Meaningful Being: The Experiences of Young South Sudanese-Australians

Dr Susannah Tipping
Supervised by Dr Ida Kaplan & Prof Di Bretherton

tippings@foundationhouse.org.au

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University of Melbourne
Context
History: Sudan & South Sudan

- Independence 1956
- North/South Civil War: 1956-72 & 1983-2005
- Darfur conflict: 2003+
- Diverse
- Peace agreement: 2005
- South Sudan: 2011
- Ongoing violence & famine
Displacement

• In 2000s Sudan was a major source of IDPs & refugees
• Sudanese humanitarian entrants to Australia
  • Around 22,000 entrants, mainly in the mid ‘00s
  • Majority aged ≤25 years
  • Highly disrupted education
  • Varying degrees of family intactness
Review of Literature
“Refugee Mental Health” (RMH)

- Burgeoning RMH and survivor of violence literature
  - Incorporation of PTSD into the DSM-III in 1980
  - Health and human rights – documenting impact of HRVs
- Regional differences in approaches
- Distinct from broader trauma literature
  - Trauma PLUS displacement, forced migration etc
  - Range of disciplines relevant to RMH
Post-Displacement Mental Health

- Risk factors (internal & external factors)
  - Greater exposure to pre-migration trauma
  - Ongoing conflict in country of origin
  - Discrimination & unemployment
  - Language struggles
  - Personal characteristics (e.g., older, female, higher level of past education)

- Protective factors (internal & external factors)
  - Participation in society (e.g., in employment or education)
  - Social resources (e.g., community support, family presence)
  - Personal resources (e.g., coping strategies, belief systems)
“RMH”: Observations

• Research mainly conducted in a developed resettlement country
• Psychological research dominated by quantitative methods & rates of mental health problems
  • cf. social science research
  • More recently, an increase in qualitative methodologies
• Theoretical influences not always articulated
Relevant Theories & Frameworks

- Psychosocial frameworks
- Social psychological theories
- Sociological and anthropological approaches & concepts
- Phenomenological & existential psychology
- Ecological-developmental theories
Methodology & Method
Methodology & Method

- Constructivist lens
- Cultural consultation
- Mixed-methods
  - WHOQoL-Bref; WHO5; Life Regard Index-Revised; Friendship Scale
  - Semi-structured interview
- Non-random sampling
Methodology & Method

• Coding of interviews
  • QSR NVivo
  • Coding tree informed by literature & early interviews
  • Refined over time
• Some participants re-interviewed two years later
• Reflective journal
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Years in Aust</th>
<th>Study or work (main activity)</th>
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<td>Birth Country</td>
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<td>Time in temporary settlement (exc ID)</td>
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Results & Discussion
Initial Observations

- Participants preferred qualitative to the quantitative
- Recurring themes across the three constructs
  - Seemed irrelevant what I asked
  - Spoke about things that mattered to them
- Valued the opportunity to have a say
Quantitative Findings

- Restricted to non-parametric correlations
  - Sample size
  - Non-normal distribution
- Amongst other significant relationships
  - Time in exile negatively correlated with overall health
  - Social connectedness correlated with well-being
  - Life framework correlated with time in exile
Overview of Key Themes

- Factors contributing to a sense of meaning:
  - Education
  - Systems and structures (incl. representatives of)
  - Family, friends and community
  - Personal and cultural beliefs
  - Expectations about life in Australia and the future

- Barriers & facilitators to settlement:
  - Tangible (e.g., services, people)
  - Symbolic (e.g., sense of belonging, feeling equal)
  - Challenge of juggling two plus cultures
Themes: Peace & Conflict

- Foundations: Security & sense of safety
- Forced displacement shaping personal belief systems
  - Life is a struggle
  - Human rights
- Harmony and conflict in relationships
- Peace and conflict in the society in which one lives
- Future peace in South Sudan
The Unintended Conference...
Synthesis & Implications
Synthesis

- Beliefs
  - Social Connectedness, Belonging & Identity
- Personal Resources
  - Physical Safety & Health
  - Systems & Structures of the State
- Values
  - Peace, Justice, Equality & Freedom
- Place
  - Access to Health, Housing, Education & Employment
- Time
  - Geo-Political Web
  - Social Networks, Encounters & Resources
  - Dominant Culture & Language; Transmitted Culture

- Personal
  - Peace, Conflict, Violence & Security

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Implications

- Participatory/action research exploring concepts of peace and ways to build peace
  - Individual, family, community, and societal levels
  - Peace in South Sudan: The potential role of the diaspora community
  - Role of different methods/approaches in conflict transformation
- Partnerships & resources for members of the diaspora engaged in peace-building initiatives
Thank you
Key References

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