



Valuing the Older Person within a Sudanese Context

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The Sudan Context

- ▶ 2004 to 2008: Information Counselling and Legal Assistance (ICLA) project – Norwegian Refugee Council
- ▶ Six offices – camps and squatter areas
- ▶ Twenty year civil war in Sudan, conflict – north and south
- ▶ 2 millions internally displaced persons in Sudan
- ▶ Assistance for South Sudanese IDPs to return home or remain in North Sudan







The Customary Law Research Project

- Research project
- Approximately 60 tribes in South Sudan
- Interviewed 30 sultans (customary law judges) from different tribes
- Located in different camps and squatter areas of Khartoum
- Find some common denominators in customary law: family law, bridal wealth, polygamy, divorce, custody of children, levirate, kidnapping
- Some observations I made



اسکیم
اسکیم ۱۳۱۲۰۲۰۲
۱۔ ہل اسٹیشن
۲۔ الودیعہ
۳۔ ضلع نائی
۴۔ اسٹیشن
۵۔ منورہ





ورشه عمل أربع ايام

ما هو نوعنا تلك الفترة
الزمنية

- 1- جمعنا كذا
- 2- تعلمنا كذا
- 3- شاركنا كذا
- 4- نشرنا كذا
- 5- نريد كذا
- 6- نأمل كذا
- 7- نرجو كذا
- 8- ننتظر كذا

1. The Elders Had a Valued Role

- ▶ The sultans/judges held a highly valued role
- ▶ To be a sultan you had to be elderly
- ▶ Education or literacy irrelevant
- ▶ if a person holds valued social roles, a person is highly likely to receive from society those good things in life that are available or at least the opportunities for obtaining them, e.g. mayor, judge, business owner, doctor people who are devalued struggle to enjoy their human rights (Wolfensberger, W. (1991). "A Brief Introduction to Social Role Valorization as a High-Order Concept for Structuring Human Services. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University, Training Institute on Human Services Planning, Leadership and Change Agency)



<http://www.gurtong.net/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=VjBn4P%2FhMio%3D&tabid=343> last viewed at 7 February 2018>



2. The Elders Were Active in their Older Years

- ▶ Kept working into old age, physically and mentally active
 - ▶ Worked as the sultans i.e. customary law sultans/judges
 - ▶ Worked as carers for younger children while parents worked elsewhere
 - ▶ Selling goods in the makeshift shops
 - ▶ May have been motivated by poverty or necessity
 - ▶ They worked on legal issues for the benefit of the community
 - ▶ They were out and about, visiting different places, homes etcetera where the issues were being decided upon
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- ▶ Adults who engage in at least 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity each week live longer than inactive adults

(Ian Janssen, Valerie Carson, I-Min Lee, Peter T. Katzmarzyk, Steven N. Blair. Years of life gained due to leisure-time physical activity in the U.S.. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 2013 DOI: [10.1016/j.amepre.2012.09.056](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2012.09.056))



3. The Elders Shared their Wisdom, Knowledge and Life Experiences

- ▶ As sultans they were able to share their wisdom that they had gained from a lifetime of experiences
- ▶ The community really respected this wisdom and incorporated the judgements provided by the sultans in their lives
- ▶ A recent study suggests that caregiving within and beyond the family is associated with lower mortality for the caregiver (“Caregiving within and beyond the family is associated with lower mortality for the caregiver: a prospective study”, Sonja Hilbrand, David A Coall, Denis Gerstorf, Ralph Hertwig, Evolution and Human Behaviour, [http://www.ehbonline.org/article/S1090-5138\(16\)30072-1/abstract](http://www.ehbonline.org/article/S1090-5138(16)30072-1/abstract) last viewed at 17 January 2018)
- ▶ Do we also value and tap into the knowledge and wisdom of our older citizens in Australia?



4. The Community Focused on the Rights of the Community

- ▶ Collective rights were more important than individual rights
- ▶ The good of the community was important over and above the good of an individual
- ▶ So if one person was hurt everyone was hurt



5. The Elders Lived as Part of the Community and Were Not Socially Isolated

- ▶ The elders lived with their community – not separately
 - ▶ They were part of the community
 - ▶ They helped the community to solve their problems in the role of customary law judges
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- ▶ Across 148 studies (308,849 participants) there was an 50% increased likelihood of survival for participants with stronger social relationships.
 - ▶ The influence of social relationships on risk for mortality is comparable with well-established risk factors for mortality.

(Social Relationships and Mortality Risk: A Meta-analytic Review, July 27, 2010, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1000316>)



So, How Can We Learn from the Sudanese Example?

1. Offer older people a valued role to play in our lives and in the community
2. Ensure that we include the elderly in our lives
3. Ensure that we make use of their knowledge, wisdom and experience
4. Think of them as part of the community, if they are hurt we as a society are also hurt
5. Do not isolate, ignore, neglect older people: keep them relevant in our lives

Thank you for listening!

