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GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE: COMPARING THE EXPERIENCES OF SUDANESE WOMEN IN IOWA BEFORE AND AFTER MIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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ABSTRACT

Sexism against women has been a global issue for many decades. Although, women have made incredible progress over the years, the problem persists. Sexism affects women regardless of their race, age, culture and socioeconomic status. This research sought to understand the experiences of Sudanese women regarding gender-based violence before and after migration to the United States of America, specifically, the state of Iowa. The study demonstrates the practice of stereotypical gender roles, although there were changes in the role the women played in the United States. Evidence from the study indicates the presence of gender-based violence before and after migrating to the United States. Sensitivity to the Sudanese culture as well as community outreach and empowerment programs could help reduce gender-based violence against Sudanese women while they reside in the United States.

KEY TERMS: Sudan, sexism, gender-based violence, State of Iowa.

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INTRODUCTION

Sexism against women has been a global issue for many decades. This includes domestic violence, gender discrimination, gender inequality in all spheres of life, and stereotyping women (Blanchfield, et al., 2011). Although, women have made incredible progress during the last century, the problem (sexism) persists as pointed out by Faye (2010). Many women throughout the world are still deprived of their basic human rights on the basis of their gender. Sexism affects women's employment, education, income and results in gender-based violence regardless of their race, age, culture and socioeconomic status (Blanchfield, Blyther, & Wyler, 2011; Faye, 2010; Mingot, 2013). The situation could be worse in both Sudan and South Sudan since these countries are classified as developing, engulfed with ethnic and religious conflicts and are patriarchal institutionalized.

Sudan was the largest country within the African continent until its separation into two countries (Sudan and South Sudan) in 2011. Both Sudan and South Sudan are known to have cultural orientation that is mainly patriarchal (Elnour, 2012; & Faya, 2010). Men predominantly dominate all sectors of the economy, creating and maintaining power in ways that marginalize women in all spheres of life. The Sudanese society follows very strict gender roles where men and boys are seen as decision makers while women and girls must strictly abide by the rules and regulations made by the men (Elnour, 2012, Mingot, 2013). Sudanese culture orientation, similar to the Chinese, holds firmly the belief that women's role should not change whether they live in their country of origin or elsewhere in the world (Chen, Fiske, & Lee, 2009; Hatoss, 2010; Elnour, 2012; Gervais & Hoffman, 2013). The situation and the role of women in both Sudan and South Sudan have been influenced by the history of conflict and political changes (Elnour, 2012; Mingot, 2013). The past and ongoing civil wars between South and North Sudan as well as political changes have huge impact on Sudanese women (Jack, 2010). Several authors reported that conflict has deepened prejudice, discrimination, gender inequality and gender-based violence against women (Elnour, 2012; Faye, 2010; Hatoss, 2010).

The practices discussed earlier result in several challenges for Sudanese women both within and outside of their countries. Evidence from a study by Nilson at Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya indicated that Sudanese women were forced into marriages, assaulted, experienced gender-based violence, stripping off their freedom and independency (Nilson; 2013). Gender-based violence is highly acceptable by both Sudanese men and women in their countries of origin (Hebbani, 2010; Scott et al, 2013) and host countries (Hebbani, 2010). Women and girls who refuse to follow the prescribed gender roles become targets of gender-based violence. Studies indicate that women could even be abused by family members and close friends due to the belief that cultural rules should not be disobeyed (Arabi, 2011; Mingot, 2013; Elnour, 2012).

An investigation (between 2009-2013, 7 sites with 680 respondents) on gender-based violence in South Sudan by Scott et al (2013) found that about 82% of females and 81% of males agreed to the statement that 'a woman should tolerate violence in order to keep her family together.' The majority of respondents (68% females and 63% males) also agreed to the statement that "there are times when a woman deserves to be beaten" while more women (47%) than men (37%) were more likely to agree that "it is okay for a man to hit his wife if she won't have sex with him."

One of the biggest challenge Sudanese women encounters in their host countries is the pressure to maintain their cultural traditions (e.g., maintaining their traditional gender roles) as well as embracing the new culture which presents them with opportunities of furthering their education, working and becoming financially independent. Baird & Boyle (2012), who investigated Sudanese refugee women in Kansas City, reported that the women had

challenges raising their children in American while trying to maintain traditional Sudanese culture since they did not have a choice between the two cultures.

Sudanese culture also creates gender inequality for men and women. Research shows that the Sudanese government has paid little attention towards women's education due to their culture (Duflo, 2012; Faye, 2010; Mingot, 2013). Even those women who braced the odds and attained higher education are less likely to secure jobs due to gender based discrimination (Mingott, 2013). Sudanese Women's right to own land and other properties is also inhibited by their culture (Duflo, 2012).

Immigrants residing in the United States of America have been estimated to be about 38.5 million (Hatoss, 2010). Within the last decade, a significant majority of African women have migrated to the United States of America either voluntarily or involuntarily (Hatoss, 2010). The vast majority of Africans immigrants are from East African countries such as Somalia, Congo, Sudan and South Sudan, Burundi, Eritrea, and Ethiopia (Haffejee & East, 2015).

Literature shows that the majority of African immigrants is less educated, and faces significant challenges during their resettlement period due to language difference (Baird & Boyle, 2012; Elnour, 2012; Haffejee & East, 2015; Hatoss, 2010; Hebbani, 2010). Furthermore, African immigrants bring with them their cultural values and traditions which tend to disadvantage women (McCabe, 2011; Haffejee & East, 2015).

Given the patriarchal Sudanese culture which oppresses women both host and countries of origin, and the fact that many African immigrants (the majority of whom migrated from Eastern Africa which including Sudan and South Sudan) have little education and language problems, it is imperative to investigate the daily experiences of Sudanese women regarding gender-based violence. Some work has been done on gender-based violence against Sudanese women before and after migration into the Western world; in Australia (Hatoss, 2010; Hebbani, 2010) and some parts of the United States, specifically, Baltimore, Maryland, Kansas City, Missouri, and Arizona (Baird & Boyle, 2012; Jack, 2012; Scot, et al., 2013).

The studies in Maryland and Missouri examined gender-based violence, gender inequitable norms, health issues and other challenges/barriers that the Sudanese women experienced (Baird & Boyle, 2012; Jack, 2012; Scot, Averbach, Modest, Hacker, Cornish, Spencer, Murphy, & Parmar, 2013). Evidence from these studies indicates that migrating into the United States undoubtedly changes the traditional gender roles of the Sudanese women (Gladden, 2013). However, the women continue to experience, within the Sudanese communities, gender-based violence, gender inequality and stereotypical gender roles while in the United States (Jack, 2012). Little is known about how Sudanese women experience gender-based violence before and after migrating to the State of Iowa, specifically, Des Moines, the capital. This study seeks to fill this gap in literature for social work and gender studies. It is a well-known fact that gender-based violence is under reported. But a more disturbing phenomenon is the inadequate response to the identification and treatment of victims of gender-based violence by medical personnel (Clark, 2000). The role of social workers in creating awareness about gender-based violence in communities, available resources for victims as well as empowering victims cannot be overemphasised. This study could result in policy and practice decisions that would reduce gender-based violence and discrimination against Sudanese women who migrate to the State of Iowa.

METHODOLOGY

Non-probability sampling procedures (purposive and snowball sampling) were used to select study participants. Purposive because flyers about the study were posted at vantage points (including libraries, local African churches, local grocery stores, and at local Sudanese organizations) where Sudanese women frequented. Those who were interested in the study contacted the researchers by phone. The researchers then asked the few (4) that contacted

them to help recruit other participants they knew who fit the inclusion criteria: Sudanese women who migrated into the United States voluntarily or involuntarily, ages 18-years or older, either employed or enrolled in school, were former refugees or non-refugees living in Des Moines, Iowa. A total of nine of the women were interviewed (N=9).

The ages of study participants ranged from 25-46 years and they all disclosed that they migrated into the State of Iowa as refugees. More than half (6) of the participants identified as Southern Sudanese, while 3 were from Sudan. In regards to their marital status, 5 reported married, divorced 2, separated 1 and one 1 single/never married. Further, study outcome indicated that, with the exception of one, all study participants had children ranging from 1-7 with an average of 3 children.

It is noteworthy that all the study participants had some form of education. Except one who dropped out of school at third grade, 3 of the study participants had Associate degrees while another 2 were in the process of completing their Associate degrees and 1 had technical education. Furthermore, one of the women reported having a B.Sc. degree in Nursing and another had a Master's degree. It is also important to note that all of the study participants (8) except one, said they were employed.

Face-to-face in-depth individual interviews were used to collect data for the study. Study participants were informed that their participation in the study was completely voluntarily and that they could refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study anytime they chose to. The interview was not structure. This allowed room for participants to freely share information about their experiences without any judgment from the interviewers. An interview guide which comprised mostly of open ended questions was used to solicit information about participants' experiences of gender-based violence before and after migration into the United States of America. The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes each. With the participant's permission, the interviews were audio recorded. It is noteworthy that all the names presented in this report are pseudonyms.

The data were analyzed manually. To analyze the data, the audio-tapes were reviewed several times before transcription and were transcribed verbatim. The scripts were read several times before the analysis, to allow immersion of self into the data. Line by line analysis was used to develop codes to determine themes and categories to draw conclusions about the research topic.

FINDINGS

Several themes emerged from the study. These themes have been grouped under Sudan and United States of America experiences as well as common experiences in the three countries (Sudan and South Sudan and the United States of America). Sudan and South Sudan experiences include: (1) Patriarchy, education, and employment; (2) communal living and abuse; (3) gender roles, expectations and violence; and (4) intersection of gender and Christianity. Participants' experiences in the United States of America falls under the following themes: (1) cultural beliefs, expectations abuse and divorce and (2) New identities and opportunities. The experience common to the women in all three countries was staying in abusive relationship. A detailed discussion of the results is given below.

Sudan (S) and South Sudan (SS) experiences

Patriarchy, Education and Employment

The women reported that due to patriarch dogma, which marginalizes women, they were not given the opportunity to attend school as reported by Nima and Lorlor.

Nima (SS): I did not go to school because my family believed that a girl should not go to school because she will be a bad person. Many people did not allow their children

to go to school to learn because they think that girls will be bad girls and will lose their manner and no man will want them.

Lorlor (S): The society viewed women as property because they (girls) get married, her husband pay dowry to the girls family. That is why it was hard for some people to do what they want to do, such as going to school.

Some of the participants stated that they were forced into marriages instead of going to school; Receva (SS) “Sudanese people belief that women and girls should not be in school because they would know better, so they forced their daughters to get married early so that the family could profit from it.”

On the other hand, parents of participants who were educated enrolled their children in schools as indicated by Lorlor (S) “...but I went to school only because my dad was educated and wanted me to be educated as well so that I could be a better person.” However, the participants noted that since they were very few among the men, they were stereotyped and treated differently as Mary noted, “I went to school but people were always mean to me because I am a girl and that I don’t belong in the class rooms with boys.” The educated women also lamented that they had difficulties finding jobs after school. Tibessa (S) noted; “I completed my bachelor’s degree but no one would give me a job because I am a woman and everyone don’t like an educated woman because they think that she will abuse the men.”

Communal living and abuse

Participants reported mixed feelings about communal living in Sudan. Some reported good aspects of communal living-respect for the elderly and mutual support: Nima (SS) reported that, “I grew up knowing that respecting your elder is the key component and under no circumstance should you disrespect your elder because they will curse you if you do something wrong,” and Tibesa (S) said “I like the respect in Sudanese culture because it’s like we are following the bible that younger kids have to respect their elders no matter what. We also had a very close family; we relied on each other for everything whether you are poor or rich because there was no other source you could turn to.” On the other hand, some of the women reported abuse by members of the community, especially family members. See narratives of Mary and Sarah.

Mary (S): I was not allowed to make mistake by my aunt because my parent would be gone all the time, so my aunt took care of me and my siblings including beating us up but it was never looked as abuse.

Sarah (SS): My uncle, who was my dad’s brother was sleeping with my mother... when I talk to him that I don’t like that, he slapped me and said my opinion will never matter in that house.

Intersection of gender and Christianity

The effects of the intersection of gender and Christianity were reported. An example is given below:

Tibessa (NS): Another thing is that if you are Christian it feels like you are not a human being. You have no rights because you are just a woman, just a good wife to cook for people and a good mother...When I completed my ministry training in Khartoum, I went for a job interview, but did not get the job, for once I am a female and that I’m not a Muslim.

Gender roles, expectations and violence

The women noted that in their culture their job is to maintain traditional gender such as cooking, cleaning, marrying and bearing children. The participants recounted several abuses they experienced in Sudan, which seem to emanate basically from gender role assignment. The following subthemes emerged: Physical abuse, verbal and emotional abuse, sexual abuse and anti-reproductive rights.

Physical abuse

Many of the participants either personally experienced physical abuse while growing up in the then Sudan and/or witnessed abuse of other relatives by their family members. The women reported either having been slapped and/or beaten by their fathers for not completing ordered responsibilities or witnessed their mothers being physically assaulted by the fathers. The narratives of Mary and Wani demonstrate these situations:

Mary (S): I would see my dad beat up my mother every time she back talks to him or said something rude. When I got married, everything that happened to my mother, I was now going through them.

Wani (SS): I see that if my mother did not cook that day, my dad would question her why there was no food at home, "what were you doing all day" he will ask. So he would get mad and slap my mother and she could not do anything. When I tried to tell my dad to stop, he would verbally say mean things to me or he would slap me and tell me to collect some wood. For that reason, I had to respect my dad and never questioned what he said or did otherwise I would get slapped again and no one was going to help me or my mom.

Unfortunately, some of the physical abuses resulted in the loss of lives, but even so, the men continued abusing the women as commented by Rebecca (SS):

I was the only person who cooked, walked long distance to bring water, and got beaten up if I didn't make food for a day, even if I was tired. I got beaten up. While I was pregnant, one time I lost the baby because my husband beat me up. He also forced me to cook even though it was so hard to cook and I didn't really feel like cooking.

Verbal and emotional abuse

The women spent considerable amount of time expressing they feeling about the way they were treated in their home countries. Most of them detailed verbal abuse by husbands or relatives. Some of the Sudanese women stated that they endured verbal criticisms, overpowering control and/or manipulation as expressed in the narratives below:

Receva (SS): My in-laws wanted me to make food all the time. They wanted kids from me, I had to walk long distance to get water or food, and every time I tried to express my tiredness, I would get criticized by my in-laws that I'm a lazy woman... I can't cook the food right, I can't bear children, and I don't know how to talk to people."

Lorlor (S): I was married to my husband for about 5 month before coming to Iowa. The way I was being treated by him and his family was not good. I cried every night because I was in pain and no one asked me if I was okay or not.

Sexual abuse

The participants described how the patriarchal Sudanese culture permitted men as sole decision makers regardless of who the decision impacted. This practice resulted in sexual abuse as indicated in the following narratives:

Nima (S): According to the Sudanese culture, men are the decision makers where they did everything without telling their wives and their wives would not say anything because it's accepted. Back home your husband would beat you up if you refuse to have sexual intercourse with him and no one will say anything about it.

Koach (S): Growing up in the Sudanese culture was rough; I was raped by my uncle at the age of 8 and raped again by my uncle's friend at the age of 10. It is a cultural belief that if something like this happens to a child, people would believe an older person than the child.

Sadly, the women lamented the lack of measures to protect them from abuse. They said that law enforcement agencies, like the police did not address their reports.

Sarah (SS): What I don't like about my culture is that there is no strong government that protects women. If the woman tried and went to the police to complaint, they would tell her it is none of their business and if you begged them to help you, some of them will turn on you to do other things to you.

Anti-reproductive rights

The women report that the Sudanese culture was unfriendly to reproductive rights because of the belief that it will depopulate their members as well as because men are the sole decision makers.

Tibessa (S): Whenever I tried to teach my cousin about birth control, I would get in trouble with my uncles because they think that I will break their family apart. The women would not want to have baby with their husbands anymore.

United States of America experience

Study participants' experiences in their host country are grouped under the following two themes: (1) Cultural beliefs, expectations, abuse and divorce and (2) new identities and opportunities.

Culture beliefs, expectations, abuse and divorce

As these women settled in Iowa, they realized that the patriarchal Sudanese cultural roles and expectations conflicted with the American culture. However, they narrated that they had no choice but to succumb to their oppressive culture and its unpleasant consequences. An instance is given in the following narrative:

Nima (SS): Even here in America, where women have freedom to do the things they want to do, Sudanese women still have that gap and limitation because women have to work, take care of their children and do the domestic work without any help from their husbands. Women are overworked. But women sometimes get beaten by their husbands because they voice their opinion. Most people that I know experience emotional abuse.

Those women who could not stand abusive relationships resorted to divorce, regardless of criticism from family and community members.

Mary (S): When I'm around my Sudanese people, especially my husband, he wants me to come from work, cook and clean. I can now say something to him because I know if he try to hurt me the police will come, but after few incidents, I left him for good and now I don't get beaten anymore. I still hear people saying bad things about me for leaving him and still claim that I'm his wife.

Lorlor (S): When we came to Iowa, after three years of living together, I decided to move from him because he would say that I'm not a good mother and wanted me to do everything by myself after coming home from work. We are no longer together. People say that I'm a bad person for leaving him, I'm prostitute, so now people don't let their wives hangout with me because they think I will turn them into bad persons.

An interesting source of divorce discovered in this study was about educated men taking advantage of their uneducated wives to amass wealth for themselves and their families as Tibessa (S) narrated below:

Men who knew their wives couldn't read would send money home without their wives knowledge because they knew "she will not know what it is." But smart women when they find the receipts, they will bring it to someone who could read and will explain to them what it is. Because of this, people ended up divorcing because they don't want to be with someone who sends money to his family without their permission.

On the other hand, some of the uneducated women reported that their educated husbands had used their educational advantage to help them as indicated by Rebeca (SS), "There are things I have to rely on my husband such as reading the mail and translating at doctors' appointments." Another interesting finding this is that educated men tend to be less abusive as narrated by Sarah (SS):

When I got married my husband brought me to America and I was able to work, go to ESL class to learn English. My husband never abuses me or does something wrong to me because he went to school and know right from wrong.

New identities and opportunities

While in their host country, the women explored opportunities they were represented with to empower themselves personally, educationally and economically. They embraced the opportunities for freedom and independence. Some of the women furthered their education, secured paid or self-employment jobs. The following narratives describe these instances:

Mary (NS): When I came to the United States, I was happy because I now found school, I can work and fully support myself without having to worry about being beaten up when I did something wrong. I also found freedom at the work place.

Earning their own income and contributing to household expenses gave the women some sort of independence and power as described below by Wani (SS); "Now that I live in the United States, I have the freedom to own my own business. Without a husband or relatives taking care of me and my children. I'm now the head of my household."

The women also reported that they felt more secured and confident in the United States, knowing that they could report abuse when it happened.

Koach (SS): When I moved to America with my family, I was sexually assaulted by two Sudanese men, and this time, I told my dad and my dad went to look for them so we called the police and filed a complaint with them. Now, I'm in a country where

the government could protect you if you were abused and value women to bring peace to my life.

Staying in abusive relationship: Common experience in Sudan, South Sudan and United States of America

Although, some of the women reported leaving abusive relationships, others reported staying regardless of the violence. This is mainly due to their respect for their culture (despite its oppressive nature) and also having to return the dowry price (which is between 15 and 60 cows, depending on the tribe and the girl's education levels). Staying in abusive relationship was a common experience for women in Sudan, South Sudan as well as in the United States of America as narrated below:

Nima (SS): But in our culture, women are not encouraged to leave their husbands no matter what, back home, but even in the United States, some women still stayed with their abusive husbands because they don't want to break their family or want people to talk bad about them.

Wani (SS): When I got married in the States, my husband would verbally abuse me, and beat me up sometimes but I couldn't tell anyone because in my culture, it's not okay to talk outside of your marriage. So I had to keep everything to myself... Now in Des Moines, I know people who have been getting beaten up by their husbands, but would not want to report it because they are afraid that their family will have to pay back the dowry.

DISCUSSION

Study findings indicate that patriarchy Sudanese culture discriminates against women and marginalizes them. Evidence from the study demonstrates gender inequality in education as in other studies (Dulflo, 2012; Faye, 2010; Jack, 2012; Mingot, 2013) and employment (Jack, 2010; Mingott, 2013). The women reported lack of access to educational opportunities when they were growing up. They attributed this issue to their culture, which has strict stereotypical gender roles that must be religiously adhered to. An interesting finding of the study is that, regardless of the oppressive Sudanese cultural, some educated parents were more likely to educate their girl-child. Girls who were fortunate to be enrolled in schools were more likely to be targeted and stereotyped. Study outcome also suggests that educated women experienced employment-based discrimination, supporting other studies (Jack, 2010; Mingott, 2013). Christian women in Sudan were more likely to experience employment-based discrimination due to their religion because Islam is the predominant religion in Sudan—about 97% of the population is Muslim (BBC News: Sudan Profile. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14094995>)

Another interesting finding is that, educated men were less likely to abuse their wives. On the other hand, some educated men took advantage of their uneducated wives to amass wealth for themselves and their families. And yet, other educated men used their educational advantage to help their wives to read their mails and to translate for them during doctors' visits.

The study also demonstrates that, regardless of where they resided, Sudanese women performed stereotypical gender roles. However, there was some change in the roles the women played while in the State of Iowa, validating studies which suggest that migrating into the United States of America undoubtedly changes the traditional gender roles of Sudanese women (Gladden, 2013). In the United States of America, some of the women furthered their

education and/or secured paid or self-employment jobs and contributed financially to household expenditures.

Also, irrespective of their ages and levels of education, the study findings indicated that Sudanese women are more likely to experience gender-based violence including physical, verbal and emotional and sexual. Gender-based violence from this study emanates from gender role assignment. It occurred both in the countries of origin and in the host country because gender-based violence is largely acceptable by both Sudanese men and women in their countries of origin (Hebbani, 2010; Scott et al, 2013) and host countries (Hebbani, 2010).

In addition, the study suggests that the women had difficulties reporting abuses both in their home and host countries due to their respect for the elderly, which is one of the key Sudanese cultural values. Once the elderly (family or community members) disapproved of reporting abuse and/or divorce, the women have no say. However, while in the United States of America, some of the women embraced opportunities for freedom and independence. They empowered themselves personally, educationally and economically. Some of them reported abuses to reduce the severity. Others divorced, regardless of opposition and criticism from family and community members. Evidence from the study suggests that women who divorced were branded “prostitutes” and “bad persons.” Some were even treated as outcasts by their families.

On the other hand, some of the women remained in abusive relationship regardless of systems to protect their human rights. The study found that Sudanese women stayed in abusive relationships in both Sudan and South Sudan as well as in the State of Iowa. Reasons for staying in abusive relationships include respect for Sudanese culture and the elderly; inability to pay back dowry (bridal price), which is between 15 and 60 cows depending on the tribe and the girl’s education levels and the abuse of women who disobey their culture rules (by family and community members). This finding validates studies indicating that women could even be abused by family members and close friends due to the belief that cultural rules should not be disobeyed (Arabi, 2011; Mingot, 2013; Elnour, 2012).

It is noteworthy that, throughout the women’s narrations, there was no single reference to seeking professional help from social workers except the law enforcement. This alone demonstrates the need for social workers to reaching out to this vulnerable population .

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although findings from this qualitative study cannot be generalized to experiences of Sudanese women in Sudan, South Sudan and State of Iowa (United States of America) due to the limitations posed by sampling techniques, sample size, and study coverage area. However, insights from the study outcome could be useful for social work practitioners (especially those in the United States of America) given that the women currently reside in there. It is important for social work practitioners to be aware of and sensitive to communal/shared values (positive and negative) inherent in the Sudanese culture. This knowledge could enhance effective service delivery for this population. For example, familiar support could be tapped for therapeutic processes. On the other hand, where there is an unfavorable living environment, the practitioner could present the victim with options to staying in the abusive environment.

Social workers could build the capacity of the women by providing them with information about available resources and how to access them as well as educating them about abuse and its consequences and avenues to address their concerns. I suggest that community outreach

approach be used in dealing with these women. Specifically, door-to-door outreach to hand out flyers containing information about useful existing resources and how to access them is recommended. The flyers could also be placed in the community at common places that the women are likely to go (e.g., (including libraries, local African churches, local grocery stores, and local Sudanese organizations). Social workers could also reach out to the Sudanese women by having booths at local fairs and events.

In conclusion, the study which explored the experiences of Sudanese women in regards to gender-based violence before and after migration to the United States of America demonstrates the practice of stereotypical gender roles before and after migrating to the United States, although there were changes in the role the women played in the United States. The study also demonstrates the presence of gender-based violence before and after migrating to the United States. However, while some of the women accepted divorce and separation as part of their adaptation to the new culture, others remained in abusive relationships due to their respect for the Sudanese culture and their inability to pay back dowry (bridal price) as well as abuse of women who disobey their cultural rules. Cultural sensitivity awareness by social work practitioners and empowerment programs for the target population could help reduce gender-based violence against Sudanese women while they reside in the United States of America.

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