SOCIAL CHALLENGES FACING SOMALI WOMEN REFUGEES: THE CASE OF EASTLEIGH, NAIROBI. 1990 - 2011

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to establish the social challenges facing women refugees of Somali origin living in Eastleigh. The term social challenge shall be used to mean, a condition that at least some people in a community view as being undesirable. The challenges identified were: health and shelter, insecurity, gender based violence, education and access to social amenities. Economic challenges were also highlighted. From the challenges, coping mechanisms were also identified, some of which include: Trade, remittances, employment and religion.

On methodology, the study interviewed thirty local residents, seventy urban Somali women refugees and thirty Somali male refugees. The men were interviewed so as to offer a male perspective on the issues that the women raised and for gender inclusion. The interviews were carried out using a semi-structured questionnaire and were both individual and focus group discussions. The study also used secondary data, that is, from books, newspapers, unpublished articles and articles published in journals and periodicals. Snowballing was used to get a sample that was a representation of the demographic.

Halleh Ghorashi’s Organizational Theory was used for the theoretical framework. Through the deficit approach he states that migrants or refugees are held responsible when a society/organization is not diverse enough. The urban Somali women refugee is privileged to limited rights thus making her environment not diverse. The deficit in this study represents the challenges that the Somali women refugees face and therefore seek to get organized or to fill up that deficit by getting organized which is what the study refers to as coping mechanisms. To further explain this, the study concluded that, in a new context where women want to thrive and become active participants, they have to influence their mindsets, change behaviors for a chance to realize their dreams.

The study established that women refugees of Somali origin actively took up education opportunities; they established businesses and took up employment opportunities. It was also discovered that they were prone to Gender Based Violence (GBV) and some of them had been subjected to violence like sexual abuse and Female Genitals Mutilation (FGM). Further, the study established that, while health services were not as discriminative, poor roads,
garbage collection and sewerage systems were a major challenge.

Inasmuch as the study explored different social challenges facing urban Somali women refugees, the study still has room for more academic research in the area of other social challenges facing the women and specifically insecurity, socio-economic challenges and pressure on social amenities.

At the end of the project, the Somali women refugees forwarded some recommendations to the Government of Kenya and the Nairobi County government. This information will be helpful to further development and planning for Eastleigh.