

Life at the Fence: Lived Experiences of Navigating Cultural and Social Complexities among South Sudanese Refugees in Australia

Authors : Sabitra Kaphle, Rebecca Fanany, Jenny Kelly

Abstract : Australia welcomes significant numbers of humanitarian arrivals every year with the commitment to provide equal opportunities and the resources required for integration into the new society. Over the last two decades, more than 24,000 South Sudanese people have come to call Australia home. Most of these refugees experienced several challenges while settling into the new social structures and service systems in Australia. The aim of the research is to explore the factors influencing social and cultural integration of South Sudanese refugees who have settled in Australia. Methodology: This study used a phenomenological approach based on in-depth interviews designed to elicit the lived experiences of South Sudanese refugees settled in Australia. It applied the principles of narrative ethnography, allowing participants an opportunity to speak about themselves and their experiences of social and cultural integration using their own words. Twenty-six participants were recruited to the study. Participants were long-term residents (over 10 years of settlement experience) who self-identified as refugees from South Sudan. Participants were given an opportunity to speak in the language of their choice, and interviews were conducted by a bilingual interviewer in their preferred language, time, and location. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim and translated to English for thematic analysis. Findings: Participants' experiences portray the complexities of integrating into a new society due to the daily challenges that South Sudanese refugees face. Themes emerged from narratives indicated that South Sudanese refugees express a high level of association with a Sudanese identity while demonstrating a significant level of integration into the Australian society. Despite this identity dilemma, these refugees show a high level of consensus about the experiences of living in Australia that is closely associated with a group identity. In the process of maintaining identity and social affiliation, there are significant inter-generational cultural conflicts that participants experience in adapting to Australian society. It has been elucidated that identity conflict often emerges centering on what constitutes authentic cultural practice as well as who is entitled to claim to be a member of the South Sudanese culture. Conclusions: Results of this study suggest that the cultural identity and social affiliations of South Sudanese refugees settling into Australian society are complex and multifaceted. While there are positive elements of their integration into the new society, inter-generational conflicts and identity confusion require further investigation to understand the context that will assist refugees to integrate more successfully into their new society. Given the length of stay of these refugees in Australia, government and settlement agencies may benefit from developing appropriate resources and process that are adaptive to the social and cultural context in which newly arrived refugees will live.

Keywords : cultural integration, inter-generational conflict, lived experiences, refugees, South Sudanese

Conference Title : ICMRS 2022 : International Conference on Migration and Refugee Studies

Conference Location : London, United Kingdom

Conference Dates : November 18-19, 2022