

# Sudanese "Lost Boys" and Their Interactions with the Criminal Justice System in Queensland Australia

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper examines the challenges faced by Sudanese youth who have had interactions with the criminal justice system in Queensland Australia. The majority of youth who took part in the study identified themselves as "Lost Boys" which is the name given to the groups of over 20,000 boys of the Nuer and Dinka ethnic groups who were displaced and/or orphaned during the Second Sudanese Civil War (1983-2005).*

**Keywords:** Sudanese youth, criminal justice system, ethnic minorities.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the challenges faced by Sudanese youth who have had interactions with the criminal justice system in Queensland Australia. The majority of youth who took part in the study identified themselves as "Lost Boys" which is the name given to the groups of over 20,000 boys of the Nuer and Dinka ethnic groups who were displaced and/or orphaned during the Second Sudanese Civil War (1983-2005).

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Most of these youth were orphaned when government troops and government-sponsored militias systematically attacked villages in southern Sudan, killing many of the inhabitants. Many avoided capture or death because they were away from their villages tending cattle and were able to flee and hide in the dense African bush. The majority of Lost Boys traveled by foot in search of safe refuge, on a journey that carried them over a thousand miles across three countries to refugee camps where they resided in Ethiopia and Kenya. Many died along the way due to starvation, dehydration, sickness and disease. In 2001, as part of a program established by the United States Government and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), approximately 3800 Lost Boys were allowed to resettle in the United States. At the same time a smaller number of young Sudanese were awarded refugee status in Australia in 2001-2002 and were initially located in the major cities of Melbourne, Sydney, Perth and Brisbane.

Queensland was the third largest settlement state in Australia. Since 2002 to June 2007 there were 6247 Sudanese resettled in Queensland under the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) humanitarian settlement program. According to DIAC 2007 data the three major settlement destinations were Brisbane, Logan/Beenleigh/Woodbridge, Toowoomba. The regional city of Townsville was fourth on the list. Over time Sudanese people have outweighed people from other African nations who have gain entry into the country under the humanitarian settlement program during this period (DIAC, 2007).

### **ETHNIC MINORITY YOUTH AND THEIR INTERACTIONS WITH THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSETM**

As with previous first generations of immigrant groups such as Vietnamese in the 1970's, Sudanese refugees have attracted considerable attention and debate concerning the extent to which they have successfully integrated into Australian society as well as the degree to which they represent a 'social problem'. For instance, there was an initial concern about whether racial vilification against Sudanese admitted into Australia was taking place (Coventry and Dawes, 2006). More recently, media coverage has focused on the alleged involvement of Sudanese young men, akin to LA rap-style gangs, as being the perpetrators of crime and social disorder. In addition some politicians, right wing hate groups and some academics have made public content which has constructed the Lost Boys as troublesome and/or criminogenic due to their experiences with violence in war torn Sudan.

The research focus on young people from ethnic or Indigenous backgrounds in terms of their interactions with the criminal justice system is not new. Initially much of the Australian criminological and policing scholarship has been directed at the intersections between police and Indigenous Australians (Cunneen, 2001). Policing and criminal justice practices related to interactions with Indigenous people has been the focus of various inquiries dating back to the early colonial period. Finnane's (1994) research on the policing of Indigenous communities in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is one example of this research. More recently sociologists and criminologists in Australia have examined the precipitating factors which has led to the current "over representation problem" of Indigenous youth in the juvenile justice system.

Cunneen and Robb's (1987) study in rural NSW identified a high degree of hostility between Indigenous youth and police, and that policing was mostly directed towards the Indigenous population. Another study in North Queensland was carried out by Hil and Dawes (2000) which examined juvenile crime and vigilantism in Townsville and found that the "crime problem" was synonymous with the presence of Indigenous youth in their neighborhood. Although the study only focused on Townsville it is important because it pointed to the "racialisation of crime". This concept was utilized in another North Queensland study on young Indigenous youth who steal cars to joyride (Dawes, 2002). Dawes concluded that for many Indigenous youth; "joyriding may be interpreted as a form of resistance to their social and economic marginalization in society" (p.207).

There have been important studies conducted in Queensland that investigate criminal trajectories from adolescence through to adulthood. A study by (Lynch, Buckman & Krenske, 2003) found that Indigenous youth were more likely to progress to the adult system than non-Indigenous young people. Using the same data set, Brame, Mazerolle and Piquero (2010) examined the trajectories of young people involved in crime. A major outcome of the research was that male

Indigenous offenders who had high levels of offending as adolescents were more likely to offend in adulthood compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts.

Another strand of research has focused on the experiences of refugee or immigrant young people who also tend to have greater interactions with the police, courts and juvenile detention centres compared to non-ethnic youth. For example research by Pickering (2008) raised critical concerns about the criminalisation and demonization of refugees in Australia. Her analysis

pointed to the intertwining of media depictions of race, anxieties about the 'other', particularly post-911, and the social construction of 'new and undeserving' criminals. This broader context was supported by observations made by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC, 2004), which identified the complexities of immigrant experiences including that of discrimination, vilification and prejudice across Australian communities. This report highlighted the importance of considering complex factors involving political, economic, cultural and social factors which need to be considered when analyzing refugees attempts at integrating into Australian society.

However despite some of the perceived problems experienced by refugees when arriving in Australia, there was less support for the assertion that these youth were more criminogenic than other cohorts of young people. Poynting (2008: 119) for example stated that a statistical connection with ethnic minority crime is 'scant', that the data collection has been 'patchy in quality' and 'haphazard' which indicated that ethnic crime was 'disproportionately low'. He suggested 'moral panics'(Cohen, 1972) regarding ethnic 'gangs' and crime was the product of sensationalized media reportage which amplified the extent of the "refugee problem" to the rest of the community.

One common factor cited in the sociological and criminological literature which contributed to increased interactions between police and ethnic youth was due to how these youth used public spaces (White, 1995). Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2008) argued that African immigrants are highly visible due to their stature, skin- colour, and kinship-based social practices (for instance seeking to congregate in large numbers in public places). This rendered them as more likely to come into contact with the police particularly if they congregated in large male dominated groups in public spaces.

What is clear with regard to Sudanese refugees is their high visibility in a 'white nation' (Hage 1998), the lack of existing 'assimilability' factors such as 'invisibility' and established community ties, language, education and the limits placed on the 'advantageous self-identification or self inclusion' that exists for white refugees. From this situation Colic-Peisker (2005) stated that these factors ensure Sudanese experience additional challenges to obtain 'self inclusion' let alone true social inclusion in Australian society.

Relationships between police and minority groups is therefore seen as a "universal, pervasive and continuing problem" (Neyroud and Beckley, 2001:159). Central to this issue was the need to ensure that trust is

established between police and different minority groups that exist in any country. As the Macpherson inquiry in the UK indicated, "seeking to achieve trust and confidence through a demonstration of fairness will not in itself be sufficient. It must be accompanied by a vigorous pursuit of openness and accountability" (para.46-32).

A recent DIAC report on regional settlement of humanitarian immigrants highlighted the importance of social capital to successful settlement of refugees. In that report, social capital was measured through such variables as; 'public safety, vandalism and crime' (as well as other measures such as health, happiness and economics). Further, "these indicators are extremely important to their successful settlement" (DIAC, 2007: 8). However, the same report identified that: "To date there is limited research into the experiences of humanitarian entrants living in regional and rural Australia or the impacts of their settlement on the established community, the services and economics of the region" (p.7).

In addition through interviews and focus groups African refugees the DIAC report did identify that there were some concerns that; "police services varied widely across the different regions", that some interviewees believed; "police discriminate against black Africans", that too little was being done; "to combat racism or harassment from the broader community" leading to the need to enhance; "fair and equitable access to the justice systems" (in particular, through access to appropriate interpreting services) and the necessity to develop "Methods for identifying and encouraging good policing practices".

DIAC is not alone in expressing concerns about the paucity of research in this area. The criminological literature also indicated that the research record of "racial/ethnic/immigrant group attitudes towards the criminal justice system and the police" is limited, though such research generally finds that such groups have different attitudes to the dominant population (Martinez 2007: 57; Weitzer and Tuch 2005).

In addition, the Victoria Multicultural Commission and Multicultural Affairs Queensland funded research into 'the global crisis events on community relations in multicultural Australia' (Bouma et al 2007). This report and associated 'Toolkits' identified that:

Initiatives aimed at promoting harmonious community relations ... seem to be most successful when relationships between Governments and CALD communities are forged; when communities are consulted on policies; and when stakeholder

networks are established to facilitate dialogue and effective communication ( Bouma et al 2007:10).

In summary it may well be that some Sudanese young people do represent 'trouble' in earlier phases of the criminal justice system. For instance, Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2008) pointed to troublesome relationships between low socio-economic status and highly visible African and Indigenous Australian young people. For these groups, material competition and symbolic resources lie at the heart of such tensions. However there is scant knowledge about how young Sudanese interact with the criminal justice system in Queensland and the degree to which they are the perpetrators or victims of crime. Furthermore there is less data which sheds light about how Sudanese youth interact with the criminal justice system from their perspective.

## **THE RESEARCH STUDY**

The research reported in this paper is an attempt to provide some insights about this perceived problem from the perspective of young Sudanese who were formerly known as the Lost Boys. As such it is the first study that attempts to highlight the previously silenced voices of these young people. The data contained in this paper is derived from a larger study (Coventry, Dawes, Moston & Palmer, 2010) which explored the experiences of Sudanese Australians in relation to crime and the Queensland criminal justice system, particularly with the Queensland Police Service (QPS). The project triangulated data from a number of sources consisting on an analysis of 222 media reports about Sudanese people from 2000-2009. In addition 380 Sudanese community surveys were conducted over three cities in Queensland while Queensland police data bases were analysed relating to arrest/charges victim data pertaining to Sudanese from 2000-2009. Finally, qualitative data was obtained through focus group interviews with 14 Queensland Police personnel while other focus group interviews were conducted across three sites with Sudanese male elders, female elders and young people.

The data from the focus group interviews with young Sudanese forms the basis of this paper. In terms of this cohort the major focus of the interviews was to provide increased understandings about the:

1. reactions of young Sudanese to the ways they were constructed by the media as troublesome and belonging to criminal youth gangs.
2. perceptions of young Sudanese in terms of the types of interactions they experienced with police.

3. extent to which young Sudanese perceived whether they were the perpetrators or victims of crime in Queensland.

## **THE VOICES OF THE LOST BOYS**

An analysis of the interview data with young Sudanese people resulted in three major themes relating to how they were constructed as the perpetrators of crime by the media, their use of public spaces and the resulting interactions they had with police. Each of these themes will be discussed with the reference to some of the rich descriptive data obtained from the interviews with these young people.

### **Victims of Negative Media Reports**

The youth focus group members perceived that inaccurate and inflated media reports in the local and national press had produced a "moral panic" about young Sudanese and their purported involvement in criminal activity. Sudanese young people perceived that public concerns which were whipped up by the media created a Sudanese youth "problem" which had resulted in higher police interactions with this cohort. Two young people from Brisbane described how public perceptions about Sudanese, youth based on their previous experiences in Sudan, was one reason why they had more contact with police than non-Sudanese youth. This account illustrates how members of the community were fearful about interacting with groups of Sudanese youth in public spaces:

They should, they should not judge just our side, we're not a bad people or our youth are not bad, there's nothing to say that Sudanese are the worst people because the media always says that Sudanese they're this, they're this, they're this, you know but actually we're not. My cousin and some other friends were walking down the road near our house one day and there was an old lady in front of us. She turned around and saw us and screamed and run off into another house. Next the police car pulled us over and told us to get in the car and we end up at the police station. I did not understand but they said we followed that old lady. But we did nothing but they don't ever believe us. They think we are all troublemakers. But this is not true.

The youth also identified inflammatory comments made in the media by prominent academics and politicians which fuelled negative public responses about Sudanese people and their purported links to crime. There was a common perception that Sudanese lacked a voice to refute these

claims which constituted an unequal balance of power relations in terms of responding to such criticisms:

Yes I'd just like to let you know that the problem of Sudanese crime has been like I said, the Sudanese are being targeted by Australian community by saying that the Sudanese are the people who make the crime like for example it's happened in New South Wales in the University of Macquarie, the Professor wrote a sentence about Sudanese and make a comment about Sudanese how bad they are and thus when other communities say that they are Sudanese the Police are accepting that without checking their licence and the details of the background of the other communities. So what I say is this is what the Australian communities are hitting us in order that other communities depend on Sudanese. Coming today, we Sudanese defend ourselves, there's no way we can defend ourselves but we can say to Australia that we commit to that. Australian community have to make sure that they are Sudanese like they say they are because when we came to Australia everyone had his own report on the government that is here even your driving licence you have to have your own report that you are Sudanese or you are from somewhere different but the Australia community, they still enforcing that and they are accepting that and when I said I came from Sudan, they accepted that but they make some newspapers about some Sudanese are committing crime and that's what increasing the crime of Sudanese.

### **Sudanese Youth and their Presence in Public Spaces**

In addition Sudanese young people perceived that they were unfairly targeted by police as the perpetrators of crime. Most of these incidents took place in public spaces where groups of Sudanese congregated and were more visible. The youth perceived that they had more interactions with police than other young Australians due to their physical appearance and the way they dressed. A common experience for young people was to be stopped by police and searched for weapons or stolen property. A number of youth reported that police often accused them of being members of organised gangs based purely on their appearance and demeanour. In one case a group of Sudanese were accused of having links with criminal African-American gangs because of their style of dress. One young person observed that popular media images of

African American gang culture influenced the way the community perceived groups of Sudanese youth in public spaces:



I think this is a problem and I think we are connected to the other black society like America. But we are living here in Australia and the culture you see in the movies is not the Sudanese culture here in Australia. So we should not be connected to American culture with gangs and that, that's American culture. Number two the judicial system is based on the media and that too is based on American culture and American popular culture. So Sudanese are seen as troublemakers, thieves and the like. We are not like that at all.

Another youth rationalized that police were more likely to intervene when they saw Sudanese youth in public spaces due to the tendency of young people to gather in large numbers which was a feature of the collective nature of Sudanese culture. He argued that Sudanese gathered in large groups for protection from other youth groups and not due to the popular conception that they were organized gangs who were threats to the rest of society:

Yeah. You know like back home, not just Sudanese as African, we live in like - we like to be together all the time so that doesn't mean if we are 5, 6 or 7 like we are a gang or something - that's our way of living, that's the way we live back home. We go out in big groups so we can look after each other in case we meet another group. We don't want to hurt anyone or cause trouble because we are not like that.

In addition there were high levels of resentment among the Sudanese interviewees about how police applied the laws to them in such a way as to exclude them from public spaces. Some accounts show that young people were not given adequate explanations by police as to why they were being charged for an offence. In particular there was confusion among a number of the youth about their rights in contesting a charge which in some cases resulted in young people being detained for resisting arrest. The example below demonstrates how a group of young people who failed to understand the "move on law" were charged by police for failing to follow a police instruction which resulted in a summons to appear in court:

YP: It's an African club. A group of us came you know, we came in the back of a car and the Police pulled out behind us and they said 'you guys are not allowed to be here now' and I went like 'why?' and they said 'oh there'd been a noise' and the neighbours have reported that you guys have been making noise. Like we just came to get in the car and the neighbours reported the claim about the noise and obviously they heard the noise but they did not look to see who was making the noise. So we'd actually just came from home and they gave all of us a warning saying 'you guys are not allowed to come back to this street for the period of 6 hours'

I: Yeah, the Move On law

YP: I was in the club and just opposite the club there's another café, I was actually like me and the girl were sitting there - they came back later and that same woman that saw me, actually you know he said 'I thought you were told not to be here - not to come back here' and I went 'I'm not there' This is the club that we actually like to go in and just opposite I was outside of it and this is besides this is actually Katherine Street. And the street that you guys gave us a warning on was another street. And that's it, they grabbed me and took me to the Watch House, that was my first time to go to a Watch House. Yeah, in the morning - later you know like they send me to go to Court. When I went to Court they're going at everything and they said the reason that you know like I came there was because -actually mine was adjourned in the first place by the Judge because he couldn't understand why I was arrested on Katherine Street when I was given a warning in a different street. And they went and got another one added to it saying oh you know that was only 50 metres off the other street. Now, when he actually give me a warning, there was nothing saying oh you have to be 50 metres or anything like that, all I was told was move on directions and there was no like distance or anything and besides I can't actually, I can only estimate that I'm 50 metres away from that place. But, since I don't have a proper measurement, I can't be exact about it.

## **Victims of Police Harassment**

The young people were asked to describe the types of interactions they had with police in public spaces. A common perception among the group is that some police officers lacked an understanding of Sudanese culture and acted in a superior and authoritarian manner when interacting with the young people. This often produced conflicts between the youth and police resulting in some youth being charged for offensive language. There was agreement that the relationships between the Sudanese community and police would be improved if police adopted a more mediatory approach. The following scenario is one example as to how tensions between both groups escalated due to a breakdown in communications between both groups:

There's the misunderstanding between the cops and us, like between our youth so we're looking forward to working with them to understand our Sudanese youth. They're really good people but I think it's the way the Police approach us. So, the other day at the party, because I went to the party and then the Police actually she swore at me in the beginning, like she used the F word to me and I said 'sorry Police Officer can I have your name?' And she said 'I can't

give you my name, can you give it to me? I'll give it to you after what happened' and I said 'I'm a Sudanese Special Affairs worker you know like I work and I know this thing. If you've got a problem I'll help you out because I'm here, I'll help you with these people' s he said 'oh you F, F, F' and I said - and I swore back to her like I was just so offended like she was saying that because one of my friends was in Emergency, had a - it was, she has Asthma but not really an Asthma attack so I'm trying to help her too as well as to translate and at the same time I'm trying to tell her to quit that and she refused actually to give a hand with her. In the end the police officer warned me that I could be charged for swearing at her.

Other case studies support the perception of Sudanese as victims of police intimidation. For example there were a number of cases where young drivers were stopped by police for no apparent reason and had their cars examined for defects. These incidents were perceived as a form of police intimidation with the intention of provoking negative reactions from Sudanese people:

The policeman gets out of the car and looks over our car and he asked 'is this your car?' It happened to me when I was driving a friend's car and then the Police pulled me over and said that the car had been reported as a stolen car and I said 'okay, that's fine, I'm here with the owner of the car and if it was reported as stolen, who stole it?' and then from there, they said the number plate are not the owner's and that they came to find out and I said 'well here is the owner' and then they went back onto the tyres and they said 'now, sir, your tyres are flat' But how did the whole thing get started? You see that's what provokes the situation whereby you get angry so the level of approach from the Police matters sometimes. The police cannot be trusted because what they are taught is the thing about crime and how to catch a criminal, so that when they approach a person, they approach you as a criminal and that's how they are taught. In the Police Force, everything is about the crime and how to catch a criminal so with that there's a lack of trust in between whereby they perceive you as a criminal.

While there were a number of accounts about police harassment there were two cases where young Sudanese witnessed police physically assaulting young people in a public space. One incident in Brisbane described how a young person who was handcuffed was assaulted by two policemen with the incident being recorded on a mobile phone camera. The mobile phone was later destroyed by police:

YP: Yeah. You can't prove it, that's the thing and the same thing with the Police - and if I can just get off that topic - but even with the Police a witnesses states that it was all right, that it was right but at the same time the Police you know to just do it but there's always no evidence. Last time, because there was this incident at South Bank where the Police you know got involved, brutally,

GD: Mm. So, tell me this, this happened at the South Bank and there was a Sudanese kid with a bully and he got beaten up

YP: Yeah with a bully and the bully was beating him up GD: The Police were beating him up

YP: Yeah and one of the guys actually got a mobile phone to record it, to record the thing that has happened, because that was the only evidence they had and you know like they've gone and looked for him and got the mobile - yeah, grab it and chuck it out and break it

GD: Did they?

J: Yeah

GD: So what did the guy get beaten up for?

J: No one knows at all, no one knows at all but all I know is that you know like the Police are not supposed to put their hands on people especially if your hands are cuffed behind.

One graduate from university who had obtained a degree in Justice Administration summed up the problems experienced by some Sudanese as a lack of understanding of their basic rights when interacting with police:

Just before - let me say that - just before we get to that part about the Police need - what I would say is the Police are basically using a Sudanese community because of the lack of knowledge of the legal sides and lack of English. I've witnessed a couple of those, I can tell you a thousand stories about the Police but let me tell you this I have studied Justice Admin so I know exactly. So if the Police today face me, I would tell him exactly what are my rights but not half of the Sudanese understand what their rights are but that's the way the Police come in and abuse their power or their position. Because, today, you as a Police Officer, before you talk to me or anything, you should introduce yourself - say my name is Constable 'this', I am from Police Station 'this', I want to talk to you regarding this matter. They're just coming straight up without not even introducing themselves, even if you are in uniform, how the hell would I know

that you are a Police Officer. Okay, you can introduce yourself or show me your badge, that way I know that you are a Police Officer - those are the things.

The Sudanese interviewees also stated that they were unfairly labeled as criminogenic by police when youth from other African nations identified themselves as Sudanese when they were interrogated by police. This produced an inflated view that all troublesome youth from Africa were Sudanese which produced a critical appraisal about police about their lack of scrutiny relating to the nationality of the young people they were interacting with. Young Sudanese identified the need for more Sudanese Police Liaison Officers to work with police in areas when interacting with African youth:

As far as I know, in the past, and we've addressed these issues with the Police, I mean some Africans used to commit some other crimes or whatever and they used to call themselves Sudanese. So police and the public say yeah because you're black, you're Sudanese. But you tell me any black person walking, I can tell you straight away whether he's Sudanese or he's not Sudanese. That's where the lack of knowledge comes in with the Police - you know another person tells you he's Sudanese so that means he's Sudanese. What you can do is, all right that's when we have a Liaison Police Officer. If the person's lying, they can identify, they can ask them a few questions to identify whether he's a Sudanese or not. All right, you can show your IDs, the name straight up will show you whether he's a Sudanese or not.

When Sudanese people progressed further into the criminal justice system after being charged for offences they found court to be an alienating experience. The majority of those who attended court perceived that there was little chance that they would receive justice due to the unfamiliarity of the setting, the formality of the language as well as the limited representation they received. Female members of the focus groups in particular were critical because they could not afford private solicitors due to their economic situation and were dependent on the advice of court based solicitors. They perceived that this type of representation was not adequate due to the limited time they could prepare for cases, the failure of solicitors to adequately explain the charges as well as the likely outcomes of their court appearance. One female victim of domestic violence perceived that she could not understand the duty solicitor or the court process:

YP: The problem with lawyers is because we do not have money to do it.

GD: So you have to have a duty solicitor?

YP: Yeah we get legal aid with them.

GD: So you have to go to anybody?

YP: Yeah and they are not good. They lack the language and we do not understand what they mean sometimes. You say to the boy or whoever, there's too big a gap there so the story could twist around with one word and you know you can lose your rights. My court case fell to bits because they let my husband free and made me look like the problem.

The perceived inadequacy of representation led a number of people to question how fair the legal system was for people who came from disadvantaged social backgrounds such as Sudanese. Some people spoke about the inevitability of being found guilty and having to pay a fine despite maintaining their innocence. Others described how they were told by their solicitor to plead guilty in order to receive a lighter sentence. This young person's description of his negative experiences within the justice were indicative of the feelings of helplessness experienced by other Sudanese youth:

I have been to court twice and at the end of the day there's no justice and because I appear they say you're inside a social institution and you have been charged for interfering in police affairs. And we have a young man who comes from Sudan and speaks good English but someone will take advantage of him and tell him he is supposed to be a criminal. They tell you to speak English because you are in their country and then they don't believe what you say. I don't think you use the language and it's so complex. Every young person speaks of finance and there's no not guilty verdict for young Sudanese. They're always guilty because it's mentioned in the hearing and after that you have to pay something. I have seen young people who don't want to accept the hearing but you go to court and you don't walk out of it so you say I plead guilty.

## CONCLUSION

This study provided an opportunity to hear the previously silenced voices of young Sudanese in terms of the types of interactions they had with the criminal justice system in Queensland. The research adds to the body of sociological and criminological literature which focuses on the construction of ethnic young people as a "racialised youth problem" (Dawes and Hil; Neyroud and Beckley, 2001). It was clear that the Sudanese who were interviewed in this research perceived that they were the focus of increased interactions with police because of their racial characteristics and collective practices. For

example, the young people identified a number of problems with police specifically when large groups of Sudanese youth congregated in public spaces such as parks and shopping malls due to the popular misconception that they belonged to troublesome ethnic gangs. Colic -Peisker and Tilbury (2008) argued that one factor for negative interactions between police and groups of ethnic youth relates to their high visibility in terms of their height, skin colour and collective kinship based social practices. This makes them easier to be labeled as gangs despite a lack of any real proof (White et al 1999). The Sudanese youth in this study however argued that rather than being a threat when interacting in public spaces they felt vulnerable due to over-policing and occupy public spaces in groups for personal safety.

In addition the young people in this study expressed concerns about the skewed public perceptions that labeled them as being criminogenic and threats to law and order. The source of such misperceptions came from some politicians and academics which were covered in a number of media stories which constructed Sudanese youth as criminogenic due to the problems they encountered when attempting to integrate into Australian society. The work of Pickering (1998) and Poynting (2008) suggested that such media reports and comments by influential individuals promote moral panics within the community fuels calls for increased surveillance and regulation by authority figures such as police.

While the media reports and general public perceptions painted Sudanese as the perpetrators of crime, the young interviewees in this study saw themselves as victims of the criminal justice system. For example, a high number of Sudanese who were interviewed stated that they were the subjects of police harassment. They also felt that police were less likely to listen to their account of events and were often the victims of verbal and/or physical abuse. This proposition is supported by other research such as the DIAC (2007) report which identified concerns that police discriminate against black Africans and too little is being done to combat racism and harassment from the broader community. A commonly cited reason for negative interactions between police and Sudanese is that they do not understand the law or the roles of police: However this research supports the view of the DIAC (2007) report that the supposed "lack of understanding" is either baseless or over-emphasised and instead is a justification for increased police intervention into Australian -African communities. These misunderstandings serve to diminish the role that systematic racism and class disadvantage plays in social conflict and the ensuing discrimination faced by young Sudanese people.

In order to address the perceived problems identified in this research a number of policies could be adopted to foster an increased understanding of the law among Sudanese young people as well as strategies that could result in better relationships between these young people and the police. The suggestions are that:

1. the Queensland state government invests in programmes which are designed to change the way in which young Sudanese Australian people and police interact.
2. Queensland police undertake training in order to gain an understanding of Sudanese culture and develop strategies for interacting with Sudanese young people.
3. where possible, Sudanese elders are consulted and are called on to mediate in disputes between young people and police.
4. more members of the Sudanese community are recruited as police officers and work in locations with high concentrations of Sudanese people.
5. Community agencies and the Queensland Police Service provide education programmes for Sudanese Australians pertaining to their rights and responsibilities in relation to the criminal justice system.
6. Monitoring of the press is ongoing to better ensure that reporting is more balanced regarding the lives of young Sudanese Australians.

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