



## **Sudanese Refugees in Australia: Experiences of Crime and the Criminal Justice System – Research in Progress**

**21<sup>st</sup> Annual ANZSOC Conference  
28<sup>th</sup> of November, Canberra**

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# Summary of Paper

- ▣ Research project in progress
- ▣ Focus changed after media analysis, literature review and consultation with Sudanese community and Queensland Police Service
- ▣ Project aims to give the Sudanese community a voice and has overall been a wide ranging consultative process

# Project Overview

- ▣ Inflammatory 2005 media comments by Andrew Fraser regarding race, intelligence (IQ) and crime of Sudanese refugees in Australia
- ▣ Coventry and Dawes ANZSOC paper in Hobart 2006: “What All Australians Should Know About Race, Racism and Crime”. The ‘deafening’ silence from anthropologists and criminologists
- ▣ JCU School of Arts and Social Sciences 2008 ‘seeding’ grant: “Race Hate Crimes in Queensland”

# Original Major Aims

- ▣ To compare the various ways that hate crimes are measured;
- ▣ To identify and gain perceptions of the general community and other key stake holders regarding race hate crimes in Queensland; and
- ▣ Compare such incidents impacting on Sudanese and Indigenous communities.

# Overview of Sudanese People

- ▣ Queensland is the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest Sudanese settlement state in Australia, since 2002/03 to June 2007, 6247 Sudanese resettled in QLD under DIAC humanitarian settlement program
- ▣ Major settlement destinations in order have been Brisbane, Logan/Beenleigh/Woodbridge, Toowoomba and Townsville
- ▣ Like previous new immigrant /refugee groups Sudanese have attracted attention as to whether they are a ‘social problem’.
- ▣ In Victoria, for example, police and African groups have more recently urged the resettlement of Sudanese from metropolitan Melbourne to regional centres and country towns.
- ▣ This ‘push’ lies in notions about Sudanese refugees being exposed to ‘big city vice’. “ghettoisation”, ethnic youth gangs”

# Assembling the Research Team:

- ▣ Recruitment of Bona Duot, a Sudanese criminology student at JCU: Liaison with Sudanese communities
- ▣ Recruitment of Laura Swanson, a Research Masters Degree JCU student, “The Gang of 49?”: Indigenous research background
- ▣ Recruitment of Darren Palmer, Deakin University: Policing expertise

# Phase One

- ▣ Focus Group (N=8) with 8 Sudanese JCU undergraduate students, February 11

## *Key Findings:*

- Lack of support systems for new arrivals
- Traditional Sudanese kinship structures are mistaken as gang culture
- Cross-cultural training be made available for police officers
- The larger narrative: 'from genocide through foreign refugee camps to institutionalized racism in the Australian educational and labour market sectors'
- The 'Lost Boys'

# Ongoing Project Tasks

- ▣ Media Analysis
- ▣ Literature Review
- ▣ Initial Contacts with Department of Immigration and Citizenship
- ▣ Establishing relationships with Sudanese communities and the QPS

# Initial Media Analysis

- ▣ Sudanese refugees presented as a 'threat to the Australian social order' by right wing, white supremacist groups
- ▣ Federal politicians claim that Sudanese refugees 'do not integrate well into the wider Australian community'
- ▣ Media portrayals of Sudanese refugees shifted from 'victims of crime' to 'perpetrators of crime'
- ▣ Conflicting police views between Chief Commissioner of Police and Police Union in Victoria
- ▣ This leads us to question whether Sudanese refugees are a crime problem at all. Indeed, available Queensland cjs data indicate that Sudanese account for less than 0.002 % of the prison population

# Initial Literature Review

- ▣ Hate crime in Australia is difficult to measure and define and is connected to complex societal discourses
- ▣ Concerns about the criminalisation and demonisation of refugees
- ▣ Ethnic crime is disproportionately low but moral panics regarding ethnic 'gangs' are high
- ▣ Visibility lends to over-policing?
- ▣ Social capital, social exclusion problems for Sudanese. The challenge is to promote social inclusion – a key goal of our research

# Restricting the Focus of the Study

## *Key Issues:*

1. Limiting the study to Sudanese Refugees in Queensland only. Due to timelines required to establish cooperation with other eastern seaboard agencies in Victoria, NSW and Tasmania; and 'fishbowling' of Indigenous peoples
2. Growing doubts about the concept and measurement of Race Hate crime. Focus groups' discussions and Queensland Police Service input regarding low incidence and measurement problems

# Phase Two

- ▣ Townsville Focus Group (N=12), June 26

*Key Findings:*

- Cultural misrepresentation
- Cultural differences in how to discipline children
- Desire to be heard as a community
- Stereotyping of Sudanese refugees as criminals by the media
- Small group of offenders leads to generalization of entire community

# Phase Three

- ▣ Research Meeting with Queensland Police Service, Brisbane, June 18; elder patrols

*Key Findings:* - QPS data can provide race/ethnicity of offenders and victims

- Sudanese on Sudanese incidents outweigh all other racial/ethnic incidents

- Toowoomba estimate is 8-10 troublesome young people out of population of 1100

- QPS active in working with elders to identify Sudanese as opposed to other African young people

- QPS and elders concerned about lack of Sudanese knowledge about the CJS

# Phase Four

- ▣ Negotiating letters of support from major Brisbane and Townsville agencies which deal with Sudanese community settlement and related issues
- ▣ JCU Research Ethics approval, September 30
- ▣ Queensland Police Service Ethics approval, pending

# The New Project: “Sudanese Refugees’ Experiences with the Queensland Criminal Justice System”

## Research Aims and Questions

- ▣ To explore Sudanese refugees’ experiences and knowledge about the CJS in Australia
- ▣ What are these perceptions based on?
- ▣ How are crimes against Sudanese people recorded and analysed by QPS?
- ▣ What are the perceptions of QPS, local government and NGO’s of Sudanese victim support services and contact with CJS?

# New Research Aims and Questions (continued)

- ▣ How are Sudanese refugees portrayed by the media? And how do these portrayals shape perceptions by the community?
- ▣ How accurate is it to characterize Sudanese young people as youth gangs?

# Proposed Methodology

- ▣ For Queensland communities: Brisbane, Logan, Toowoomba and Townsville triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data:
  - Various QPS data bases including incidence and arrest data
  - Media reporting
  - Major survey of Sudanese peoples
  - Interviews/focus groups with Sudanese communities, QPS, NGO's and local government

# Policy Relevance

The proposed project has potential implications for ;

- planning and resource allocation
- provision of perceptions of minority groups regarding the CJS and victim support services ( i.e. Sudanese refugees)
- police recruitment, training and professional development
- enhancement of data bases regarding crimes/incidence reports tracking both perpetrators and victims of crime

# Concluding Remarks

The research team maintained a fortnightly one hour meeting program to discuss progress of the project and to plan assigned tasks.

The research team established and maintained both formal and informal communications with QPS and key members of Sudanese communities.

The New Research proposal includes a consultative committee comprised of criminologists and elders representing Sudanese communities from each site.

Finally, the research team is committed to providing comprehensive feedback regarding findings to date to Sudanese communities and our supporting agencies.