

Sudanese Women Fleeing the Conflict from Omdurman to Cairo Shared Their Experiences

Rawia Alfadil Sharif Mahmoud

The Regional Institute of Gender, Diversity, Peace, and Rights, Ahfad University for Women, Omdurman, Sudan. Email: ra.sharif@auw.edu.sd

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Abstract

This research investigated the difficulties encountered by Sudanese women who sought asylum in Egypt after the eruption of war in their country in April 2023. Central to the study were the flee women's own narratives. Eight families were purposefully selected for the study. They consented to share their experiences without disclosing their identities. The study utilized interviews with open-ended questions. Moreover, it was structured in the form of narrative accounts.

Key findings from the narratives indicated that Sudanese women were compelled to flee their homes due to the rapid escalation of violence in their home country. The violence began in Khartoum, the capital, and extended to neighboring regions and states. Many Sudanese people experienced forced displacement and migration. They endured severe conditions throughout their journey until the arrival to their destination. Egypt was the most favored location among a lot of Sudanese women. The narratives highlighted themes such as, harsh circumstances of migration, fears faced by the flee women during their travels, challenges of settling down in Egypt, and other coping mechanisms. These stories revealed the profound physical and psychological sufferings that impacted these individuals, at personal and family levels, at the present time and in the futures. Furthermore, it showed the urgency to provide them with the crucial support and policies to address their challenges in the host countries.

Keywords: Sudanese women, challenges, migration, experiences

1. Introduction

The armed conflict that erupted on April 15 has placed Sudanese women in perilous situations. Sudanese women from Khartoum state, in particular, have never encountered such violence before. The war came as a shocking event for them. It marked their first experience of forced migration. Mahasneh (2025), noted that during this tough period Egypt emerged as a sanctuary for these women. It offered a safe and secure environment for them as they made

a difficult decision to leave their beloved homeland. They left their country because they wanted to protect themselves and their children from harm.

This research aims to explore challenges faced by Sudanese women who have sought refuge in Egypt. According to UN Women Organization (2025), The conflict in Sudan has had a serious devastating impact on the lives of women and girls. Millions of women and girls have been displaced, lost their livelihoods, faced escalating levels of gender-based violence, and suffered from severe hunger. Women outnumbered men among internally displaced persons (IDPs) across all age groups. They make 53% of the total IDP of all age groups. Women constitute more than half of the 12 million people displaced within and outside Sudan. Furthermore, more than half of Sudan's population, over 24.6 million people, face acute food insecurity.

Most Sudanese refugees fleeing Sudan since the start of the war have gone to Egypt. They favored Egypt more than other places due to cultural, linguistic, and historical ties, as well as its closeness to Sudan. This closeness facilitates their movements and allows them maintain good connections to their homeland. Many refugees view their displacement as temporary status. Staying in Egypt offer them with easy means to follow developments in Sudan, keep contact with their family members in the country, and facilitate their return to their homeland to contribute to post-war reconstruction (Kon & Sullivan, 2025), whenever they decide to return.

During their journeys, refugees take two routes: official border crossings by obtaining entry visa from Egyptian authority, or via smugglers who exploit the rugged terrain and mountains to transport them into Egyptian mainland. The smuggling process is extremely harsh, whether it is in summer or winter. The smuggled people usually face numerous dangerous situations, including car or truck breakdowns, the threat of insects and sometimes venomous reptiles (Muzou & Matran, 2025).

In 2025, several researchers, including Mahasneh and Mohamed, Ahmed, Hamid, Heck, Nair, and Sal, along with Adebayo, P. T, highlighted the marginalization of displaced women within legal, political, and social systems in their studies. They identified future directions of women refugees by emphasizing the urgent need to review gender-sensitive asylum policies and address systemic gaps in international protection to safeguard the rights and dignity of refugees. Many displaced women find themselves in precarious situations because they are unable to access justice or protection. This kind of marginalization in the resorted country reinforces the structural inequalities they sought to escape. Despite these inequalities, flee women from Sudan to Egypt often engaged in diverse community activities as part of their resistance. They are capable of demonstrating resilience even in the face of vulnerability.

Female refugee from Sudan faced numerous challenges in Egypt, such as limited job opportunities because are foreigners and most of them are without specific qualifications. They are subdued to working long hours and getting meager wages. In addition, the loss of educational certificates and other vital documents during their flight from the war areas has forced many into jobs that do not match their skills and experience. Educational access in the host country is also restricted by high tuition fees and restrictive visa requirements. These

requirements hindered many Sudanese students from continuing their studies in Egypt. Nonetheless, healthcare services are available, but often remain inaccessible due to financial constraints. Despite these structural challenges, displaced women engaged in various forms of resistance, demonstrating their resilience even in the most vulnerable situations.

Salih (2025), documented the difficult psychological challenges faced by Sudanese women refugees in Egypt, noting persistent anxiety, sadness, intrusive thoughts, and sleep disturbances. Some individuals described feelings of helplessness and loss of controlling things around them even after their arrival to the host countries. In fact, the lack of psychosocial support exacerbates these conditions. Albeit, these women are exposed to a cumulative impact of war-related stress that has serious effects on the mental health of women in conflict zones and during displacement.

The European Commission (2025), reported that many Sudanese refugees arrive in Egypt with minimal resources. They heavily rely on family and social networks for support and community protection programs. Most Sudanese refugees live in impoverished and marginalized neighborhoods in major Egyptian cities. They struggle to meet their most basic needs. Some Sudanese refugees visit UNHCR registration centers to obtain registration services, renew documents, update their legal status, and access specialized support for those in need of protection. The European Union is a major donor of emergency cash assistance worldwide. Being a refugee in a large city, in a foreign land, without money or a safety net makes a person vulnerable to exploitation and extortion. Sadly, gender-based violence is prevalent in these situations, and victims often live in silence. The challenge lies in not knowing how to deal with this violence, who they turn to, or what pathway to protection is.

1.1 Research Questions

1. Who are the Sudanese women who are fleeing the conflict as they move from Omdurman to Cairo?
2. What are the challenges faced by Sudanese female refugees in their journeys to Egypt in terms of hardships, fears, and resilience?
3. What are the social and emotional challenges they faced during their displacement and what were the coping processes in Cairo?

2. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research methodology to explore the migration experiences of Sudanese women fleeing conflict in Sudan, specifically from Omdurman to Cairo. This method is well-suited for observing and gaining a deep understanding of the personal stories of the study's target population by understanding the meaning and experiential dimensions of their lives within their social environments (Fossey et al., (2002). Chatty (2010), emphasizes that personal narratives reflect deep analysis through personal stories of forced migration. This narrative must be highlighted, with a focus on the perspectives of those displaced.

2.1 Sampling and Data Collection

The demographic information for these women provided crucial context regarding their socioeconomic backgrounds, migration journeys, and current living conditions. It also highlighted the challenges they faced both during and after displacement to Egypt. All participants are the primary breadwinners for their families; they are married or were previously married; they migrated with their families; and they lack alternative sources of support, in addition to the fluctuating Sudanese network community supports. Despite possessing academic qualifications and work experience, they are engaged in low-paying, marginal jobs alongside their family members. This situation has intensified their difficulties in overcoming various challenges, especially economic ones.

Participants were deliberately selected to offer meaningful insights into their migration experiences and to align with the research objectives. Eight Sudanese women aged 18 and above, from families that recently migrated due to conflict, participated in the study. Considering the depth of individual stories and the exploratory nature of the research, this sample size was sufficient to highlight key experiences and patterns relevant to this specific context.

The researcher used focus group to collect her data. The focus group discussions took place in Giza, Cairo, an ideal location related to the high concentration of the Sudanese diaspora. Giza also serves as a central hub for the availability of traditional Sudanese products; it is an ideal location. Topics discussed included migration hardships, fears, adaptation challenges, and resilience. All participants provided informed consent, and confidentiality was maintained to ensure the integrity of the research.

2.2 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used in this study to deepen our understanding of Sudanese refugee women's migration experiences. All stories were carefully reviewed to identify challenges they faced that were relevant to the study's objectives. Regarding data saturation, the responses of the study sample were similar, and the primary cause of displacement was war. The data was rich enough to reflect the participants' experiences. Each woman had the opportunity to recount the full details of her displacement journey, allowing every participant to express her personal experience and then share her stories and experiences of displacement with her family by answering group discussion questions confidentially. Their voices and perspectives were adequately represented in the analysis.

2.3 Limitation

The study was limited to examining only eight women from eight families, which does not represent the diverse experiences of all Sudanese women displaced in Egypt. This small number is a limitation in the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, the study was conducted over a short period of time without any expectation of long-term effects or changes in the women's circumstances. This also limits the understanding of the ongoing challenges and resilience these women face over time.

3. Results

Eight Sudanese women shared their stories of fleeing war in Sudan and arriving in Egypt. The focus group discussion was held in September 2023. Participants were allowed to narrate their journeys from Sudan to Cairo, guided by key points. These fi focus group discussion marked the first time they could articulate their stories. The women were eager to participate and highly welcomed the chance to speak frankly. Many noted that the focus group discussion provided them with a great opportunity to reflect on their experiences although they sometimes made them revisiting painful moments of their journey and how they overcame them.

The preliminary findings reveal that Sudanese women fleeing Sudan to Cairo face many challenges, such as violence, displacement, adaptation, and other basic services. Despite all these challenges, many are showing resilience, relying on personal strength and social support. These experiences explain the vital issues of forced migration, highlight the emotional effect of displacement, and the resilience.

3.1 Essential Aspects of Women's Narrated Experiences Include

- The emotions associated with the choice to escape to Egypt
- Gender-Related Vulnerabilities and Risks
- Challenges of Settlement and Living Conditions
- Coping Mechanisms and Aspirations

The participants consented to engage in the research with the assurance that their identities would be kept confidential. The research analysis has been finalized, and the results were conveyed through narratives provided by the women, in accordance with the specified points. These narratives detail the experiences of women who sought refuge from Sudan to Egypt.

3.2 The Emotions Associated with the Choice to Escape to Egypt

Forcibly displaced women faced numerous challenges and dangers during their perilous journeys in search of safety. They fled a war that had devastated everything, in addition to the humanitarian crises that it caused. Participants reported experiencing immense and ongoing psychological stress from leaving their homes and abandoning their most precious possessions behind them. In addition to the exhaustion and hardship they went through during their displacement from Omdurman to Cairo. They were always filled with fear of the unknown challenges. They were also forced to leave their home, families, and relatives, and were scattered between states within Sudan and to neighboring countries. Furthermore, there were cases of illness and death during the displacement journey, and the burial of loved ones in the desert and unknown locations and places.

One female stated, “Upon my arrival, I realized that leaving Sudan was merely a means of escaping war and violence. However, a new source of anxiety arose: my worry for my mother and siblings, whom I had left behind. I was constantly concerned about their safety and where they had found shelter amidst the rapidly increasing conflict in Sudan. Moreover,

communication with them was limited due to the phone's bad connection. It is sad," they didn't learn of our father's death until a month later!

3.3 Gender, Vulnerabilities and Risks

Women's accounts highlight the various risks that they faced during displacement, including exposure to different type of violence, threats, health problems, and psychological distress. An elderly woman reported that upon reaching the border crossing, they felt a sense of security, especially since her greatest concern was the safety of her young daughters. She had previously endured sleepless haunted by fears for their well-being. They became desensitized to the surrounding confusion, including attacks, assaults and harassment on girls in front of their families in addition to the widespread violence. Out of these, they slept under beds to the sounds of gunfire and heavy artillery, keeping their doors locked all the day, as if they were imprisoned.

3.4 Challenges of Settlement and Living Conditions

Most of the Participants reported a profound sense of alienation, finding it difficult to communicate with Egyptians. This is often described as a form of security, despite the absence of weapons as prevalent in Sudan. However, the feeling of being in a country where people feel different is a significant challenge.

Another hardship is the weakness of the Sudanese pound exchange rate. Job opportunities are scarce, and even when available, wages are insufficient to cover all expenses and support families. Inadequate housing, and the most common jobs are house cleaning. All these economic issues are coupled with limited access to healthcare and significant challenges.

One participant mentioned experiencing racism, particularly from children in the street, who would shout at her in street, "Go back to your country! Why are you here? We don't like refugee " Their words, accompanied by mocking estrus, intensified her sense of isolation, even after more than six months in Egypt.

Coping Mechanisms and Aspirations: The participants' coping strategies are flexible, suitable and they show a strong desire to back and rejoin their families in Sudan as soon as the conflict ends. Most expressed their determination to make up their current and future circumstances in the near future, while preparing for any potential changes. During displacement period, they intend to focus on self-development and job hunting to prepare for the challenges they will face upon their return to Sudan.

4. Conclusions

The narratives confirmed that the multifaceted impact and challenges of displacement on families, particularly the most vulnerable, women, focus on ongoing trauma and psychological stress, gender-related vulnerabilities, difficulties in settling in the host country, and resilient coping mechanisms. These pivotal issues provide crucial insights into the living conditions of those displaced by war and underscore the need for targeted support to meet all their needs.

5. Discussion

For the first time, women who were born and raised in Omdurman have shared their distressing experiences of fleeing their country. They relocated to Egypt, where they found favorable opportunities, free from cultural barriers and language obstacles, and without the need for refugee camps.

During their journey, these women did not encounter sexual or gender-based violence while escaping conflict; however, they remained fearful of such possibilities. They conveyed that, as women, they might face different treatment compared to their home country, influenced by local cultural norms, religious beliefs, and the legal framework of their new environment.

These women do not hesitate to discuss the challenges they face in integrating with the host community.

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Author contributions

Dr. Rawia Alfadil Sharif Mahmoud was responsible for designing the study, collecting and analyzing data, and preparing the draft. She conducted all aspects of the study independently and approved the final draft. There are no special authorship agreements.

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