

School of Occupational Therapy and Social Work

**“I was traumatised and yet this is another trauma”:
Exploring Resettlement Challenges Facing ‘Female Heads of Households’
Settling in Western Australia from Africa 2001-2006**

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Virginia Mangazva

April 2011

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ABSTRACT

This research explores issues facing 'female heads of households' in negotiating resettlement in Perth Western Australian. African female heads of households are those women who came to Australia on the visa category 204 'women-at-risk'. The term women-at-risk is used by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to refer to refugee women who have particular protection problems and find themselves without adequate support mechanisms. The special needs of these refugee women derive from persecution and particular hardships sustained in their country of origin, during their flight from their homeland or in their country of refuge. The objectives of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee's assistance to women-at-risk are to provide international options for resettlement to refugee women who are without family protection and cannot return to their country of origin. The Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) classifies this group of refugees as female heads of households. Although there are a range of government-funded programs to meet the needs of these women, they face multiple adjustments in their way of life. The main focus of the study was to discover how these women are negotiating the settlement process and, in particular, the employment challenges associated with the Australian Welfare to Work reforms of 2006. This interpretive piece of research documents the experiences of these women. The nature of these has significant implications for policy makers, service providers and Australians generally. In particular through the use of a co-operative inquiry approach, overt links have been made between women's narratives of their experiences and the design and effectiveness of the support systems available to them.

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WORLDWIDE SURVIVORS WOMEN REFUGEES



FIGURE 1 SNAP SHOT OF A REFUGEE CAMP (UNITED NATIONS WORLD POPULATION MONITORING 2006)

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW

This thesis examines issues facing African female heads of households in negotiating settlement in Perth, and the employment challenges associated with the Australian Welfare to Work reforms of 2006. These women came to Australia on the refugee visa category 204 'women-at-risk' and they are survivors of wars and displacements. This interpretive study is an exploration of women's stories on the issues they face in Perth alongside the accounts of social workers and other human service workers. These practitioners' reflections on working with the African female heads of households identified challenges in working with these African refugees. The views of employment agents were also sought. In comparing and contrasting the issues identified by the three groups, the research documents a complex array of factors shaping the settlement process for some African female heads of households who are recent refugee settlers in Perth. The research question guiding this research was as follows:

Research Question

How have the settlement process of African 'female heads of households' in Perth been impacted by the 1 July 2006 Welfare to Work changes?

Objectives

- (a) To describe how African 'female heads of households' were negotiating settlement and the requirements under the policies of Welfare to Work changes.
- (b) To examine the intersections of single parenthood, language, illness, age, and other cultural differences that may be experienced by these women.

This naturalistic inquiry was conducted with twenty seven African female heads of households settling in Western Australia. The women arrived in Perth between 2001

and 2006. The human service workers who participated were three social work practitioners who worked in the Perth Metropolitan Area with refugees; a nutritionist who works with refugees; one high school teacher; and two Migrant employment workers.

Chapter 2: examines the literature available regarding for the target group in order to give readers a picture of a range of issues and difficulties likely to have been experienced by the women before displacement and during wars that have impacted on their settlement in Australia. Included is the researcher's refugee lived experience during an African war. Some context is given as to these African women's shared history, which includes wars, socialization, education, cultural beliefs, and religion.

Chapter 3: outlines the methodology and methods of the research design. The chapter discusses some of the principles of interpretive research used for this study. This includes issues relating to the study approach, ethical issues and questions of trustworthiness and validity. The chapter outlines how co-operative inquiries were conducted with African female heads of households and focus groups and interviews with human service workers. Details of a model developed to be sensitive when discussing the settlement and employment issues facing African female heads of households are provided.

Chapter 4: details the results from two cooperative inquiry sessions with African women participants and follow-up in-depth interviews and the results of a focus group with the social workers and other human service workers and interviews undertaken. The findings from each group are compared and contrasted. The participants' stories and experiences of these African women's settlement with regards to Welfare Reform changes and employment requirements are discussed. Participants' input has been organized into key themes for each of the two groups with the support of NVivo7 software.

Chapter 5: The concluding chapter connects the particular circumstances of African refugees women, who are female heads of households resettled in Perth, to the

issues facing displaced women and children worldwide. This chapter ties together recurrent themes from earlier chapters and in particular highlights how additional stressors generated from welfare reform, such as the requirement to find work are identified as traumatic by the women who participated in this research. The chapter concludes by reflecting on settlement issues identified through the research, and argues for some of the ways the intersectioning disadvantage experienced by these African female heads of households could be better addressed by support services.

Study Context

The African female heads of households target group of this thesis are women who have arrived in Australia, under the visa category 204 'women-at-risk' (Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children 2006; Australian Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs 1997-98). This type of visa is given to women and children that have higher war caused risks than any other refugees.

Women who arrive in Australia under visa category 204 are considered as permanent residents upon arrival in Australia. This includes entitlement to such benefits as temporary accommodation, Centrelink benefits, healthcare card, 510 hours of Adult Migrant English Program, and all other benefits related to a permanent resident. Although the government provides them with all these services, these women stated that, there are other difficult issues they face in their settlement journey as new migrants. The stressful experience of the female heads of households can be understood by using an intersectionality viewpoint.

Intersectionality: What Is It?

In this research, the intersectionality concept is useful to analyze the multiple forms of discrimination of refugee women. The researcher views the inequalities of African women as constructed through socialization, education, cultural norms and values and reinforced by African society's attitudes towards women. Ross-Sheriff, (2006:1) defines intersectionality as:

(a) An integrated approach that identifies and analyzes multiple forms of discrimination. (b) Intersectionality refers to the interaction of two or more forms of discrimination, that compound to form multiple discriminations that manifest as inequalities among women. (c) Intersectionality identifies marginalized women as experiencing multiple forms of visible, and not so visible, interacting discriminations.

Additionally Pittaway states that:

An intersectional analysis [of oppression] involves an analysis of a situation from a perspective based on the understanding that we all have shifting and multiple identities (Pittaway et al 2004:4).

Even for those who are not survivors' of wars, being a stranger in strange environment is a stressful experience. In the case of these women as survivors of wars, stress inevitably comes through various experiences, such as, the stress of being in an alien culture, without usual supports. The African female heads of households are confronted with the dual culture shock of being in an alien host society as well as becoming single women due to wars. Harms (2002) states:

For survivors, the experience of trauma is perhaps most sharply marked by the distress and suffering it leaves in its wake. There is the horror and shock that define reactions to the event itself, and there is continuing distress and suffering in the aftermath (p. 29).

The detailed intersectional experience of these women is explored in this study. I became acquainted with the confusion surrounding the 1 July 2006 Welfare to Work changes as I was working with the refugees.

Fieldwork experiences

I worked as a trauma counselor advocate and coordinator on the settlement for refugees in the Perth Metropolitan Area in 2006 and 2007 on a large project funded to assist refugees in their initial settlement. The first process that I was involved in after being appointed to this position was a needs analysis to find out how to engage with these refugees. The outcomes of this needs analysis workshop informed my professional practice with these refugees. I did a number of community workshops and information sessions on such issues as parenting, resource sharing, community

in crisis, and family conflicts. These were some of the issues identified during the needs analysis workshop. Hearing from these refugees during workshops and information sessions demonstrated to me just how traumatic their settlement experience was.

I became interested in understanding what it was all about from their perspective. I was particularly concerned about the employment requirements as they integrated with other aspects of settlement of female heads of households from a refugee background. This issue came up most frequently in counseling sessions. I was interested in following their past and present experiences and understanding what it was like for them in their country of origin, country of refuge, and country of settlement. My concern was that their perspective was not understood in human service practice for female heads of households' refugees. Policy makers and practitioners did not appear to have recognized that female heads households had different perspectives and needs.

As an African woman migrant, who moved to Australia in 2000 from Zimbabwe with my family, from 2001 to 2004, I studied at Curtin University of Technology, and qualified as a social worker. In 2005 through to 2007, I worked as a social worker with women from the target group. This experience has initiated the research topic. I am both an insider, because I share some of the group's experiences, and a researcher, because I have invited these women to tell me about their experiences. I completed a Master of Social Work by course work at Curtin University of Technology in 2006. My Masters field placement facilitated me in getting my first social work job in 2005.

In looking back to the process of undertaking this present Master of Philosophy thesis researching the lives of the female heads of households target group, what strikes me are the unanticipated ethical and political issues that proved to be more complex and more difficult to handle than I had expected. One example was that female heads of households wanted to meet in a group established by women themselves, without any men. This was partly because of my close connections with

the African communities being studied, for without this close connection it is unlikely that I would have been able to do this research at all. At the time I undertook the research, I was not working with the women, but I had previously worked with African communities on a project, to prevent family disintegration in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities. As a project officer, I developed close working relationships with many of the African communities, social workers and other human service workers with whom I worked.

My experience was that the female heads of households with limited English language found the situation to be difficult and frustrating as welfare to work changes were introduced whilst they were still trying to learn almost everything. I used to hear the issues frustrating female heads of households in most counseling sessions. The Welfare to Work changes was not made specifically for the female heads of households target group. These changes were for all Australians. Yet their impact was excessively felt by the female heads of households who are starting a new life from scratch.

The fieldwork through which settlement issues were identified by the African female heads of households and human service workers took place during the Howard era before the global financial collapse of 2008, but in an era where Multiculturalism had been removed as the prime policy concern and competitive tendering for services operated alongside a humanitarian focus on refugee resettlement services. Alston et al (2001:142) described the policy changes as follows:

Since 1996, the Conservative Federal Government, under the Prime Minister John Howard, accelerated the pace of economic change through liberalization of the economy by furthering deregulation and privatization. This liberalization followed moves during Hawke-Keating Labour period in the Government to open up global market competition in a range of manufacturing and service industries. Today, traditional social policy areas such as health, housing, education, and community services are coming to terms with the contractual and competitive tendering that such liberalization brings.

These changes resulted in more restrictive services for the community generally. The National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC) (2006: 1; Australian

Council of Social Service 2006) reported on the Federal Government's Welfare to Work changes that came into operation on 1 July 2006. The Government proposed the changes in late 2005 and allowed just one week for the community to respond to those changes. The NACLCL stated that, there was an inadequate timeframe to enable community input on measures that would affect tens of thousands of Australians over many years. The National Association of Community Legal Centre commented:

The Welfare to Work changes represents the most significant downgrading of income support in the Social Security system since the Social Security Act was introduced in 1947. They mark an historic change in Social Security law and its administration in Australia (NACLCL 2006:1).

With these changes, there was confusion among the new and emerging African communities. Because of low English literacy they were not aware of the proposed changes until they impacted on their everyday lives. The Welfare to Work changes stated that:

People with disabilities - From 1 July 2006, people who were assessed as capable of working 15–29 hours per week would have to look for work to their level of capacity. Depending on their individual needs, people would have access to specialist disability services, Vocational Rehabilitation, Australian Apprenticeships, job search and placement help, and ongoing workplace support. No-one would be expected to participate or work beyond their capacity. The changes would not affect people who were on Disability Support Pension before 10 May 2005 (NACLCL 2006:3; Centrelink 2006:1; Australian Council of Social Services 2006:5).

Parents/principal carers - From 1 July 2006, people granted income support who were principal carers of a child or children would generally have to seek part-time work if their youngest child is aged 6-15 years. These customers would have to register with an employment service provider and look for paid work of at least 15 hours per week. Job Network's new Employment Preparation service would help parents prepare for work and they would have access to other support services such as subsidized child care. Some exemptions would apply to parents with special family circumstances. People who were already on Parenting Payment would have to seek part-time work from 1 July 2007 or when their youngest child turns seven, whichever is later (NACLCL 2006:3)..

People who have been unemployed for a long time - From 1 July 2006, long-term unemployed job seekers would have access to more help to find employment. They would face increased obligations if they fail to participate in activities and services that are designed to help them find a job. New and expanded services would better meet their needs, including (depending on their circumstances) Job

Capacity Assessments, Wage Assist, Full-time Work for the Dole and access to other employment support services(NACLCLC 2006:6).

Mature age job seekers - From 1 July 2006, people aged 50 to 64 would have the same obligation to look for work as other job seekers. However, job seekers aged 55 and over would be able to meet their obligations by undertaking part-time work or volunteering for 30 hours or more per fortnight. New support services including Job Network's new Employment Preparation service would improve opportunities for all these groups of older job seekers(NACLCLC 2006:6).

There was no mention of refugee women, who were heads of households, made in the changes and accompanying regulations, yet it had significant and particular impact on these refugees. It is these changes which the African Female heads of households are struggling to understand. These refugee single women are unfamiliar with a centralized bureaucratic system involving their completion of paper work. To understand the paper work involved in the changes above, a person should be fluent, in reading; writing; speaking; and interpreting all the paper work with English language.

Significance

This research documents some of the complexities involved for this target group of migrant women in settlement during the current Welfare to Work reform implementation. There is anecdotal evidence of the type of employment sought and obtained by African female heads of households once they arrive in WA. Given the magnitude of the practical problems identified, the need for more focused research is considerable. In-depth data on what is happening for this group is limited. It is not known or understood what issues arise in their place of employment or the impact of employment on their family life. This study is significant in a number of ways. My research examines the issues that single refugee Africa women face in their settlement process in Perth Western Australia. The impact of adjustments in a new country for the African female heads of households from very different backgrounds requires Australian social work to contribute knowledge and skills to an emerging area of social justice which has national and international significance. The practice, knowledge and skill which the profession has accrued through family and ethnic community support practice with women migrants over its professional existence are

directly relevant. At the same time, many African female heads of households face issues not experienced in Australia by other migrant populations.

Summary

The main purpose of this research is to document the accounts of African female heads of households' as to their experiences of settlement challenges as new migrants in Australia. This study articulates what it is like to settle in an unfamiliar environment with entirely unfamiliar life styles. My position in this research inquiry stems from and is shaped by my own experiences as a refugee from Africa who has settled in Australia and become an African Australian social worker working with refugees.

In the first stage of the research, a focus group with social workers and other human service practitioners was conducted to find out whether the topic was researchable. The results from other practitioners during the focus group informed the second stage, which was comprised of two cooperative inquiry sessions with the African female heads of households'.

I have undertaken a review of some of the literature tracing the history of African women lifestyle as girl children and married women. The literature included the role expectations of African women subordinated to their male counterparts as head of the family. Culturally, in most African countries women are expected to do domestic work, child rearing and taking care of the elderly people. Education is considered more important for a boy child than a girl. The African female heads of households' past war traumas have been explored including the researcher's lived refugee experiences as a young girl for six years.

A cooperative inquiry with the African female heads of households' was considered to be a useful framework for achieving an outcome of greater understanding of a process that relatively inaccessible to outsiders.

CHAPTER 2 BACKGROUND

SEEKING REFUGE AND SETTLEMENT

This section provides a general background on the lifestyle of African female heads of households' before and after wars in their countries of origin. A brief historical overview of the African continent and the range of contemporary cultures, will give the reader some idea as to the impact recent history has had on African refugee female heads of households settling in Western Australia. The effects of female socialization, effects of war on girls and women, and education, employment and social support experiences in Africa highlight issues and difficulties impacting on settlement in their new country, Australia.

Section on my positioning

In this overview of the contexts forcing African women to seek refuge, I position myself as an ex-refugee from the Zimbabwean war era of 1970 to 1980. As Darlington and Scott (2002:18) state:

The qualitative researcher is inextricably immersed in the research; thus qualitative research requires a high level of 'reflexivity' or self-reflection about one's part in the phenomenon under study. For some qualitative researchers the questions they explore grow out of a strong ideological commitment and the pursuit of social justice. Some qualitative researchers are happy to acknowledge this.

It is my social work practice with refugees in Perth, Western Australia, and my personal refugee experiences that drive my research interests. In this sense it is important to include my own lived experiences as background to this study.

My lived experience

I am one of the girl children of the black/white struggle in the 1970s in Zimbabwe that dislocated young girls and women from their families and communities. Many girls were taken from schools and homes by fighters during that civil war. This situation is similarly disruptive to that of many of the African female heads of households settling in Western Australia.

This research topic focuses on the settlement experiences of vulnerable women. My interest, commitment and determination in writing and researching about these African female heads of households came from my experience as a refugee. Although I was a refugee young girl for almost 6 years, I have been able to overcome the numerous challenges and effects of being a refugee. I am motivated by a desire to encourage the African female heads of households to be positive about their current and future lives in Western Australia and to convey to mainstream Australians a fuller understanding of where these women 'are at' and their potential to contribute, given support in their vulnerability.

What do I mean about being positive?

As the author of this thesis, I strive to show women's points of view, to demonstrate their power to change and to illustrate that they can still make the best of their lives, regardless of what happened to them in refugee camps. For this reason, I encourage African female heads of households to learn English and be competent in Australian society, which is their new home. In addition, I hope to encourage women that the struggles of learning the English language and other settlement issues will eventually come to an end, and that it is a process. It is important for African women female heads of households to realize that settlement and learning a new language takes time, but at some stage they will get to a place when things become easier.

Being in a refugee camp

I was taken from a Mission by the 'black fighters'. They walked on foot during the night only and slept during the day. I had to learn to walk during the night time when I was supposed to be in bed, so I slept during the day. I never knew where I was going. I cried when no one was watching me. If tears could be finite like water in a bucket, I should have no tears by now. I remember that there was a time when I was desperately tired and thirsty. I told the fighters that I could not walk because I was thirsty; and I was told to drink my own urine. I drank my urine because I was helpless and I needed to survive.

I do not remember how many months it took to reach the relative safety of an unstructured refugee camp in Mozambique Tete Province. I stayed in different unstructured and semi-structured refugee camps made of grass and wood in

Mozambique for almost 6 years. 'Unstructured' camps were simply areas where the homeless, hopeless refugees congregated, sleeping in the open without any shelter or amenities. 'Semi-structured' camps were little better, with only crude shelters constructed from branches and locally available odds and ends. I was finally returned to my home in Zimbabwe in 1980.

Mozambique refugee camp

I arrived in Mozambique to my first unstructured refugee camp during the night. My legs were swollen, with blisters under my feet. I thought the place would have buildings where people would sleep. I was surprised as I slept with no blankets at the so-called refugee camp. In the morning I was asked whether I wanted to drink tea without milk. This was the only thing to eat. I replied that tea with no milk would give me a heart-burn. Another young girl who had lived in this camp for a long time told me that, if I did not drink the tea, all the people might have nothing to eat for two or more days. I took a deep breath. I told myself, "Oh God! Help me". I heard a loud voice telling people to wake up. I was surprised as I thought that I was going to have a rest. It was still very dark. You could not see clearly. I kept on sleeping. The next thing that woke me up was a hard stick beating me. I jumped up crying, and then I had to follow the instructions given to all the young people in that refugee camp.

Conditions at the camps

As it all became clearer, I was shocked to see a group of young boys who were very thin, like a reed in the deep blue sea. If a strong wind blew where these minors were standing, all would be on the ground. I talked to myself. "Oh God, Are those children I am seeing like me? Am I going to end up like them?" The heads of these minors were thin with no hair at the back or sides. It was as though a razor had shaved their hair. The remaining hair at the top of their heads was like the thinnest hen feathers. These boy minors were in a long queue of their own, waiting to get something to eat. One could not distinguish them from one another at a distance.

I asked another girl minor who was close to me, "What happened to the hair of those boys?" She replied that the lice had eaten their hair. As those boys started walking to take food, I noticed that they were walking on their heels, with all their toes and feet upwards. I asked what happened to their feet. She told me that the area had black

fleas that laid their white eggs on the boys' toes. After a few days, the white eggs spread all over affecting the toes and feet. I asked myself how I was going to live with all those problems. Getting something to eat was a problem. No shelter was a problem. What happens if my clothes get torn? "Oh God, help me". I saw all this within one day. For nearly six years, I lived in the Mozambique refugee camps, and I witnessed numerous abusive behaviors against girl children.

Life as a woman after leaving the refugee camps

When I was returned home to Zimbabwe in 1980, there were many adverse stereotypical sayings about young girls who had lived in refugee camps. Although I got married in 1981 to someone whom I met in a refugee camp in Mozambique, stereotypes circulating as to someone who had lived in a refugee camp affected my psychological and physical wellbeing. Some other girl children went home as single mothers with children. This was because their partners had died or, more often, the partners, as refugee boy children, had not informed those young girls of their real names and homes in Zimbabwe. So those children had no fathers because the mother did not know where the father was or if he was alive or dead. Pittaway et al (2004:4) outline the level of courage these women show:

Whereas as a refugee, she may be an object of pity, but as a woman she may also be a person of great bravery, who has taken part in political struggles, protected her family, and who maintains cultural and family unity in situations of extreme danger. As a refugee she may be poor and in need of international charity in order to feed her family. She may also be a skilled healer, someone who has sustained and raised her family with no outside help until she was forced to flee, and who has the skills and determination to be self-reliant again. Within her ethnic group she may be a leader, a person of respect, but if her ethnic group is one discriminated against by the mainstream community in which they exist, her status in that wider community will be of a marginalised community, regardless of her status within the group.

In Zimbabwe, this affected the marriage chances of these single refugee girl children. When they went home the boy children were saying that they would not marry girls who had lived in refugee camps. The girls were ostracized by all including their family members and members of their society. Some of these single mothers had a child or children with these refugee young boys in Mozambique. Although they met up again in Zimbabwe, the young men would still tell the young women that they would not marry women who lived in refugee camps. There were numerous negative

labels given to girls who had lived in refugee camps. I was surprised that so much was said about female child minors who had lived in refugee camps compared to boy minors. Why such negative labels were attached to females and not males puzzled me.

Even now, I do not understand why most of the negative labels about refugees are attached to females, while few are for males. Society, at times, contributes to such stereotyping of females. In this case, the girls were blamed for living in neighbouring refugee camps. Most, if not all, of these girls, did not choose their situation. In social work terms, this is known as “blaming the victim” (Trotter1999:40). In most African cultures, the parents were not happy, as their daughters were perceived to have brought shame into their kinship group and society as a whole. But, how does this ‘feel’ for those young girls returning home? Reflecting on the situations of these young girls; I ‘guess’ they felt humiliated.

Education and work in Zimbabwe

I started my education in Zimbabwe from where I had left when I was taken to Mozambique. These studies were attended in private colleges in the city during the evenings. I was working from 8.00am to 4.30pm. After work, I then had to go and start my evening classes from 5.00pm to 7.00pm or from 6.00pm to 8.00pm on other days. I acquired an education through evening classes. Thereafter, I attained a Certificate of Social Work in Zimbabwe at the School of Social Work in 1995. I was also responsible for my family. I had my first child in 1982, my second 1984, my third 1986, and my last in 1988. I had to learn to juggle life’s demands in this way. I managed studying, working, and family life because of the help that I got from the housemaids. The housemaids in African culture may be a daughter of your kin who lives with you in the same house and helps with the children and housework.

In 1997, after working for 16 years with women, children and families, I resigned from my job to pursue further education. I thought I needed more education at a degree level so that I could learn and critically examine why the lives of most Africans are the way they are. I applied to several universities overseas. I received a

first response from Australia, and this is how I arrived in Perth and enrolled in higher education.

Education and work in Australia

I arrived in Australia at the beginning of 2000. I had to do English classes for a semester. After completing English classes, I did two extension subjects towards the Bachelor of Social Work as a bridging course. I then did a Bachelor of Social Work from 2001 to 2004. In 2005 to 2006, I completed a Master of Social Work. At this time I was working as a social worker full time. In 2008 I commenced a Master of Philosophy (Human Services).

All this experience in Africa supported me in articulating the problems that these African women face, who are now heads of households in Australia. Although the African female heads of households are presently more vulnerable, to some extent, we share similar refugee experiences. The difference is that I met someone as a young girl who became, and still, is my husband while the African female heads of households' husbands died or disappeared.

Why should I discuss that I was a young girl in a refugee camp?

I am aware that, to some readers, writing about being a young girl in a refugee camp and my husband may sound strange as it is considered private. Yet finding a spouse/protector in a refugee camp was important, as no other men would touch you. This meant that you were safe; for other men respected that you were someone's partner. This was my experience with other young Zimbabwean girls who lived in refugee camps. If refugee women are supported effectively they, like me, do have the potential to work, learn and contribute to the economy of the Australian society. Australia has offered refuge to these women heads of households. This study looks at what providing effective refuge for these families might mean in a practice.

Overview of African female heads of households and effects of war and resettlement

The section will document the broad cultural patterns that unite Africans, but also highlight distinct regional, cultural differences and how past war experiences may

hinder the resettlement process. This overview will identify some key aspects including women's education, employment, and childcare. I have drawn on my knowledge of my home continent, my social work practice knowledge, input from participants, and a variety of texts.

Conclusion after working with refugees in Perth as a trauma counselor/advocate

The main settlement problems for these African female heads of households are similar, although they are not homogenous. Their issues include culture shock, isolation, identity crisis, fear of government, housing, lack of employment in the field of expertise, lack of established networks, financial issues, childcare, and lack of understanding of Australian laws. Frequently, individual women from the target group feel highly unsure about being in Australia. This is because they were forced to leave their homes and hopes of return come into mind for many years.

Role adjustments

African female heads of households from a refugee background face various role adjustments in their countries of settlement. In most of the African women's countries of origin, culturally, larger collective home duties are for women. These include household tasks such as taking care of the children, the aged and disabled people. The situation is different in their countries of settlement where the nuclear family is central and larger importance is placed on individual responsibility. In their country of settlement, most refugee sole women will be taking the position of being head of the family for their first time. Transforming in their new countries could be challenging if as women in their traditional societies their identity was connected to that of male relations such as father, husband and brother. In most of the countries of origin, females are socialized to play a role which is subservient to male (Human Rights Watch, 2005, 2008).

The pictures below provide a presentation of the ages of most African female heads of households, the target group of this thesis. The pictures were taken from international reports online (AFRICA-ASIA 2004; Commission for the Status of

Women 1986; Human Rights Watch Darfur 2005, 2008; Pittaway et al 2003, 2004,2005; United Nations 2006).

Survivors: African Female Heads of Households and Children



FIGURE 3 SURVIVORS WOMEN AND CHILDREN

The above pictures of women survivors show some of the responsibilities, roles and challenges women and children encounter during war and displacement. Those images highlight the problems that women and children face in refugee camps whilst waiting for safety. This gives an idea of the ages of the women and children survivors. Basically, this shows the impact of these wars and unresolved conflicts. Women and children suffer with these ongoing displacements. The author of this thesis, as a survivor of the black/white Zimbabwean war era constantly I wonder why people start these wars when they will end up negotiating. Why should people not start with negotiating so that they save innocent women and children from all these sufferings?

“Survivor” was a catch word coming from some of the discussions with refugee women in my social work professional practice. One story about an African female heads of household who came to Western Australia with the 204 women-at-risk visa category reveals the hideous situations these people have faced.

In my social work professional practice, one woman told me:

During the time of war, the rebels came to their home and killed her husband. After killing her husband they asked her to drink the blood of her husband if she did not want to be killed. The two options which the rebels gave to this refugee female head of household were hard to decide. She tried to resist both the situations. They told

her that they were about to kill her, just as they had done to her husband who was in front of her. The rebels said that they were giving her a last warning; if she did not drink they would kill her, as they had no time to waste. The woman accepted to drink the blood of her dead husband whom they had killed in her presence. This is what happens in situations of war.

The rebels attacked this family because they were well off. The woman was then displaced and one of her daughters did not manage to come with her to Australia. Her daughter was still living in a refugee camp and had three children with a man who did not marry her. This female head of household wanted her daughter to come alone without this man and the three children. In order to propose her daughter, she must provide enough information. This woman was trying to sponsor the daughter but she could not remember any information that would assist her. She was highly traumatized and she used to collapse anytime, anywhere, be it in the house or outside walking in the garden.

I was startled by her white Australian elderly neighbours who would go and assist her to call the private doctor, clinic or hospital, to call the counsellor working with her, in cleaning her house or cooking if she was unable to cope. I was amazed with this elderly couple. They were doing much for the woman and children. The female head of household at times was shy to watch the elderly woman cleaning the house. The elderly Australian woman, to me, as a counsellor, was herself developing trauma because of this female head of household's traumatized situation. At times, this elderly Australian woman had clashes with other human service practitioners trying to assist that African female head of household.

I have mentioned this story as a way to highlight some of the torture and trauma these African refugee female heads of households went through before coming to their country of settlement. There is not much documented information and published research about the female heads of households in general (Amnesty International 2009; Jupp 1994; International Committee of Red Cross 2003; International Council of Human Rights Policy 2004; Human Rights Watch 2005; Hyndman 2000). The female heads of households are the group this thesis focuses on seeking to document their experiences in the settlement process.

African women pre-war lives

In general, most African girls are socialized to accept that they are inferior, less important, and less intelligent than their brothers (UNICEF, 2000). This includes doing more work than the boy child, while at the same time being enmeshed in patriarchal beliefs about men's superiority. Those beliefs are held by the parents, society, and teachers, in a similar way. Thus, stresses relating to education, having children, and health limit the development of girls and the welfare of women and their children in rural villages and poor urban areas across Africa. As soon as the girls reach maturity, they are under social pressure to get married. This important aspect of their lives is negotiated at an early age, even though they would not have a reasonable understanding of how this would impact on their future. The cultural norms and belief systems mean that the lives of African women involve coping with some specific stressors related to their gender and roles in society (Jackson et al 2006).

The other stresses for African women in general are linked with their relationships with men, in particular regarding the extensive belief that males are superior to females and the fact that males have rights that females cannot anticipate attaining. This long-established belief attributes power to males who are decision-makers in matters of importance such as education and access to resources. In those societies where they still hold this strong belief, female roles are clearly defined in connection to reproduction and nurturance. In those communities, the emphasis of women's roles is linked to that of sexual partner, mother, and provider for children (Stephens 2000).

A study on gender differences in psychiatric illness between African women and men points out two causes of stress: traditional cultural values especially those connected with reproductive behaviour, and changes related to modernization (Kisekka 1990). The fact that life is difficult and change is slow in the rural villages means this type of stress still prevails. In many African countries, women may also have experienced stress as a reflection of the socio-political situation in which they live impacted by wars, drought, economic collapse, religious tensions and conflicts.

Socio-political stressors

For poor women socio-political stressors involve how one would meet the most basic needs, such as food and water, while keeping from violence and accessing general health services. Such stressors occur in addition to the specific stressors associated to gender (Kisekka 1990). It is important to note that relatively little psychological research has been done in Africa. Even though studies reported from one region or country seem likely to be factual for many regions or countries, sufficient data to state this with assurance are not often obtainable (Sarafino, 2002).

In African cultures, where there is generally an emphasis on moderation of emotional expression use of explicit emotion-focused coping strategies may not be common. Research with a number of ethnic groups shows that women report physical problems, such as aches and pains as common reactions to stress, implying that this is a culturally normative way of coping (Catz et al 2002).

General way of solving disputes in African

Interpersonal conflict is distressing, particularly in collectivist cultures where individuals cannot easily leave the group and join a different group. Within most African cultures, major disputes in the communities were traditionally dealt with indirectly. For those disputes that could not be solved immediately, they would be referred to others in the community. Married people were offered help from members of their extended family, parents, aunts and uncles for the resolution of the dispute. Continuance of a marriage was very important, as marriage was not just between a male and female. Marriage was a bond between families. This method of solving marriage conflict is still widely used in African countries (Grady 2004).

Girl child access to education

Girls' admission to education varies significantly from one African country to another and between regions within any one country. However, there are fewer girls than boys in schools apart from the few countries where education is available to all. For

some girls, this lack of education access could be a result of parents being very poor and so they could only manage school fees for one child. The greater status of males results in a boy being selected (UNDP 2006; UNICEF 2000; Altonji 1991). In some African societies there has been a general consensus between teachers and

parents that girls are less intelligent than boys. Thus, girls and boys acculturate to this belief and adhere to it themselves. Most African girls have been raised from birth to be subservient to men thus asking and answering questions in a mixed class with a male teacher could be difficult for them (Zeitlin 1996; Erlich 1997).

Two quotes from the literature illustrate how this gender discrimination works in practice:

Since teacher expectations have long been acknowledged to influence learning outcomes, this alone causes lower attainment for other girls. Rural community parents also believe that too much education reduces a girl's chances of getting married for if she is in class she misses the chances to learn the skills needed for married village women. Religious beliefs may be a further factor in deciding who goes to school, with Moslem girls less likely to begin school or complete education than their non-Moslem peers (Lloyd et al, 2000:113).

At school, girls may be given less attention from teachers and spend more time away from class sweeping the school yards or cleaning toilets, which is considered to be a woman's work. Because of this they spend less learning time during the school day. Following school, girls do additional housework and have less time for homework. On the whole, the learning and general school situation for girls is distinctly worse than for boys creating a hard environment for girls. The focus is on maintaining motivation for boys' learning. They feel confident in the classroom as they are appreciated by the teachers (Stephens 2000:29).

Adequate basic schooling

In some African countries, the evidence suggests that sufficient basic schooling decreases stress on women. This is because girls who have been to school are more likely to have fewer children. Their children are likely to be healthier than the children of non-schooled women. Even though their social class has not changed as a result of their education, this appears to happen because the male head of household takes more notice of an educated wife or daughter-in-law than the one who has not been to school. The stress of not being able to go to school or not being treated equal to boys in the class is experienced personally. Why can I not go to school? Does this mean that I am stupid? Why can you go to school when I cannot? Such personal and political issues for women are commonly familiar across African countries (Stewart 1990).

Refugee Migration

During the year 2004, 19.2 million people were dislocated. This included people displaced within their own countries of origin, stateless people and people looking for refuge (Parsons 2005).

Parsons (2005:3) details the situation as:

The Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is the international agency that provides protection for refugees, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), asylum seekers, and stateless persons. In 2004, the population of concern under the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees totaled about 19.2 million. Of this number, refugees account for 48 percent, or 9.2 million (Parsons 2005:3).

This challenges me to ask more questions than offer answers. What are the reasons connected with these people's displacement? Should this be connected with what some authors described as the 'two great revolutions' of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century in Europe? Is it about the urbanization? Could this be prevented?

On the other hand, as an ex-refugee woman from the Zimbabwean war era, I feel prevention would be better to protect innocent young girls, women and children from such sufferings. I do not remember telling my mother or relatives what happened to me whilst I lived in the Mozambique refugee camps. I felt that I would hurt my mother or relatives. Parsons (2005:3) stated that:

The number of refugees in the world had dropped by 24 percent since 2001 with the help of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. One factor that has contributed to the decline of the refugee population is resettlement. There are currently eighteen countries with established or developing resettlement programs coordinated with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The group of countries with established programs includes the following: Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States of America. Countries with emerging programs are Benin, Brazil, Britain, Burkina Faso, Chile, Iceland, Ireland and Spain(Parson 2005:3):

The decrease in Internally Displaced Persons, asylum seekers, and stateless persons should be appreciated, although it is hard work. It is hard because, in some cases, the programs that are designed to help the disadvantaged may not be implemented according to the design because of untrustworthy workers.

Unfortunately, the money for programs for the disadvantaged may be diverted to other areas. Parsons (2005:4) goes to say that:

Most recognized countries run on a quota program. At the beginning of the resettlement year, the Government of the country of resettlement collaborates with its nongovernmental organizations partners and their agencies to set a number of what they believe their caseload should be. This is also usually done in cooperation with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees as it projects the need for resettlement in the following year.

204 woman-at-risk visa category

This type of visa was established by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for women and girls who had higher risks caused by wars. Parson (2005:11) explained the situation as:

The majority of the countries resettle the women on 204 visa category under the refugees' general resettlement programs. This includes most countries discussed in the above paragraphs, such as Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States of America. Canada and New Zealand, as well as Australia, had created special programs for resettling women-at-risk (Parson 2005:11).

Drawing on the above higher war risks of young girls and women, if one is an unaccompanied young girl living in a refugee camp with no parents or relatives living in that particular refugee camp, is it easy to disclose such threats? Can people believe what the young girl would be saying? How could this young unaccompanied girl trust anyone in the refugee camp when she was taken for no reason? This is very hard. The situation may be uncomplicated when this is on the television, in the newspaper, or in a book, but when you are experiencing the situation as a person, it is too hard. I have no appropriate word to explain how difficult it is for a young girl living in a refugee camp to disclose the information. I mentioned that I did not tell my mother until she died in October 2009 or anyone when I went home after 6 years of living in a refugee camp. I am managing to discuss the situation through education, and through mature and direct involvement with people who have lived in refugee camps. The majority of these female heads of households represented in this thesis are young mothers. Parson (2005:11) points out that,

Due to their 'vulnerability', women under this category are likely to have experienced a high degree of refugee-related trauma and may lack personal integration resources, such as literacy, education and prior formal work experience which mean that they may need special assistance in their resettlement communities (Parson (2005:11)).

I agree with Parson. I experienced and witnessed this situation. In the time I lived in a refugee camp, as a young girl, we did not have any formal education. There were no books, pencils, writing boards or anything for formal education. However, young people learn fast. As I have stated before, after living in a refugee camp for almost 6 years, I managed to learn through evening classes. Currently, I am a holder of a Certificate of Social Work, Bachelor of Social Work, Master of Social Work Degrees, and I am looking forward to having a second Master of Philosophy Degree. With determination, these refugee female heads of households and their children could be capable of learning and working in their resettlement countries.

There are a number of barriers to the protection of young girls and women as pointed out by The Women's Commission for Refugee (2006:4):

Insufficient measures and breaches of confidentiality also inhibit reporting, as ensuring confidentiality is vital to protect a victim's safety and privacy as well as minimize the risk of social stigma. The absence of systematic reporting and response mechanisms in cases of gender-based violence can further place women and girls at risk by blocking their access to legal and medical assistance as well as impact their immediate and longer-term security. At times complaints are not taken seriously by police and security personnel as well as by camp leadership structures. Police investigations and judicial response could also be slow, inefficient or lacking. Impunity or slow legal processes can leave women and girls exposed and vulnerable to repeated attacks and intimidation by perpetrators, especially when victims continue to live in the same locality as their attackers (Women's Commission for Refugee 2006:4).

As stated above, it is hard to say what would be happening to unaccompanied young girls or women in refugee camps. The refugee camp becomes a new home of the women or young girls. Of the people living in a refugee camp, some individuals are the camp superiors' best informants who collect information for their bosses. How could a woman or young girl disclose the abuse incidence when a refugee camp turns out to be their new home? Some young girls or women and children live in the refugee camps for a number of years. Most come as minors, but as they stay in these refugee camps for more years, they become young mothers. This is why there

are female heads of households at a young age with no one to protect them. Evidence of what I am reflecting on could go back to the Zimbabwean black/white war of the 1970s, which affected me and the other (ex-refugee) young girls of that time. I am happy about the work being done to help these young women and children. In the 1970s during our era, I do not remember whether there was such help. This thesis is trying to give an overview of the effects of war on young girls, women and children. This background gives the context for a gap between the employability of these female heads of households due to limited English and job skills and the requirements of the 1 July 2006 Welfare to Work changes.

Summary

This chapter gives a general idea of the consequences of war on women and girl children. The harsh circumstances experienced by the African female heads of households and the researcher as a young girl during wars have been examined and documented. In rural and poor urban areas in most African countries, women experience difficulties related to education, and children's health limit the progress of girl children and their welfare.

This background contributes to the challenge most many African female heads of households' face in negotiating refugee camps and subsequent settlement in their new country. Many are starting education at an adult age. For the young girls who were born in refugee camps or who have lived in camps as young girls, most of the refugee camps had no formal education. The fact that most refugee camps did not have formal education affects how the young people to start learning in their new country. The young refugee people may see themselves as misfits as they would be learning in class much younger children. As a result, a number of young girls drop out from their Australian school. Basically, the African girls' socialization and cultural beliefs hinder the Australian culture development of children and women. As a consequence, the African female heads of households with no formal education experience challenges in getting a job or losing the job.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

HOW THE RESEARCH WAS APPROACHED

This chapter notes some of the principles of qualitative research that I have used to inquire into the topic of the experiences of refugee African female heads of households in their settlement as new migrants. A qualitative approach to research was considered appropriate for this study. Links are made between qualitative research and principles of social work practice. The benefits of taking a naturalistic, cooperative inquiry approach to this research are discussed. The two cooperative inquiry sessions and in-depth interviews with African female heads of households, focus groups, in-depth interviews with social workers and other human service workers, including Adult Migrant English Program or employment workers are all used to ensure a rich and deep documentation in regard to the research question.

Other methods used in the study were participant observation, field notes, and a reflective diary along with a review of published research and government reports. This inquiry into the settlement of African female heads of households is a documentation of a range of complex human activity, so requires a sensitive and responsive approach to understanding their experiences.

While the traditional positivist or scientific thinking might principally ignore the complexity of human behaviour, postmodernist and feminist scholars are well-matched with it (Liamputtong 2009:10).

Methodology

The methodology used for this research was influenced by the researcher's lived refugee experiences. I was aware that quantitative methodology would not be appropriate with African female heads of households as closed questions and/or survey forms would be inappropriate and might trigger past traumas. I experienced such traumas several times when people were asking me what happened during the six years that I have lived in a refugee camp. As an African woman, I am aware that using questions in African culture is considered impolite. Questions are considered inappropriately in most African countries especially with elderly people. Therefore, a

qualitative methodology that allowed for conversational engagement with participants on their terms was selected as a suitable research approach for the target group.

Critical Feminist and Postmodern Framing

In order to gain access to the meanings the African female heads of households were making of their settlement experiences an interpretive approach was chosen.

An interpretive approach to research provides a way of seeking to understand complex cross cultural interactions (Denzin 2005, Denzin et al 2008b; Allan et al 2003; Alston 1998). As a researcher, I have set out to inquire into the 'real world' situation that concerns these women and from my positioning as an African Australian social worker.

Critical Feminist

This inquiry incorporates feminist principles and principles of naturalistic research. Naturalistic research has a risk-taking aspect in which the researcher is 'real', human and vulnerable rather than removed and 'objective'. Feminist research is process oriented: allowing participants to define themselves and their experiences, focusing on growth of researchers and participants and dealing with action and social change (Liamputtong, 2008; Babbie 1989; Bernard 2002; Bulmer 2000). Critical Feminist principles such as empowerment are reflected in this inquiry. The African female heads of households were able to influence the direction of the discussions on practice and the support gained in the process.

Postmodern

In postmodern research, the researcher and the researched are co-creators. The co-creator nature of social work practice where the worker and the client are considered to be co-creators has been described as:

The worker and the client are co-creators, medium, performers and audience all in the one. The skilful worker sees engagement as an opportunity for the clients to exercise their creativity. Postmodernists emphasize the importance of not seeing life as a fixed course towards a single end or ambition. Life is seen as the experience of multiplicity and ambiguity, the challenges of all social worker encounters, where solutions are not as much arrived at but found in the making (Martinez-Brawley et al 1998:207).

Postmodern research is subjective. The outcomes of postmodern research are not intended to be conclusive. Interpretation in the research is ideographic not

generalisable. Reinharz (1983:177) argues that *knowledge* is contingent on the situation under which it is formed. Situations are never static, so research is an ongoing process and incomplete. This replaces the positivist assumption that data needs to be collected from a large sample so that the results can be generalized to that population. Roseneau (1992) illustrates a postmodernist conceptualization about the nature of the truth or knowledge in research:

Postmodern anthropology cannot offer truth, but it is now without content. It is interpretive 'experiential, dialogical, polyphonic'. It is receptivity, dialogue, listening to and talking with the other. It reveals paradox, myth, and enigma, and it persuades by showing, reminding, hinting and evoking rather than, by constructing theories and approximating truth. All that can be offered in postmodern anthropology is narrative, fragmented fantasies, one person's stories (Rosenau 1992:88).

This study on the African female heads of households', like that in postmodern anthropology, does not offer objective truth but rather explores the experiential, interpretive and dialogical. The alternative of objectivity is perspective:

Although objectivity is an illusion, the alternative is not subjectivity but perspective (Lincoln & Guba 1985:87).

The scientific method has been critiqued on account of being seen as promoting coercion rather than solutions from the study of human behaviour (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Alston 1998). Intersectionality is a useful concept for theoretically framing the main intersecting factors shaping the nature of the lived experience of African refugee women resettled in Australia.

Intersectionality

As an African woman survivor of the Zimbabwean war era and as a young girl refugee; my education was disturbed as a young girl. This had many negative consequences for me. This left me at a disadvantaged position as I had to study in the evenings as a mature student whilst balancing a full time job, being a wife, mother, as a carer for my mother, sibling and my mother in-law and other in laws. This is a similar situation that many refugee women face when they resettle as they need to balance working, studying, learning English whilst taking care of their families and meeting all the settlement challenges that come along. Although there is

initial support provided by the government; eventually these women have to learn to stand on their feet and support their family which is very difficult.

In this inquiry, the methodological approaches used are feminist and postmodern. Why feminist? The benefits of examining African female heads of households' settlement issues using feminist viewpoint are that the research captures:

Women's lived experiences in a respectful manner that legitimates women's voices as source of knowledge. The concern of feminism and feminist research is to construct knowledge that writes women into his-story and exploring, challenges, resisting and changing sexual and social inequalities. Feminist research advocates reflexivity. It is argued that reflexivity provides insight and crucial scrutiny (Liamputtong 2009:9).

My inquiry into the needs of the African female heads of households was natural, non-manipulative, non-controlling, and as unobtrusive as possible, whilst remaining open to whatever outcomes emerged (Australian Association of Social Workers 2003; Australian National Statement of Ethics 2007; Australian code for the Responsible Conduct of Research 2006; Australian Association of Social Workers, 1999). There were no predetermined constraints on outcomes. As will be outlined in later chapters, this had a downside in that the initial research idea was so broad and complex that the concept of developing and writing a thesis was overwhelming at first. This meant that I was handling an enormous amount of information which developed from discussion under these headings: African female heads of households' two cooperative inquiry sessions and in-depth interviews, social workers' and other human service workers; and the Adult Migrant employment workers in-depth interviews. Once my thoughts about contemporary social work practice, theoretical thinking, and the interpretivist approach to research were clarified, I could link these with the experiences of the African female heads of households target group

Why postmodern? This perspective rejects the view that there is a single reality or truth. Qualitative researchers advocating postmodern approaches argue that there are many realities and many truths. Liamputtong (2009) states that:

Postmodern researchers argue that realities are constructed within a specific social and cultural context, so the meaning of those realities can only be understood within

this particular context. Rather than relying on 'general "law" of human behaviour' postmodernism 'situates all social, cultural, and historical knowledge in the contexts shaped by gender, race, and class. Postmodern argues that 'realities are multiple'(Liamputtong 2009:10).

Combining critical feminist and postmodern approaches provide for a sharing of the multiple realities of African female heads of households on their settlement and employment issues in Australia (Liamputtong 2009). My belief is that African socialization for a girl child interrelates with some of the problems these women are facing currently. The fact that an African girl child culturally, is perceived as someone who does not need education as much as, a boy child by parents, kinships and society locates the problems historically. The position of an African girl child is socially constructed according to particular cultural and geographically located gender stereotypes. In this view, I consider cross-cultural examination to be more valuable when looking at gender differences because it provides a greater range of beliefs and roles than do single-culture studies. With greater variation comes the opportunity to look for ranges of gender differences (Bilton et al1996:200). This broad methodological approach informs the range of methods employed, which will be now outlined.

Social construction of gender

This inquiry is conducted from within an interpretive research approach. In my literature search, researching the social construction of gender in African cultures to some extent contributes to understanding the experiences faced by the female heads of households in Australia. As discussed in the background chapter, some girls have been denied formal education in their home countries. As a result, some of these young girls and women arrive into their settlement country with very limited or no English and education. The experiences of interviewing these African female heads of households can be challenging, as after doing their 510hours free English classes some women cannot manage to write or read English. For the younger women and girls it seems easier to learn the language.

Understanding the lens of social construction of gender in African cultures can be enhanced through using intersectionality theory as it is an integrated approach that identifies and analyzes multiple forms of discrimination against women (Ross-Sheriff,

2006:1). From an intersectionality viewpoint, gender is socially constructed in the sense that differences in the behaviour of males and females are learned rather than being an inevitable result of biology. Most African women are oppressed and devalued in different ways as patriarchy plays a major role in African culture (Bilton et al 1996:200).

Data Collection

The research data for the immigrant African female heads of households is derived from two cooperative enquiry sessions and individual interviews with a total of 27 African female heads of households who have immigrated to Western Australia between 2001 and 2006. The age of the women ranged from 24 years to 50 years. All were 'single women heads of household' and the average family had four children aged 3 years to 12 years. Some of these African female heads of households participants of this study are taking care of their sons' or daughters' children whose mothers or fathers were displaced or died during the war.

The research required careful consideration and management of the ethical issues identified throughout the ethics application process, issues such as anonymity, privacy and confidentiality, voluntary participation, informed consent, duty of care and storage and security of information. The research also required ethical consideration specific to the study's participants involved who were vulnerable women (Australian Association of Social Workers 2003, 1999; Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research 2006; Australian National Statement of Ethics 2007).

I was fully aware that, due to the nature of the research and the risks participants may be taking in being involved in this study, assuring their confidentiality and anonymity was paramount. The audiotapes were numbered and stored in a secure location, as was any written material in relation to the research. Any electronic data stored on my computer was only accessible through the use of a password. I confirmed to the participants that information would not be disclosed to any other person except my supervisors and in reporting research results as agreed, and also that the information will not be used for any purpose other than the research (Alston

et al 1998).The researcher took due care in protecting the privacy and anonymity of all participants in this study.

One important consideration was the question about who was going to benefit from this research (Kirby et al 1989:104). The research process was emancipatory for participants in terms of reflecting on and voicing their views as to their own settlement and employment as new migrants and feeling mutually supported in the process (DuBois et al 2005).

The women themselves determined the process including the venue. They also determined the meeting time, and how the cooperative inquiry groups were to be conducted. The women themselves were able to suggest that the cooperative inquiry groups would be for African female heads of households only and no men would be involved. At the end of the two cooperative inquiry sessions, the women mentioned that the cooperative inquiry sessions were therapeutic and they were interested in ongoing meetings and in including more women to discuss their problems.

Social Work Values

My prior theoretical studies in social work encouraged me to acknowledge the complexities of working and interacting with people and to appreciate the differences in people. Like most social workers, my values are consistent with those described by Martinez-Brawley et al (1998:208) as encompassing and respecting:

- 1) cultural variations
- 2) class differences
- 3) gender distinctions
- 4) intuitive and a systematic understanding
- 5) rational contributions
- 6) social justice issues (e.g. discrimination based on age, disability, status, education, income, marital status).

Rigor and trustworthiness

This research is a qualitative piece of work. In using a qualitative approach to the lived experiences of the African female heads of households, I have viewed validity differently from a quantitative approach. Rather than beginning by making sure that

variables are effectively accurate, I ensured rigor through the methods of data collection and analysis. I re-checked findings with the respondents/ African female heads of households to make sure I got it right. Qualitative researchers like Kirk and Miller (1986:30-1) have argued that qualitative research has an 'in-built sensitivity' which creates a kind of 'automatic validity' because the researcher is in the field, in ongoing relationship with participants. It is the nature of this relationship that shapes the quality and nature of what is shared with the researcher.

Rigor is not bound in the determination of definitive answers. Since there is an ongoing process of interpreting and meaning making; there is no one answer to satisfy everyone:

An adequate interpretation, ironically, does not give definitive answers but keeps the dialogue going (Reinharz, 1983:183).

This research aims to make space for a conversation between African female heads of households now living in Australia and the wider Australian community, particularly the service providers. The trustworthiness of research was also supported by the copies of the transcripts being sent to participants, with an invitation to comment if they so desired. Those interested did so (with one amused Liberian woman asking me how I knew Liberian English).

Methods

Research Diary

Throughout the study I kept a research diary. Using a research diary enabled me to practice my growing research knowledge and gain confidence in recording research and writing (Hughes 2000).

Hughes (2000) states that:

A research diary is a record of the researcher's involvement in a project. While the contents of the diary are sometimes used as data, this data is different from the information, observations, records or other data that are collected because it is anticipated that it may yield information about the phenomena under study. The diary contains information about the researcher, what the researcher does, and the process of research. It complements the data yielded by the research methodology(p.4).

I realized that taking field notes was vital. I wrote things that came to mind on a daily and weekly basis about my research project. African female heads of households is a group not discussed much in the research literature. For this reason, I decided there was value in documenting everyday experiences of settlement for the African female heads of households. For most of the women the issues that they currently encounter involved an inability to express their sense of self. The problem may be, for example communicating. The quotes below are from field notes.

The thing that comes to mind first, is speaking: speaking out, speaking up, especially within groups of people in society; that was something that I never did before, because of all the negative experiences I have experienced but now I do it.

I think that the risks that I take now, I look at them more as for me. How is this something that I want to do for me, and I am to get to a reality, a real base of, is this something that really needs to be; I am just going to let happen or is it going to be something that I am doing because it really fits in with what I want.

Having a voice within society that is based from the internal sense of self is to take a risk of 'exposure' of their true self and may be contrary to what the African female heads of households have learned from their country of origins. Thus, the risks that the women participants engage in, in terms of socialization, are supportive of their sense of self: One participant articulated that risk as 'being who you are'. Risking the internal sense of self includes an inherent vulnerability.

I take more risks, I think, I will jump out there. I did not take risks. I always protected myself. I was not going to intentionally put myself in the position of vulnerability, and I took the biggest risk of my life in coming here, placing myself on the line in Perth. Since then, I have been jumping out there in the spotlight. I stood up in a church group (occupied mainly by the dominant culture) and spoke about issues, and then I think, the world did not cave in. I am still living okay; let's go on with this, okay, because somebody might learn something from what I have been saying. You cannot live without taking risks – it is really fulfilling, but you cannot stop taking risks it opens up life for you.

Thus, positive risk taking based on the internal sense of self becomes an important and continuing process in the development of empowerment for those who are value oriented in religion and ethnicity. Most of the female heads of households participants, who participate in their own religion, have developed different skills and abilities that enabled them to have more choices in what they participated. This

included communication skills in the area of active listening, empathy, assertiveness and expression of feelings. This occurred because of renewed confidence in them.

Focus Groups

In a focus group, normally, there is a facilitator who acts as the leader of the group. The participants in most cases are between eight and ten, who would be expressing their views by discussing the issues in a group (Liamputtong 2009).

Typically, focus group interviews involve a group of 6-10 people who come from similar social and cultural backgrounds or who have similar experiences or concerns. They gather to discuss a specific issue with the help of the moderator in particular setting where participants feel comfortable enough to engage in a dynamic discussion for one or two hours. It is focused on a specific area interest that allows participants to discuss the topic in greater detail (Liamputtong 2009:65).

Macnaghten et al (2004:65) defined a focus group as:

a qualitative method 'with the primary aim of describing and understanding perceptions, interpretations, and beliefs of a select population to gain understanding of a particular issue from the perspective of the group's participants.

I conducted a focus group of seven human service workers. The literature that I read revealed that focus groups are suitable for examining 'sensitive' issues related to a 'sensitive' population (Liamputtong 2008; Liamputtong 2007a; Bailey 2008).

Purposive sampling was used to contact social workers and other human service worker because it was important to speak with those who worked with African female heads of households. During the focus group, a colleague took notes because I was trying to concentrate on asking questions and trying to understand what was being discussed about the topic. My colleague wrote all the key issues that emerged in the focus group. The results of the focus group that I conducted with these other practitioners established the format of the in-depth interviews with the purposively sampled practitioners that I interviewed. Liamputtong (2009:11) stated that the purposive sampling method put strength to qualitative research as it chooses 'information-rich cases' that can provide the sought data.

After reading the literature for the focus groups, I then organized to approach some of the social workers and other human services workers that I knew to find out whether they were interested in discussing the African female heads of households topic. I used the telephone to contact them and those who were interested asked me to come with the letter of introduction and the consent form. Thereafter, I kept on contacting the other human service workers participants in this thesis to arrange when and where would be suitable to meet for our discussion. I appreciate the support of all the members of the focus group as they encouraged me to go on with the topic and get started. They saw it as an important topic to document because they were aware of some of the complex issues faced by the target group.

The focus group was helpful as an initial start to arrange in-depth interviews with human services workers. The focus group was composed of the following: a social worker who is employed as a settlement worker; another social worker who is employed as a torture trauma counsellor; a nutritionist who works with migrant women; an African community leader who is a social worker and employed as a settlement worker; employment officer; and a community development worker and a teacher. The idea of the focus group was to find out whether the topic I had chosen was viable. The members of the focus group all agreed that the topic was excellent, but no one had any idea as to how I was going to approach these women, which was the most challenging task for this study.

In-Depth Interview

After the focus group I later conducted in-depth interviews with three social workers and two other human service workers working with the target group and two employment agents. There were a number of social workers known by the researcher through client referral and networks who were prepared to contribute to this research. The employment agents for migrant refugees were known by the researcher through client referral. Some of them were interested in contributing their own challenges in their work with the target group. I used telephone contact to make an appointment. In choosing in-depth interviewing, I had to select the human service workers meaningfully and strategically because of the nature of this study with 'vulnerable' participants.

Liamputtong (2009:43) states that:

The interview is a specific form of conversation where knowledge is produced through interaction between an interviewer and an interviewee. Similarly,

Schoenberg et al (2005:92) contends that:

In-depth interviews allow the researcher to access complex knowledge from an insider without the preconceived biases. From this perspective, the interview is viewed as a meaning-making occasion in which the actual circumstance of the meaning construction is important. In depth interviews permit the participants to freely articulate their worldviews while allowing researchers to remain focused on the research topic.

In the process of doing this research, I learned that in-depth interviews enable the researcher to remain faithful to the interviewees' own words.

Cooperative Inquiry

I used purposive and snowballing sampling for the African participants. I will discuss about the two cooperative inquiry sessions that I conducted with the African female heads of households. The cooperative inquiry is a term emerging from critical theory, humanistic psychology and organisational development (Reason et al 2001). This inquiry involves participants in a self-reflective and systematic learning process. A cooperative inquiry is a social process that involves working with a group cooperatively and democratically. Cooperative inquiry critically engages with our lived experience through reflection and detailed description. A cooperative inquiry is process driven and open-minded (Wadsworth 1991). It is open, tentative, speculative, informal reflective dialogue and critical, analytical conversation:

Freire defines this [dialogue] as a two-way communication, a horizontal relationship between persons who are engaged on a joint, critical search (Randall et al 1981:350)

In this research the two cooperative inquiry sessions that I did with the African female heads of households were rewarding in that I managed to hear what these women were saying in a relaxed environment. Some women indicated that they wanted to discuss their experiences of settlement with the researcher individually. Thus, after the cooperative inquiry, I exchanged mobile numbers with the interviewees, for confidential interviews.

In-depth interviews

I later conducted six (6) individual in-depth interviews with African female heads of households who were interested in further discussing their issues for the purpose of this research project. The African female heads of households who participated in the in-depth interviews all participated in the two cooperative inquiry sessions discussions. The literature on engaging research participants that I read in material on qualitative methods helped me in getting started (Liamputtong 2009, 2008, 2007; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005a, 2005b). Using this as a guide, I was able to structure the field research component of this study in a manner responsive to the African women participants and their concerns.

As Liamputtong (2009:43) points out, in-depth interviews with vulnerable women ensures their own words, thoughts, perception, feelings and experiences are foregrounded. In-depth interviews assisted me in building rapport with the African female heads of households. The individual or face-to face interaction that I had with the women gave them an opportunity to disclose their settlement issues in a private environment. This gave me an opportunity to make sense of their multiple concerns as to the issues affecting them and explanations of details, acts, circumstances, settings or cultural practices. In-depth interviews with individual African female heads of households assisted the collecting of their inner feelings in privacy. The women were keen that their concerns should be understood in context by service providers.

Heron (1996:1) points out:

How the researcher goes about research is a critical concern: To generate knowledge about persons without their full participation in deciding how to generate it is to misrepresent their personhood and to abuse by neglect, their capacity for autonomous intentionality. It is fundamentally unethical.

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Approaches To Recruit African Female Heads of Households

Starting the two cooperative inquiry sessions and getting appropriate equipment to record the women's stories was not easy. The first time these African female heads of households gathered for the cooperative inquiry, I did not manage to do anything because the equipment that I had taken to record them did not work at the place where the women had decided to meet. I had to reorganize the whole process, including the venue, transport and all other requirements for the cooperative inquiry. However, I eventually successfully conducted the interviews. The African female heads of -households during the two cooperative inquiries stated that the process was healing, as everyone managed to talk about their problems.

In the first phase, I conducted two cooperative inquiry sessions with African female heads of households, as this allowed participants to explore their experiences, opinions, wishes and concerns on their own terms. I had worked previously as a social worker with women from the target group of African female heads of households. This experience generated the research topic. I was both an insider and an outsider, because I share some of the group's experiences while also being a researcher, because I have invited these women to tell me about their experiences. In most of our African cultures, the use of questions may be considered as disrespectful or confrontational. Thus, the cooperative inquiry of people conversing as a group, inquiring as to their shared experiences of settlement was suitable for this target group.

Two cooperative inquiry sessions were conducted: one with 13 and the other one with 14 women. This method was useful for allowing participants to generate their own questions, concerns and concepts and to pursue their own priorities on their own terms and in their own vocabulary. This helped me, to develop an understanding of the key issues to explore with women who were interested in participating further. The second stage with female heads of households comprised in-depth interviews with female heads of households who were interested in the research. The two cooperative inquiry sessions were 'focused' in that it involved some kind of collective activity (Reason & Heron, 2001:1).

The two cooperative inquiry sessions and in-depth interviews enabled me to investigate how individual African female heads of households as subjects account for their situations and to demonstrate how their subjective experiences articulate with larger social, economic, and political relations. The African participants target group for the study came from diverse social, cultural, economic, political, and different geographical sites and they speak various dialects. They are therefore not a homogeneous group. Most of the conversations were conducted in various styles of English with interpreters used as necessary.

The female heads of households needed someone to sit beside them and hear them on their terms. These female heads of households mentioned that they were tired of fitting into everyone else's terms. To succeed in conducting this research, I used word-of-mouth during the women only, monthly meetings. In addition, African women met every week for church or prayer services. I used word-of-mouth during the prayers and church services to recruit the participants.

Making Meaning of Data Collected

Data analysis

The data collected was coded using identifying numbers to protect the names of the African female heads of households who participated in this research. I used NVivo to structure the coding of participants' input. An NVivo course armed me with knowledge about entering stories. The NVivo system assisted me coding transcripts using verbatim accounts of what transpired in the African female heads of households' focus groups and in-depth interviews, without editing or "tidying up" to make them "sound better". Analysis of the transcripts was undertaken by the researcher and was inductive, being determined by the data rather than a theoretical construction (Langdrige 2004). The researcher transcribed interviews directly onto a word processor and thereafter imported the documents into NVivo to carry out the analysis. In keeping with suggestions for enhancing rigour in qualitative studies, the investigator kept a reflective research diary.

Denzin (2005 citing Marshall 1995, 11) confirms that "Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data". Data was analyzed in a systematic and transparent manner so that a clear audit is available.

Interviews were transcribed and coded. I used N-Vivo to support coding and search for themes (Langdrige 2004).

Use of NVivo in making meaning

NVivo

NVivo is a software package to aid qualitative data analysis (Langdrige 2004) and is especially useful for transcribed interviews. The computer assisted qualitative data analysis that I used in my search for an accurate and transparent interpretation of the data.

I had written on my project proposal that I was going to use NVivo for coding and data analysis. I had used NVivo when I worked as a project officer 2005-2006 as I stated in chapter two. For this thesis I used Vivo to store and categorize my findings in a tree structure index in coding my findings.

Following the collection of information, I analysed the research data using NVivo after attending an NVivo qualitative methods course. The process was easy in that I imported documents directly from a word processing package and coded the information easily on the screen. The coding strips were visible at the margins of the document so that I could see which codes I had used. I was also able to write memos about particular characteristics of the information and link them to relevant pieces of the text in different documents. These included such information as accommodation, grief and loss, child care, employment as discussed in the following paragraphs.

By using NVivo software, analysing the data that I had collected was quick and simple. The system provided a quick, accurate and transparent way of sorting, grouping and coding the information from the African female heads of households, the social workers, and other human service workers, employment agents and the contributions from other graduate research students. It was easier and quicker to code text on the screen than writing it manually, cutting and pasting different pieces of text relevant to a single code onto pieces of paper and then store these in a file.

Qualitative Data Analysis Software

NVivo assisted me in terms of managing complexity such as, who said what; whether this woman was from Liberia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Eritrea or Nigeria, and what it was they say. I used the explorer tool in NVivo for mapping out how the descriptive themes relate to each other. I placed the information from the African female heads of household within their country of origin in relevant memos and, using this information, the notes were made into feasible themes within the nodes. For example, when taking into consideration family issues, the relevant text from all the cooperative inquiry sessions was coded as “family issues” and a coding report was made of this node (Bailey 2008).

After finishing gathering together data under descriptive codes, I did the second analysis to ensure that the theoretical ideas that had emerged in the first round of coding could be systematically evidenced in the data; this process addressed the trustworthiness of the research results and it was “easier” to see all data relevant to “family issues” was coded electronically together rather than manually highlighted on paper. This was easier and made it possible to search this “family issues” code to find out, for example, how many African female heads of households from a country of origin fell into this category. In using NVivo searching tools, I managed to interrogate the data at several levels. This improved the rigour of the analysis process by validating some of my own impressions of the data (Bailey 2008).

Summary

All the African female heads of households were contacted by word of mouth after prayers every week and mobile phones. The researcher invited the African female heads of households to involve themselves in a co-operative inquiry to discuss their experiences as new migrants. No doubt, there was some hesitation about the proposed inquiry. After all, who would really benefit from the research and who would read the findings? In this research, there were always various levels of concern in revealing information to a stranger that which has not formerly been revealed, dealt with or acknowledged.

The African female heads of households, who responded and were prepared and willing to participate in the study, were included. I felt the more participants there

were, the broader the range of data that would evolve in the research. The whole process of recruiting the women took me six months although I knew most of them through my social work practice. As this research involved vulnerable women I was not sure whether I would get more participants. I was surprised during the two cooperative inquiry sessions that I recruited more women than I expected.

A friendly and trusting rapport appeared to be established in the early stages. This enabled all the African female heads of households to have an opportunity to express by discussion their personal views and in being open. A qualitative research approach was found to be appropriate with this co-operative inquiry with vulnerable single women as the qualitative principles give a voice to vulnerable women.

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

STORIES FROM THE FIELD OF PRACTICE

Detailed here are the issues as raised by the African women participants and as identified by social workers and other human service providers. Both African women and service providers identified many similar themes of concern in the settlement process while both identified additional different concern and different priorities for action.

This chapter looks at mutual support, employment, Africa pre-war lives, Adult Migrant English Program, experiences of exploitation, family issues, psychological, and Centrelink employment legal requirements. All the themes identified by the African female heads of households are documented and compared with those identified by the service providers' participants. The Adult Migrant English Program is the first program enabling the refugee female heads of households to obtain required language and literacy skills to gain employment in Western Australia. The standard employment skills for an individual include technical skills such as driving cars and obtaining license, and transferable skills like verbal communication skills.

The rest of the chapter conveys the issues identified by the African female heads of households in the two cooperative inquiry sessions and in-depth interview process. Themes discussed in this chapter were identified with the support of qualitative data analysis software NVivo. The conceptual tree generated by the NVivo program is represented in Figure 4. Each of the identified themes is discussed below.

Conceptual tree, what it is

A concept tree is a visual way to pull current ideas to create more of other ideas, together and generate further ideas. In my research, I used the concept maps and the mind mapping to draw together my ideas into a conceptual tree. I started with a concept map and took the major concepts and developed and refined them as mind maps. Mind maps assisted me to arrange, and divide, the different themes into common sub categories'.

Buzan (2010) states:

Mind maps are, by definition, a graphical method of taking notes. Their visual basis helps one to distinguish words or ideas, often with colours and symbols. They generally take a hierarchical or tree branch format, with ideas branching into their subsections. Mind maps allow for greater creativity when recording ideas and information, as well as allowing the note-taker to associate words with visual representations. Mind maps differ from concept maps in that the mind maps focus on *only* one word or idea, whereas concept maps connect multiple words or ideas (Buzan 2010:2).

The tree below demonstrates how I categorized the women's stories.

Conceptual tree used for analysis of African Women Female Heads of Households input

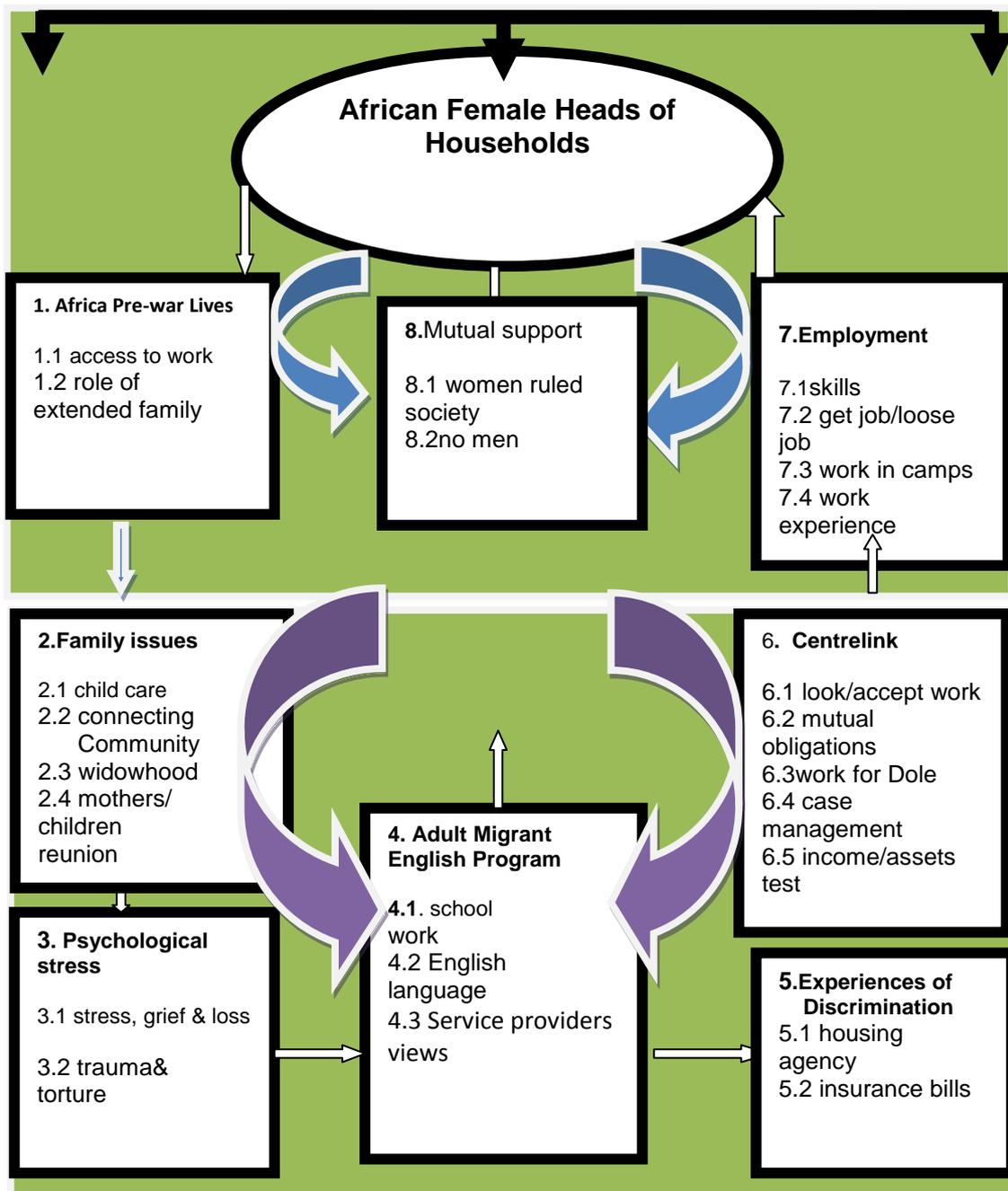


Figure 4 African Female Heads of Households Conceptual Tree Using Nvivo v7

In this section, complex issues revealed by the target group are discussed. The material presented highlights the difficulties experienced by the African female heads of households in their settlement and employment as new migrants. There are a range of issues raised by the women, and many are interrelated. To engage with the African female heads of households for the research was challenging. Information from the two cooperative inquiry sessions, and in-depth interviews are presented here as trends and comment, and the author has marked the phrases and

terminology used by the African female heads of households who participated in the study in italics.

1. Africa Pre-war lives

Most of these women before they were displaced by war in their country of origin, expressed that they had different responsibilities. In some communities, if both parents worked, children would be cared for by nannies or at school - with both parents 'working eight in the morning to four thirty, or five' in the evening. The working parents would arrive during the evening to meals prepared by their family members or housemaids.

In contrast in Australia women find child care as the greatest problem if they are in employment. For others, getting permanent or part time work is difficult as they are only getting casual work, i.e. relief work for part-time and permanent workers. For some women, driving lessons are so expensive and failing driving tests compounds the problem. This worries them because most employers would not employ them if they did not have a driving license.

2. Family Issues

2.1 Childcare

In their new country, Australia, access to childcare, especially because of excessive cost and inflexible available times, is a source of stress and are frequently the determinant of whether women maintain or leave their jobs. An African participant from Ethiopia described her experiences as follows:

Child care is very expensive... all the money that we are working for ...goes to child care. How can you go to work with three or four children? First child aged twelve and last three years. So how can you go to work with a child or children and then the child care is so expensive.

2.2 Role of the community

Most Liberian female heads of households interviewed expressed the role of the community as to assist with resettlement issues, to act as a source of information, and to link the new members to government and non-government services. Although the majority of female heads of households mentioned this role of

community as vital, one female head of household from Ethiopia aged 36 was not comfortable in connecting to her community. She described her experience:

I am scared to join other women in our community because some of them do not belong to our clan. If I join other women who are married, they think that maybe I want to take their husbands since I have no husband. These are my problem that is the reason I wanted to see you only.

This woman's statement shows that some of the patriarchal cultures from the female heads of households' country of origin are carried and exist within the community in Perth. The problems of distance from friends and other family members only exacerbate the issues of loneliness, isolation and depression expressed by many new arrivals. This sense of isolation and childcare expressed by the African female heads of households is captured in the words of one leader who referred to her community as scattered, fragmented and depressed. "We are all dying from the inside," she said. A lack of trust brought from their experiences in the home country prevents group solidarity in some African communities in the Australian setting.

2.3 Widowhood and Missing Husbands

African female heads of households suffered during the wars and they saw their husbands dying or did not know where they were. Even now, some women do not know what happened to the fathers of their children. The situation is hard to forget. If something triggers the memories, women continue to be stressed, often resulting in depression. A number of the African female heads of households are taking anti-depressant tablets because they are frustrated with their situation. Thus, the African women whose husband disappeared could be in the same distressed category with those who witnessed the death of their husband because they might never see them again (Women's Commission for Refugee Women 2006; UNDP 2006).

An Ethiopian female head of household aged 50 who was sponsored by her son to come to Australia stated that.

I am in a safe country but I am not safe. I was helped by my son to come here. I stayed with my son here in Australia for six months. For the six months that I have stayed with my son, he was hitting me. I have a broken back and leg. I was helped by the police, who found other people to help me. I am now staying alone. I cannot read, write or speak English.

The case of this African female heads of household is contested. One can argue that having a male family member does not necessarily mean that the women are safe. The situation is complex for some single women.

2.4 Mother and children tension

These female heads of households operating as single parents in an alien environment express that their problems are complex and unlike those of couples. The female heads of households have sole responsibility for the children and, in some cases, this mean children are left unsupervised. The women are concerned about their children's success. Some children leave school at year 8 or 9 as they find they are unable to catch up academically. The differences in their new country Australia expectations about childcare affected the ability of parents to discipline their children and adolescents, 'within their normally acceptable cultural methods' (Women's Commission for Refugee Women 2006).

One woman described this as an intergenerational and intercultural conflict.

"In our new country Australia, our children answer back, whereas in African society, that would not happen".

The woman went on saying:

"if a children do not respect you at home, how can they respect other people outside the home".

It became a chorus with the voices of women crying and shouting at the same time. I had to let them shout until they expressed their anger. I assured them that I had recorded all of what they had said, and all would be documented.

One female head of household aged 35 described her predicament in this way:

The problem that worries me is about my daughter. My daughter wanted to play soccer at school. The teacher refused her. The teacher sent her home three times. Fourth time, this teacher told my daughter that she should not come to school anymore. I went to see the teacher from Nollamara, which is very far. The teacher told me that there was no need for me to go there as my daughter was cancelled from school. I do not know what to do with my daughter. Now...she cannot go to school. We came here because of war in Africa, we did not do anything. It is war that brought us here. Why is it that this teacher does not want to see me and my child?

May the government help us with some of these problems. We are traumatized by employers, housing agents and teachers like that teacher of my daughter.

Other female head of household, described their experiences as:

I am taking care of my son's children who died in war. These children are not respecting me. They are not listening what I am saying because I cannot speak much English. They are not doing well at school as they are playing with other children who are drinking beer. I do not know how to deal with them.

The woman was shouting at the top of her voice with tears running down her face. I looked at the other women; most of them were shedding tears. I told myself that I should be strong and assured them that all their stories would be documented.

Another woman described the situation as:

In Africa, extended families were also expected to contribute to the discipline of the younger members of the community and older children were expected to care for younger siblings to teach them responsibility for later on – here in our new country it is called child abuse. I am not settling well because of these children. I always think that if their father was with them he could discipline them.

Others started shouting, trying to explain the situation. It became hard to listen as most of them started shouting very loudly. I told them that each one interested in saying something would have a chance. One woman explained the discipline dilemma:

If you hit the child, they will go to school and tell their teachers or report you to the Department for Child Protection. The children would be taken away from you. We do not know what to do.

Basically, this is what was said by the women survivors. In this project I did not seek the children's voices as survivors. It is clear from the way participants interacted with me over this issue, that it is a cause of significant frustration and anger. Many women felt helpless to address the tension and achieve the best for their children and grandchildren.

3. Psychological issues

3.1 Stress, grief and loss

All the women who participated in this study feel grief and loss, and many of them feel stressed most of the time. The female heads of households interviewed do not know how the government could help them with some of the problems they are facing. They also mentioned that they do not know how the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) could help them to connect with some relatives for those who have relatives or someone whom they know to help them in their settlement in their new country. Some women experience difficulties in controlling their children without a father as head of the family. Other women experience trauma and the lack of social networks and loss of independence after protracted stays in refugee camps (Women's Commission for Refugee Women 2006).

As a result, these women feel depression and some are diagnosed with mental health problems, and it is hard for them to be working. One woman from Ethiopia described her situation:

I am traumatized and frustrated; I do not know what to do. I am stressed as I am here alone. My mother was settled in another country and I am just alone here with the community being my parents. I feel if people are being settled it would be better if they come with another family member or be able to sponsor a family member/(s) who could assist. If the UNHC could consider that before someone departs to their new country, this could help us.

3.2 Trauma experience

The African female heads of households have suffered more than one can say during wars. These women explained that they had been exposed to numerous abuses. Women participants revealed that they experience traumas, of the death and disappearing of their husbands. Some African female heads of households disclosed that they witnessed the death of their husbands, relatives and kinships. During displacement, the women pointed out that they were traumatized leaving their belongings and their homelands not by choice. African women participants mentioned that, some of them are taking anti-depressant tablets as they suffer from depression caused by physical and psychological abuses during the time of wars.

Most of them suffer from depression. One African female heads of household from Ethiopia aged 26 described the importance of her religion in this way:

I think I value religion, I think coming back to my religion, has been the greatest healing process of all. There is this little warm voice inside that I can listen to, it is such a confronting feeling, that if I am really still or quite then, the answers are right inside. I have been able to highly react emotionally to other people's sentiments.

Another way some individuals overcome war traumas is through religion; they believe everything happens for a reason. In their journey of recovering from trauma, they combine praying to God in order to gain strength and professional counseling. This process is common to most African women's situations; in some cases praying to God is healing, but this should go together with other healing processes. In the case of working with these African female heads of households, understanding both trauma recovery processes-professional counseling and praying-may is helpful for the client.

4. Adult Migrant English Program

The African female heads of households with no formal English language who participated in the Adult Migrant program felt that there were less formal goals represented by the program to make the students feel comfortable, secure, and inspired. The women mentioned that after completing 510 hours English classes, they feel that they have been left alone with no one wanting to help them. The women explained that with 510 hours, they would not be competent to get jobs in the Australian labour markets.

The female heads of households went on saying, after the 510 hours they are left to find jobs as a requirement of Centrelink benefits. To get a job that matches with their English level, would be difficult even when they are assisted by the job networks. Thus, certain types of literacy and learning were prioritized and valued at the expense of language learning and other kinds of literacy. This includes employability skills. To name a few, car license, knowing employee's and employer responsibilities. The women mentioned that the program is designed to provide grammar lessons, instruction on how to write a resume, and guidance on how to take standardized tests. They stated that they were not encouraged to read or think critically and to practice speaking in English for real life situations (Hull et al 2001).

4.1 School work

Most women appreciated themselves as mature student to start learning English in Australia. The problems that they stated were that it takes time to read and write in English as most of them, this would be their first time to learn. The women felt that the development skills training would assist them more in getting jobs. Others felt that it was hard to learn when you are an elderly person. A woman from Eritrea in her 50s' explained the situation in this way:

Australia is very nice country. Children go to school. Mother goes to school. When I came to Australia no speaking English, now speak/speak. Need more training and work. No speak English no work.

4.2 English Program

Of the refugee female heads households that I have interviewed for this thesis, most speak minimal English and I understood what they said. During my social work practice with the women, children and families, I did not use interpreters as I understood them. However, I noted that writing and reading is a problem for some. Confirming widespread reading and writing problems, African women used to come to the office for help with doctors' letters or forms, Centrelink forms, gas, water, electricity bill statements including letters from a relative at home.

4.3 Service providers views

The view from the Adult Migrant English Program tutors was related but slightly different. They stated that the program is challenging for some women with no formal education and they struggle to learn. The tutors mentioned that the young women with Basic English Language were trying hard. Most of the young women after completing the 510 hours would be able to start other programs in their selected pathways for employment. In contrast, young women with no Basic English Language, who were born in the refugee camps where there was no education to secure employment, being able to speak English is a basic pre-requisite for most positions. This reflects that negotiating multiple illiteracies and identities is paramount for the female heads of households in order to successfully settle and be employed. A female head of household from Liberia aged 27 described the situation as:

About the jobs and housing, English language is the problem. You are discriminated by the time they see you. Some will say that, you have an accent I cannot hear you. What are you saying? Once the owner of the business sees that you are an African

they will not give you the job or house. We do not know how the government could help us with these problems.

The language issue can easily be used to mask prejudice. Other female heads of households stated that some companies refused the women's resumes after reading them and seeing that they are from African culture. Some participants thought their noticeable dissimilarity and pronunciation are a source of not being offered work as employers would like someone who speaks English well.

I really want to learn English but I am shy because I am old. I am stressed because I cannot do what I want alone. I am always sick since I came. Sometimes my daughter does not go to school because she helps me to go to the hospital or clinic. English is a problem. Sometimes I wake up during the night and start walking around the room disturbing my daughter who will be going to school following morning. Do you think I will be okay one day? I am taking psychosis tablets and these tablets make me sick. I have not been taking them for two months now because I am trying to pray to God so that he could help me. I do not know whether I will live well in my new country.

The pressure mounts when female heads of households struggle to overcome language barriers that clearly compound other aspects of their initial settlement

5. Experience of racial discrimination

The African female heads of households during the two cooperative inquiry sessions and in-depth interviews mentioned that they feel employers discriminate them because of their colour, as other women who cannot speak English well were getting the jobs. Other women explained that to be called for an interview was hard. One female heads of household from Ethiopia, explained her experiences of not getting a house as a form of discrimination. The housing agent kept on telling her that she did not qualify for the house due to her Centrelink income.

5.1 Housing Discrimination

In regard to housing, the female heads of households described similar experiences. A female head of household from Liberia aged 32 stated that:

Houses are a big problem for us. Homeswest will put you on a waiting list for 4-5 years. Housing Agents especially L J Hooker is discriminating us. You spent 3-6 months looking for a house. You get the house, after nine months or one year the

agents will tell you that, he is selling the property and you should look for accommodation... especially... L J Hooker I repeat.

Another female head of household from Liberia aged 28 described the situation thus:

The housing agents are ripping us. All the bond money, these housing agents will find a problem that you did. They will take all the bond money; in some cases they would want you to add more money on top of the money that you gave them when you got the house. I am saying this because it happened to me.

Another female head of household from Ethiopia aged 22 illustrated the situation as:

I had stayed in the house for one year six months J Hooker told me that he was selling the house. I was asked to pay \$600 on top of \$1300 the bond that I had paid when I got the house. He told me that I had burnt the kitchen table and I needed to replace it as he was not getting the same material for the top of that table. He told me that he was going to put a new table. So...I had to give him \$600 on top of my money \$1300 I gave him when I got the house. I cannot speak much English so I think that's why he took my money. English is a problem.

For some women, housing is the major problem. This is linked to such issues as getting a permanent house and the cost of rent.

5.2 Insurance - experience of exploitation

A few of the female heads of households described their dire situations and vulnerability to exploitation. A female head of household from Liberia aged 42 stated that:

I do not know what to do. I have a bill that is coming every month from a Life Insurance company. Someone called my telephone number. I do not speak English well. I called my daughter who is fifteen years, to help me answering this person. The person was reading all my confidential information over the telephone. Such as: My name, date of birth, home address, my password and my debit card number. After that this man said that do you agree with the information that I have read to you. I said yes. Then the man told my daughter that he called me in connection with a life

insurance for my loved ones in the case of unexpected death. All this was over the phone. The next things that I got were two letters. The first letter was saying that, congratulations on taking out Lite Life Direct Insurance. You can be assured now that your loved ones will be financially protected should the unthinkable happen. The other letter was saying that I am writing to confirm that your first month's premium will be free, the first premium of \$95.15 collection from your account will be on 20th March rather than 20th February as stated in the Confirmation of Cover Letter that you should have already received. Please feel free to contact our Customer Service Team on this number should you have any further queries regarding your Lite Life Direct Insurance. The Benefit Under Your Policy: Life Cover= Your Nominated Benefit is \$500000. This person in taking money from my account and I do not know

him but he knows all my details. My account is being deducted this amount but I never agreed to this because this person was taking to me through my 15 year daughter.

Stories such as these were widespread amongst the female heads of households' participants.

“if a children do not respect you at home, how can they respect other people outside the home”.

It became a chorus with the voices of women crying and shouting at the same time. I had to let them shout until they expressed their anger. I assured them that I had recorded all of what they had said, and all would be documented.

A woman aged 42 expressed the situation thus:

“We are concerned about children's success not becoming problem. Help us with stress added more”.

One female head of household aged 35 described her predicament in this way:

The problem that worries me is about my daughter. My daughter wanted to play soccer at school. The teacher refused her. The teacher sent her home three times. Fourth time, this teacher told my daughter that she should not come to school anymore. I went to see the teacher from Nollamara, which is very far. The teacher told me that there was no need for me to go there as my daughter was cancelled from school. I do not know what to do with my daughter. Now...she cannot go to school. We came here because of war in Africa, we did not do anything. It is war that brought us here. Why is it that this teacher does not want to see me and my child? May the government help us with some of these problems. We are traumatized by employers, housing agents and teachers like that teacher of my daughter.

Other female head of households, described their experiences as:

I am taking care of my son's children who died in war. These children are not respecting me. They are not listening what I am saying because I cannot speak much English. They are not doing well at school as they are playing with other children who are drinking beer. I do not know how to deal with them.

The woman was shouting at the top of her voice with tears running down her face. I looked at the other women; most of them were shedding tears. I told myself that I should be strong and assured them that all their stories would be documented.

Another woman described the situation as:

In Africa, extended families were also expected to contribute to the discipline of the younger members of the community and older children were expected to care for younger siblings to teach them responsibility for later on – here in our new country it is called child abuse. I am not settling well because of these children. I always think that if their father was with them he could discipline them.

Others started shouting, trying to explain the situation. It became hard to listen as most of them started shouting very loudly. I told them that each one interested in saying something would have a chance. One woman explained the discipline dilemma:

If you hit the child, they will go to school and tell their teachers or report you to the Department for Child Protection. The children would be taken away from you. We do not know what to do.

Basically, this is what was said by the women survivors. In this project I did not seek the children's voices as survivors. It is clear from the way participants interacted with me over this issue, that it is a cause of significant frustration and anger. Many women felt helpless to address the tension and achieve the best for their children and grandchildren. This question of emotion and mental anguish is addressed in the next section.

6. Centrelink employment legal requirement

The African female heads of households discussed their frustration with getting employment based on the 1 July 2006 employment requirements to seek and undertake work. During the two cooperative inquiry sessions and in-depth interview process with African female heads of households, the pressure to look for and accept work was experienced as a traumatizing condition, as employers were not willing to employ most of the women without formal English language, work experience, car, and a driver's license.

A social worker employed as a settlement worker, described the frustration of these refugee single women as being trapped by Centrelink. Both social workers and other human service workers who participated in this research revealed that the women find it hard to get employed without previous experience and with no formal education. The women participants, social workers and other human service workers mentioned that employers need education to understand the position of these

women as new migrants. Some of the women are capable of working in jobs that do not require much writing, reading and speaking. Both social workers and other human service workers interviewed felt that the women needed more training for them to be employed in the Australian workplace.

7 Employment

The African female heads of households were worried about not understanding the employment system in their new country. The women expressed that even those who were employed in some cases; they are dismissed from jobs without any explanation. In this learning process of what is needed in the labour markets, they feel confused and frustrated.

7.1 Get job/loose job

An African female head of household from Liberia expressed how she felt:

It is like I am repeating what other speakers have said, all money salary earned goes to child care. Wrongful dismissal, at work and under-paid, Centrelink is harassing us to work. Work hard gave money back to childcare. May the government help us, we are single mothers,... and we have nowhere to cry.

In an in-depth interview with an Ethiopian woman she said:

I have five children. The oldest one is twelve years. I really want to work but I do not know what to do with the children. The childcare is very expensive. One day I took the children to the Community Development Offices because I wanted to die. Life is so hard for me to raise these children without a husband. On the other hand Centrelink is putting pressure on me to work.

7.2 Wrongful dismissal

For some women, wrongful dismissal is the problem, whereas for others unclear payments are their main concern. For some women, unclear employment status is the problem, i.e. the contract they sign will be written "congratulations you got employment fifteen (15) hours per week". Later they would find out this not so and it was up to 15 hours. This would be according to the availability on the roster. This means if there is no one to relieve, they may have four (4) weeks or so without a shift and this becomes a problem with Centrelink where they receive their benefits.

A settlement social worker at TAFE commented that some African female heads of households feel depressed and pressured by Centrelink. The female heads of

households felt as though they are ‘*haunted*’ by Centrelink.

These verbatim quotes above reflect how the 1 July 2006 Welfare to Work changes, are experienced by the African female heads of households. The African single women understand Centrelink’s conditions from the policy changes apply for every citizen. However, in their circumstances as new migrants, these changes came in to effect when they were struggling to find their own positions within this new country. The National Association of Community Legal Centers (NACLC) explained the impact of the policy changes as:

4,000 of the 18,000 who had their payments suspended for eight weeks would be case managed. The Federal Government allocated \$25.7 million over four years to run the case management system where charities would work out a person’s “essential expenses” which may then be paid directly to the creditor by Centrelink. For doing this work, charities/community welfare organizations will be paid \$650 for each person they “case manage”. The entire system of case management was found to have difficulties in that most people would not qualify to have their expenses paid, as the criteria are so strict that even a person who is homeless does not automatically qualify (NACLC 2006: 9).

The challenge for African female heads of households is that they do not understand the support system, nor do they understand how to access outside help in addressing their concerns. Instead, they get by drawing on expressive forms of imagery through story, and relying on each other which has limited potential and success.

A common point of discussion revolved around the treatment individuals received from some Centrelink workers. One African female head of household from Eritrea said that “*the welfare system treats everyone like a criminal*” as they cut benefits even for those people finding it hard to get jobs because of low English language. The woman hopes that Centrelink employees may realize that these refugees are single women starting a new life in their country of settlement, Western Australia, and they require additional assistance.

7.3 Experience in getting employment

Many of these African female heads of households stated they had problems getting employed because during interviews they were asked to present proof of Australian

work experience. Women realized that they lacked knowledge of the Australian job market. The women who got jobs had completed some studies in Australia. The next section discusses the role adjustment in the countries of settlement for these refugee single women.

7.4 Opportunity and reality of getting a job in Australia

These African female heads of households had varying expectations on getting employed in Australia. Some had no expectations of getting a job as they thought that most African people would not meet the Australian standard of English for one to be employed. Some wanted to work and were planning to study but the care of children was a problem. The other women expressed doubt to work because of the discrimination attitudes in the work place.

Some women feel pressured by Centrelink to find a job and work whilst they are having problems securing employment. The requirements on how to find employment in their new country Australia cause confusion and despondency. Information collected during the focus groups and interviews suggest that, within this target group of female heads of households, only two of the women are highly qualified but they cannot find employment at this level. This means that they are likely to be unemployed and on Centrelink support, but they really need a job. For example, someone who was a professional in her home country may only be able to access part-time casual work here for which no qualifications are required. Because the majority of the female heads of households are not highly educated or qualified in Western terms, they are dependent, but not always happy about this dependency.

Many female heads of households expressed difficulties in finding work. Female heads of households found this frustrating and annoying. A female heads of household from Liberia, aged 34, described this predicament:

Employers seem to have no understanding that we are newly arrived refugees or migrants and had no opportunity to gain Australian experience in the short time since arriving.

A female head of household from Ethiopia age 23 explained her experience below:

I am not good in writing and reading the Centrelink information. I received a statement saying that I was overpaid by \$3000 and I should pay this amount on installments. I do not have a permanent job. Completing the forms sometimes we make mistakes. I do not know what to do. Getting part-time or permanent job is difficult. Completing Centrelink forms all the time is difficult, as I do not have good English language. I will always make a mistake, unless I take it to Settlement Agency Workers to help me. This is hard to take the forms to the Settlement Workers every fortnight who are so busy.

There was a general consensus about Centrelink harassing and pressuring the female heads of households to work if they wanted to keep on receiving the benefits and a cancellation of the benefits without the female heads of households understanding the cause. One female head of household mentioned this dilemma, and all the women participants started shouting, with some crying about their circumstances.

We did not do anything in Africa; we are here because of war. If they are tired with us, they can send us back in Africa. Centrelink is harassing and stressing us to work. Getting a job is very difficult. We do not know what to do.

One female head of household from Eritrea aged 28 stated:

I have been traumatized. My husband was killed in the war. My other family members were killed and displaced. I am alone here. The community is my husband, children, father, mother, and everything. I do not know what to do. I am sick, I have heart problem. I am not strong to work but Centrelink is putting pressure on me to work. I was traumatized and yet this is another trauma.

A number of the female head of households described similar situations. Many female heads of households realized that they lacked knowledge about the job market. Those who found it easier to find employment were female heads of households who had completed some studies. One female head of household explained that her sister found the job for her and she just had to '*front up for the interview and got a job*', whilst another female head of household from Ghana aged 36 who gained employment easily '*put it down to my personality*'.

An interesting response from a female head of household came from a Liberian participant, who confidently claimed:

We expected to come and meet my house and car and get a job immediate. We arrived because we were told; this was the end of all suffering.

A Liberian female head of household aged 33 connected her experiences of not finding a job with discrimination. She described her situation:

I went to look for job. I met another girl who was a white girl. She could not speak English at all... No English. This girl got the job and I was told that she will put my application on file and they will call me when they need someone. No one called me up to six months. I do not know whether I shall ever work here in my new country. So what can I do...Centrelink is putting pressure on me to work and I cannot get a job. I am very strong. We Africans, we are very strong even at the age of 65+ we will be still very strong for work. What can I do to get job? I can speak English.

Clearly, so much depends on gaining employment to provide the economic basis for a better life in Australia. The other major point made on gaining employment for African female heads of households is to send money to refugee camps for the children and relatives left behind due to war displacement. The lack of employment leads to financial stresses, which exacerbate all the other problems for the female heads of households. One female head of household from Liberia aged 29 described her situation in this way:

Driving lessons are so expensive starting from \$50 per lesson. The employer will ask you if you have driving license before they can employ you. If you are depending on Centrelink, where do you get the money for driving lessons, rent, childcare, food, gas, electricity, and transport to go and work?

A number of the African female heads of households described similar experiences. The current era is one of more restrictive welfare systems in developed countries, including Australia. These female heads of households refugees seem to have been caught in between the implementation of the global welfare restructures at the time they need more support.

7.5 Country of origins

Some female heads of households indicated that they had enough family and community support for the care of their children and, as such, the availability of child care had no impact on their ability to access and keep a job. Most women depended on extended family members to carry out their “carer” role. However, some had difficulties in securing the services of a stable nanny. A female head of household described her experience of childcare in this way: *I had family members helping out, for instance my mother in law minded the kids and I just got on with my hair saloon business.*

Support of any kind becomes crucial to dealing with such issues as employment, language, and confidence as a new migrant. Without support networks it is much harder to quickly fit in to the new environment.

Privileges of public service officers

A few female heads of households who worked in their home countries for the government agencies indicated that they had access to free accommodation as part of their employment conditions; this was seen as a privilege by some: *I worked for the government and lived in government quarters*. Some participants had led relatively privileged lives as employees in their home countries.

Information given to female heads of households on obtaining employment in Australia

The information on employment varied depending on the country the female heads of households were migrating from and who was providing information. Answers ranged from *'able to get employment easily'* to *'not get employment without training and experience'*. Workers conducting pre-embarkation courses (the International Organization for Migration (IOM) or Catholic Migration Commission) informed female heads of households from Liberia that 'they needed job experience; they needed to be well presented for interviews and have 'verifiable certificates'. One female head of household from Ethiopia was told to get skills in hair dressing in order to secure a job as soon as possible. A number of women from Ethiopia are doing well on hair saloons small business in Perth, Western Australia. In this case, the information given to the Ethiopian women during pre-embarkation courses was helpful.

7.6 Employment in refugee camps or countries of asylum

The African female heads of households point out that they had to work long hours for little money in their countries of asylum in particular Egypt and Lebanon. Most of these women felt that they were taken advantage of being refugee women by their employers because of that poor treatment. For other women the language difficulty between the women and that of the country of asylum made it difficult. For other women to get employment it was not easy. The women that found it easy were the ones working with aid agencies as they were often referred to other agencies when

their work agency's contract come to an end. Most of the women were employed as housekeepers and cleaners.

7.7 Work experience in country of settlement

The common issues referred to by most of the female heads of households as to working in Australia were the issues of discrimination and abuse in the workplace. Abuse took the form of either verbal or physical abuse, or both. In some cases, this has caused women to resign from their workplace. One female head of household mentioned that she was happy when she had finished work knowing that she was going home. Her boss was verbally abusive to her all the time.

8. Mutual support

Finding time to meet for this research was not easy as the African female heads of households were busy with their children, job seeking and other private business as new settlers. But they meet regularly as what they term 'the society'. The African female heads of household's society in their terms is a social meeting to support one and the other emotionally, physically and mentally. As an African woman, meeting with other African women, the researcher had to contribute \$5 as a participant on the particular day she conducted the two cooperative inquiry sessions, although she was not a member of the society. The author was not previously aware that there were such meetings going on. These African female heads of households mentioned that they had been to a number of meetings or gatherings with other service providers at the request of their funding agreements, and they were now "sick and tired of such mutual support meetings". I was impressed by the way they initiated their support society. They used the word 'society' and it has possible connection to the friendly society tradition of mutual support. To me, this revealed that, although most of these African female heads of households have limited formal education, they are creative and resourceful. They used the money collected by communal contribution at such meetings to purchase needed household goods for members in a rotated order.

As most African female heads of households have no relatives, joining other women is a form of assisting each other with mainstream and other non-government service settlement information systems. Most African female heads of households came from cultures in which the extended family lives together; therefore close relatives mean a lot in their everyday life. The fact that they are no longer living within their

kinship system is a cause of depression. Many African participants of this study are also responsible for looking after their children and close relatives still living in refugee camps. This is another stress added to these African women participants of this research. One African female head of household from Liberia in her 50s who is a community leader opened the focus groups describing the experiences in this way:

We commend everyone who is here and we recognize our “two elders” who are always with us to discuss our settlement and other problems, as “single mothers”. If we do not “talk” about the problems that we are facing, no one will be able to help us, as they would not know what we are going through. We need to visit one another and support each other as we do not have extended family or kinship families to support us on our problems. We also thank the Australian Government, especially the Department of Immigration and Citizenship for the help we are getting on our initial settlement as new migrants. We also thank all the government and non government agencies that are kind to help us with the problems that we are facing during our initial settlement.

Participants were mindful of expressing their positioning as recent refugees, in the main still vulnerable and dependent on government support. Their comments show an eagerness to build their self-determination through mutual support, and sharing their settlement issues as new migrants. These types of meetings are held every fortnight, aiming to orientate new migrants from the target group. Contributing to these meetings, every member of the group will bring the agreed amount of money to be given to the host member of the group for that fortnight. The amount of money to be contributed would be agreed at the formation of this group. The host member of the African female heads of households would prepare different traditional foods of her own culture. In turn, she would receive all the money contributed by the other members of the African female heads of households as participants.

For instance, if the members of the society agreed to contribute \$5 Australian dollars, every fortnight, when they meet, this would mean that the host member would receive a considerable sum, sufficient to buy something that the host member wanted that she could not manage to raise the money for. A few members would go with the host member to buy what she wanted and could not manage alone. Access to participants for this research was successful because the author was advised by the African female heads of households themselves to conduct the two cooperative inquiry sessions through their mutual support society.

Information collected from the two cooperative inquiry sessions and in-depth interviews with African female heads of households, social workers, and other human service workers revealed that the Welfare Reform changes and their conditions were clearly not understood by many African female heads of households. Some of the reasons for the strong need for mutual support were revealed when the women discussed their situations.

Social workers and other human service workers stories from the field

Themes that were identified from the contributions of social workers and other human service workers working with the African female heads of households and children are listed in figure 5 under the heading Settlement Issues for women heads of households. Social workers and other human service workers contributions in the NVivo Conceptual tree are discussed according to their numerical order in the following section. Most of what they mentioned was similar and connected with what the African female heads of households had revealed. Where there differing positioning was obvious in the greater emphasis placed on the needs of the children of these women. Below is a conceptual tree generated from the social workers and other human service practitioners.

**Conceptual Tree Generated From Input of Social Workers
And Other Human Service Workers Reflection**

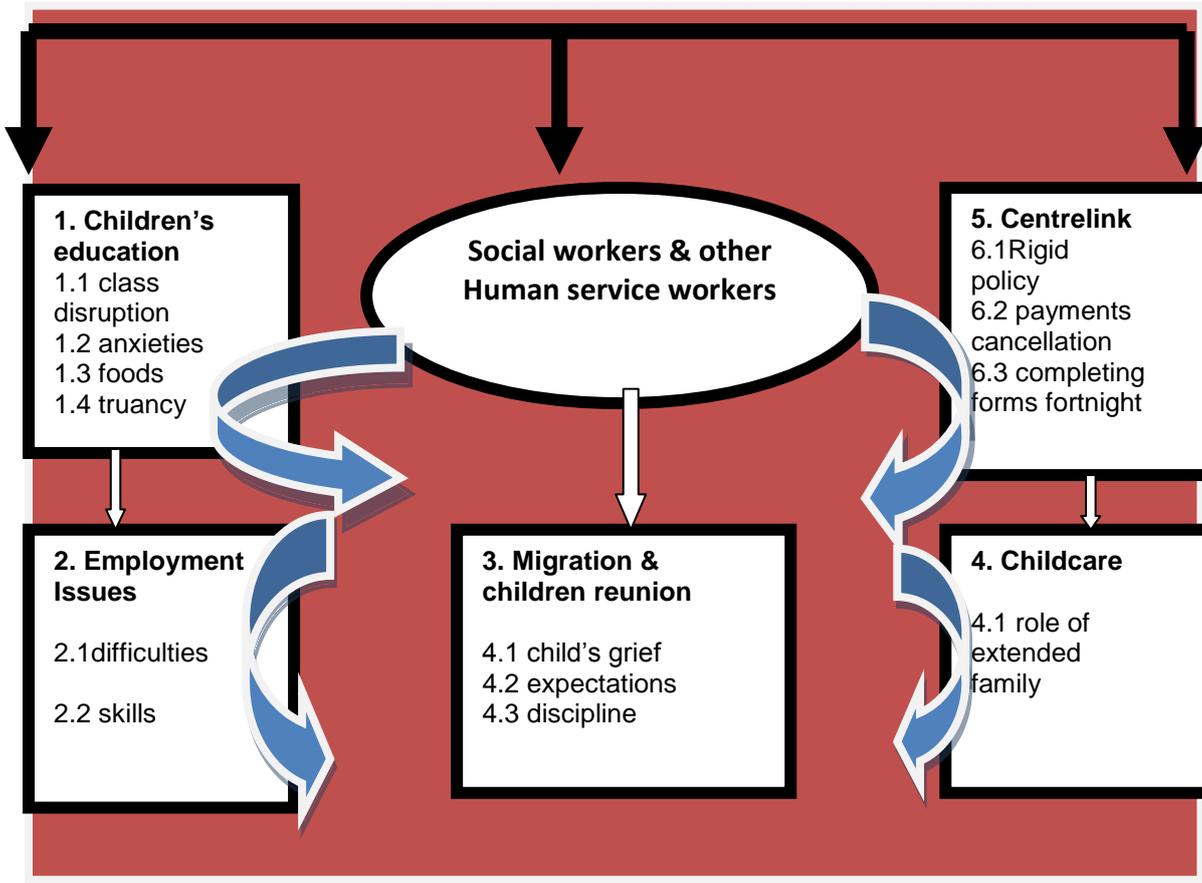


Figure 5 Settlement Issues For Women Heads of Households As Identified By Social Workers & Other Human Service Workers

In-depth interviews with practitioners

1.1 Children's Education

A human services worker described the situation of a nine year Ethiopian boy.

The boy had been suspended from school for being disruptive in class failing to comply with the classroom instruction. The school also reported he was insolent and intimidating towards his teachers and had been caught fighting with other pupils lunchtimes. This boy was coming to school with no lunch and had no shoes to wear.

This case was reported to the social worker and an investigation followed as to why this was happening to this young boy. The social worker noted that the mother was depressed and she was trying to commit suicide. No one was taking care of this young boy. The teacher said that there were a number of cases when African female heads of households' children were referred to a psychiatrist when everyone was confused with the child's misbehaving. This teacher revealed that some of the

African female headed-households felt that, under the Australian law, the child can do what he or she wants. In the African culture the parents use other methods to reinforce good behaviours at school. There was a lot of fear and uncertainty about physical discipline being against the law in Australia.

2. 1 Employment difficulties

The other qualified social worker who works as a settlement worker explained their situation in this way:

I do not work with the target group only. In general refugee women feel haunted by Centrelink. The refugee women whom I am working with are saying that they are getting Centrelink benefits when they come so that Centrelink could make a follow up on them to harass them to work. The women are so depressed especially if their education level is low to speak English. There are individual refugee women who are educated but find it hard to get work as employers would like someone who has got past experience in the Australian labour market and a driver's license.

2.2 Employment Skills

The social workers' responses to these issues depended on the key role of their employing organization. Most organizations did not see their role as seeking employment for the women. However, they all recognized the need for women to get work. The settlement social worker interviewed reflected that:

Some agencies had linked the women to do nursing course at TAFE for both training and employment opportunities. A small number are funded to develop training and employment opportunities for the women. Other organizations have the desire to be able to assist women to find work but they are unsure on how to go about it.

During the focus group and interviews, the African female heads of households revealed that they were worried about their children's success and their behaviours. The researcher cited the concerns of the female heads of households about their children to the social worker and other human services workers during interviews. Below are findings on what was subsequently revealed by both workers during the interviews.

3. Migration and subsequent reunion with children

One social worker stated that the greatest confusion and difficulties that families face as a result of their migration concerned their children. Some of the hardest of these problems arise when parents are forced to leave their children in their country of

origin or refugee camps when immigrating to the countries of asylum. The extent of difficulties connected with the separation of parents and children will depend on a number of factors. Such factors include the age of the children and the time of separation, their relationship with their mothers, and the length of their separation from them.

This also involves the quality of care they receive in their country of origin and the circumstances of their families when they are reunited with them. Another human services worker mentioned that mainstream children are usually cared for almost entirely by their mothers, with some involvement on the part of the fathers. Many children from African backgrounds have always been cared for by their fairly extensive family network. These include grandparents, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles. Their own parents may not always have been particularly involved in their care, having delegated it, for various reasons, to other relatives.

The departure of these parents for countries of asylum may not, therefore, be a tremendous loss and shock for their children, as they will continue to find most of the security they need with other relatives. But when the time comes for them to join their mothers, many children have very little time to prepare for emigrating. They will almost certainly grieve for the people who cared for them all their lives, perhaps realizing that there is little chance they will ever see them again. It is as if these relatives were dead, and many children recently arrived in Western Australia experience a period of mourning which is not always recognized or understood by their mothers.

3.1 Child's grief

To the grief these children feel at separation from interim carers is added the shock of finding themselves in a totally unfamiliar country. This includes living often in a confined space with people they hardly know or remember and, perhaps, in the company of younger brothers and sisters. It seems the whole pattern of life of these children changes in a few hours. These children may be confused about the responses required of them and without the comfort and support of those who have, until now, represented parental authority and love. For the children who were not part of such extended family networks and who experienced the dual separation

from their mothers and then, perhaps, their grandmothers, the confusion and unhappiness may be even greater.

A human service worker interviewed argued that both human services workers and social workers need to discover the pattern of a child's life before coming to the country of asylum. This could help to understand a child's grief, loneliness, and possibly withdrawn or hostile behaviour apart from this initial separation from their mother. Understanding previous children traumas would help workers to assess current behavioural problems. Sometimes it is easy to assess the current behaviour without locating where the problem started, blaming the victim.

3.2 Expectations

One social worker expressed that, given all that has been said by other workers sometimes it is easy to feel sympathy with children who have had this experience of a rapid transfer from a familiar to a strange world. The worker went on saying, sometimes, other social workers or human services workers are angered by mothers who appear not to understand the strains such change places on their children. But these parents are also in a difficult position. To bring their children whom they left in refugee camps or other countries during the war, many African female heads of households have made great financial sacrifices to bring their children to Australia and provide them with safety. They have worked and longed for the day when their family would be reunited. It can be a bitter disappointment for parents to find their children confused, resentful, and withdrawn instead of grateful and delighted by their reunion.

Children who are reunited with their mothers in their adolescence may also face serious problems of adjustment. As has already been said by social workers and other human services workers, many will be at an educational disadvantage and so may find it hard to obtain satisfactory employment. They are likely to be confused by the way of life of young people in Australia and, perhaps, wish to copy them. This will probably be fiercely resisted by their mothers who are African female heads of households. Many of these women may well have poor opinions of the use they see Australian children making of their independence. The African female heads of households may fear that their children who are newly arrived in Western Australia

will not understand the constraints on behaviour that do exist and are recognized by children who have lived all their lives in Australia. Advantage may easily be taken of children suffering from this kind of confusion.

Some of the most complex problems facing African female heads of households with older children cluster around the degree of independence these children want and are allowed. This demand to be free of some of the bonds of the family can be a source of anger and concern. The African female heads of households may view such freedom as a threat to the structure of the family and a desertion of traditions, which also provide immigrants with security in unfamiliar country and link with their past certainties. Questions about the extent of older children's independence involve, therefore, a consideration of a family's basic values and beliefs and their view of their future in the country of asylum.

3.3 Discipline

African female heads of households, who are lonely and isolated, are also reluctant to allow their children a reasonable measure of independence. Some African female heads of households, who have had to leave their other children in the refugee camps, could in their guilt and sense of loss cling insistently to the children still living with them. The children will resent this clinging behaviour, but feel guilty if, by trying to withdraw, they add to their mothers' unhappiness. One social worker stated that those female headed-households would need a great deal of client support and understanding from their families to allow their children some degree of freedom.

Possibly, for African female heads of households, the greatest cause for concern revolves around the discipline of their children and the standards of behaviour they wish them to adopt. Such methods of more freedom of child-rearing are totally unfamiliar to them and are seen as the origin of much potential unhappiness in their families. On the other hand they realize their traditional methods of upbringing are not entirely appropriate for children whose friends and school companions enjoy a much greater degree of independence. Some African female heads of households see that some adaptation must be made, but are uncertain how to do this; and, for many of them, there are little common tried experiences on which to build.

4. Childcare

4. 1 Role of extended family

The human service workers focus group and interviews revealed that African female heads of households indicated that they had enough family and community support for the care of their children and such availability of child care had no impact on the ability to access and keep a job. Most women depended on extended family members to carry out their “carer” role. It is clear that there is significant difference between the female heads of households and their support workers on this topic, as many of the female heads of households had no extended family and named childcare as one of their biggest concerns.

5. Centrelink

The social workers and other human service workers said that, in their experience, most African female heads of households have small children and had not completed much formal education. Considering that these female heads of households would be entering into workforce for the first time, with no sufficient learning, the women found the situation frustrating. The workers stated that female heads of households do not understand the eight week no payment penalty as a result of the 1 July 2006 Welfare to Work changes.

The women affected with the penalty should go to Centrelink to ask what they should do when their payment has been stopped. If the woman was doing casual work and stopped working, the woman should report at Centrelink that their casual work has been terminated. Centrelink workers would give them new forms so that the woman can start getting the benefits. Many African female heads of households were going to see social workers and other human service workers crying without money to pay for electricity, gas, water and food. The penalty is:

not only applied when a person commits a third offence (for example, failing to attend an interview or a training course), but as well applies as an immediate cut in payments for a “more serious offence” such as: refusing an offer of a suitable job (without a reasonable excuse); resigning without a good reason; failing to participate in full-time “Work for the Dole” and being dismissed from employment due to misconduct (NACLC 2006:8).

Because of communication difficulties, African women were often categorized as a serious offender because they did not understand the system. These employment requirements state that when a person fails to comply with participation their payments would be suspended until they do so. The African female heads of households struggle to participate as they may be dismissed from jobs or placements by their employers due to inadequate English language communication skills.

It is hard saying that the woman lost her job because she did not have enough job skills when the employer indicated that she lost her job because of misconduct. For the African female heads of households who manage to comply with the participation requirements, the completion of Centrelink forms every fortnight with limited English language was another problem stated by social workers and other human service workers, as regularly women took all the forms to the workers for assistance to complete them.

In conclusion, another social worker stated that most adolescents in western societies go through a period when they question and, perhaps, rebel against their parents' ideals and norms of behaviour in an attempt to establish their own values and identity. This is an unfamiliar scenario to the African female heads of households' interviewed who mainly come from very conservative, hierarchical and traditional cultures who feel and expect that their children should 'naturally' behave well. In my social work practice, I noticed that children often accept the differences in their lives in and outside the family. They are able to negotiate the multiple realities they live in. These children may make a good adjustment to the dual demands placed on them, although this may be achieved after some pain and conflict.

The human service workers stated that, during their contacts with African female heads of households, they always articulate that before their displacement by war, they had the support of extended family and neighbours in the care of their children. In their country of settlement, Australia, access to childcare, its high-priced cost and nonflexible available times, are sources of stress and are frequently the determinants of whether they maintain or leave their jobs.

The information collected from African female heads of households, social workers and other human service workers about these women's employment status in Australia revealed that there is a gap as after 510 hours of Adult Migrant English Program most women would not be ready for work. About mothers and children's tensions, the African women participants felt that the workers sympathize more with the children and do not consider the efforts of those mothers in bringing the children to Australia.

The refugee sole women who have experienced male violence before war, during war or after war may feel insecure to discuss issues in the presence of a male. Due to the past violence experienced, these women may be less likely to involve themselves in language training or orientation education. Participation in programs where a service delivery staff is a man may be avoided, especially in the areas of health care, social support, language help, language training and orientation. In other instances, religion or culture might prohibit these sole women from employment outside the house. Basically, African women who were living in rural areas or poor urban settings involve coping with specific stressors related to their gender and roles in society before wars or displacement. In Australia, there would be stress connected with being a refugee and learning a new life in their resettlement process (Human Rights Watch, 2004).

Summary

This chapter has shown how the African female heads of households struggle to balance coping with past traumas and engaging in the new life style expected of them. The women's voices demonstrated that it is not easy to start a new life in an unfamiliar system. The stresses connected with the grief and loss from war lives is always revealed in counseling sessions as influencing the current situation in their new country. During the two co-operative inquiry sessions, the past traumas were mentioned as triggering many of the current problems of these single women. Most of these African female heads of households have never worked in their country of origin. The women had different roles to do according to their cultural or religious traditions.

Although, there are social support systems to support them, the fact that the system is unfamiliar, the women revealed that they are struggling to access and utilize them. To find a job was expressed as challenging as most of these women do not possess the required employment skills relevant for the labour markets in their new country. The African female heads of households stated that they want to learn and work but it takes time for the adult women to acquire the required skills. The social workers and other human service practitioners revealed similar information which was stated by the African female heads of households.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This inquiry has documented issues faced by the African female heads of households on their settlement process and employment requirements as new migrants in Perth, Western Australia. This interpretive study documented African female heads of households' stories on issues they faced during wars and displacements in their countries of origin, in their countries of refuge and in their country of settlement. The women's stories, alongside social workers and other human service workers reflections on practice with this group and challenges employment agents have identified in working with these single women, have been collected in this thesis. All these accounts have been interpreted against the available information documented in the Welfare to Work journey taken by these African refugee single women.

African Female Heads of Households

The major settlement needs of African female heads of households have been identified as relating to English language, employment, family issues, childcare, psychological and emotional issues. These are all issues confronting this new group of African women settling in Perth, Western Australia.

As a social worker with experience in working with these women, I found it hard to counsel people with a number of significant settlement issues. I discovered that casework may be appropriate to work with women and girls who have been traumatized. The worker would combine casework and settlement issues. It is difficult to counsel someone who has been told to vacate the house when she does not have an alternative accommodation. Casework will intertwine counselling and advocating for the housing problem. In my social work experience, in most cases once the client gets the accommodation, the stress for housing would be over. The workers encourage the traumatized women and girls to keep learning and developing themselves as this is a major concern of most new migrants from non English speaking backgrounds.

During this period of five years of free settlement services, combining Adult Migrant English Program and Workforce Development Skills may be a helpful preparation for the women to gain employment in their new countries. The Workforce Development Skills training, if provided with qualified and experienced human service workers, motivates the traumatized women as they interact with one another. It is not surprising that, if these traumatized women meet with other traumatized women from different cultures, experiences of trauma might be shared during the process. I discovered this process to be healing and the women during two cooperative inquiry sessions and in-depth interviews for this research confirmed this. The next paragraph discusses the role of the Adult Migrant English Program that assists women with employment and education pathways, as well as integration in the mainstream services. The English and Workforce Development Skills is site for better and more extensive supporting those women could utilize for better chances to be employed.

SETTLEMENT AND EMPLOYMENT PRIMARY ISSUES

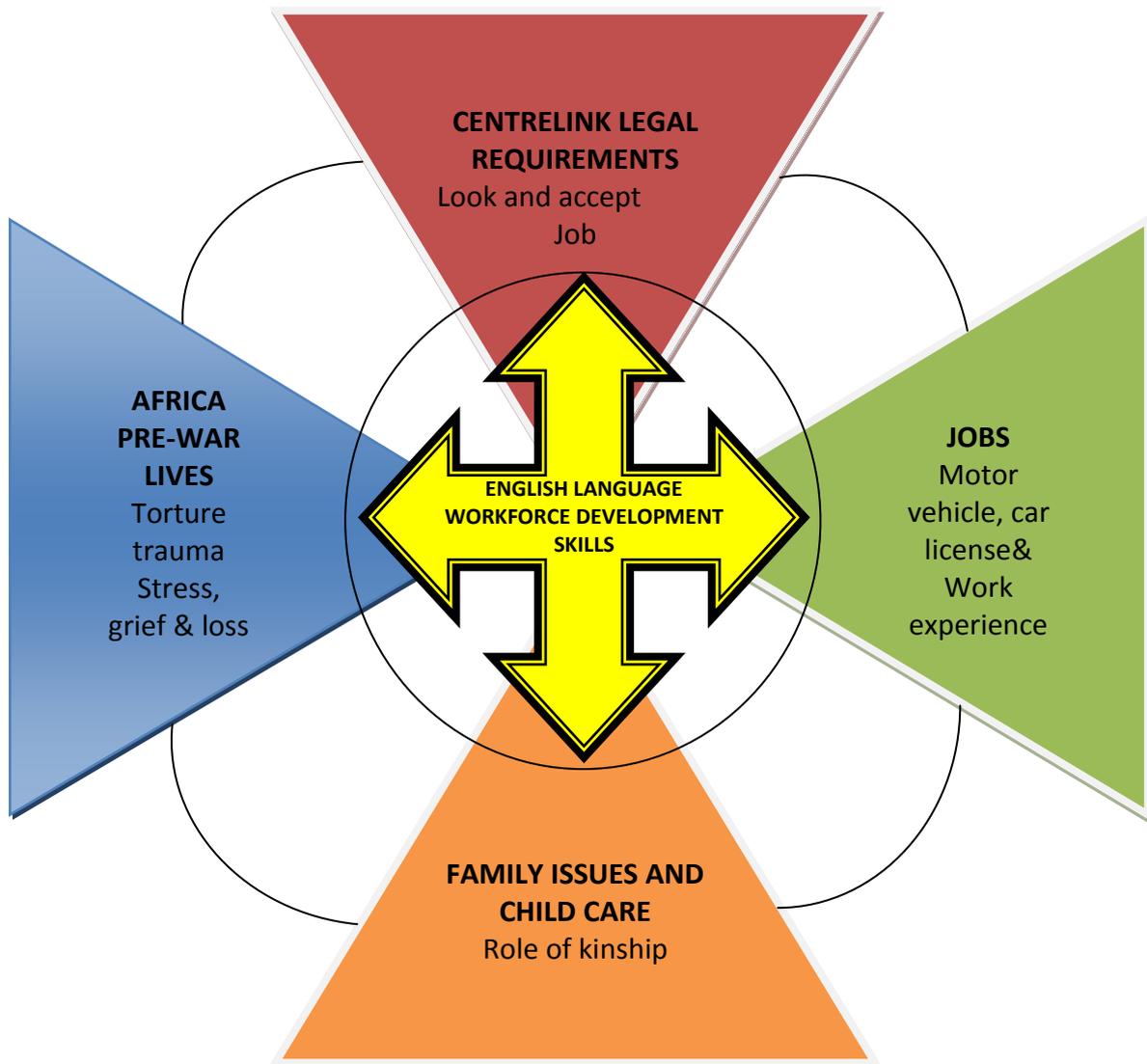


Figure 6 Settlement And Development Primary Issues

English Language and Workforce Development Skills = Employability

Adult Migrant English Program

The research literature on education reveals that many critical feminist studies of literacy and literacies show that important lessons can be learned from lessons of out-of-school literacy and everyday learning applied to the school setting (Hull et al 2001). From my own education experience as a mature student, a combination of out-of-school literacy and learning applied in school assisted me to acquire the education that I currently possess. It is hard sometimes to understand information during a lecture session. In a lecture there will be so many students. Even though you do not understand, it is difficult to keep on raising your hand saying, I do not

understand. Whereas, in a tutorial session, it is easy to say that I need help as a tutorial has few students.

The African female heads of households during the two co-operative inquiry sessions revealed that during the Adult Migrant English Program sessions, the class was often overcrowded. These single women mentioned that even though they do not understand, they would be shy to say that they do not understand. It is also hard for the teacher to concentrate on just the students who are starting from zero as one of the social workers working at TAFE affirmed. The African female heads of households mentioned that they feel frustrated as in most cases they sit in the class without understanding anything.

Most of these African female heads of households would use up the 510 hours allocated to them as new migrants, still unable to read and write. The women mentioned that a combination of the Adult Migrant English Program sessions and conversational English would assist them in the real situation. This is true; no one will employ you if you cannot speak English. The women cannot even do any meaningful employability courses with minimal English.

As Hull et al (2001:589) found:

Studies of literacy state that helpful lessons can be learned from both out-of-class literacy and formal learning in class contexts.

This educational structure on literacy and language learning may be helpful when working with the African female heads of households, since they are refugees. As stated in chapter two, most of these single women's situation could be connected to their African socialization, historical life (wars) and economic factors.

Recent studies of second language learning and language contact in bilingual and multilingual communities have been informed by theoretical frameworks that rely on poststructuralist and feminist approaches to the study of language, gender, and identity. With a view of gender as a combination of social and economic relationships as well as a set of discursive practices, such research focuses on the various ways that ideologies (of language *and* of gender) mediate those social and economic relations (Norton 2000:88).

Similarly, Pavlenko (2001:25) stated:

immigrant and minority women's access to education in majority languages may be significantly constrained by language and gender ideologies and practices of both majority and minority communities...women's status as housekeepers and mothers, in conjunction with lack of governmentally funded day care, may result in complete immobility.

Employment issues

During the two cooperative inquiry sessions, English language was found to be one of the primary factors influencing the process of these African female heads of households in getting employment as new migrants in Perth, Western Australia. The requirements for an individual to get employment in the Australian labour markets include having a car and a car license, reading, writing, listening, and speaking English; and work experience with a reference from previous employers. Most African woman refugees from refugee camps would not be able to meet these employment requirements. Therefore, getting a job could be stressful whilst a Centrelink employment criterion requires them to work.

The African female heads of households found this employment requirement particularly hard and challenging. Most of these African single women were denied education even in their own languages in their country of origins before the wars. Some young mothers were born in refugee camps where there was no formal education. Employers found it hard to employ them when they are not able to communicate well. Even for cleaning jobs, the women need to be able to read the labels of cleaning chemicals for their safety and others. To be able to learn English language, these traumatized women need some motivation support from experienced human service workers who understand where these refugee single women are coming from.

From my own experience as an ex-refugee survivor, it takes time for an individual to overcome the traumas of war. People have different coping mechanisms; some are able to overcome the traumas faster than others. Some of these women have higher levels of war trauma, such as witnessing their husband being killed and women

being force to drink his blood. In this case, if something triggers the trauma, they start experiencing the traumas again.

The violence that erupted in Africa in the 1990s totally disrupted the lives of ordinary women, and children. Millions of civilians were brutally murdered, schools and hospitals were closed, farms were burned, and families were forced to flee for their lives. The scale and intensity of the violence and the speed with which it spread had a totalizing effect on all citizens, but the process of fleeing one's country and seeking refuge was particularly challenging for women, who encountered special obstacles, due not only to their social status in Africa, but also due to particularities in application of international legal principles governing the handling and processing of asylum-seeking individuals and families (UNHCR 2001a:15).

So understanding the depth of this trauma is crucial to offering effective support to these woman and their families. This thesis has drawn upon my social work reflection, through working with these African female heads of households.

Family Issues in country of origin before wars

In general, African village women live in collectivist cultures where the survival and well being of the kinship group is central to their values. The African women who live in poor urban and rural areas lead lives that are very different to that of their husbands and sons. Most of the poor rural girls and women will have no access to good education because of some African cultural beliefs or religious beliefs which spell out the recommended roles of girl children.

Most young girls would spend more time with their aunts and grandmothers learning the norms and customs expected of them for marriage. This is associated with strong social bonds with other women, with whom they spend the greater part of their time (Jackson et al, 2006). These gender stereotypes serve as the foundation for gender differences in self perception and roles. In most African cultures men and women generally carry out different roles. One example is how women are expected to work at home and care for young children and elderly people, whilst men are expected to work outside the home. Thus, formal education of the girl children and women in not valued much.

Childcare and learning

The responsibility for the care, upbringing and education of children is shared throughout the extended family. Children belong to everybody and there may be a lot of movement among relatives. If the biological parents have a disagreement with their own child, it is not unusual for an African child to be raised by a grandparent or aunty rather than the biological parents. Mothers, aunts and grandmothers have many responsibilities associated with the care and education of young girls and young women.

In general, in most African families and kinship systems, siblings of the same sex are considered equal, such as two brothers being equal. Any child of the two brothers would call each other brother and sister, not cousins. Following this system, a person could have several mothers and fathers and a number of brothers and sisters. The father's sister, on the other hand, would be referred to as aunty, and the mother's brother would be referred as uncle. If a child is not getting on well with his or her biological parents, he or she can choose to live with anyone within the kinship group.

Psychological and emotional issues

Country of origin

In war situations, mothers, children, fathers, and most of the kinship, group were disrupted and destroyed. Mothers, children, fathers and most relatives were killed. This could have happened during the presence of one and the other. This meant that the entire family and in were dislocated or dead. These traumatic situations could influence the survivors to lose their cultural beliefs, for the training of young people was destroyed. For the mothers, children, fathers and most of the kinship group, as survivors they witnessed their homes being destroyed, and most of their belongings too. Allen (1998) illustrated the situation as:

Most wars and conflict situations can be understood in part as the result of identity politics, and refugees are commonly the casualties of identity clashes, be they national, racial, ethnic, religious or political in nature. When a group of people is persecuted, tortured, killed, driven out of their homes by another group of people, we witness the 'stark outcomes [when identity] turns the merely different into the absolutely other' In this women are particularly vulnerable.
(Allen 1998:58)

Country of settlement psychological and emotional issues

The above-mentioned circumstances make it challenging to work productively with this target group. Most of these survivors are highly traumatized. Some of these African female heads of households seek information in a different way from other cultures. They may ask questions indirectly, use silence at length, and appear to agree in order to facilitate a smooth social relationship. Direct eye contact may be avoided, as looking directly at someone is not always an acceptable behaviour.

In some cases, for the worker to be understood, it could be a good idea to explain what he or she is doing and keep it simple. For the woman survivor, she may already be a little nervous and a lot of technical information may increase her anxiety. It might be a good idea to make sure that the women have understood what the worker explained. One example, of this how the client was asked whether she understood the appointment made by the worker. The client replied, 'yes'. The worker went on booking an interpreter for the day, Tuesday, and the client came on the Wednesday. This reflects that the client did not understand what the worker had said. Most of the African female heads of households may be reluctant to use mainstream services so, they need encouragement.

Advocacy, empowerment, prevention & support with women survivors of wars

Ife (2002) defines advocacy as a skill of being able to represent the interests of an individual, group, and community on their behalf. Ife stated that:

Sometimes advocacy is essential, especially when the worker is working with a particularly disempowered community that has immediate and urgent needs. The important point is that a worker must not assume that by adopting an advocacy role she/he is necessarily working for empowerment. Rather, advocacy must be accompanied by some form of power analysis, and must be to enable people to represent their own interests, rather than to feel that they always need someone else to do it for them. Advocacy requires that the worker be skilled in listening to and understanding, also in presenting the case for that community (2002:248).

In my social work practice in Perth Metropolitan Area, with women survivors of wars, I have learned that advocacy, empowerment, prevention, and support are connected with one and the other, for most women survivors of war in Perth, from African backgrounds who cannot speak, read or write the English language well, have

trouble signing contracts, which they do not understand. Some huge legal documents are signed without understanding the details of the document, or with the help of a young child who can speak English. When the contractor is threatening them to pay, they will often rush to the agency for assistance with the issue. In such cases, usually, you would start by finding out the process used by the women to sign the contract. It is not surprising to hear the woman saying how- her eight year daughter helped to complete the document.

As a worker, dealing with the case, you are in between the contractor and the woman survivor, advocating on behalf of the client, trying to explain to the contractor that the woman did not understand the document. Your role as a worker is supporting the woman through negotiating a smooth deal, empowering the woman by finding good approaches to such issues, and prevention, through finding strategies to stop this from happening in the future.

Social Work Practice with Women Survivors of Wars

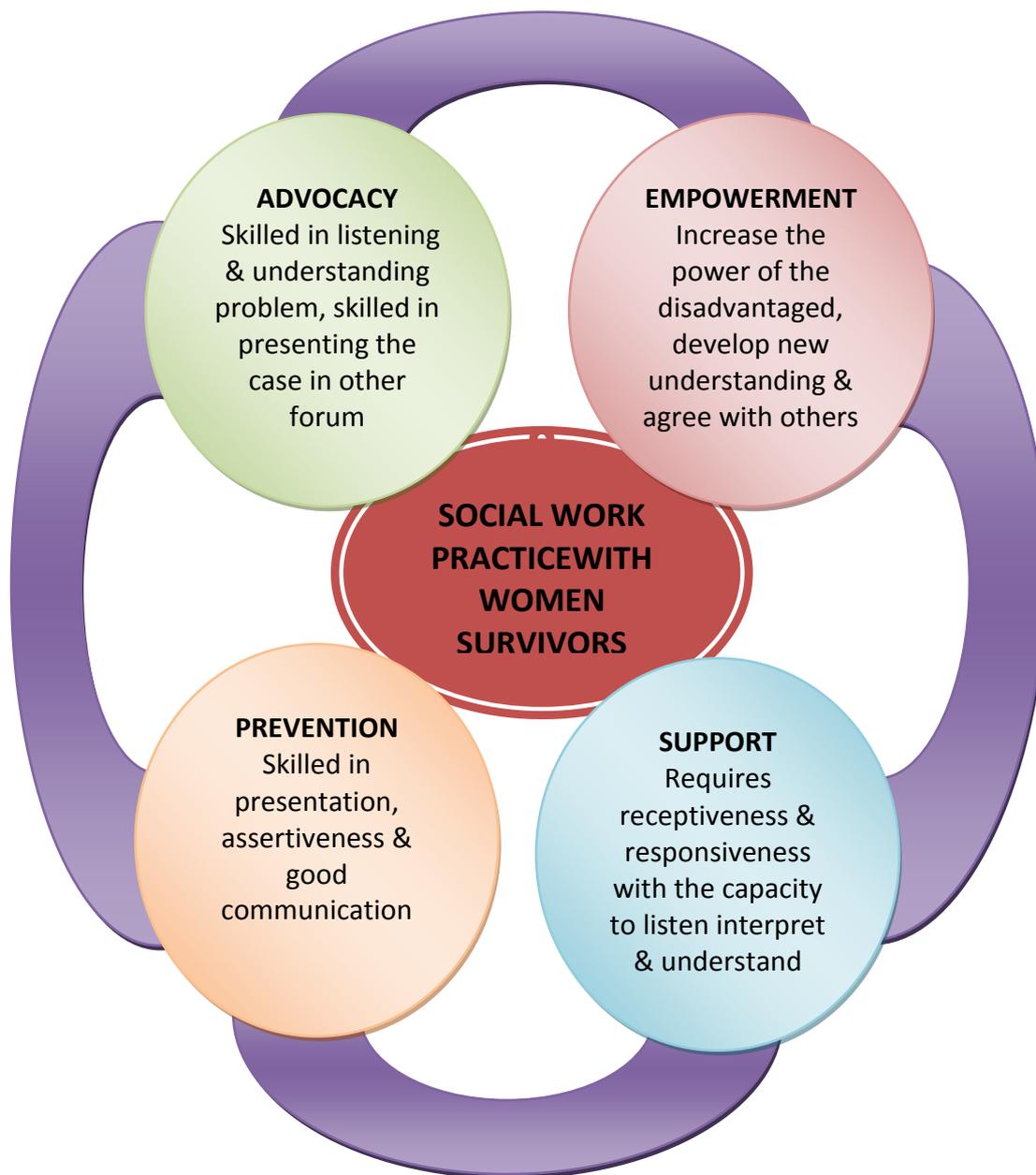


Figure 7 Social Work Practice With African Women Survivors Of War Drawn From My Research

Social work practice with women survivors of wars

Hidden Voices

As an ex-refugee woman survivor, I am proud to be a qualified social worker. I like my profession. To me, a social worker is just like any other professional. A distinctive aspect of social work is that it connects you, as a practitioner, with other professionals in diverse fields of practices, with clients from different cultural backgrounds. The social work profession and its knowledge of the modest yet complex tasks involved in the role of social caretaking, from a personal and professional perspective, is a vital service worldwide. Social work skills have grown

out of demands faced by people in situations of need. In both the home and the agency, social workers have developed and worked on skills that make it possible for the social family to survive and, in the best circumstances, to thrive, even in hardship (Davis, 1978:106-113; Ermarth 1985:55).

Developing English Language Skills

While many of the communities are known to speak English, this research found that there are differing levels of English language ability and literacy levels. Many people have been displaced from their original communities and have fled to refugee camps with the subsequent disruption to education and training resulting in poor literacy and language skills. Therefore, many lack adequate English language and workplace skills to gain employment. The need for childcare, attending overcrowded classes, the distance to classes and the mode of travel also act as barriers to accessing English language classes.

African mutual support group

This thesis has shown that, in working with African female heads of households, traditional ways of coping with some stressors remains an effective tool in some circumstance. The strategies used included problem-solving, seeking social support, a mix of emotion-focused and problem-focused approaches to stress. However, the combination of limited resources, low status, lack of control over such resources do exist, and lack of education means that African women need help to learn new ways of solving the problems they face. Working with the African refugee women, I learned that women respond well to new information and learn skills quickly that will help them solve stressful recurrent problems relating to survival.

The research suggests that the African mutual support group used by the researcher to gain access to the participants is one method that might be useful as a site through which to design and deliver effective family support or strengthening programs in partnership with African women at risk. This study suggests service providers and policy makers could recognize the potential for mutual support groups in ensuring therapeutic and support mechanisms for these female headed-households. This study suggests a need for more resourced and culturally attuned social workers to work with the African female heads of households and their

children due to their vulnerability. This thesis tries to encourage workers to acknowledge the female heads of household's society, as it is a strength point of some refugee women social and mutual support. One woman described her situation of insensitive and ill-prepared support workers as follows:

I am sick and tired of these interrogations. I was interrogated in Guinea. Life In Guinea was not easy. I was interrogated in Egypt and I am being interrogated again in my settlement country. This counseling is not culturally appropriate. I feel better at home than coming at the agency to be interrogated.

This statement reveals that some workers might not be aware about the vulnerability of this target group. For example, using questions in a counseling session could be appropriate with some clients. In the case of female heads of household, some view questions as interrogation, depending on how one is questioning. Paraphrasing could be useful counseling a female heads of household as this does not trigger the previous traumas. Social workers practice within the Australian Association of Social Workers Practice Standards (AASW). These standards apply to all social work practice, irrespective of the context in which it is undertaken. The Standards spell thus:

In any client situation and in any of the main areas of social work practice, the social worker will be aware of cultural considerations and influences and respond appropriately (AASAW Practice Standards 2003:6).

The social work practice standards recognize the importance of cultural considerations and influences in client situations. As well as Dubois et al (2005) points out that:

As researchers and scholars, social workers add to social work's base of theory and evaluate practice and program outcome. These activities link social work practice and theory through knowledge-development strategies (Dubois et al 2005:248).

Dubois et al (2005) went on defining research as a:

Method of systematic investigation or experimentation, the aim of which is the discovery or interpretation of facts, the development of knowledge, and the practical application of new or revised theories. Thus, Dubois et al defined social work

research as building theories, designing practice strategies, and measuring the outcomes(Dubois et al 2005:248).

Dubois et al (2005) end saying that, professional scholarship that contributes to the professional knowledge base is an obligation shared by all social workers.

Policy of competitive tendering and disconnect with policies of support

The participants in this study were not aware of the policy of competitive tendering that worked to impact on them when Centrelink cancelled their benefits. Centrelink workers tried to enter all the information on computer so that the women could access it, read or be assisted. The women were scared to call Centrelink with their limited English Language, and the closest person for help was their counselors. The contractual-competitive approach has created an unregulated market environment and overtaken the rights approach. Alston et al (2001) stated that:

Employment services are responsible for job placement of the unemployed and long-term unemployed. Most services fall under the umbrella term 'case management' and exist within a more discretionary and fragmented unemployment-benefit regime. There are both legal and economic reasons why the current employment service approach is inadequate. The transition from a citizenship to contractual state is now evidenced by the major shifts from employment benefits to employment services. Under the de-legalized process of contracted employment services, the rights of the unemployed are not adequately protected as they would be in services that have a more solid grounding in contract law. (Alston et al 2001:145)

The two cooperative inquiry sessions and interviews with the female heads of households revealed that most women want to work. The most frustrating situation mentioned was what employers require from these female heads of households as new migrants. Expectations included a car, car license, work experience, and good English language. The African female heads of households stated that employers seem to have no idea that they are new comers. There is not much security for those who managed to get a job as most of the jobs they got would be on a casual basis. They could have fewer shifts or lose a job at any given time without notice or reason for loosing that job.

Wearing (2001) contends that:

Case management can overemphasize administrative and legal compliance at the social cost of not finding unemployed people meaningful jobs. Focusing case-managed services on participation, as an instrumental planning value in policy and in

service delivery, may bring greater compliance of clients to service rules and regulation; that is, greater normative control (Wearing 2001:144).

Wearing (2001) went on saying:

An acknowledgement of the organizational and inter-organizational complexities and the contractual and legal basis of community services should yield a more thorough appraisal. Labour-market programs are an important area of service delivery in the community service sector. The sector is also involved in prevention, advocacy and self-help programs, and other forms of case management and brokerage (Wearing 2001:144).

It is within these global labour market changes where new comers such as, the African female heads of households as single parents with low English language are struggling to understand the changes in their new environment.

Welfare to work policy

Welfare to Work policy is not a bad policy. Even in their country of origins, most women do communal farming to sustain their lives. These female heads of households, if they could get adequate education, employment skills and less discrimination by employers, can participate fully in the Australian economy. A number of young people have trained as enrolled and registered nurses and are working in aged care facilities and hospitals. Some of them are working as carers in the aged care facilities. Facilitated with education and employment skills they can work hard and settle well.

The study concludes that Australian Government policy makers could consider designing more comprehensive support services to families migrating under the visa 204 woman at risk program and employing more social workers to work with the female heads of households and their children. The Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship and the UNHCR worked hard to assist the women who came with the visa category 204 women at risk to refuge in a safe environment.

When these families arrive in Australia there experience is often not one of safety but rather trauma. Much of this hard experience can be traced to the working of the Welfare Reform of 2006 through Centrelink Services. This contrasts markedly with the historical fact that the post-war focus on migration services was on nation-building and settlement and professional social work services were seen as integral

to this. Now once the families are landed on Australian soil a very different governmental logic seems to take precedence in regards to the lives of these families. The findings of this study suggests a revisiting of policy in regard to the 204 visa category for female heads of households to make for more coherent outcomes in regards to the wellbeing of these families and of Australian communities more generally.

The Adult Migrant English Program is an obvious site to locate a more comprehensive support to effectively settle these women and their families and coordinate Federal, State and Non-government services. The children need to be encouraged and supported so that they value supporting their mothers in the process integration within the Australian mainstream.

APPENDIX 1: SOCIAL WORKERS AND OTHER HUMAN SERVICE WORKERS

Letter of Introduction

Dear (name)

Thank you for indicating that you may be interested in participating in my research. My name is Virginia Mangazva. I have completed the Bachelor of Social Work 2004 and Master of Social Work 2006 degrees, at Curtin University. The research I am conducting is toward the Master of Philosophy Social Work and Social Policy and it is focused on the needs of 'female heads of households' in the Perth Metropolitan area who experience employment and settling problems. This research aims to explore what would make a difference to these women, and what assistance and support (if any) would be most beneficial to them. The research also seeks to discover if existing services have been used in the past, and if so whether or not these have been helpful. Your participation in relation to exploring the issues would be greatly appreciated.

Should you decide to participate I would like to interview you for approximately 45 to 60 minutes and record the interview on tape. A written account of the tape will be available approximately 4 weeks after the interview, at which time you are free to edit or retract anything that you do not wish to be included in the research. I plan to conduct the interviews wherever is suitable for you. I am flexible in this and happy to meet with you at a location and time nominated by you.

Participation in the research project is voluntary, and in order to protect your privacy and anonymity your real name will not be used. Also, you will be free to withdraw your participation at any time, and there will be no requirement for you to provide a reason or explanation for this. If you decide to participate, I will meet with you shortly to further discuss the research and to answer any questions you may have. If you have any questions please feel free to phone me on the above numbers, or email me at the above email address. Alternatively, you can contact my supervisor APROF Fran Crawford (Department of Social Work & Social Policy) 9266 3360. I look forward to meeting you.

Yours sincerely,

Virginia Mangazva

This study has been approved by the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number HR 39/2008). The Committee is comprised of members of the public, academics, lawyers, doctors and pastoral carers. Its main role is to protect participants. If needed, verification of approval can be obtained either by writing to the Curtin University Human Research Ethics committee, c/- Office of Research and Development, Curtin University of Technology, GPO Box U1987, Perth, 6845 or by telephoning 9266 2784 or by emailing hrec@curtin.edu.au

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Research Title EMPLOYMENT ISSUES FACING 'FEMALE HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS' SETTLING IN AUSTRALIA FROM AFRICA 2001 – 2006

Researcher: Virginia Mangazva – Master of Philosophy Social Work and Social Policy Curtin University of Technology.

I, _____ agree to participate in this research. I understand the following:

- ◆ I participate voluntarily and can withdraw from the project at any time without having to provide any explanation or reason whatsoever.

I do not have to answer any questions I do not wish to.

The purpose of the research has been explained to me and I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and can seek further clarification throughout the process if necessary.

Any information I provide will be used solely for the purpose of the research.

- ◆ The interview will be audiotaped and transcribed by the interviewer. I am free to read the said transcript.

I can amend, alter or retract any information I provide at any time during the research process. Any information or personal details about me will remain confidential and my name or other identifying information will not be used or published without my express written authorization.

Measures will be taken at all times throughout the research to protect my privacy and confidentiality.

Signed: _____

Thank you very much for your time. Please keep this letter for your information.

This study has been approved by the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number HR 39/2008). The Committee is comprised of members of the public, academics, lawyers, doctors and pastoral carers. Its main role is to protect participants. If needed, verification of approval can be obtained either by writing to the Curtin University Human Research Ethics committee, c/- Office of Research and Development, Curtin University of Technology, GPO Box U1987, Perth, 6845 or by telephoning 9266 2784 or by emailing hrec@curtin.edu.au

APPENDIX 11: African Female heads of Households

Letter of Introduction

Dear (name)

◆ Thank you for your interest in participating in my research. My name is Virginia Mangazva. I am a student at Curtin University of Technology. This research aims to find out how, 'female heads of households' are settling and getting jobs in Perth, Western Australia.

The 'female heads of households' interested in doing the study, should be those who came to Australia from 2001-2006.

◆ If you are happy to share your experiences with other women, I would like to interview you for more or less 60 minutes and record the interview on tape.

A written story of the tape will be on hand more or less 4 weeks after the interview, at which time you are free to change or withdraw anything that you do not wish to be included in the research.

I plan to do the interviews wherever you like. I am happy to meet with you at a place and time you want.

◆ Sharing the settling and job experiences in this research project is voluntary, and in order to protect your privacy and secrecy your real name will not be used.

Also, you will be free to withdraw what you would have said at any time. You will not be asked to give a reason for that. If you make your mind up to share the experiences, I will meet with you shortly to further discuss the research and to answer any questions you may have. If you have any questions please feel free to phone me on the above numbers, or email me at the above email address.

◆ You can also contact my supervisor APROF Fran Crawford (Department of Social Work & Social Policy) 9266 3340. I look forward to meeting you.

This study has been approved by the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number HR 39/2008). The Committee is comprised of members of the public, academics, lawyers, doctors and pastoral carers. Its main role is to protect participants. If needed, verification of approval can be obtained either by writing to the Curtin University Human Research Ethics committee, c/- Office of Research and Development, Curtin University of Technology, GPO Box U1987, Perth, 6845 or by telephoning 9266 2784 or by emailing hrec@curtin.edu.au.

Yours sincerely,
Virginia Mangazva

Informed Consent Form

Research Title EMPLOYMENT ISSUES FACING 'FEMALE HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS' SETTLING IN AUSTRALIA FROM AFRICA 2001 – 2006

Researcher: Virginia Mangazva – Master of Philosophy Social Work and Social Policy. Curtin University of Technology

I, _____ agree to participate in this research. I

understand the following:

- ◆ I participate voluntarily and can withdraw from the project at any time without having to provide any explanation or reason whatsoever. I do not have to answer any questions I do not wish to.

The purpose of the research has been explained to me and I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and can seek further clarification throughout the process if necessary.

- ◆ Any information I provide will be used solely for the purpose of the research. The interview will be audiotaped and transcribed by the interviewer. I am free to read the said transcript.

I can amend, alter or retract any information I provide at any time during the research process.

Any information or personal details about me will remain confidential and my name or other identifying information will not be used or published without my express written authorization.

Measures will be taken at all times throughout the research to protect my privacy and confidentiality.

Signed: _____

Thank you very much for your time. Please keep this letter for your information.

This study has been approved by the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number HR 39/2008). The Committee is comprised of members of the public, academics, lawyers, doctors and pastoral carers. Its main role is to protect participants. If needed, verification of approval can be obtained either by writing to the Curtin University Human Research Ethics committee, c/- Office of Research and Development, Curtin University of Technology, GPO Box U1987, Perth, 6845 or by telephoning 9266 2784 or by emailing hrec@curtin.edu.au

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