

# *Sudanese Settlement and Social Determinants of Mental Health in Ontario*

## Team members in Toronto

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## Overview

This study provided a profile of Sudanese immigrants and refugees who arrived in Canada from 2000 to 2003 and reside in seven Ontario cities: Ottawa, the Greater Toronto Area, Hamilton, St. Catharines, Kitchener, London and Windsor. The study outlined current settlement needs, service gaps and recommendations for settlement service delivery. In addition, our analysis focused on social determinants of mental health during the process of settlement in Canada. Results of statistical analysis indicate that those Sudanese for whom life in Canada was not what they expected and those who experienced economic hardship as measured by worry over having enough money for food or medicine experienced poorer overall health and reported a greater number of symptoms of psychological distress.\*

## Participatory Approach

- ❖ Primary Partners: Culture, Community and Health Studies Program (CCHS), University of Toronto and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) and
- ❖ Ani-Sa'a: The Association of Sudanese Women in Research & Development
- ❖ CBR Highlights: Active participation of Sudanese researchers (4 Co-Investigators, 2 Research Assistants) and 47 Sudanese interviewers in field sites
- ❖ 23 Sudanese community associations and many voluntary community advisors:

**Hamilton:** African Sudanese Association of Hamilton, The Sudanese League, and SISO

**London:** Sudanese Ministry Team, Good News Church; African Sudanese Association of Canada; Sudanese Canadian Community Association of London and Surrounding Area

**GTA:** Omer Ibna Al Khattab Mosque, Sudanese Women's Organization; Southern Sudanese Community Organization of Greater Toronto (SOSCO-GT); The Sudanese Community Church

**Windsor:** YMCA New Canadians' Centre, Office of Refugees of the Diocese of London, Multicultural Council of Windsor and Essex County, The Sudanese Community in Windsor

**St. Catharines:** Folk Arts Multicultural Centre, The Sudanese Canadian Community of Niagara, The Sudanese Women's Association of Niagara  
**Ottawa:** Catholic Immigration Centre; Southern Sudanese Community Association of Ottawa-Carleton; Southern Sudanese Association of Ottawa; The Sudanese Community; Ottawa-Carleton Sudanese Association

- ❖ CBR was essential in study design, recruitment, data collection, knowledge exchange and advocacy
- ❖ The study was funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), Ontario Region, which helped to ensure practical applications of study findings in new CIC initiatives, hiring and programs.
- ❖ The research team produced a final report with recommendations used by CIC to strengthen settlement and orientation services to enhance wellbeing in Sudanese communities across Ontario
- ❖ Community-led dissemination and advocacy efforts led to United Way of Greater Toronto funding for a new Sudanese women's training program
- ❖ Follow-up university-community research is ongoing in the provinces Ontario and Alberta

## Study Methods

**We combined quantitative and qualitative approaches to meet the research objectives.**

- ★ **220 structured, in-person interviews allowed for a cross-sectional analysis of diverse settlement and health-related issues in a dispersed population.**
- ★ **Languages of interviews:**  
**Arabic 50%, English 28%, Arabi Juba, Dinka and Nuer 6% each, Bari 3%.**

## Highlights of Study Findings

- One-third of survey respondents were displaced inside Sudan before coming to Canada due to conflict-induced migration; 70% of government-assisted refugees (GARs) came directly from a refugee camp.
- Refugees reported the highest level of needs on arrival: specifically they needed help with housing, job search, learning where to go for help, and daily living, as well as continuing education, satisfactory employment and living on a low budget.
- The greatest sources of social support for Sudanese upon arrival in Canada were friends and other Sudanese, followed by reception house workers, family members and settlement workers.
- The two initial challenges during the first 6-12 months reported in greatest proportions were worry about family not in Canada (68%) and finding a satisfactory job (67%). More women than men reported difficulties with getting around and communicating.
- High rates of unemployment and under-employment continue to be great concerns, even though survey respondents have been in Canada over two years on average.
- The majority (77%) of survey respondents who received government support felt that it was inadequate to meet their needs; 70% reported difficulty paying back the government transportation loan; 31% reported worrying about having enough money for food or prescribed medicine.
- The majority (75%) reported that Canada is not the way they thought it would be. Most survey respondents expected to be able to pursue opportunities for work and study; 85% did not expect difficulties in finding employment; 76% did not expect the high cost of living.
- High proportions of respondents (especially GARs) reported experiencing recent stress such as trouble at work or school, financial or housing problems and concerns with children.
- Family separation and family reunification challenges due to low-income have created ongoing emotional stress for individuals and extended families.
- Gender role changes in Canada have profoundly, and sometimes adversely, affected Sudanese women, men and families.
- Survey respondents rated their overall health as good. However, there is some evidence of persistent mental stress during settlement, including possible signs of depression and trauma.
- Coping strategies included obtaining help from friends and hoping for a better life in Canada. Some refugees noted that hope of returning to Sudan helped them to cope.
- Barriers to settlement service use include lack of awareness of services among Sudanese and perceived lack of cultural awareness among settlement service providers.
- The most frequently offered recommendation by respondents was to involve Sudanese community members directly in settlement service delivery.

**For more information:** The full report is online at

[http://settlement.org/downloads/atwork/Study\\_of\\_Sudanese\\_Settlement\\_in\\_Ontario.pdf](http://settlement.org/downloads/atwork/Study_of_Sudanese_Settlement_in_Ontario.pdf)

### **Other publications:**

\*Simich, L., Hamilton, H. and Baya, B.K. (2006) Mental Distress, Economic Hardship and Expectations of Life in Canada among Sudanese Newcomers, *Transcultural Psychiatry* 43(3): 419-445.

Baya, B. K., Simich, L. and Bukhari, S. (2007) Migration, Resettlement Experiences and Mental Well Being: A Case Study of Sudanese Immigrant and Refugee Women in Southern Ontario, in *Working with Immigrant and Refugee Women: Guidelines for Mental Health Professionals*, S. Guruge and E. Collins (Eds.) Toronto: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (forthcoming).