“EDUCATION WILL BE OUR MOTHER”:
AN EXPLORATION OF RESILIENCE MECHANISMS RELATING TO THE
EDUCATIONAL PERSISTENCE OF SUDANESE REFUGEES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the cultural and contextual resilience mechanisms operating in the lives of Sudanese refugees living in Virginia. A convenience and snowball sampling of 10 Sudanese refugees (1 female, 9 male) living in Virginia were selected to participate in this study. Through interviews, I gathered and documented participant narratives. For the purpose of triangulation, I collected demographic information and data about the level of traumatic events experienced and the impact of these events using quantitative instruments. I analyzed the data using grounded theory methodology in order to explore the meaning attributed to past events and understand how collective and personal history and culture contribute to persistence toward and achievement of educational goals. Findings from this study confirm prior research findings related to resilience as well as add to the literature base. This study reinforces the importance of turning points, the development of steeling effects, and the need to examine resilience mechanisms as opposed to generating lists of risk and protective factors. Furthermore, this study affirms the integral role of culture and context in the development of resilience. Additionally, this study uncovers a new phenomenon that has not yet been discussed in the literature, the concept of altruistic resilience, which I define as overcoming personal adversity for the selfless advancement of others who lack the means, resources, or opportunity to do so for themselves. These findings are depicted in a theoretical model that illustrates the development of resilience mechanisms in the adult Sudanese refugees who participated in this study.