “…parenting and family relationships, encompassing issues such as conflict resolution between parents and children, intergenerational relationships, gender roles, women’s rights and domestic violence”. Other studies similarly suggest the need for increased education about host culture systems and structures (Ingamells & Westoby 2008; MIC 2008a; DIAC 2009b; RCOA 2010a). However, participants described their frustration at being continually targeted for these kinds of programs, insulted at the suggestion that their parenting styles and family structures need redress.

Community leaders explained how this creates barriers to accessing services. Leaders explained how services and their intentions are often misunderstood or largely unvalued, viewed from a transnational perspective that attaches different meanings to those
assumed by service systems. Leaders described how men have become sceptical of services that they believe are encouraging women to challenge patriarchal family structures or leave their husbands. Some participants similarly believed services such as Child Protection taught children to scapegoat parents, making up stories of abuse in order to snatch power at home. There were also suggestions that people simply don’t value the information they expect to receive from services, thus deterring their utilisation.

Negative experiences with workers and services appear to have further discouraged service access. During focus group discussions, participants expressed frustration at feeling misunderstood by service workers, including police. Participants described instances where they felt unheard or did not have processes adequately explained to them. Authors have previously observed how effective work with CALD groups requires workers acknowledging and accepting cultural diversity (Healy 2005; Ingamells & Westoby 2008). Pease and Rees (2008) specifically encourage increased understanding within the sector of how masculinities operate and are perceived within diverse cultural frameworks and CALD communities in Australia. This highlights the importance of reciprocal education within the service sector itself.

Nevertheless, cultural inclusivity requires more than just awareness and understanding, particularly when ‘culture’ is dynamic and often contested in itself (Cohen 2004). Commitment to social justice means service providers cannot condone patriarchal family structures that support oppression or abuse of women and children, for example. However, if the sector is truly committed to abandoning assimilationist approaches to resettlement as contemporary immigration policy suggests, we similarly cannot expect refugees to dismiss cultural expectations placed upon them and ignore transnational influences, even if this could help them ‘fit in’. So how can service providers develop effective service intervention that upholds women’s and children’s rights and educates about Australian laws and social systems, without being essentialist or demanding change?
Working alongside men, women and young people from south Sudanese backgrounds – considerations for service providers

For community and government service providers to work effectively with men and women from south Sudanese backgrounds, understanding the social spaces occupied and the factors influencing individuals’ understandings and experiences of family is essential. However, ‘positive resettlement’ is constructed in Australia by integration measures that position refugees in host societies alone, ignoring transnational influences (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury 2003; Ager & Strang 2008; Dhanji 2009; Farrugia 2009). The findings illustrate how this construction does not consider transnational connections which continue to influence how men, women and young people separately experience family in Australia.

Community and government service systems can therefore be misunderstood, as they are often founded on Australian social constructs unrepresentative of participants’ experiences of family. To be ‘culturally sensitive’, service agencies need to reassess practice approaches to better work alongside south Sudanese families.

Turner (2006) observes that shifts in oppressive practices only occur when two groups can recognise one another as equal. Similarly, Connolly and Ward (2008) suggest service users should be regarded as active participants in worker-client relationships and play a functional role in improving their own lives. However, researchers have expressed concern over refugees’ repeated construction as ‘victims’ or ‘recipients’ of welfare, including within settlement service sectors, rather than active participants who can contribute to their resettlement (RCOA 2010a; Ives 2007; Palmer 2010). Service agencies should consequently reflect on their own practice and organisational systems, which may indeed embody ethnocentric assumptions (Westoby 2008; Mitchell et al. 2006; Ling 2004).

Ingamells and Westoby (2008) suggest a deconstructionist approach, allowing both workers and service users a space to unpack the systems and structures that govern the actions and understandings being used in practice. A shift in approaches that value reciprocal working relationships between workers or agencies and clients, could thus create space for collaborative sharing of information, necessary to best assist south Sudanese families in their resettlement.
Reflecting the importance of ‘community’, participants in both focus groups unanimously recommended community-based interventions to assist individuals with family changes in Australia. Services could subsequently benefit by working within ‘the community’ itself. This could include holding discussions during existing community meetings, church services or other gatherings. This approach respects and utilises existing community structures and problem solving strategies which sit outside the service sector, which past research has shown to support positive working relationships with African ‘communities’ in Australia (Lejukole 2008; Westoby 2008; AHRC 2010). Working with local communities similarly respects its influence upon individuals in their experiences and understandings of family roles and structures. This approach could similarly be employed to develop best practice approaches for working with south Sudanese families in Australia.

Ife’s (2008) notion of *dialogical praxis* sees the necessary co-existence of the theoretical and practical aspects of social work coming together to create change. Using this approach, service providers can understand oppressive social structures and discourse, whilst implementing action to overcome them. For south Sudanese ‘communities’, this could be achieved using a collaborative or participatory action research (PAR) approach; a research methodology which pursues action or change and research or understanding simultaneously (Wadsworth 1998; Alston & Bowles 2003).

Collaborative program development approaches with ‘communities’ requires dramatic organisational change that might challenge structural and cultural environments of service agencies. For individual workers, it necessitates a conceptual shift as they position themselves as ‘learners’ rather than ‘experts’ (Mitchell et al. 2006; Alam 2008; Westoby 2008; Graham et al. 2009a; Krummer-Neevo 2009). Unfortunately, community service programs and agencies are usually contingent on funding agreements and directive service strategies, which demand output and results and may lack emphasis on collaborative approaches.

Consequently, collaborative service development projects of this nature are few. In contemporary Australia, settlement service funding allocated by the DIAC is short term, for projects and services of between 1-3 years (DIAC 2010). There are also specific guidelines of the kinds of services agencies can provide and how they must be implemented (DIAC 2010).
Recognizing the barriers this creates for service providers to implement long term, collaborative programs with refugee clients the RCOA (2010a) has recently recommended longer-term funding for SGP projects. This could create opportunities for on-going collaborations with south Sudanese ‘communities’ and provide opportunities for service providers to take time out from busy, crisis-driven practice settings to reflect on practice approaches.

The findings in this study suggest these approaches would be beneficial in bridging gaps between the service sector and south Sudanese men and women in Melbourne. Such approaches consequently embrace the DIAC policy models of ‘social cohesion’ and ‘integration’, without undermining or ignoring the social spaces which continue to influence individual understandings and thus behaviours within families. Utilising these approaches, service providers and practitioners could be more confident of cultural competency in practice.
Conclusion

The research set out to explore changes to family as experienced by men and women from south Sudanese backgrounds in Australia and to investigate factors which have influenced this change. Concurrently, it focussed on experiences of former refugees from south Sudan with Australian community and government services when seeking assistance for family related issues, and sought suggestions from participants on how services can better assist with family changes experienced in Australia.

Evident in the findings was how experiences of family change are shaped by gender and age, and whether one is a parent or child within the family. Cultural constructs determining what it meant to be a wife, mother, husband, father or child in the Sudan have been challenged with the shift to a new social environment with its own set of gendered constructs and norms. How new gender and family roles are experienced in Australia are consequently different for men, women and young people, based on how these new constructs compare to the old. Individuals within gender and age groups similarly share some common experiences and some that are unique, illustrating the diversity present amongst participants.

Family changes were similarly influenced by a number of external factors. The findings suggest three major factors influencing family change amongst participants – interactions with Australian social environments and institutions, transnational connections to kin and concurrent south Sudanese culture in Africa, and, interactions with the local south Sudanese ‘community’ in Australia. How individuals respond to these influences exhibits a significant amount of personal agency, which ultimately affects both the changes made and how they are experienced by individuals.

The findings contribute to literature investigating family change amongst refugee groups by highlighting the influence of the local south Sudanese ‘community’ upon family change. Previous research frameworks for analysing family change have not included interactions with diasporic communities in local settings as an influencing factor. Future research could investigate whether this is similarly true for other refugee diasporic groups.
The findings similarly contribute to the field by revealing participants’ experiences of community and government service systems in Melbourne, experiences that are largely undocumented in migration literature (Fanjoy et al. 2005; Westoby 2008). The findings illustrate widespread misunderstandings of the role and intentions of family violence and Child Protection services, which have created barriers to service utilisation. The Australian community service sector could benefit from recognising these barriers and shifting practice approaches to help bridge misunderstandings.

Future research could build on these findings by investigating experiences of parents from south Sudanese backgrounds in Australia. Studies could focus on how parenting was undertaken in the Sudan, including the specific roles of parents, extended kin and the wider ‘community’ in raising and disciplining children, and how this has changed in Australia. Studies could similarly investigate the experiences of both parents and young people from south Sudanese backgrounds within the Child Protection service system in Australia. Other research could be undertaken with young people to explore their experiences within families, particularly in relation to ‘community’ and family expectations.

The success of the community-based collaborative research approach adopted for this study illustrates the need for more research to be conducted collaboratively, alongside rather than ‘on’ refugee communities. Having a reference group comprised of community leaders who were consulted throughout the process meant the western assumption positioning the researcher as ‘expert’ was abandoned. It similarly respected existing community structures and the importance of working with those who have been elected to represent south Sudanese communities. Consulting community members on what they thought could improve services for families similarly valued community knowledge, skills and capacity in finding solutions to issues affecting their lives. This approach could be used to improve and develop services for other refugee groups, allowing for generation of data upon which models of ‘best practice’ can be based.

Using community-based collaborative approaches to research and practice illustrates a shift away from western ethnocentric assumptions that can dictate research processes and service programs but hold little meaning for those who participate within them. Instead, it exhibits commitment to working alongside and within refugee ‘communities’, as individuals rebuild and reconstruct their lives in Australia.
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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Interview Questions

What was family life like in the Sudan?
Prompts:
- What were the roles of men/women/young people in the family?
- How were these decided/divided?

What was your family life like before you came to Australia?
Prompts:
- Who was in your family/household?
- How was household and paid work divided (who went to work, cooked, cleaned, looked after/disciplined children)?
- Did your family life change from Sudan to the camp/first country of asylum?

When did you come to Australia?
Prompts:
- Who was with you when you arrived?
- Are there relatives who didn’t come with you?

What are some of the changes that have occurred within south Sudanese families in Australia?
Prompts:
- What have been the biggest changes for men/women/young people?
- Have these changes been difficult/created problems?

Have these things changed in your family since you arrived in Australia?
Prompts:
- What is your household life like in Australia?
- Who lives at your house?
- What sorts of things did you do in Sudan within your family that you can’t/don’t do in Australia?
- What is different for you as a woman/man in Australia?
Appendix 2 – Focus Group Questions

What has influenced individuals and families from south Sudanese backgrounds to make changes in their families in Australia?

How have services assisted individuals and families from south Sudanese backgrounds to make changes in their families?

How can services better assist individuals and families from south Sudanese backgrounds to make changes within their families to lead happy and healthy family lives in Australia?
Plain Language Statement (English)

Plain Language Statement

Changed experiences of family amongst men and women from south Sudanese backgrounds - A research project

What is the purpose of the research project?
My name is Jessica Bishop and I am doing a research project for my Masters in Social Work at the University of Melbourne. For this research, I want to hear stories and learn about family life changes for south Sudanese families living in Australia, to understand what it is like for families to come to a new culture and environment. I hope that this will help workers in Australian services understand some of the challenges that south Sudanese families face in adjusting to life in Australia and will inform community agencies about these issues so that they can provide better services to assist the south Sudanese community in the future.

Who will be included in the research project?
I would like to meet with people from many different south Sudanese backgrounds, from different tribes and from different regions in the Sudan, to hear many individual family stories. This is so that I do not make generalisations about the community but instead learn about many different experiences.

Participation in this project is completely voluntary – you do not have to participate, only if you want to. I would like to meet with people over 18 years (men and women) who have been in Australia for more than four years.

What will happen if I participate in the research project?
If you would like to participate in this research project, I will arrange a time to talk with you. In this meeting I will ask you questions about what your family life was like before you came to Australia, and what your family life has been like after you came to Australia. This meeting will take 1-2 hours.

It is possible that you may find it upsetting to talk about some of your experiences. I will ask you to write down the names and contact details of people who can be contacted if you become upset. These people can be friends, relatives, support workers or other people who you would like to talk to. I will also offer you details of local support services who you can contact if you would like. Participation in this project will not affect any services that you receive from community, health or government services.

After the individual meeting, I will invite you to attend a group meeting with other people who I have spoken with. In the group meeting, we will discuss how Australian services can assist south Sudanese families adjusting to life in Australia. This might include things like ideas for new programs or services that we can recommend to community agencies. This meeting will run for approximately 2 hours. During this meeting, we will not be discussing individual or personal family problems and I will not be able to help you to solve your own family problems.

What will happen to the information that I provide?
Some of the things that we talk about in the meetings will be written in a report. I will use a false name when I write about you in the report, so that people who read it will not know that
the information is about you. You can ask me to remove some of the information about you from the report if you wish.

Once the report has been completed, the report will be handed to Melbourne University Social Work Department for assessment and a copy of the main things that are learnt will be given to you, Sudanese community elders and leaders and the other participants. All participants will also meet together to decide what should happen to the report and who should receive a copy. People who might receive a copy are other members of the Sudanese community, community service agencies, Migrant Resource Centres, government departments, academic journals and others.

How can I get more information and how can I be involved?
If you would like to participate in this project or have any concerns that you wish to discuss, please contact Jessica Bishop – Ph: 0402 046 069 or email: j.bishop@pgrad.unimelb.edu.au
OR
Dr. Winsome Roberts – email: winsome@unimelb.edu.au or phone 8344 9401, 8344 9422.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research project you can contact the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, The University of Melbourne, ph: 8344 2073; fax 9347 6739
مشروع البحث - التغييرات الطارئة على الحياة الأسرية للرجال والنساء من واقع تجارب السودانيين القادمين من جنوب السودان

قسم الخدمة المجتمعية

ما الهدف من مشروع البحث؟

الهدف من وراء هذا البحث إلى الاستماع إلى التجارب والتعرف على التغييرات الأسرية الطارئة على الأسر السودانية القادمة من جنوب السودان والمقيمين حالياً باستراليا بغية التوصل إلى فهم كامل لما يجنب هذه الأسر نحو القعود إلى بيئة وثقافة جديدة عليهم. وأمل أن يساعد هذا البحث العاملين في مجال الخدمات باستراليا على فهم التحديات التي تواجهها الأسر القادمة من جنوب السودان من أجل التأقلم مع نمط الحياة في استراليا وإطلاق المؤسسات المجتمعية على هذا النتائج حتى تتمكن خدمات أفضل لمساعدة الجالية السودانية القادمة من جنوب السودان في المستقبل.

من الذي سيلمهم هذا المشروع البحث؟

أو أن التقرير يمتلك أسماء الأفراد الذين قد يكونوا أصدقاء أو أقاربك أو أفراد الدعم أو أفراد من الجالية السودانية الذين يكون أصدقائهم أو أقربائهم أو أفراد الدعم منهم يرغبون في الاستماع إلى هذه التجارب.

وسنتكلم في هذا المشروع على نحو تطوعي بالكامل - حيث لا يتبع عليك المشاركة إلا إذا أردت ذلك. وأود القاء بين تجاوزاً من 18 عاماً (رجالاً ونساء) والمقيمين في استراليا منذ أكثر من أربع سنوات.

ما الذي سيعقده في حضورك في مشروع البحث؟

إذا ما رغبت في المشاركة في هذا المشروع البحث، سأقوم بترتيب موعداً معك لنتبادل أطراف الحدث، وخلال هذا اللقاء سأطرح عليك بعض الأسئلة حول ما كانت عليه حياتك الأسرية قبل قدمتك إلى استراليا، وما أنثى به بعد قدمتك إليها. وسستمر هذا اللقاء من ساعة إلى ساعتين.

من الممكن أن تشعر بالضيق جراء الحدث عن بعض تجاربك، لذا سأطلب منك تقديم أسماء ومعلومات اتصال مفصلة لأشخاص يمكنهم الاستماع إلى حوارك.

وفي هذا اللقاء سنتكلم في هذا المشروع على نحو تطوعي بالكامل - حيث لا يتبع عليك المشاركة إلا إذا أردت ذلك. وأود القاء بين تجاوزاً من 18 عاماً (رجالاً ونساء) والمقيمين في استراليا منذ أكثر من أربع سنوات.

عند المشاركة في هذا المشروع، سنتكلم باللغة الأصلية مع الأشخاص الذين يرغبون في الاستماع إلى حياتك الأسرية، وسنتكلم باللغة الأصلية مع الأشخاص الذين يرغبون في الاستماع إلى حياتك الأسرية.

وسيستمر هذا اللقاء لما يقارب الساعتين، وخلال هذا اللقاء لن نتواصل مع الأشخاص الذين يرغبون في الاستماع إلى حياتك الأسرية.

ما سيفحت بالعلومات التي تقدمها؟

بعض المعلومات التي ستحصل عليها طيفًا يولد في هذه اللقاءات يتضمن الإعداد والإرشاد في قضايا تتعلق بحياة الأسر السودانية في استراليا، وسنتكلم في هذا المشروع على نحو تطوعي بالكامل - حيث لا يتبع عليك المشاركة إلا إذا أردت ذلك. وأود القاء بين تجاوزاً من 18 عاماً (رجالاً ونساء) والمقيمين في استراليا منذ أكثر من أربع سنوات.

وسيستمر هذا اللقاء لما يقارب الساعتين، وخلال هذا اللقاء لن نتطرق للمشكلات الأسرية الشخصية أو الفردية ولن تكون بمقدورنا المساعدة في حل أي مشكلة أخرى.

إذنا، نحن نقدم هذه المعلومات لمساعدة الأشخاص الذين يرغبون في الاستماع إلى حياتك الأسرية، وسنتكلم في هذا المشروع على نحو تطوعي بالكامل - حيث لا يتبع عليك المشاركة إلا إذا أردت ذلك. وأود القاء بين تجاوزاً من 18 عاماً (رجالاً ونساء) والمقيمين في استراليا منذ أكثر من أربع سنوات.

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الأشخاص الذين يتلقون نسخة من التقرير باقي أعضاء الجالية السودانية وهيئات الخدمة المجتمعية ومرکز مستقدمي المهاجرين والادارات الحكومية والصحف المعنية بالشأن الجامعي الأكاديمي وغيرهم.

كيف يمكنني الحصول على المزيد من المعلومات وكيفية المشاركة؟

إذا ما رغبت في المشاركة في هذا المشروع أو كنت لديك أي ملاحظات ترغب في مناقشتها، يرجى الاتصال بجيسكا بيشوب – هاتفي: 0402046069 أو على البريد الإلكتروني: j.bishop@pgrad.unimelb.edu.au

وينسوم روبرتسي – بريد إلكتروني: winsome@unimelb.edu.au أو هاتفي 83449422 و8344901

إذا مكان لديك أي ملاحظات بشأن سير العمل في هذا المشروع البحطي يمكنكم الاتصال بالموظف التنفيذي لجنة أخلاقيات البحث العلمي، جامعة ملبورن، هاتف: 83444976739؛ فاكس 93442073.
Appendix 4 – Consent Forms

Consent Form (English)

Consent Form

I, .......................................................................................................................... agree to participate in Jessica Bishop’s Social Work research project titled Changed experiences of Family amongst men and women from south Sudanese backgrounds in Melbourne.

Please tick each box to show that you agree.

☐ I have been provided with the plain language statement or it has been explained to me and I understand what it says.

☐ I understand that it is my own decision to participate in this project and I do not have to participate. I understand that I can change my mind and stop participating at any time.

☐ I understand that I will be asked to participate in both an individual interview and a group meeting.

☐ I understand that the information that I provide will be kept private and that Jessica will use a false name to represent me in the final report.

☐ The only time that Jessica will not keep the information private is if I tell Jessica that I have seriously harmed someone or if someone is harming me.

☐ I understand that I have the right to tell Jessica if I do not want some of the information that I talk about to be included in the report.

☐ I understand that I will be asked to discuss changes within my family since arriving in Australia. I understand that if I become upset when talking about this, there are people who I can talk to. The names and contact telephone numbers of other people or agencies who I would like to talk to if I become upset are:

1) Name........................................................................................................
   PH: ............................................

2) Name........................................................................................................
   PH: ............................................

☐ I understand that both the interview and focus group will be audio-recorded. This means that Jessica will use a tape recorder during the interview and focus group and will be able to listen back to the things that I have said.

☐ I understand that the information that I provide will be included in a Masters thesis written by Jessica and will be submitted to The University of Melbourne.
The information that I provide may also be made available to the Australian community through published journal articles and/or reports distributed to community services and/or the south Sudanese community in Australia.

☐ I understand that I will be given an opportunity to say what I would like to happen with the findings of the research.

Signed…………………………………………………………. Date ........../........../........

Name……………………………………………………………

Witness…………………………………………………………

Researcher……………………………………………………

145
نموذج الموافقة

أوافق أنا……………………………………………………………………………………………

على المشاركة في المشروع البحثي الذي تقوم به جيسيكا بيشوب ليلد للدكتوراه في مجال الخدمة المجتمعية

بما في التغييرات الطارئة على الحياة الأسرية للرجال والنساء من واقع تجارب السودانيين القادمين من جنوب السودان.

يرجى وضع علامة اختيار في كل مربع لإثبات موافقتك عليه.

- قد تم تزويدى بإقرار لغته واضحه أو تم تفسيره وشرحه لي وأحظت بتحفيزه.
- أدرك أن الاشتراك في هذا المشروع يأتي من منطلق قراري دون وجوب بالاشتراك . أعلم أنه بإمكانتك تغيير رأيي وقتما أشاء والتوقف عن المشاركة.
- أفهم أن المطلوب اشتراكني في كلاً من المقابلة الفردية واللقاء الجماعي.
- أعلم أن المعلومات التي سأقوم بتقديمها ستظل يتمتع بالخصوصية وأن جيسيكا ستستخدم اسمًا مستعارًا برمز إلٍ في التقرير النهائي.
- لن تُبقِ جيسيكا على خصوصية المعلومات في حالة واحدة فقط وهي إذا ما أخبرتني بأنها قمت بإيذاء شخص ما إيهاً شديداً أو أن شخصًا ما يقوم بإيذاء.
- أعلم أن لدي الحق في حال رغبتي بعد تضمين التقرير بعضًا مما ذكرته أن أخبر جيسيكا بذلك.
- أحظتُ علمًا بأنه سلوكنا مناقشة التغييرات التي حدثت في نطاق أسرتي منذ وصولي إلى أستراليا.
- أعلم أنه في حالة شعوري أحظت علمًا بأنه سيطلب مني مناقشة التغييرات التي حدثت في نطاق أسرتي منذ وصولي إلى أستراليا.
- أعلم أن المعلومات التي سأقوم بتقديمها ستظل يتمتع بالخصوصية وأن جيسيكا ستستخدم اسمًا مستعارًا برمز إلٍ في التقرير النهائي.
- أعلم أنه سيكون من الممكنية الفردية التقدم إلى دائرة الاستلام النهائي.

الاسم: ............................................. 
الهاتف: .............................................

الاسم: ............................................. 
الهاتف: .............................................

أما يعني أن جيسيكا ستستخدم جهاز تسجيل أثناء المقابلة ومجموعة أعم أن كلاً من المقابلة ومجموعة النقاش سيم تنسلجها صوتياً.

أعلم أن المعلومات التي سأقوم بتقديمها إلى جيسيكا ستستخدم نسخها في رسالة الماجستير التي تصرف بها جيسيكا وستكون نسخها إلى جامعة ملبورن. كما أو التقارير الموزعة على الخدمات /أن المعلومات التي نصدقها قد تكون للمجتمع الأسترالي من خلال المقابلات الصحفية المشتركة و / أو المجلية المكونة من السودانيين الجنوبيين في أستراليا/المجتمعية و / أو الجمعيات الأخرى.

أعلم أنه ستتاح لي الفرصة للمشاركة في هذا البحث.

التاريخ: ............../.........../........
الباحث: .............................................
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