

Remittance Patterns of Southern Sudanese Refugee Men

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Sudanese refugee men who send money to support family members elsewhere while providing for self and family in their country of resettlement are enacting the role of a global breadwinner. As global breadwinners, they may experience financial role strain because financial obligations to family members in Sudan leave fewer resources for their own resettlement. In addition, the men may experience emotional strain from the anxiety that comes with financial obligations to family members who reside in refugee camps or war-affected areas, and from not being able to carry out the global breadwinner role as much as they would like. While those who send remittances may have increased emotional and financial strain, they may also feel a sense of pride and accomplishment in helping family members with remittances. Akuei (2004) points out how important remittances are in creating social continuity in a system that has been fragmented by war and displacement.

Objectives of this paper were (1) to document the patterns of sending remittances by Sudanese refugee men and (2) to identify predictor variables for the financial and emotional strain associated with sending remittances. The hypothesis for objective 2 is: More social support, greater religiosity, larger proportion of income spent on remittances, being single, in Canada a longer time, and poorer English proficiency will be predictive of reduced financial and emotional strain of sending remittances.

Sudanese men completed questionnaires about their remittance behaviors and attitudes, and emotional and financial strain experienced as global breadwinners. An economic role strain measure (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978) was used to assess financial strain of the global breadwinner role and a seven-item scale was developed to measure the emotional strain of the global breadwinner role (alpha .76 and .63, respectively). Standard reliable measures of religiosity (Genia, 1997) and social support (Vaux et al., 1986), percent of income spent on remittances as well as key demographic variables (length of time in Canada, marital status, English language proficiency) were included as predictors of the financial and emotional strain of sending remittances.

Respondents were 162 Southern Sudanese men (mean age = 31.4, $SD=9.1$). The average length of residence in Canada was 3.7 years with over half having lived in Canada for less than 3 years. The sample included 88 (54.7%) men who were married or living common-law and 73 (45.3%) men who were never married or legally separated, widowed or divorced. Compared to the average earnings of men in BC (Statistics Canada, 2001), Sudanese men earned relatively meagre incomes. The BC average was \$38,039, whereas a large proportion of Sudanese men earned between \$20,000 and 29,999 a year (37.8%) followed by 30.1% who earned between \$30,000 and 39,999, 19.2% who earned between \$10,000 and 19,999 and 11.2% who earned between \$0 and 9,999. Only 1.2% of the men reported incomes exceeding \$40,000 per annum.

Most (91%) were sending remittances, averaging \$148 month or less than 10% of their income. While they believe the money helps their family a lot and that it is important to send it, they also say they have difficulty meeting their own basic expenses of food, shelter, and bill payments. They experience high levels of emotional and financial strain from being global breadwinners. In separate regression analyses, emotional and financial role strain of the global breadwinner role were regressed on the independent variables. Financial Strain was predicted by less social support, a lower proportion of income sent as remittances, fewer years in Canada and better language proficiency. The predictors were related to financial strain as anticipated, with the exception of language proficiency. Sudanese men reported a high level of proficiency in English and were well educated, yet did not procure employment that lifted them out of economic insecurity. Less social support predicted increased financial strain which reinforces the notion that support from family and friends eases financial strain and acts as a coping resource. The inverse relationship between the proportion of income sent in remittances and financial strain reflects the men's low wages and decreased ability to remit sufficient money. Emotional strain from carrying out the global breadwinner role was predicted by more social support, a lower proportion of income sent as remittances, being single and being more religious. The finding that increased social support predicts increased emotional strain lends support to the notion of a dark side of social capital (Kawachi & Berkman, 2001). Men who live in a tight-knit ethnic enclave such as the Sudanese community likely feel pressure from families abroad and from the Sudanese community to comply with expectations to send regular remittances to family members in Africa. Being single also predicted emotional strain as expected. Men who are in Canada without their families would feel increased strain as they likely have more family members still in Africa whom they are expected to support financially. Lastly, being more religious predicted increased emotional strain. Traditional religious values as endorsed by the Sudanese

community stress obligations to family members and likely increase feelings of anxiety and guilt when the men are not able to remit as much money as they feel they should.

The major implication for financial counselors working in social service agencies and debt counseling agencies is to understand the importance of and the commitment the men have to provide for family members both residing in Canada and elsewhere. These are financial obligations that create financial and emotional strain in their lives, but that are viewed as important obligations to maintain at least in the early years in Canada. These obligations also may limit the financial options they have in Canada, and because they are not a set amount that is documented each month, they may be viewed as flexible expenses by counselors, but as fixed obligations by the client. The role of social support from the Sudanese community, friends and family in Canada in reinforcing traditional beliefs of financial obligations, and of providing for those members of the Sudanese community within Canada may create both important ties and financial obligations. Additional research on the meaning of social support in Canada and the meaning of remittances are needed to better understand this important role played by members of transnational families.

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