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**Abdelrahim Abulbasher [1,*] and Julie Yingling [2]**

[1] Qatar University
[2] Lycoming College; yingling@lycoming.edu

**Abstract:** Research on intimate partner violence among refugee and immigrant communities in the United States has been extensive over the past three decades, but little attention has been given to Sudanese refugees. This qualitative study examines intimate partner violence within Sudanese refugee communities in the Great Plains region of the United States, focusing on how Sudanese cultural traditions influence such violence. The research employs a grounded theory approach, utilizing loosely structured in-depth interviews conducted in early 2015 with twenty male and female Sudanese refugees. Key findings from this study are as follows: 1) Male partners often use traditional cultural beliefs to justify psychological and physical violence. These cultural norms are invoked to maintain control over their partners, reflecting deeply ingrained attitudes towards discipline and gender roles. 2) A combination of low educational attainment, unemployment, and financial disputes contribute to the prevalence of intimate partner violence, especially when it intersects with the cultural context. Conflicts often arise from financial pressures, including the obligation to send remittances to relatives back in Sudan and managing household expenses. 3) Victims of intimate partner violence within this community are generally reluctant to involve the police. Instead, they prefer seeking help from traditional leaders, who are seen as more aligned with their cultural values and more likely to provide a culturally sensitive resolution. The study calls for further investigation into why Sudanese women prefer traditional leaders over police, considering distrust of law enforcement, fear of stigma, and perceived effectiveness of traditional methods. It also highlights the need to understand the challenges faced by women after their husbands' imprisonment, such as economic hardship and social isolation. Effective intervention requires a nuanced understanding of these cultural dynamics.

**Keywords:** refugee; intimate partner violence; Sudanese traditions; remittances; education; employment

## 1. Introduction

Research on intimate partner violence (IPV) among refugee and immigrant communities in the United States has significantly increased over the past three decades. This surge in research followed the 1995 United Nations Fourth Conference on Women in Beijing, China, where violence against women was officially recognized as a fundamental human rights violation (Johnson and Ferraro 2000; Menjívar and Salcido 2002). Despite this increase in research, studies focusing on IPV within Sudanese refugee communities in the United States remain limited (Gustafson and Iluebey 2013). This qualitative study examines how cultural traditions and norms intersect with social factors such as resettlement stress, education level, employment, and financial strain to influence IPV among Sudanese refugees in the Great Plains. It has two main objectives: 1) to explore how aspects of Sudanese cultural traditions and norms—such as wife-beating, psychological abuse, pressure on women to obey men, and men's control over family resources—influence IPV among Sudanese refugees in the Great Plains, and 2) to examine the impact of education level, access to employment, and financial stress on refugee men's behavior toward IPV.

Cultural factors significantly influence IPV among refugee and immigrant communities. However, culture alone is often less impactful unless it intersects with social structures that create

barriers and inequities (Wenham, Sebar, and Lee, 2023). Refugee women face complex and interrelated barriers in the host country, which increase their risk of IPV, especially when combined with factors such as education, employment status, and financial stress. Consequently, IPV rates among refugee communities are higher than in the general American population (Payne, 2020; Ayubi and Satyen, 2024). Refugees often maintain traditional practices, including wife-beating, psychological abuse, and control over family resources (Menjívar and Salcido, 2002; Gatimu, 2018). In response to these issues, researchers like Wallach, Weingram, and Avitan (2010), Amanor-Boadu, Messing, and Stith (2012), Gustafson and Iluebey (2013), Mose and Gillum (2016), and Njie-Carr, Sabri, Messing, et al. (2021) have called for a thorough investigation of IPV among refugee populations.

The study employs a qualitative grounded theory approach, utilizing in-depth interviews to gather experiences and perceptions about the impact of Sudanese traditions on IPV in the Sudanese refugee community in the Great Plains. We assume that the intersection of Sudanese traditions and social factors such as education level, employment, resettlement stress, financial stress, language and cultural barriers, and adaptation challenges influences IPV in this community. This assumption provides the background for this research question: How do aspects of Sudanese cultural traditions influence the use of violence among the Sudanese refugee population in the Great Plains? Sub-problems include the perceptions of marital relationships and gender roles (specifically the family division of labor) among refugees, the reasons why refugee males maintain traditional practices that impact the well-being of their families and society, and the influence of education, unemployment, language, and acculturation on IPV among these individuals.

To explore these research questions, a set of interview questions was developed to examine the presence of cultural traditions and norms that condone men's attitudes toward IPV. Sample interview questions included: 1) Are there traditional beliefs in your community that tolerate men's behavior in insulting, swearing at, punching, or hitting their partner with something that could hurt? What are the circumstances that cause this kind of violent response? How do other community members react to that response? 2) What factors play a role in using that behavior? Describe each one: a. Does men's employment affect whether they insult, swear at, punch, or hit their partner with something that could hurt? Why? How? b. Does men's refugee status in your community affect whether they insult, swear at, punch, or hit their partner with something that could hurt? Why? How? c. Does men's education level in your community affect whether they insult, swear at, punch, or hit their partner with something that could hurt? Why? How?

## 2. Literature Review

Refugee women might be more vulnerable to experiencing IPV compared to their counterparts from the native community. This increased vulnerability could be attributed to the challenges of resettlement and the stress associated with leaving families and relatives in their countries of origin (Mose and Gillum 2016; Goliaei 2023). Other potential factors influencing IPV among refugee communities might include language barriers, lack of knowledge about legal rights, lack of education, difficulties coping with and adapting to a new culture, and employment challenges (Runner, Yoshihama, and Novick 2009). However, the rates and prevalence of IPV among refugee and immigrant populations might differ based on their sociodemographic and socioeconomic characteristics.

Some evidence suggests that the prevalence of IPV among Asian and Latino women could be relatively lower than among women from other races and ethnicities, potentially due to a lack of data about IPV prevalence in other refugee and immigrant communities (Runner, Yoshihama, and Novick 2009). Furthermore, socioeconomic characteristics and substance abuse of male partners might diminish the racial and ethnic differences when examining IPV across various communities (Runner, Yoshihama, and Novick 2009).

African immigrant and refugee women might face a greater risk of intimate partner abuse than female refugees from other racial and ethnic backgrounds (Mose and Gillum 2016). These women may struggle more with adapting to a new culture and escaping partner violence, partly due to the larger and more interconnected family structures common in African societies compared to those in American society (Gustafson and Iluebey 2013; Mose and Gillum 2016). As Mose and Gillum (2016)

describe, an African family might include parents, uncles, aunts, and relatives living outside the United States, all living interdependently and collaboratively. The husband often acts as the head of the household, making most, if not all, family decisions (Jin and Keat 2010; Mose and Gillum 2016). Despite this, family members in African societies might tolerate abusive behavior from the male partner and underestimate the negative impact of male control over female partners (Mose and Gillum 2016).

*2.1. Educational Challenges*

Refugees often arrive in host countries with hopes and aspirations, believing that a safer environment might provide opportunities to enhance their education and gain academic qualifications. This seems particularly true for those who already hold college degrees. Many refugees pursue higher-paying jobs and seek greater financial stability to improve their personal and family circumstances (Frox, Benson, DeMaris, and Wyk 2002). However, they may face various challenges, particularly when it comes to adapting to a new culture, which can bring numerous demands and responsibilities.

Reports suggest that refugees frequently encounter stress related to acculturation, which seems to induce gradual shifts in their cultural and ethnic identities (Bhugra and Becker 2005; Goliaei et al. 2023). Additionally, there appears to be significant stress stemming from changes in social structures and the potential loss of values and social support networks that were once accessible through family and friends in their countries of origin (Bhugra and Becker, 2005; Makwarimba et al., 2013). This situation may create a pressing need for both partners in refugee families to seek employment to meet their financial obligations and provide for their children (Bellinger 2013; Gustafson and Iluebey 2013).

For Sudanese refugees, in particular, there seems to be a notable struggle regarding educational attainment and the skills necessary for competing in the job market. Many refugees in the United States appear to possess limited educational qualifications and may lack the work skills and experience required for professional roles. Furthermore, challenges such as inadequate financial resources, limited English language proficiency, and a lack of familiarity with American culture are often prevalent (Keller and Brennan 2007). Due to these language barriers, it seems that many Sudanese refugees are unable to access educational institutions to further their studies or to pursue jobs that necessitate higher qualifications.

Existing literature indicates that educational attainment may influence employment status. At the same time, household economic conditions can impact male partners' attitudes toward IPV, including behaviors such as insulting, swearing at, or damaging a partner's belongings (Fox, Benson, DeMaris, et al. 2002; Wachter, Horn, Friis, et al. 2018). It is suggested that a lack of adequate income and unemployment among male partners might correlate with higher instances of IPV, particularly in couples facing financial strain due to low wages or joblessness (Fox, Benson, DeMaris, and Wyk 2002).

Moreover, education appears to shape refugees' behaviors and attitudes towards intimate relationships, potentially facilitating their transition into the host society's culture. Research by Wallach, Weingram, and Avitan (2010) indicates that refugees often experience social isolation attributed to their limited English skills, which might lead them to reside in enclaves or low-income neighborhoods. The likelihood of IPV might increase during transitional periods, particularly when traditional gender roles are in flux (Orloff, Dutton, Hass, and Ammar 2003; Wallach, Weingram, and Avitan 2010; Gustafson and Ilubey 2013; Green, Satyen, and Toumbourou 2024).

However, there are indications that attitudes may be shifting among refugee youth. Those who have received education, whether in their host country or their countries of origin, seem more likely to reject gender violence. This educational experience might change gender expectations among young adult refugees, potentially transforming their families and communities (Wallach, Weingram, and Avitan 2010). Furthermore, young adult refugees may face fewer language and cultural integration obstacles, work opportunities, and coping mechanisms (Sullivan, Bhuyan, Senturia, Shiu-Thornton, and Ciske 2005).

*2.2. Employment Challenges*

In some Sudanese cultures, gender roles may be traditionally divided, with individuals potentially being socialized into these roles by community and family members, including parents, relatives, and neighbors (Bellinger, 2013). Within this familial division of labor, it seems that men often engage in traditional subsistence farming and micro-businesses to support their families financially (Johnson and Stoll, 2013; Bellinger, 2013). Men might also be expected to fulfill roles as fathers, family protectors, and teachers, instructing their children in social and life skills. It is suggested that most Sudanese refugees grow up in families and communities where men are considered heads of households, which is considered essential and valued (Gustafson and Iluebey, 2013).

On the other hand, women are often tasked with household duties such as cleaning, cooking, and childcare, occasionally assisting their husbands with subsistence farming (Lainof and Elsea, 2004). When refugees immigrate to more individualistic host countries with more equally divided gender roles, the traditional family structure may change as they adapt to the new environment and culture (Bhuyan and Senturia, 2005).

There are suggestions that some refugee men might discourage their wives from enrolling in school to limit their interactions with men (Gustafson and Iluebey, 2013). Similarly, these men may tend to obstruct women's participation in the job market, especially if the job is far from home, possibly to prevent their acculturation (Casimiro, Hancock, and Northcote, 2007; Gustafson and Iluebey, 2013). Another potential reason for limiting their partners' socialization could be maintaining women's dependence and preventing their cultural awareness from challenging the traditional family structure (Mose and Gillum, 2016).

It has been suggested that when women become self-sufficient, they might challenge their husbands' power and controlling behavior, potentially causing tensions. This situation and resettlement stress, and financial strain could increase IPV among refugees (Jin and Keat, 2010). Additionally, research indicates that refugee women might avoid working at distant locations to minimize disagreements with their partners (Umberson, Anderson, Glick, and Shapiro, 1998). However, Sudanese refugee women often seem compelled to work if their partner's income is insufficient (Gustafson and Iluebey, 2013). Financial stress could heighten marital tension, especially when both partners are unemployed (Orloff, Dutton, Hass, and Ammar, 2003).

To address unemployment, refugees might enroll in public schools or vocational training institutions to gain education and job skills that could improve their family's financial situation (Fox, Benson, DeMaris, and Van Wyk, 2002). However, refugees often lack English literacy and writing skills (Fox et al., 2002). Within Sudanese culture, men are traditionally responsible for providing for and meeting the needs of their families, regardless of their job status (Keller and Brennan, 2007; Johnson and Stoll, 2013). Despite limited financial resources and low-paying jobs, there might be a sense of obligation to send remittances to relatives in Sudan (Johnson and Stoll, 2008). These challenges could cause significant stress for refugee men, leading them to feel incompetent when they cannot meet cultural expectations, potentially manifesting as IPV towards their wives and families (Orloff et al., 2003; Darvishpour, 2002).

*2.3. Cultural Challenges*

Keller and Brennan (2007) suggest that Sudanese refugee women may have internalized a perception of subordination to their husbands, potentially normalizing the frequent mistreatment or abuse they endure. Men within this community might view women and children as property, believing it acceptable to abuse them (Gustafson and Iluebey 2013). In specific Sudanese communities, women may be strongly discouraged from seeking divorce. If a wife suggests divorce, her husband or society might reject the notion (Ahmed and Elmardi 2005). Conversely, if a husband desires a divorce, the woman typically may not be permitted to oppose it, as Sudanese society often blames women for the dissolution of the marriage (Ahmed and Elmardi 2005; Gustafson and Iluebey 2013).

Society generally may deem it unacceptable for women to request a divorce and might expect them to remain in the marriage, even in the face of abuse. Additionally, women could be discouraged from living independently; if divorced, they often face social isolation, including from their own

families (Ahmed and Elmardi 2005). If a woman files for divorce and her husband consents, he might retain all rights over family property, and the woman may leave without any items or personal belongings. Furthermore, women often lose custody of their children or the right to visit them post-divorce (Keller and Brennan 2007).

Consequently, women might fear the repercussions of separation or divorce, even when seeking refuge from abusive partners. The controlling nature of men could lead Sudanese refugee victims of IPV to be less cooperative with law enforcement, particularly in communities with mandatory arrest laws or with service providers. Many Sudanese refugees, especially IPV victims, might be unaware of their legal rights in the United States (Keller and Brennan 2007). These circumstances could cause refugee women to believe the abuse is their fault, resulting in feelings of shame (Keller and Brennan 2007).

## 3. Materials and Methods

### 3.1. Location and Participants

The study was conducted within a Sudanese refugee community in the Great Plains region of the United States. This community originated in the 1990s amidst the civil war between North and South Sudan, and its population has steadily grown since then. A significant population surge occurred following the outbreak of conflict in Darfur in 2003 (Reyna 2010). Although exact figures are unspecified, estimates place the community's population at several thousand residents. The study sample comprised 20 adults, 13 men (65%) and seven women (35%). These adults represented fifteen different Sudanese tribes from various regions of Sudan, including western, eastern, northern, and southern areas. Most participants identified themselves as Muslim (n = 13), while the remaining identified as Christian (n = 7).

Regarding marital status, half of the participants were married (n = 10), with smaller proportions identifying as single (n = 5) or divorced (n = 5). The age range of participants varied from 26 to over 61 years old, with 75 percent falling between the ages of thirty and fifty. In terms of duration of residence in the United States, the largest group of participants reported living in the country for 1-5 years (n = 7). Other participants indicated durations of less than one year (n = 3), 5-10 years (n = 5), and more than ten years (n = 5). Education levels among participants were diverse, with a significant number having less than a high school education (n = 8). In contrast, an equal number possessed either a college degree (n = 8) or a high school diploma (n = 5).

### 3.2. Design and Procedure

Key informants and community leaders experienced in snowball sampling played crucial roles in this research. These individuals, representing diverse religions, ages, tribes, and regions of Sudan, were instrumental in promoting the study among community members. Extensive site visits were conducted within the refugee community to engage with gatekeepers. The primary author, a community member, actively participated in social and public events attended by community leaders and members. During these gatherings, the researcher interacted with interested individuals, addressing their queries and encouraging referrals of friends or family members to participate in the study.

Interviews were scheduled between January and February 2015, with participants selecting their preferred interview locations. Before each interview, participants received detailed explanations about the study's objectives. They were informed of their rights to decline to answer specific questions or terminate the interview at any point. Confidentiality was assured by anonymizing participants using an ID number and gender while omitting details such as tribe, region, or pseudonym. Interviews typically ranged from 60 to 120 minutes.

The primary author conducted individual interviews using a loosely structured interview guide. The questions aimed to explore the impact of Sudanese traditions on IPV and how these traditions and norms intersect with social factors such as refugee status, education, employment, resettlement challenges, and language barriers, influencing IPV dynamics in this community. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, particularly regarding female participants' consent to share their IPV experiences,

the unit of analysis focused on the community rather than individual narratives. Participants often began discussions at the community level before delving into personal experiences. From an ecological perspective, our analysis extends beyond individual participants to incorporate Sudanese society's social and cultural context.

The interview instrument was initially crafted in English, translated into Arabic, and then back-translated to ensure accuracy and consistency. Interviews were conducted in the participants' preferred language, with 16 conducted in Arabic and 4 in English. Following the interviews, transcriptions, and translations into English were meticulously carried out. Individual interviews were preferred due to concerns about privacy and confidentiality. During site visits, many refugee women and men expressed reluctance to disclose their identities and information to other participants. Many women were unwilling to participate in focus groups. In studies involving IPV, participants may hesitate to join group discussions, fearing the exposure of their identities, which results in insecurity (Kataoka, Yaju, Eto, et al. 2010).

### 3.3. Data Analysis

Narrative and content analysis explored IPV-related themes, explicitly focusing on the intersection of culture with education, employment, and financial decisions. All interview data were transcribed immediately after each interview, allowing the analysis process to begin promptly. Early transcription and summarization facilitated the classification of similar or repeated responses and helped organize and contextualize unexpected comments and notes, examining their relevance to the research's central question. After each interview, the researcher carefully matched and reviewed tapes and notes to ensure recording accuracy. Once transcribed, the tapes were erased. The transcribed data were then entered into NVivo, a qualitative analysis software program, and analyzed using a grounded theory approach.

The coding process began with initial coding, where broad themes were identified, and the researchers familiarized themselves with the data by reading the transcripts. Regular meetings were held to discuss the data, followed by individual coding of data segments. Discrepancies in coding were discussed, and the coding process was repeated until there were no disagreements or mismatches. Impressions and themes were compared, and findings were reviewed after each coding segment. A codebook was then developed, and intercoder reliability was established.

### 4. Results

Our analysis identified various categories and subcategories, including education, resettlement, and financial issues (further divided into financial stress and remittances). Other categories included employment, cultural differences, work stress, gender role changes, and the upholding of traditional norms, such as justifying wife-beating and controlling partners. Additionally, psychological aggression emerged as a category, with subcategories such as insulting and swearing at partners. Physical assault was another category, with subcategories like punching or hitting a partner.

A significant finding was the male partners' intent to control and claim ownership over their spouses and family resources. This could be conceptualized through the male partner's assertion of ownership and perception of the family as his property, compounded by his financial inability to support the family. Additionally, the man might use the female partner's disobedience to justify his behavior.

Participants suggested that men's claims of ownership and control over family resources could be a primary factor contributing to IPV within their community. One participant stated, "The most important factor causing spousal conflicts in our community is men's claim of ownership and control over financial issues. Men like having control, and women resent that" (participant 3, female). Another respondent illustrated, "Sometimes the woman does not heed her husband's words. So, you hit her when she repeatedly disobeys. You beat her to discipline her. If she does not listen to her husband, people say she is bad; she does not listen" (respondent 13, male). These statements may indicate that a mentality of ownership and entitlement over women exacerbates IPV in this community.

While this attitude can be observed in various societies, including some developed countries, it appears particularly pronounced in societies such as the Sudanese. Participants have suggested that,

within Sudanese cultures, a woman who does not comply with her husband's directives may be perceived negatively. The prevailing cultural expectation is that a virtuous woman should not question or disobey her husband but instead listen to and follow his instructions. Consequently, even if women experience IPV, they might feel pressured to stay in the relationship to avoid being judged as immoral.

A third respondent suggested that IPV might emerge when a husband struggles to provide financially for his family. He noted, "Family discussions involve many facets. Sometimes, the husband may be unable to meet the family's needs, the wife might not comply with his expectations, and he may rationalize using physical discipline" (participant 10, male). Participants highlighted the importance of men's control over family matters, particularly financial resources, which can lead to marital conflicts and potentially result in IPV.

Furthermore, three additional themes appeared during the discussions. Participants implied that IPV could be linked to issues related to education, employment, and financial decisions.

### 4.1. Education

Men and women generally believe there is a connection between men's education and IPV, although this connection is complex and multifaceted. Some participants felt that education could positively influence male partners' attitudes and behaviors by fostering better mutual understanding between spouses, which might reduce disagreements and IPV. As one man noted, "Education usually has a positive effect. An educated person can navigate conflicts by understanding their root causes with their spouse and analyzing them before reacting" (Participant 10, male).

Conversely, another participant suggested that education may improve mutual understanding and increase awareness of legal consequences. He said, "Education has a positive impact. An educated person is aware of the country's laws and understands the repercussions of breaking them" (Participant 5, male). This viewpoint implies that education might deter men from engaging in illegal behavior against their partners, especially in the U.S.

While some participants acknowledged that education could potentially reduce IPV perpetrated by men, they also warned that this outcome is not guaranteed. This caution was particularly prevalent among women. For instance, one woman elaborated, "Education has a positive impact because educated individuals tend to handle issues wisely. Although not all educated individuals think positively, most use their education to overcome challenges" (Participant 15, female). This suggests that education may influence the behavior and attitudes of Sudanese refugee men toward their partners, but it is not a definitive solution.

Participants also noted that men's attitudes and education significantly shape their behaviors and perceptions. However, certain deeply ingrained attitudes related to entitlement and ownership of women might limit the effectiveness of education. One participant reflected, "Education brings about positive change, but its impact depends on the cultural environment in which the man originates and resides" (Participant 4, male).

The relationship between education and IPV is indeed intricate. Some respondents observed that education could be misused as a tool for control. They described scenarios where a more educated man might exploit his education to assert dominance, enforcing rules and demands upon his wife. This could include insults or threats if she resists or challenges his control over family resources and household decisions. As one participant noted, "In some cases, an educated person may assault or exploit his wife and try to control her. But, in some families, an educated man can understand his wife better than an uneducated person" (Participant 13, female). Another female respondent added:

"Sometimes, education may enable a man to deal with his wife wisely. So, even if the problem is significant, using the wisdom gained through education can help resolve it. However, education can also make the man worse. An educated man may devalue his wife, view himself as superior, and consider her inferior. If she questions him, he may respond in a way that makes her feel diminished, which can be very disheartening" (Participant 15, female).

From the participants' statements, it is evident that the impact of education on the behavior and attitudes of Sudanese refugee men towards their partners is primarily determined by individual

morals and attitudes. Education might enhance a male partner's awareness, aiding in resolving spousal conflicts more effectively. However, it does not always lead to increased awareness; in some cases, it might cause a man to devalue his partner, especially if she is less educated. This could heighten the risk of IPV. Consequently, the morals and attitudes of the male partner are critical factors influencing the risk of IPV, as education alone might not significantly affect men's awareness or behavior regarding IPV.

> "Education affects a little bit. It may or may not because it depends on the person's understanding of marital and life issues. You can be well-educated but still lack a better knowledge of life. Even if well-educated, you may act like an uneducated person," stated Participant 14 (female).

Moreover, entitlement and ownership are so pervasive that addressing these cultural issues is crucial for improving how men treat women. Participants also highlighted that men with college degrees and prestigious professional jobs in Sudan often face significant distress upon arriving in the U.S., where their qualifications are frequently not recognized. These refugees and immigrants, who initially hoped to enhance their financial situation and support their families both in the U.S. and back in Sudan, often find themselves working in low-paying jobs that require no more than a high school diploma.

As one participant noted, "Sometimes refugees say, 'Why did I come to this country?'" (Participant 7, female). Educated men in the community experience additional stress as their qualifications go unrecognized, leading to feelings of hopelessness and affecting their behavior toward their partners.

### 4.2. Employment

The division of labor within Sudanese families is traditionally structured along gender lines, with women typically managing household duties while men work outside the home (Orloff et al., 2003). However, this dynamic often shifts when Sudanese couples immigrate to the United States, where both partners usually need to work. Such a shift can introduce significant stress and may increase the risk of IPV among refugee couples (Lainof and Elsea, 2004). Despite both partners working, there is often an expectation that women will continue to handle domestic responsibilities, a belief deeply rooted in their cultural background (Bellinger, 2013; Lainof and Elsea, 2004).

The situation may become even more strained if the husband is unemployed or unable to secure stable employment. Respondents have noted that unemployment or low-paying jobs can increase IPV's likelihood. One male respondent pointed out:

> "Because of the husband's low income, he cannot meet his family's needs. This could lead to differences between couples because the husband is psychologically stressed. It happens a lot in our community in Sudan and here [in the United States]" (participant 4, male).

Financial strain from insufficient income can exacerbate stress for husbands, which may, in turn, manifest as abusive behavior towards their wives. Some respondents mentioned that a wife's lack of understanding regarding her husband's stress over employment could lead to spousal conflicts and IPV. Wives' questions or complaints about financial issues are sometimes perceived as insults by husbands, leading to anger. Another male respondent elaborated:

> "For some people, lack of income might become a problem. When the man has a low income, he cannot fulfill his family's needs, while the wife keeps asking for things he cannot afford. Besides, the man gets stressed at work, and upon his arrival home, the wife begins asking questions about the demands she has made. He might become frustrated. In this case, the arguments between the couples will get heated, and the stress will increase" (participant 18, male).

Another participant highlighted the direct impact of job status and poverty on men's behavior toward their partners, noting, "Job status and poverty significantly affect men's behavior toward their

partners. Insufficient financial resources may cause disagreements, leading the husband to insult and swear at his partner" (participant 3, male). Another respondent succinctly related a livable income to IPV, stating, "The person who has a good job has fewer problems in his family" (participant 5, male). This underscores the crucial role that employment status plays in mitigating conflict and tension within the Sudanese refugee community.

Employment status profoundly influences the behavior of refugee men. Those unemployed or who hold low-paying jobs due to insufficient skills and training often struggle to meet their household needs. Respondents noted that financial responsibilities differ between the host country and their countries of origin. In Sudan, a male partner's income usually covers his family's basic needs. However, a male partner lacking job skills in the United States often falls short of meeting his family's needs. This financial strain, coupled with the challenges of resettlement, acculturation, and language barriers, places immense stress on men, impacting their relationships with their partners.

Education, job status, and men's attitudes toward their partners are interconnected factors that significantly contribute to IPV within their community. Both men and women refugees frequently enroll in public schools or vocational training centers to acquire education and job skills to improve their families' financial situation. However, achieving this often requires basic English language skills, which many refugees lack (Fox, Benson, DeMaris, and Van Wyk, 2002). One woman shared:

> "Job status and education are interrelated. If you have a good job, it means you have a good education. If you have a good education, that means you are an open-minded person. Then, you will not use that behavior like swearing or mistreating your wife. Not all educated people treat their wives fairly, but most do" (participant 14, female).

Participants emphasized that securing a good job often depends on academic qualifications. They also noted that education helps refugee men better understand and cope with the challenges of adapting to new cultural and linguistic environments, affecting how they treat women.

### 4.3. Financial Decisions

In Sudanese refugee households, two primary financial issues appear to provoke spousal conflict: remittances and tax returns. Typically, Sudanese refugee men are expected to support their families financially, irrespective of their employment situation (Keller and Brennan, 2007; Johnson and Stoll, 2013). At the same time, these refugees are often under pressure to send remittances to relatives in Sudan, which can place a considerable financial burden on them. Despite limited resources, many respondents reported that the obligation to remit funds is a significant stressor. Employment opportunities for refugees are often insufficient, and the jobs available frequently do not provide adequate income. As a result, rather than saving wages for household expenses, both partners might regularly send remittances to their Sudanese relatives. One man explained:

> "Most of the problems in our community arise because both partners work and want to send money to their relatives in Sudan. This limits their financial resources to meet household needs, such as paying bills, feeding the children, and buying clothes" (Respondent 2, male).

This financial strain can lead to severe conflicts within families and the broader community. The management of tax return funds further complicates matters, as partners often have differing opinions on how these funds should be spent or distributed. In some cases, couples may file tax returns separately to avoid disputes. For example:

> "The wife might want to use the tax return money to change the furniture, renovate the house, or buy clothes for herself and her children. Meanwhile, the husband may wish to send the tax return money to his parents, saying, 'I want to send it to my mum or dad,' while the wife also wants to send it to her parents" (Respondent 7, male).

Such disagreements over tax return allocation often escalate, leading partners to seek mediation from community leaders. One community leader recounted advising a husband to allow his partner

to remit an equivalent amount to her relatives: "Where there is disagreement, you always ask them to work together. If you want to send money to your family, your wife should also be free to send it to hers" (Respondent 9, male).

Community leaders are crucial in resolving spousal conflicts within this community. Many respondents indicated that married couples in their community prefer contacting traditional leaders rather than the police when disputes arise. "The community leaders and elders will come to the lady and say how you called the police and why you called them. They blame the woman and say, "Why did you call the police; you should have called us first." (Participant 1, female). The respondent noted that the police lack understanding of their culture. "The police do not know our cultures, and they treat us like Americans" (Respondent 1, female). Another participant illustrates that their community members are reluctant to call the police in the events of IPV because of the fear that calling the police would only complicate the situation since the police do not understand their culture:

> "Whenever there is a problem, the relatives of both partners will be called. In Sudan, the man will call the parents or relatives of a female partner. They come and discuss and see who is guilty. Here [in the U.S.] is the same thing. Although the methods of solving this problem have changed in the U.S., the traditions and norms remain the same, unlike back home. I see it here in the U.S. For example, when I disagreed with my ex-husband, we never went to court, and I did not call the police because they would only make it more complicated. Although there was punching and beating between us, it never happened to call the police" (Respondent 16, female).

> Participants also highlighted the issue of men exerting control over their partners and family finances: "The man wants to control his wife and the family resources. He wants to make all decisions by himself. However, some participants refuse to compromise and seek the mediation of a community leader. Some men send money to Sudan from their earnings or tax returns without informing their wives" (Respondent 13, female).

These observations are consistent with the findings of Brownridge and Halli (2002), who argue that men in patriarchal societies often use their authority to dominate their spouses and control family finances.

Two financial issues catalyze conflict within Sudanese refugee households: remittances and tax returns. Sudanese refugee men are typically responsible for meeting their families' financial needs, regardless of their employment status (Keller and Brennan, 2007; Johnson and Stoll 2013). Concurrently, these refugees are also compelled to send remittances to relatives in Sudan, creating an enormous financial strain. Despite their limited resources, respondents indicated that the obligation to remit funds was a significant stressor. Employment opportunities for refugees are often inadequate, and many available jobs do not provide sufficient income. Consequently, instead of saving wages for household needs, each partner frequently sends remittances to their Sudanese relatives. One man elucidates:

> Most of the problems in our community arise because both partners work and want to send money to their relatives in Sudan. This limits their financial resources to meet household needs, such as paying bills, feeding the children, and buying clothes (Respondent 2, male).

This financial strain generates serious conflict within the community and families. Furthermore, how couples manage tax return funds exacerbates tensions. Partners often have divergent views on how to spend or distribute these funds, intensifying conflicts to the extent that some couples file tax returns separately to avoid disputes. For instance:

> The wife might want to use the tax return money to change the furniture, renovate the house, or buy clothes for herself and her children. Meanwhile, the husband may wish to send the tax return money to his parents, saying, 'I want to send it to my mum or dad,' while the wife also wants to send it to her parents (Respondent 7, male).

Such disagreements over tax return distribution frequently escalate, prompting partners to seek intervention from community leaders. A community leader recounted often advising the husband to allow his partner to remit an equivalent amount to her relatives: "Where there is disagreement, you always ask them to work together. If you want to send money to your family, your wife should also be free to send it to hers" (Respondent 9, male).

Community leaders play a pivotal role in resolving spousal conflicts within this community. As such, many respondents indicated that community members prefer contacting their traditional leaders rather than the police when disputes arise. Participants also highlighted the issue of men exerting control over their partners and family finances: "The man wants to control his wife and the family resources. He wants to make all decisions by himself. However, some participants refuse to compromise and seek the mediation of a community leader. Some men send money to Sudan from their earnings or tax returns without informing their wives" (Respondent 13, female).

These accounts align with the findings of Brownridge and Halli (2002), who argue that men in patriarchal societies wield their authority to dominate their spouses and control family finances.

## 5. Discussion

The study highlights several significant themes related to the meanings and implications of IPV within the Sudanese refugee community. These themes are control, ownership, financial strain, education, employment, and cultural expectations.

Participants indicated that male partners asserting control and ownership over spouses and family resources is a primary factor contributing to IPV. This dynamic is deeply ingrained in cultural expectations, where men are perceived as heads of households with authority over financial and familial decisions. Female participants emphasized that men's desire to control financial matters often leads to conflicts. Male respondents justified their actions as necessary for discipline and maintaining order, aligning with broader societal norms in Sudanese culture, where a woman's disobedience is judged harshly, compelling women to stay in abusive relationships to avoid social stigma.

Financial strain emerged as a crucial factor in marital conflicts and IPV. Participants noted that a husband's inability to provide for his family financially often leads to increased stress and abusive behavior. This challenge is further compounded for Sudanese refugees in the U.S., who often face underemployment and issues regarding the recognition of their qualifications. These observations align with previous research suggesting that the vulnerability of refugee women and the stress associated with resettlement contribute to IPV (Menjivar and Salcido 2002).

Education was discussed as a double-edged sword in its impact on IPV. While some participants believed education fosters better mutual understanding and legal awareness, potentially reducing IPV, others cautioned that education alone does not guarantee positive behavior changes. Deeply ingrained cultural attitudes might limit the positive influence of education. This suggests that while education can be beneficial, it is not a panacea for addressing IPV without tackling cultural norms. This contradicts the finding (Ayubi and Satyen 2024) that education level affects men's attitudes towards IPV; they found that IPV is more prevalent among male partners with low education levels.

The shift in traditional gender roles due to the necessity for both partners to work in the U.S. also contributes to marital stress and IPV. Men's unemployment or low-paying jobs exacerbate this issue, leading to psychological stress and conflicts. The expectation that women manage domestic responsibilities despite also working outside the home creates additional pressure and potential conflicts. This shift from traditional gender roles can increase IPV risk as men struggle to adapt to new socio-economic dynamics.

Disagreements over financial decisions, particularly regarding remittances and tax returns, were highlighted as significant stressors within Sudanese refugee households. Participants noted that the obligation to send money to relatives in Sudan often strains household finances, leading to conflicts. These financial pressures are compounded by differing opinions on allocating tax return funds, with couples often seeking mediation from community leaders to resolve disputes. Consistent with previous studies (Menjivar and Salcido 2002; Orloff et al. 2003; Bhuyan and Senturia 2005; Gustafson and Iluebey 2013; Mose and Gillum 2016), this study underscores that difficulties related to coping,

adaptation, changes in gender roles, and cultural and language barriers tend to heighten the incidence of IPV among refugee men.

*Study Limitations*

The study has three limitations: 1) Small Sample Size (20 Participants): Despite efforts to include diverse responses, some key informants and community leaders chose not to participate. This was notably common among Muslim women, who were unable to sit with a male interviewer due to religious beliefs, and among women who could not obtain permission from their husbands. Consequently, the sample comprises 13 men and seven women, leading to an imbalance in representation. Future research might benefit from including an Arabic-speaking Muslim female researcher to better access this population. 2) Limited Generalizability: While these findings may not be generalizable to all Sudanese refugees in the US or other African refugees, qualitative research typically does not aim for broad generalizability (Creswell, 2012). However, the diverse sample—encompassing men and women, Muslims and Christians, and members of fifteen Sudanese tribes—offers a nuanced examination of community perceptions of IPV within the Sudanese refugee community in the Great Plains. 3) Methodological Constraints: Although focus groups could have yielded more robust discussions, individual interviews were chosen due to concerns about privacy and confidentiality. Several refugee women and men expressed concerns during site visits about disclosing their identity and the information they provided to other participants.

*Implications for Research and Intervention*

Although the sample size in this study was relatively small, the perceptions and reasons for IPV among participants were notably consistent. The Sudanese refugee community examined here could benefit from educational initiatives about their rights and U.S. laws, provided in English and Arabic. While raising awareness about legal boundaries is essential, it is equally important to foster a broader community shift in gender norms and attitudes toward women. Leaders from community organizations, religious institutions, political spheres, and government agencies should actively condemn spousal violence and the subordination of women (Vandello & Cohen, 2004).

Respondents in the study expressed mistrust of authorities, language barriers, and limited legal knowledge. This mistrust often stems from fear that the police would not understand their culture and from previous experiences in their home countries where authorities might have been corrupt or ineffective. This skepticism makes it challenging for refugee women to communicate their needs and understand the resources available to them. The language gap further complicates their ability to seek help or report incidents of IPV effectively. Moreover, a lack of knowledge about legal rights and the legal system in the U.S. exacerbates the problem, as many people may not be aware of the protections and services available to IPV victims.

Due to a combination of mistrust, language barriers, and limited legal knowledge, there is a notably low rate of reporting IPV incidents among the Sudanese refugee community in the Great Plains. Both victims and perpetrators of IPV may fear the repercussions of contacting authorities, either because they do not trust the authorities to provide help or because the victims do not know how to report the abuse. Previous studies (Keller & Brennan, 2007; Green, Satyen, & Toumbourou, 2024) have highlighted the issue of underreported IPV cases among refugee communities. Minor assaults or injuries, in particular, might not be seen as severe enough to warrant reporting, leading many instances of IPV to go unnoticed and unaddressed.

Law enforcement faces challenges due to refugees' reluctance to report domestic violence and crime, often driven by a desire to maintain a positive family image (Keller & Brennan, 2007). Strong kinship ties and close community relationships within refugee populations can deter victims from seeking help (Gustafson & Iluebey, 2013). To address these issues, law enforcement agencies might consider recruiting officers from within the refugee community, providing cultural training, recruiting Arabic-speaking officers, and ensuring access to Arabic translators.

This discussion highlights the multifaceted challenges that refugee communities in the U.S. face when dealing with IPV. Perceived mistrust, language barriers, and limited legal knowledge

contribute to low reporting rates of IPV incidents, leaving many victims without the help they need. Additionally, the intersection of cultural context and social factors, such as education level, employment status, and financial strains, may influence refugee men's attitudes toward IPV.

Further research is needed to specifically investigate the factors that motivate refugee women to prefer the intervention of their traditional leaders over that of the police during instances of IPV. Some participants indicated that they fear for the stability of their families, but a comprehensive understanding of the issue requires more investigation. Another area for future research is the challenges refugee women face following the imprisonment of their husbands. Participants noted that refugee women encounter additional difficulties when their partners are arrested by law enforcement in cases of IPV.

## Conclusions

The exploratory discussions reveal that IPV within the Sudanese refugee community is multifaceted, influenced by cultural norms, financial stress, education, and employment status. The deeply ingrained cultural attitudes regarding male control and ownership over family resources significantly contribute to IPV. While education has the potential to mitigate these behaviors, its impact is limited by the cultural context.

Financial strain due to underemployment and the obligation to support relatives in Sudan exacerbates marital conflicts, leading to IPV. The shift in gender roles and expectations in the U.S. further complicates this dynamic, increasing stress and the potential for violence. Effective interventions must address these interconnected factors. Community-based approaches involving education, financial support, and cultural sensitivity are crucial. Additionally, empowering women and promoting mutual respect and shared decision-making within households can help reduce the prevalence of IPV in this community.

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