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# System of Structural Dependency in the Sudanese Refugee Women of Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya

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*Many countries facing an influx of refugees have established refugee camps to provide temporary housing. Lacking a solution for the refugee crisis, these temporary facilities become long-term housing for many refugees. As a result, many refugees spend years or even decades in refugee camps. The refugees often are legally prohibited from obtaining employment. They must rely on aid from the United Nations and other organizations for their survival. This study considers some of the impacts of living in a refugee camp and surviving solely on humanitarian aid. In particular, this study examines the structural dependency observed in the Sudanese refugee women in the Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya.*

*Keywords: refugee, women refugees, structural dependency, humanitarian aid, warehousing, social capital*

Many refugee groups spend long periods of time—often ten, twenty, or more years—in refugee camps, a situation often called warehousing. These refugees are unable to return to their home country due to ongoing safety concerns or political situations, and a permanent solution (such as resettlement, repatriation or local integration) has not been found for them. This study examines a sample of Sudanese women living in the Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya.

Sudan has been a source of refugee flows to other countries since the mid-1950s, when many fled to escape the civil war between the Government of Sudan and southern rebel forces (Karunakara et al., 2004). A particularly large refugee flow began in 1986, when tens of thousands of refugees were forced to flee from southern Sudan to Ethiopia, and then subsequently were expelled into Kenya in 1991 (Jeppsson & Hjern, 2005). Kakuma Refugee Camp was established specifically due to this large group of refugees. In 2014, the camp was home to approximately 150,000 refugees, and conflicts in neighboring countries continue to increase the population (Nyoka et al., 2017, p. 16).

Conditions have sadly only deteriorated since South Sudan was formed, causing an increase in refugees fleeing this area. Although there were hopes that the formation of the country of South Sudan would allow some refugees to return home, this development did not seem to change the personal situations to allow the women to return home in safety. Instead, new outbreaks of violence took place and new refugee flows into Kakuma and other refugee camps took place. A few refugees continue to be accepted for resettlement, but as always, this is a very small percent of the refugees who seek it. At the time of this study, the U.S. allotment for refugees coming out of Kakuma Refugee Camp was 1,500 out of the 80,000 total population (Jeffery Savage, Senior Protection Officer, UNHCR, Personal communication, May 8, 2011). In recent times, the opportunities for resettlement, particularly in the United States, is on a decline. In 2018, instead of seeing resettlement numbers in the 70,000 to 80,000 range, only 22,491 refugees were resettled (Center for Immigration Studies, 2018).

Many women living in the Kakuma Refugee Camp, thus, have been residents of the camp for years or even decades. They rely exclusively on humanitarian aid for subsistence and are legally prohibited from obtaining employment (Horn, 2010, p.

359). Many have lost family and social support systems in their flight to the refugee camp, and most see no prospect of leaving. This study examines how the system of refugee camp life creates structural dependency and causes a deterioration in relationships and relatedness for the residents.

## Literature Review

Research has shown that total reliance on outsiders for subsistence goods can create structural dependency. Refugees are susceptible to structural dependency because of their total reliance on humanitarian aid for survival. Furthermore, living in a refugee camp can impact systems of relationships, and can deprive women of existing social networks on which they may have relied in their homelands.

### *Structural Dependency*

Refugee camps form a unique society. Specifically, the idea that refugee camps are only temporary creates an unusual system. Agier (2008, p. 72) describes the camps as creating permanent precariousness as an emergency gives way to a long-term situation. The camp creates “models of uncertainty,” as “spaces and populations are administered in the mode of emergency and exception...a camp is an emergency intervention that has been on ‘stand-by’ for months or years: five to ten years, or even more.” When people flee to these camps, it is usually with the expectation that after a short stay they will be able to return home. Often, this is not the case. “Despite their ostensible ‘temporary’ nature, these settings have become the main living environments for many refugees for years and, in some cases, for more than one generation” (Harrell-Bond, 2002, p. 56). There are many implications for those living what is meant to be a temporary setting for the long-term.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other relief programs provide certain items of aid such as food, shelter, and a police force. But the camp residents often lack a means to legally support themselves for long-term survival. Refugees in a camp usually have few rights or opportunities. In general, refugees have “no right to move freely or work in the countries” where they reside in the refugee camps (Agier, 2008, p. 81). Furthermore,

the Kakuma refugee camp is administered by UNHCR “independently of the government, outside its judicial system, with no checks on powers, and, in effect, without legal remedies against abuses’ despite the fact that its population is living on the territory of Kenya” (Harrell-Bond, 2002, p. 59). UNHCR is limited in what it is able to provide within these guidelines.

With these restrictions, many refugees are forced to subsist on only what is given to them by aid programs, or on rare occasions sent to them from family members outside the camp system. The result is an “asymmetrical relationship” between humanitarian aid workers and refugees “who are symbolically disempowered through becoming clients of those upon whom they are dependent for the means of survival and security” (Harrell-Bond, 2002, p. 55). It makes sense that refugees should be protected by the international community given their circumstances. But often “the unique distortions imposed by the camp regime stifle the productivity and thus the economic welfare of refugees, causing them to live in poorer conditions than is necessary” (Werker, 2007, p. 461).

The society created by this long-term temporary situation has several major implications that contribute to dependency in its inhabitants. Refugees can develop structural dependency because they must rely on the systematic support from outside agencies to provide for daily needs. As Hoyer (2005) explained, the ability of refugees to care for their families is taken away from the individual and community and shifted to the protection given only from agencies working within the camps. The justification for aid relies on “portraying refugees as helpless and desperately in need of international assistance” (Harrell-Bond, 2002, p. 57). This dynamic also conditions the aid workers to label the refugees as helpless and vulnerable (Harrell-Bond, 2002, p. 57).

Refugee women have many specific needs and challenges that may differ from refugee men or children. For example, refugee women often face violence in the camp setting due to the daily tasks of caring for their families, such as traveling to unsafe locations to carry firewood to cook food (Harris, 1996). “The frustrations of life in Kakuma have been said to have an impact on the refugees’ psychological and emotional wellbeing, and domestic violence has been found to be common” (Horn, 2010, p. 359). Facing this type of struggle for decades may cause refugee women to have different coping strategies or dependency

issues than refugee men who do not face the same challenges. In addition, many women must provide for their families, often without a partner, which may mean that women are at increased risk of relying solely on systematic support for economic survival. In short,

Refugees' dependency on outside agencies, and the way that agencies have attempted to improve the situation of female refugees, has had a significant impact on social roles and status, on gender relations, and on traditional community systems and structures (Horn, 2010, p. 366).

As a result, refugee women may have a different narrative than refugee men.

### *Shifting Relationships*

Relationships are key for the well-being of any individual or group. The nature of refugee camps forces changes in refugees' interpersonal relationships. These relationships can be considered in the context of social capital, which exists when a group of people have shared identities, experiences, and values, and support each other verbally and through actions (Boateng, 2010). Women, as frequent primary caregivers, play particularly important roles in developing social capital within a group or society (Boateng, 2010). Unfortunately, some studies note that women in refugee camps have limited social capital due to their lack of opportunities to develop the kinds of relationships that would be available in their home environment (McMichael & Manderson, 2004). Horn notes that, "community groups which provide not only social support, but also activities that give meaning and continuity to life (e.g. women's, church and youth groups), tend not to survive displacement" (Horn, 2010, p. 366). Without these social ties, women have limited support and fewer opportunities to invest their own skills in a way that can create meaning. Thus, social functioning within a camp can have unique impacts on women.

Relationships within the family unit are often lost or altered in the context of the refugee camp system. Boateng (2010) noted that although women continue to be the individuals with the strongest ties to relatives and communities, women in refugee

camps have limited opportunities to develop the social interactions that would help them adapt to their new setting. Although one might assume that the women could develop new support networks, this is not always possible. Boateng (2010) discusses several refugee women living in camps who reported they had no friends due to issues around safety and security. Even when social networks allow for positive and supportive emotional relationships within the camp setting, these networks are often unable to provide any economic support, as the other individuals may also have few resources. Marume, January, and Maradzika (2018) report that, in their study, 84% of refugees stated they did not have anyone they could rely on for monetary support. Before living in the camp, many of these individuals would likely have relied on their family members and extended support systems for economic needs.

Women in refugee camps also are impacted by the change in the social roles and status for men. Refugees often lose their social role and status because of their displacement, along with job loss, loss of access to land, and loss of roles within the communities (Horn, 2010, p. 365). Men who traditionally provided for the family may be unable to do so in the refugee camp, and the change in status within the family might lead to domestic violence to compensate for the loss of power (Horn, 2010, p. 365). It is also not unusual for women to be separated from the men in the family who would have provided for them, or that these men have been killed before or during the process of fleeing.

### *Length of Time in Camps*

Long-term life in refugee camps has unique consequences, as adults adjust to the system of survival, and as entire youth populations grow up in camps. In Kakuma, as in other refugee camps, the host country does not allow refugees to integrate into the local society but requires them to stay within the confines of the camp and under UNHCR maintenance (Jansen, 2008). Long-term confinement in camps can have negative impacts on the individual. Research suggests that the longer refugees reside in camps, the more severe the consequences become. For example, long periods with no employment can impact the refugees over time, both in terms of financial resources and future employment potential. Refugees face increasing family size, reduction

of food and other support over time, lack of funds for educational or business development, and long-term exploitation of casual labor—all of which can cause their physical conditions to deteriorate (Kaiser, 2006). These issues also have significant impacts on refugees' physical, emotional, and mental health over extended periods of time (Agier, 2008; Goodman, 2004).

In short, refugees, and in particular refugee women, face many challenges living in refugee camps. They may become dependent on foreign aid and face loss of relationships. These issues may be exacerbated the longer they remain in the camp.

## Methods

### *Sample*

This study includes interviews of thirty adult Sudanese refugee women who were living in Kakuma Refugee Camp at the time of the study. The participant's ages ranged from 18 to approximately 50 (not all women were aware of their ages), and all participants identified as Dinka or stated they were not a part of any ethnic group (via interpreters) but spoke the Dinka language.

Twenty-six of the interviewees described themselves as unemployed, while the remaining four stated they were self-employed, primarily in carrying water from the well to the homes of other refugee women, mostly from the Somali community. Fifteen of the women had some primary-level education, one woman had begun secondary education, and the remaining women had no formal education. Most of the women with several years of education were teens—18 or 19 years old. Most of this youngest age group ( $n = 10$ ) had never been married and did not have children. The older age groups ( $n = 20$ , age 20 and above) all reported being either widowed, divorced, or separated, with only two participants stating they were currently married. The mothers reported one to eight children. Many of the women reported having children who had previously died.

Participants were located through convenience and snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is particularly effective for "hard to reach populations," and has been used to research such populations including the homeless and incarcerated individuals (Abrams, 2010, p. 541) as well as resettled refugees (Berthold et al., 2019). "In studying hard to reach populations, a host

of circumstances often force researchers to operate with samples of available subjects—resulting in strategies that may best be placed in the category of ‘convenience sampling’” (Abrams, 2010, p. 542). In this instance, the researcher met with several community leaders within the Sudanese community to share the details of the study. Once permission was granted from this leadership group, the researcher received the names and locations of several refugee women within the refugee camp who were available and likely willing to answer questions. These women recommended other potential participants who were then provided details and completed the study if they wished.

### *Ethical Considerations*

International studies involving vulnerable populations, such as refugee women, necessitate the consideration of ethics in the planning and execution of the study. Some authors note that the field of refugee research represents one of the areas with the most difficult ethical and methodological challenges in the research fields (Kabranian-Melkonian, 2015). Sieber (2009) discusses that although ethical issues are inevitable, it is vital that research takes place within these communities to provide data that will increase the success of interventions designed to work with them. Thus, it is up to the individual researcher (as well as IRB institutions) to employ methods that cause the least amount of potential harm to the population. This can be done through collection of background information, the use of local cultural gatekeepers (Sommers-Flanagan, 2007), seeking to remove unintended cultural consequences, and awareness of potential illiteracy issues (Kabranian-Melkonian, 2015).

Due to this researcher’s belief that it is important for the voices of refugee women in camps to be heard, the study went forward with a focus on limiting potential harm in any way possible. The researcher previously worked with a similar refugee community. In the formation of the study, other researchers with additional experience in similar communities were consulted. The researcher worked closely with a partner agency in Kenya, the African Mental Health Foundation. This agency served as a cultural gatekeeper in the formation of the study. The study was thoroughly reviewed by both the university human review board as well as a second human review board through the government of Kenya.

Permission was also sought from the authorities at Kakuma Refugee Camp and from local Sudanese community leaders before any interviews were conducted. The interpreters utilized were recommended by the UNHCR. Due to issues of illiteracy, consent forms were read out loud and thumbprints were obtained instead of signatures, as requested by the human review board of the government of Kenya.

### *Measures, Data Collection, and Analysis*

The measurement tool was a qualitative structured interview questionnaire with nineteen open ended questions to examine coping strategies and a collection of demographics. This instrument was developed by the primary researcher after reviewing the literature on coping strategies in general and within the refugee community. The researcher was also familiar with East African refugees and utilized a combination of cultural knowledge from experience and literature themes to develop the questionnaire. Several questions included were: 1) Who has supported you or assisted you since you came to Kakuma?; 2) What is the most important thing to you?; 3) Do you have any religious beliefs regarding your current living situation?; and 4) Are there any supports such as clinics and counseling centers that you have utilized? These questions were developed to explore several main areas of coping strategies. These areas included social support, religious beliefs, and community or humanitarian resources.

This instrument was pilot tested by the primary researcher with a local Sudanese population before use in the refugee camp. Five interviews with women who were Sudanese and had lived in Kakuma Refugee Camp prior to resettlement were completed. After completing the survey, the women were brought together as a group and asked for feedback and changes that would be helpful for collecting information. The women discussed the survey but noted no changes that they recommended. Thus, the questionnaire was not edited.

The questionnaire was completed in multiple locations in the Sudanese areas of Kakuma Refugee Camp. The researcher utilized two female interpreters who were recommended by the UNHCR office and trained by the researcher to provide exact wording of the participants. Confidentiality training was also

provided by the researcher. The primary researcher completed all 30 interviews included in this study. Interviews lasted from 15 to 45 minutes and included check-back procedures. The researcher took notes on main data points and the emotional reactions of the participants while the interviews were being conducted. At the end of each interview, check-back procedures were completed that included a review of the primary data provided with requests for correct, clarification, or additional information. A token package of soap, matches, and sanitary pads was provided to each participant as compensation for their time.

The researcher audio recorded and transcribed all interviews verbatim. Data analysis occurred by utilizing NVivo with a research assistant also analyzing a random 20% of the full interviews to check for coding discrepancies. Both open and axial coding were utilized as described by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Starting codes included items such as food, housing, friends, God, talk, church, clinic, hospital, and help. These were combined into themes such as social support, religion, and humanitarian aid to cover primary categories of coping strategies. Once themes were developed, negative case analysis with a review for contradictory evidence (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was also used to discover if there were any cases in which one interviewee's experience showed that not all women shared the general categories of these phenomenon. This included reviewing the transcriptions in their entirety to explore possible areas in which one participant's experience fell outside the primary experiences of the other 29. The only case in which one individual noted a somewhat different experience was that one 19-year-old had reached secondary school, whereas the rest of the participants had minimal education. The field notes, informal interviews, and previous theory from the literature later provided triangulation for this analysis as they were reviewed for similarities and possible contradictory evidence. These methods for triangulation also examined potential areas where the overall themes did not appear to match the experience of an individual. No noteworthy differences were found.

## Results

The study revealed that the women in the refugee camp were nearly entirely dependent on humanitarian aid for basic

survival. They reported few other opportunities to acquire life necessities. They both appreciated the assistance and lamented its limited nature. The women also reported that life in the refugee camp caused them to suffer loss of relationships and relatedness to others. Finally, the women described living in the refugee camps for many years with little prospect of leaving. This negatively impacted their sense of hope for the future.

### *Dependency through Physical Assistance*

One of the most significant characteristics of refugee camps is the physical aid given to the residents. All the refugee women in this study discussed the physical assistance they received from the UNHCR (note: the women often attributed all aid by agencies as coming from the United Nations, even if the assistance was from a related program such as the World Food Programme). The women were grateful to the UN for providing them with necessities like food; however, they also used language indicating that they were not given all they felt they needed. In discussing what they did receive, the women mentioned food, shelter, and cooking utensils such as cooking pots. Mariel shared that "UN people gave them food, the house, even those plate for eating." Hannah stated that "they have been distributed by UN, those plate of cooking, those of eating, blanket, and the food." These were common descriptions of the types of assistance offered. This focus on items that meet basic physical needs may be due to the theory presented by Maslow (1954), in which lower needs such as food and shelter must be cared for before a person is able to move on to higher level needs, even those of safety or intimacy.

Some of the women spoke of the UN in very close, relational terms. For example, one woman stated that "nobody else support me, but then they give me house. Apart from UN, they did not help." Susan shared that the UN was the only program helping her, "so I will be stay with UNHCR here." She continued to say that "if I was still in Sudan, maybe [I would be] dead with the children and the husband...UNHCR is here and helping me a lot." Julie also shared that "since UN is here it is not as bad...is safe." Especially in the absence of family, the UN was often very important. Hannah said, "I am an orphan...want to

stay with UNHCR." Mayek also shared that she felt "only UN is the father to [me] and the mother and the child."

The women also described frustration concerning the limited nature of the aid. For example, Yar stated, "they just give food. Maybe when it is coming fast...just give food and house, struggle alone. It is not proper. Latrines. Nothing for the toilet... for the house..." Another woman, Janet, shared "You get food, but nothing else. Not enough for that month. They just give maybe only for three day, four days. Four days." Mariel stated that it was "Not enough. It is not enough. Some days, maybe 5 days or 4 days they are stay without food." The women presented as discouraged by the level of assistance provided. It was often enough to survive on, but barely.

Some women shared "there is no other help except UN." Even though they were frustrated, they had nowhere else to turn for assistance. The women appeared to often have limited familial and community support and often did not have the opportunity to grow their own food as they had done in their home country. The opportunities for formal employment also were severely limited for most women in the camp. Refugee camp residents were prohibited from obtaining legal employment, although some women were able to circumvent these prohibitions. For example, in some instances non-governmental organizations unofficially hired refugees for certain positions (Agier, 2008). Most of these "unofficial" positions were for refugees with specific skills, such as teaching and language skills for interpretation (Agier, 2008; UNHCR interpreters, Personal communication, May 7, 2011). None of the women in this study had these types of qualifications. While four of the women in this study had informal employment opportunities through carrying water to the homes of Somali women, they did not earn enough to provide for their families. Lastly, some programs exist that provide refugee women with opportunities through crafts, sewing, or other services, but none of these women in the study were able to participate in these programs. As a result, the women in this study were almost entirely dependent on what the UNHCR and other NGOs could provide for them.

*Dependency in Relationships*

Several of the women described the UNHCR in relational terms, such as being the father and mother to one who is orphaned. Most of these women reported that they did not currently have supportive family members. In a more traditional society, the Dinka (and other Sudanese) women are part of an extensive system involving extended families and networks. While many of the women either arrived with a family member or had some family in the camp, the deeper network appeared to have been broken. When women referred to family members, they often spoke of them not as source of assistance, but as potential or current problems. For example, one woman came to the camp with her cousin who then left for Nairobi. She stated that her fear was that if the cousin returned to the camp, he would force her to leave the house she was currently living in, which "belonged" to the cousin. One woman arrived with her mother, but stated she was "alone, there is no, just my mother only and my mother is old, yes she grow old." Another woman spoke of her mother as one who made life difficult and did not allow her to stay in the same house. She said, "You know, the first time I come and sleep, after that the mother chase me."

Unfortunately, family members in the camp often provided little support. Many of the refugee women had previously been married but were now separated or widowed and had multiple young children. Some women also discussed having added social challenges due to their husband's fate. Multiple women shared that their husbands had left them. One woman spoke of her husband only returning to the camp to force her to have sex with him, and then leaving again once she was pregnant. Another spoke of being forced by her uncle to marry another man for the dowry that is given to the family. In these cases, the husbands did not appear to be providing for their families in the traditional Sudanese manner. In short, the women reported relying on humanitarian aid for necessities and reported a lack of the family support system on which they previously relied.

*Time Factors and Hope*

The women in this study reported feeling they had no options. All thirty of the women stated they were not able to

return to Sudan because of ongoing conflicts and the fear of harm or not having any family members left in the country. For example, Ana stated "The family died. I live orphan...mother died. I have nobody in Sudan. So I come here."

The women in this study seemed to believe that resettlement was their best option, although they acknowledged that it was unlikely. Martha stated "the only important thing in good life...will be outside, is America, outside of the camp. That is the good life." Yar stated "Even though people say, the UN say to let me go to Sudan I will stay here, it is fit to kill someone. If they don't allow me to go abroad, I will die in the camp." These women faced long periods of time spent in the camp combined with the limited chance of resettlement. The women seemed to recognize this and did not sound as though they believed they would be allowed to resettle overseas.

The women also suffered from problems associated with inactivity, including a feeling of hopelessness. Most women had no chance of employment, although a few women found informal options by carrying water. Many of the women were previously involved in farming or cattle keeping, which was not an option in the camp. Some of the younger women attended school; however, most lacked the money needed to support their education. They were not allowed the freedom of movement to leave the camp. When Mary was asked what she thought might happen to her or her children in the future, she said simply "nothing. Just staying like this." The women in the study seemed to have little hope. The lack of hope for changes in the future seemed to be one of the serious, long-term problems. The women seemed to think there was little chance that their lives could someday be different.

### *Strengths*

Although the women primarily reported difficulties as discussed above, it is noteworthy that these women exemplified a variety of strengths as well. The women in this study were highly resourceful, although it is not likely that they would recognize this. Although official employment is not possible, four of the women noted being engaged in informal employment through carrying water for other refugees with more resources. They were seeking methods to gain resources that may not have been

obvious. Many of the younger women focused on their desire for more education as a method of changing their situation. Indeed, the only time issues beyond survival arose was within the discussion of how education could improve their situation. This shows that the women in refugee camps are far more than simply "victims"—they are strong women with agency who are able to survive and support their families with almost no resources.

## Discussion

The system of structural dependency in the camps can have long-term implications for refugees (Agier, 2008). Some hoped to be able to leave the refugee camps for some other long-term solution, such as local integration, resettlement, or return to the home country. However, in the Kakuma Refugee Camp, this hope began to dwindle when refugees remained in the camp for extended periods of time. This protracted situation caused some unexpected long-term issues, such as the dependency on the system for physical needs, loss of relatedness, and lack of hope for change.

Some authors discuss this concept as the "victim" or learned helplessness mindset. Agier (2008, pp. 155, 213–214) discusses how "refugees are adopted by national or international NGOs and UN agencies in the name of human rights, and these take responsibility for them as pure victims...being de-socialized and in a state of purely biological life...individuals are treated and managed as nameless victims devoid of identity." According to this mindset, the refugees are only victims who need to be given help, not whole people who would like to have a full life and the ability to support themselves. The literature increasingly recognizes that the system created within the refugee camps forces people to become primarily dependent on the aid system for their basic needs.

The camp structure of prohibiting legal employment created dependency and caused the refugees to be essentially "institutionalized" (Kibreab, 1993). Some refugees, however, found ways around the legal constraints. Kibreab (1993) notes that governments and camp authorities treat refugees as helpless, which can contribute to the sense of institutionalization. But this study demonstrates that the refugees were not helpless victims. As noted above, the refugees in this study had strengths

that allowed them to demonstrate agency within the confines of the camp structure. Some refugees supplemented their needs by trading on the black market or procuring informal employment. Many of the women reported a desire to work or to return to school. Outside of the interviews themselves, the researcher noted refugee who had formed small informal businesses such as a modest (and possibly illegal) restaurants. These findings suggest that the camp structure may be classifying refugees as helpless while simultaneously keeping them in a setting where they are dependent on others as much as possible.

Many factors likely contribute to the endemic problems of refugee camps. One such factor is the government's need to establish control over a large group of people who could easily overwhelm poor and often struggling countries that may not have the resources to support such an influx of people. Even the physical conditions of the land to which the refugees migrate may be a part of the difficulty, as the camps are often in dry areas unable to support farms or animal husbandry (Kibreab, 1993). As Agier (2008, p. 12) notes, "every policy of assistance is simultaneously an instrument of control over its beneficiaries." Refugees are often dependent on humanitarian aid not because they are helpless, but rather because of "the government's policy, misconception of the relief agencies about the refugees' traditions, coping mechanisms, capabilities, etc. and in the severe constraints imposed by the climatic and physical conditions of the country" (Kibreab, 1993, p. 332). The governments may also pose additional constraints. For example, Kenya prohibits refugees from Kakuma to keep animals due to potential conflicts with the local population (Horn, 2010).

Some programs have made strides to overcome this system of dependency. For example, one program attempts to "alleviate the victim mindset and resulting dependency" by providing programs like basket weaving that are designed to increase self-sufficiency and reduce vulnerability (Hermanson, 2007, p. 154). In Kakuma at the time of the study, there was at least one program that was based on creating and selling pottery observed by the researcher. Many of these programs use craft-making to give the women activities as well as a chance to make extra money to support themselves. Some refugees were able to secure startup funds for small business enterprises (Kibreab, 1993). Boateng (2010) suggests that micro-loans help

women start businesses and provide education opportunities. Unfortunately, programs such as these tend to reach only a small portion of the population (Hermanson, 2007).

Long-term refugee camp life has significant impacts on refugees' physical and emotional well-being. Long-term dependency on outside support, a loss of social structures and relationships, and the expanding time frame can create a lack of hope. The women in this study described feeling total dependency on outside aid and the lack of any foreseeable change in their situation. Many of the women interviewed for this project had been in Kakuma or other refugee camps since the early 1990's, or even the 1980's. These refugees were waiting for a long-term solution and had little to occupy their days. Agier (2008) described this time to be like being in a "waiting room." Goodman (2004) interviewed a Sudanese refugee who had resettled in the U.S., who stated:

We had eight years in Kenya, and it was really boring. Because you can't work, you can't go to school, you can't even hope for your future. There was no hope for the future. So we just lived there as...we didn't even count ourselves (Goodman, 2004, p. 1188).

In short, refugees face what Agier describes as the "problem of inactivity" where "moral suffering, or even the psychological disturbance bound up with lack of occupational activity, play an important role in individual daily life" (2008, p. 137). The women in the present study similarly reported a lack of activity and lack of hope for the future.

## Conclusion

This paper considers issues such as the victim mentality, loss in relationships, lack of activities and supports for women in the camp that lead to lack of hope, and the poor conditions of the land and restrictions for its use. These are just some of the issues facing women in the refugee camps—issues caused by the conditions and restrictions of the environment. Many of the changes that would be required for these conditions to change are political and unlikely to be swift. However, it is noted that the women in the camp can be highly resourceful themselves.

The examples provided in this research show women who are dedicated to their children and families, who want to improve themselves through education, and who wish to work and will do so in any way they can. Finding methods of providing for these desires and to support their dedication could alleviate the lack of hope that many of the women reported.

### *Strengths and Limitations*

As with all research, this study has strengths and limitations. Strengths of this study include the rare focus on the individual experiences and words of refugee women living in a refugee camp. However, this was a short-term study, which may not have allowed time for the researcher to develop trust within the community. Additionally, some study participants might have believed the researcher was connected to the camp and able to provide or withhold assistance. This belief may have impacted responses. Language and cultural barriers were present but were limited as much as possible by the use of local interpreters and assistants.

### *Implications for Policy and Practice*

The findings from this study show that Sudanese refugee women in the Kakuma Refugee Camp survive in a system that creates and encourages long-term dependency. This study supports several potential changes that could improve the lives of these women. Changes to support decreasing dependency, increasing and strengthening relationships, and limiting the length of time in refugee camps would assist greatly in limiting the impacts of learned helplessness.

A shift in policy that could be highly useful would be to support host countries in the integration of refugee populations when it becomes apparent that conflicts in the home country will be lengthy. It is recommended that additional financial assistance be given to host countries of refugee camps to allow for more permanent settlement within the host country. This will require financial support to provide for housing, employment, and possibly employment training so that the refugees can become independent providers for themselves and their families.

It is also reasonable to provide financial support to the local communities surrounding these settlements to lessen feelings of unfair distribution by local host country populations.

### *Reducing Structural Dependency*

To limit structural dependency, programs could target women specifically to create skills to enable them to support their families. The basket weaving program discussed by Hermanson (2007) created culturally-appropriate opportunities for the women to increase their self-sufficiency within the camp system. Micro-finance and other opportunities to increase employment and self-sufficiency also could decrease dependency. With financial independence, these women could avoid activities that subject them to the risk of violence, like gathering firewood in dangerous areas. Any employment training to assist women in their return to society outside of the camp would also be beneficial. Such training could include child-care classes, English training, or sewing. These opportunities could provide women hope for the future. Any program that can combat the inactivity and hopelessness could be of great benefit to the women.

### *Increasing Social Capital and Relationships*

While some studies have noted that refugees rely on social networks in refugee camps (Teye & Yebileh, 2015), other studies have noted that at times refugees have difficulty forming the relationships necessary for social capital (Marume et al., 2018). The women interviewed in this study expressed feelings of loneliness and isolation. Efforts to increase social capital could help these refugee women in terms of finances and emotional well-being. Such efforts can improve overall quality of life for refugees (Marume et al., 2018). Encouraging income-generating activities provides not only more financial independence but also an increased sense of community (Perouse de Montclos & Kagwanja, 2000). Support for additional social activities like women's groups and church also may decrease isolation and improve social capital.

*Time Factors—Limiting the Length of Stay in Camps*

A much more difficult and long-term challenge is reducing the length of time refugees are forced to stay in refugee camps. Policy changes and political solutions may take decades. This long period of waiting in a refugee camp has negative effects on the refugees, including structural dependency and lack of social capital. If political pressure could be increased to find long-term solutions more quickly, a great many refugees would benefit. Host countries also could improve the lives of refugees by considering policy changes like allowing refugees to gain employment. The international community or UNHCR could provide support to refugee-hosting countries to encourage them to allow non-nationals to secure employment. The international community could support both the local populations and refugees to be able to meet a basic level of self-sufficiency through cultivation of new farms, wells, or procuring animals for animal husbandry. While integrating refugees into the host country would reflect a major policy change, both the refugee and local populations could benefit from receiving needed resources and skills training to increase their overall welfare.

### Research Recommendations

Additional research should be implemented to examine the relationship between refugee women and the system of dependency in refugee camps. Research on female refugees more broadly is needed as most refugees on the continent of Africa are women or children (Pavlish, 2005). Other research also could focus on the consequences of long-term “warehousing” of refugees in camps to supplement Agier’s findings. Another important concern is resources available to refugees in resettlement countries, and additional research should supplement Potocky’s (1996) findings that such resources often are insufficient. Such studies could benefit resettlement countries to best provide for the transition out of the refugee camps. Similarly, research concerning refugees who return to their home countries or integrate into their host countries would be beneficial. This research could be supported by the UNHCR as well as universities and refugee-related programs from around the world.

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