Somali Youth in Diaspora: A Comparative Study of Gender Perceptions of Further Studies and Future Career (Case Study: Somali Youth Melbourne, Australia)*

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Aqoon la'aani waa iftiin la'aanee
Waa aqal iyo ilays la'aanee
Ogaada ogaada, dugsiyada ogaada
O aada o aaya walaalayaalow aada

Lack of knowledge is lack of enlightenment
Is homeless and lightless
Be aware, be aware of schools
And go to schools, go to schools
Brothers and sisters go to schools

Abdullahi Qarshe (1961)

I. Introduction

This study explores the educational and employment goals of a sample of Somali adolescents in high schools in Melbourne, Australia, comparing male and female perspectives. It also identifies the barriers Somali students face in defining and achieving their goals, and develops a set of recommendations aimed at assisting Somali students to achieve these goals.

This research begins with an overview of the cultural background and history of education in Somalia and demographics of Somali families in Melbourne (i.e., family size and home situations). It is important to note that there is significant diversity within the Somali community, based on factors such as kinship, however this is not the focus of this study. Instead, the research describes, analyzes, and compares a number of issues related to parents, including educational and current employment situations and the impact these may have on their children's educational and employment goals. Parental views about

their children's education and the types of work they would like their children to pursue are comparatively covered, as are parents' beliefs relating to gender and employment and their attitudes and practices in helping their children identify and follow education and employment avenues. Finally, parents' desire for assistance, advice, and information to help them guide their children in exploring educational and employment options is discussed.

The study also investigates female and male student's perspectives on education and employment, comparing their differences and similarities. The consequences for children's development and studies of living with a single parent and frequently changing schools are discussed. Future educational and employment plans and the values students place on various options are explored, with an example of an aspiring Somali student. The strengths and barriers to pursuing future aspirations are critically analyzed and compared, along with perceptions of gender role differences, parents' expectations, the need to consult with parents, the value of voluntary work, and financial influences.

Several issues relating to resettlement in Australia are acknowledged, including the existence of multiple plans for the future and social and self-exclusion. The report concludes by drawing attention to the implications of the findings and how they can inform improved support for Somali students to achieve their educational and employment goals.

1.1 Data Collection and Methodology

The study employed qualitative methods to infer, and understand in depth, the educational and employment aspirations of Somali high school students from their own perspectives. Primary data was collected through personal observations of focus group surveys and individual interviews. A total of 48 people participated in surveys and interviews: twelve fathers, twelve mothers, twelve male students, and twelve female students. All students were aged 16–19 and were attending Somali weekend Qur'an and Islamic classes at the time of the surveys and interviews. The interviews with the students were recorded with their prior consent.

The twelve mothers were informally interviewed as a group. The mothers were also attending classes at the Somali weekend school. Twelve fathers were randomly approached at Somali business shops

and restaurants, and participated in answering surveys and questionnaires or in informal interviews. The researcher explained to the participants the aim and purpose of the research, and obtained verbal consent from these parents. Prior to collecting primary data, the relevant literature was reviewed and previous findings were used to inform the design of the study.

This research was conducted over a seven-month period, from May to November 2005, and provides a backdrop for those wishing to conduct further research on the settlement experiences of Somali youth. However, while inferences from this research provide invaluable information and insights into the future plans of the Somali diasporic population, the author acknowledges that due to the small sample size, external validity is limited and therefore generalizations cannot be made about young African refugees in general or the entire Somali community in Australia or other Western countries.

2. Cultural Background

2.1 The Land

Somalia is located in the Horn of Africa. The Horn is bounded by the northern Indian Ocean, southern Arabian Sea, and the Gulf of Aden.[1] The second highest mountain in Africa (after Kilimanjaro in Tanzania) is found in Somalia. Named Surat, it is about 7,900 feet high. The climate is generally tropical, with temperatures ranging from 20°C to 30°C throughout the year. Life in the country is very harsh.[2] The environment is often demanding and dangerous. Apart from a few places, frequent droughts, ruthless famine, disease, predatory beasts, and feuds and wars are continuous threats to the people and their beasts.[3] Therefore, Somalis are often in a state of alarm and sometimes flee from brutal murder by hostile tribesmen or predators.[4]

2.2 Social Composition (Kinship)

First and foremost, the term "Somali" may represent the Somali nomads' way of life, because in its popular connotation, the term means "go milk a beast for yourself," which shows the concept of hospitality of Somali nomads.[5] In social composition, Somali society is comprised of *beelo* (clans). The clan is closely knit by two cardinal ties: *Tol* (kinship) and *Heer* (agreement/customary law).[6] The *Tol* means "to sew"

and it implies that patrilineal relations are forever attached.[7] Clans were formed on the basis of descent traced from common ancestors.[8] In some cases, clans are formed from genealogically different groups over a considerable period of time of living together as a coalition and in alliances.[9] Geographically, clans, sub-clans, or family units, who may all be related by blood via patrilineal descent, and other unrelated individuals who may enjoy a client status, often congregate in a favorite pasture or field or near water wells for common defense and to help each other. When there is relative peace, however, they are not restricted to a specific territory.[10]

Because of the absence of any central authority in Somali culture, the clan is a protection, an insurance, and a means of survival for its members. Clans or sub-clans have welfare systems called *Qaaraan* (collection of money, animals, etc.) and other forms of assistance for those in need.[11] Moreover, "the security of the individual pastoralist and property depends ultimately upon his (clan) membership."[12]

2.3 Islam, Identity and Belonging

Islam and clan lineages are the two main components that constitute and shape the *identity* of Somali people, both at an individual and collective level. Birman and Trickett underline that, "Somalis are Sunni Muslims, with Islam being the principal faith and source of Somali national identity."[13] In parallel with Islam, the clan is also very important in molding Somali identity and sense of belonging. Clanship and Islam act as primary articulators of Somalis' identity. Similarly, Mohamed also acknowledges that ancestry and clan affiliation provide Somalis with a sense of belonging and identity.[14] Clanism is particularly "the form in which the contemporary Somali 'imagined identity' is collectively constructed."[15]

2.4 Brief History of Somali Education

The traditional system of teaching and learning in Somalia involved the training of children and young people by elders in the methods and manners of utilizing the environment, clan collective responsibilities, and fighting skills. Later, nomadic schools were introduced with male religious leaders teaching children how to read, write, and memorize the Qur'an, and included different units of Islamic studies such as Shariah law, Arabic grammar, and aspects of Sufism. In these

settings, pupils learned by rote, using wooden tablets. Traditionally, education in Somalia has been basically male oriented; the preferential treatment of boys was a reflection of broader traditions of decision-making in which only adult men participated in community affairs.[16]

During colonization by the Italians and British in the 19th and early 20th centuries, Western-style education was introduced to satisfy the employment needs of the colonizers. Seven years of such education was considered necessary and sufficient for those Somalis assuming administrative and low-level technical roles.[17]

Between 1950 and 1960, the postcolonial administration required the Italian government in southern Somalia, under a United Nations Trusteeship, to prepare Somalis for independence. This necessitated the establishment and development of a modern education system for Somali children and adult learners.[18] Somalis embraced the values of modern education. When Somalia gained independence in 1960, mass education was further promoted as a vehicle for national development. The Somali language was formally inscribed in 1972. Coupled with a mass literacy campaign in rural areas, this resulted in a sharp increase in literacy rates from 15% to 55% by 1974.[19] In the 1980s, the country had around 1,400 primary schools with approximately 3,370 teachers.[20]

Political suppression during the early 1980s to 1990 resulted in a significant drop in literacy rates—to 36% for males and 14% for females.[21] To understand the scale of deterioration, the gross enrollment rate for 4–23 year olds was estimated as being a low 14% in 1980, but by 1988, it had slid back to 7%.[22] On top of that, some studies show that the majority of Somalis are roaming nomads with no school services available for their children, which makes the big picture for Somali children very bleak. Under such circumstances the great majority of Somali children of school age remains illiterate and innumerate.[23] Virtually 90% of educational institutions and resources, including schools, technical training centers, and university facilities, became casualties in the mass destruction of the country's infrastructure.[24] To understand the scale of the destruction to educational organizations, an American journalist reported from Mogadishu in 1995, describing terrible conditions at La Foole, the famous college for training teachers:

> The low-rise, modern looking building of the former college of education is now a displaced persons' camp. The class-rooms and dormitories are full of families, the walls are blackened by cooking fire, the library

> is a world of dust. Books are piled everywhere on sagging shelves, on toppling heaps, the dust is so deep, that it is as though the desert itself is creeping though the walls burying the books in fine sand.[25]

In fact, Somali children were denied their right to education, which is one of the fundamental principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.[26] In summary, after ousting the former dictator, the nation-state deteriorated and Somalia became a prime example of a "Failed State," with *"the communal mind of people being in a coma."*[27]

Despite the depressing picture facing Somali children, there are some positive educational developments taking place in Somalia, particularly in the regions that are relatively peaceful. Most of these new educational services are initiatives by local communities and supported by local business people and Islamic charitable entities. Some of these Islamic entities are local, some are Arab charity organizations, and others are international NGOs. The U.N. and European Union also provide some support to these schools.[28] Many regional universities have also been founded, such as Amoud University, Mogadishu University, Hargeisa University, and East Africa University. This new trend of establishing universities in the major cities is now an ongoing project as well as a competition among regions, which some people see as a good sign to provide educational services for Somali children in their local areas.

3. The Somali Community in Australia

Before I discuss the educational and employment goals for Somali youth in Melbourne, it is valuable to explain the circumstances under which Somalis came to Australia.

3.1 Migration to Australia

In the early 1970s, a few Somali males arrived in Australia as students or visitors, and the majority of these students dropped their studies and married Australian women to obtain residence. Those who did not succeed in getting resident visas through marriage applied for refugee status when the civil war began in Somalia in the early 1980s.

Because of the civil war, *Qaxooti* (or people in a "desperate exodus") have fled their homeland, "taken almost any road out of country,"[29] and sought asylum around the world. Over the last seventeen years,

Australia has accepted a large number of Somali refugees. The Somali community is now the youngest emerging language group in Australia.[30] According to the 2001 census, only twenty Somalis were in Australia before 1985, while 87.6% of the Somali population in Australia arrived between 1991 and 2001.[31] A significant number of Somalis arrived in Australia under the Refugee and the Special Humanitarian Program Category and under the Family Reunion Program. On top of that, many arrived as illegal refugees, then applied for and were mostly granted Protection visas by the Australian government.

3.2 Population

The size of the Somali community (whether Somali born or of Somali ancestry) was around 8,850 in the 2001 census, and the largest number (5,542) lived in Victoria, 99.1% of them in Melbourne.[32] Recently, the community population in Australia has been estimated at about 16,000.[33] However, the SBS Radio-Somali section estimates the Somali population in Melbourne alone at around 10,000. According to the 2001 census, 61.9% of the Somali population in Australia were under 24 years old. The annual average growth for the Somali community in Victoria is 10.6%, compared with the 1.1% for all Victorians. As a result, the number of Somali children is dramatically increasing.

3.3 Geographical Distribution

Some community workers assert that the geographical distribution of the Somali community in Melbourne is grounded in tribe affiliations. Because of clan divisions, it was observed that Somali communities in the diaspora (such as Australia) are geographically concentrated in ethnic enclaves in the big cities, seeking socializing and assistance from their kinship network and getting access into Islamic institutions, such as mosques and Islamic schools.[34]

3.4 Employment

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, unemployment among the Somali community in Victoria was 47.1% in the 2001 census compared with 6.8% for the total population of Victoria.[35] The situation of Somali refugees is often worse than that of other black African arrivals because the occupational skill level for the Somalis has been lower

overall than the skill level for other settlers. The majority of Somalis are either semi-skilled or unskilled. Their English is also less advanced than that of other refugees.[36]

3.5 Education

Most Somali youth came to Australia with their immediate families or relatives. These families were required to send their children to school, but many of the children, particularly those who came at the age of ten and over, have faced challenges in coping with school due to their interrupted education in Somalia[37] or in refugee camps, which can negatively affect their experience of schooling in their new culture.[38] In addition, it is reported that in refugee camps, children learn bad language and develop behavior patterns foreign to their parents and cultural background. It is also confirmed that refugee culture becomes the norm in children's lives in the long term.[39]

In the Western education system, new refugee and migrant children are placed at the level of their local counterparts without considering their lack of educational background. This inevitably puts them in a disadvantaged position and increases their chances of underachievement.[40] The educational interruption has an effect on their feelings about school and their motivation to keep trying. On this topic, Birman quotes Somali students' comments that, "It was too much information…suddenly I had to learn all this stuff very quickly," the teachers "give you a test or essay and whether or not you understand, it is up to you," and "sometimes I felt like quitting, like skipping class."[41] Somali students face a range of challenges that include insufficient English language comprehension, culture shock, negative discrimination based on religion and race, psychological problems, poor time management skills, lack of positive role models, lack of negotiation skills, discipline and behavior problems caused by the new surroundings, family crisis, and challenges in planning for the future.[42]

4. Parents' Perceptions of their Children's Education

> "*Sumadii awoowiyo sinji waa ma guuraan*." (Somali proverb)
> The marks of my grandfather and ethnicity are ineradicable.[43]

To gain insight into the perspectives of Somali parents with respect to their children's educational and employment goal and opportunities,

twelve Somali mothers and twelve Somali fathers (not from the same families) living in Melbourne were interviewed. The following section reports on the data obtained from these interviews.

4.1 Family Composition

This section describes the household composition of the parents interviewed. The smallest of these families consisted of four people: mother, father and two children. The largest of these families comprised thirteen people: mother, father and eleven children. The total number of children in the 24 families represented was 113, with the total number of parents 43. The mean number of persons in each family was 6.5. Only two families had other relatives living in their homes; one family resided with three non-immediate relatives and another with two non-immediate relatives.

The main difficulties associated with large family sizes articulated by the mothers and fathers were overcrowding at home, lack of space and a quiet environment to study, lack of privacy, and increased care responsibilities for older children. In addition, the lack of adequate affordable housing sometimes necessitated moving several times a year.[44] The frequent movement from one place to another definitely causes the children to disconnect and lose ties and association with the friends and networks they established in the former school, and with a familiar educational system. At the same time, they face the challenges of how to make new friends and networks and understand the new schooling system. Such an unstable life may negatively impact their educational attainment and, as a result, their career trajectory.

4.2 Parents' Education

There is broad variation in the level of education attained by the Somali parents interviewed, with parents' education ranging from none to the tertiary postgraduate level. Mothers were clearly less educated than fathers: only one out of the twelve mothers had a tertiary degree, compared with six out of the twelve fathers. Furthermore, two of the fathers had obtained a postgraduate degree, while two of the mothers had never been to school at all. Even though the number of parents who were studying was very small, more mothers than fathers were involved in further education, which is a positive asset for assisting their children with their homework and education needs.

Research has demonstrated that refugee parents with a strong educational background and who work to improve their language skills and academic competencies by attending courses and attaining degrees in their receiving country are able to better assist and support their children in achieving educational goals.[45] It is thought that these parents are able to better monitor and guide their children on educational matters because they progress through the acculturation process faster than less educated parents. This could lead to their children having considerable aspirations to succeed in their educational and future employment plans.

Conversely, low educational levels and low occupational status of parents may be detrimental to their children's educational achievements.[46] This is particularly pronounced in the case of uneducated mothers, because in Somali culture mothers are the first person to teach their children: "traditionally, Somali parents have been extremely family and child oriented, with motherhood and child rearing central to women's social status and self perception."[47] Research demonstrates that uneducated Somali parents with limited knowledge of the language of the receiving county often have little capability to assist their children with homework assignments, and the tradition of families communicating orally rather than in writing means that written notes from school often end up in the wastepaper basket.[48] Furthermore, when parents cannot communicate with the mainstream community, children often assume the role of interpreter, which further contributes to the reversal of roles between generations and commonly serves to undermine parental authority.[49]

4.3 Parents' Occupations

A significant number of mothers interviewed (8 out of 12) work within the home, i.e., they do not have a formal job or attend educational classes. Two mothers were employed at childcare institutions, while the remaining two were students. Our survey also indicated that five of the mothers interviewed were single parents. Four of the mothers had husbands that were out of work, while three had husbands that were employed (one as a student, another as a taxi driver, and the third as a businessman).

Five of the twelve fathers interviewed were employed: one as a butcher, one as a self-employed businessman, and three as taxi drivers. Taxi driving as a main job for newly arrived refugees is so prevalent

that "being driven in a taxi by a highly skilled non-English speaking background immigrant is nowadays part of the Australian urban folklore."[50] Five fathers were unemployed, all of whom had tertiary degrees (undergraduate or postgraduate). One of the remaining two fathers was a student, while the other preferred not to reveal his employment situation. Regarding their wives, six out of the twelve were housewives with no formal income. Two were students, two were employed in childcare and business, and the employment status of the remaining two is unknown. Interestingly, all twelve of the fathers were married, whereas only seven of the mothers were married, with the remainder being single parents.

In summary, the majority of the mothers and fathers interviewed were unemployed, which may impact negatively on their children's educational achievement and job aspirations. Anisef emphasizes that parents' occupational status, particularly that of fathers, plays an important role in influencing children's future educational and employment plans. Anisef's research on the relationship between fathers' occupations and their children's future occupations found that 72.5% of those students with fathers employed in high prestige jobs intended to enroll in universities, whereas only 51.2% of students with fathers in low prestige jobs have similar plans. The study indicates that children's career trajectory often follows that of their fathers with respect to occupational status.[51] In addition, recent studies have asserted that satisfactory employment is the crux of successful settlement for refugees.[52]

The present small study indicates that Somali refugee parents in Australia with higher levels of education, particularly fathers, are more likely to be unemployed. The five fathers who were unemployed had tertiary degree or postgraduate qualifications. Confirming our findings, Colic-Peisker's research on refugees and employment circumstances in Australia underlines that in spite of the high education levels of many refugees, they also experience high levels of unemployment. Colic-Peisker attributes this unemployment to problems that include difficulties in getting qualifications recognized (notably for new arrivals from Africa); lack of Australian local work experience; lack of referees in Australia; breaks in work life after being in refugee camps without any kind of job; being bereft of social network connections with the mainstream; lack of well-established ethnic communities; and systemic and unsystemic discrimination against visible groups. In relation to discrimination, it is observed that, "the focus of

Australian racism has recently shifted from Asians…to migrants from Middle East and Africa who tend to be refugees."[53]

4.4 Perceptions of Children's Education and Future Careers

Drawn from responses to a series of open-ended questions, this research shows that Somali parents are very aware that appropriate education is needed for their children to secure a good job in the future. For example, parents made statements such as:

> "I like our children to be well-educated to obtain the highest qualification from universities to teach our coming generations." (Male parent)
>
> "I would like to say that education is right for all human beings, so we have to support our children's education." (Female parent)

In the eyes of Somali parents, children are regarded as future providers for their parents, families, relatives, and the Somali community. For these reasons, Somali parents demonstrate a strong desire for their children to have access to quality education that will lead to well-paid employment opportunities in the future. In agreement with our findings, Kapteijns and Arman point out that most Somali "parents as well as the community at large, see education as the major strategy to escape poverty…[for that reason] they have great respect for *jamici*, or the university graduate."[54] They also wish for their children to have educational opportunities that they did not have when growing up in Somalia.

These ideas are supported by research in other countries. For example, Niitamo describes that Somali parents living in metropolitan Helsinki expressed positive attitudes toward children's education and demonstrated high levels of interest in their children's schooling.[55] Studies in Norway show similar results, reaffirming that Somali parents place a high emphasis on their children receiving a good education due to the belief that education is a buffer against unemployment, crime, lack of direction, and general drifting. More broadly, research indicates that migrants in general have high educational aspirations for their children.[56] According to Elder and Kloproge, "despite the fact that most students from migrant (and refugee) families are in weak positions in terms of socio-economics and education, their positive views and high expectation for their children's education make them hold what can be described as middle class values."[57] Parents wish for

their children to acquire educational credentials that will allow them to gain social status and occupational security in the country of resettlement.

The findings of this research clearly disprove the incorrect perception of some teachers and writers that Somali parents are not interested in their children's education and future aspirations. Somali parents settling in Australia, however, may not understand how the Australian educational system functions. For example, parents may need to understand that Australian education encourages a student's ability to reason, think independently, and demonstrate creativity, while Somali education typically emphasizes memorization, dictation, and rote learning. Tutoring children at home, the parent-school relationship, extra-curricular sports and academic activities, and family and community excursions are also important features in the Australian approach to education but unfamiliar in the Somali education system. Somali parents need to be assisted to understand the importance of these features. The parents also may not understand how to best help their children achieve educational and employment goals because of language barriers, the strangeness of the new environment, their own educational levels, and the culture that the Somali community continues to live in. In addition, in Somali culture, the role of parents is to prepare their children and send them to school, leaving the teachers and school administrators to teach and discipline the children. In summary, Somali parents' lack of understanding of the education system in Australia and their passive role in the teaching of their children does not translate to neglecting their children's education.[58]

4.5 Perceptions of Job Choices

When questioned about what job they would like their children to have in the future, both mothers and fathers stated the following jobs were preferable: medicine, nursing, teaching, engineering, and mechanics. Fathers additionally saw aircraft piloting and business as desirable career paths. In general, the nature of jobs that Somali parents prefer for their children in Australia directly relates to those jobs that are highly valued and well paid in Somalia.

All twelve of the mothers and ten of the fathers thought that girls and boys should work in different professions. The remaining two fathers disagreed, saying that future vocation depends on the child's choices, abilities, and ambitions.

Generally speaking, both mothers and fathers expressed that they would like their daughters to work in medicine, nursing, or childcare. Mothers articulated three additional professions: teaching, secretarial, and religious work. Fathers also saw working with computers, banking, economics, law, air stewarding, research, and journalism as appropriate. In contrast, most of the mothers and fathers expressed that engineering, mechanics, piloting, and academic positions would be appropriate for their sons. Fathers additionally thought the army, banking, skilled vocations, economics, law, business, sports, and computing jobs were somewhat desirable.

Findings of this research show that mothers have an inclination for theological education and employment for their children. Some mothers stated that they would like their children to study and work in Islamic education, whereas fathers did not mention Islamic education or employment at all. For instance, one mother said, "I beg my Allah to enable them to have an Islamic education and good job," which refers to her wish for Islam to feature in both her children's education and employment.

While the research did not address the types of jobs deemed undesirable by parents, personal experience and observations of the Somali community indicate that many Somali parents would prefer that their children not undertake employment in the arts, namely, theatre or dance, as it is seen to be in conflict with Islamic values. In general, there is also a preference to avoid professions seen as heavily dominated by Anglo-Saxons, such as employment in the police force.

4.6 Perceptions of Preferred Country of Employment

Parents' responses varied when asked in which countries they would prefer their children to work. As their answers show, four mothers singled out Somalia as the preferred country for their children to work, while five generalized about all Muslim countries (including Somalia) without specifying any in particular. Three mothers chose Somalia or other Muslim countries, meaning that all twelve mothers directly or indirectly mentioned Somalia as a suitable workplace for their children in the future. Most significantly, none of the mothers mentioned Australia as one of their preferences for their children's workplace in the long term. In contrast, five of the fathers interviewed singled out Somalia as a desired working destination for their children. Three chose Muslim countries and one Somalia or another Muslim country.

Three fathers expressed that they would like their children to stay and work in Australia.

4.7 Involvement in Children's Education and Employment-Related Decision-Making

All twelve of the mothers and ten of the fathers said that they actively talk with their children regarding educational and employment goals. Their reasons for doing so included the desire to give their children advice, nurture and train them, understand their likes and goals, encourage them to think about their future, help them to make plans, and inform them of the long-term benefits of knowledge and education. Two fathers stated that they do not talk with their children about education and employment, one of whom justified his attitude by saying,

> "I don't like to cause a headache for my children because they are still very young. I only talk with them about God and how they could worship him."

Parents offered a range of reasons for talking to their children about education and employment-related issues. For example,

> "…because I like every good thing for them. I advise them to think about good jobs for their life and hereafter."

> "I often remind them that education is the key for good life but it is a very tough path and a very challenging one."

4.8 Perceived Barriers to Children's Achievement of Educational and Employment Goals

Those mothers and fathers interviewed had different views of the barriers their children face in achieving educational and employment goals. Seven out of twelve of the mothers considered the exposure to other cultures as a challenge for their children, whereas only one father articulated cultural issues as problematic.

> "The issue of culture is a big challenge. Our children are growing up in this culture and grasping it while we as parents are in shock and surprise with this culture." (Mother)

Both mothers and fathers, however, agreed that the lack of successful role models and educational support at home and in the community, as well as poor English skills, hindered their children's achievement of educational goals and job aspirations. According to some parents:

> "There is no good mentor or successful role model who warns children away from a bad path." (Father)

> "Children greatly need educational support at home but fathers most of time are out of homes while mothers have not enough education to help them." (Father)

4.9 Desire for Assistance, Advice, and Information

All of the mothers interviewed and the majority of the fathers (10 out of 12) expressed that they would like assistance, advice, or information to aid them in assisting their children achieve their educational and employment goals. They indicated that they need assistance in helping their children to differentiate between Islamic culture and non-Islamic culture, as well as assistance with developing their abilities to appropriately discipline their children and teach them good manners. According to one parent:

> "Children need help to know differences between Islamic culture and non-Islamic culture. So I need help in that area." (Mother)

Parents were also deeply concerned about their children's soul purification and fulfillment, and desired assistance to overcome the generational gap between themselves and their children. As one parent stated,

> "If I get an advice about my children's soul purification and manners I will be grateful. I need help about how to overcome differences because I have different views from my children." (Mother)

Overall, the mothers and fathers who participated in this research expressed varying, yet complementary, thoughts on the supports children need to achieve their educational and/or employment goals. That is, while mothers and fathers agreed on some points, they diverged on others. Both mothers and fathers, for example, mentioned the necessity of educational support and the teaching of culture and Islam. Yet

there were some issues that were only raised by the mothers, such as the need to tell children about their country of origin and perhaps take them there to see their people and motherland. Mothers also mentioned the importance of families being able to practice religion in Australia, teaching children planning skills, and reminding children of why they are in Australia. Fathers, on the other hand, discussed the role of recreational activities and volunteering in supporting children to achieve their educational and employment goals.

5. Students' Perception of their Further Studies and Future Careers

"Nin (qof) yari inta uu geed ka boodo ayuu talo ka boodaa." (Somali proverb)
While a young person may have the ability to jump high over tall trees, this does not reflect the height of their wisdom and ability to judge a situation, which will develop with age and experience.

The following information is drawn from interviews and surveys conducted with twelve Somali female and twelve Somali male students in Melbourne, all of who were aged between 16 and 19 years at the time.

5.1 Experience of Frequently Changing Schools

Surveys indicate that the number of years that the students had lived in Australia and the number of times they had changed school during this period varies. While there are significant variations, most of the students had resided in Australia for over four years, with some having arrived in Australia more than fourteen years ago. On the other hand, a small number of students (just three) had been in Australia for only 1–2 years. Since their arrival in Australia, most of the students had changed schools at least two or three times. Some had changed school six or eight times, with the highest number of changes being eleven in six years.

Traditionally, Somali people are nomads, constantly moving with their stock in search of water and grazing. Constant movement from place to place is central to Somali culture.[59] As expressed by Ahad and Gerrad, "the rejection of a sedentary existence is no doubt a feature of nomadic populations whose freedom may be likened to that of flocks of migrating birds."[60] The Somali lifestyle in urban areas is therefore underpinned by their desire to frequently relocate. In relation to set-

tlement in Melbourne, some Somali families move from suburbs for housing reasons or to have better access to Islamic institutions, such as mosques or Islamic schools. They also sometimes move to join their extended relatives and the Somali community in other suburbs. Nonetheless, frequent moving necessitates that children change schools often.

Frequent school changes can greatly disturb a child's educational experience, and hence have a negative impact on their long-term employment opportunities.[61] Bhatnagar points out that many new immigrants change their residence within the first few years to areas of second and third settlement, which may require their children to change schools. With frequent changing of schools, development of good English language skills and academic progress can be challenging, although the ability to speak English is not thought to suffer as much.[62]

5.2 Family Composition

Table 10 details the family composition of the students who participated in the research. Five boys and four girls lived with only their mothers at the time of the interviews, while the remainder of the students lived with both parents. This data correlates with White's observation that, "a majority of the young Somalis [in Melbourne] lived either with their parents or with their mothers."[63] Few students had relatives other than their parent(s) and siblings living with them.

As our study indicates, a number of the Somali students interviewed lived with their mothers only. The absence of one parent, particularly the father, in collective communities such as the Somali community, can be extremely negative for children's development and achievement of educational and employment goals. Research on Somali youth in London indicates that aggression, violence, absence from school, and high school drop-out rates can be attributed to depression and poor motivation resulting from family separation.[64] In addition, many Somali students are not in the care of their parents.[65] Overall, the lack of positive adult male role models is thought to limit children's capacity to develop self-esteem and a good sense of appropriate social and personal boundaries.

5.3 Perceived Value of Education and Employment

Like their parents, the majority of the students indicated that they valued education, perhaps as a result of the great importance placed on education in Somalia. However, a minority of them believed that having a job and making money was better than studying.

> "Education is good because it gives you good job and life…Good education good job you know…if I don't get educated I can't (help) myself when I get older." (Male focus group participant)

Generally speaking, the female students interviewed had higher educational aspirations than the males. During the focus group discussion, the majority of students agreed that female students of the Somali community are academically more successful than males. As a result, more female Somalis gained entrance into university, generally into the course of their first or second preference.

> "Because girls concentrate more…they are more determined than boys… Boys play too much…Boys have more freedom to go outside but girls stay at home and do more study…Girls have only one option to go out of home: weddings or celebrations." (Male focus group participant)

Other research also indicates that the future plans of Somali females are more ambitious than those of Somali males.[66] This finding, however, is at odds with Bhatnagar, who reports that migrant male students have considerably higher aspirations than migrant female students.[67] This may be because migrant male students receive from their parents greater encouragement to strive academically than migrant female students. Anisef points out that with respect to traditional gender roles, males internationally have been socialized for educational and employment achievement while females have been socialized for domestic and marital roles.[68]

Based on participant observation, it is hypothesized that the academic excellence of Somali females in Melbourne will continue into their tertiary studies. Yet after they get married and have greater domestic responsibilities, they may be limited in the time they can devote to academic pursuits.

Overall, both female and male students valued education and learning, reconfirming the results of White's research, which concluded that

"a positive outlook towards education was also reflected in the (Somali youth) responses…education seemed to be valued in its own right, as well as being a potential stepping stone to future employment or further study."[69] Eleven of the twelve female students confirmed that they knew what profession they would like to enter whereas only nine of the twelve male students expressed that they had concrete employment aspirations. One girl and three boys were uncertain regarding their future employment because of their interest in several opportunities.

The majority of the students acknowledged that achieving their employment aspirations would require post-secondary education. If accomplished, these students will receive an education that their parents were unable to access in Somalia, resulting in the second-generation Somali community being more educated than the first in Australia. Interestingly, studies conducted on Somali youth in the U.S.A. emphasize that the second-generation Somali youth may outperform not only the first generation but also the third generation.[70] It has been argued that the high levels of motivation and ambitious aspirations of students from migrant and refugee backgrounds contribute greatly to high rates of school retention, even more so than high intellectual capacity.[71] Their motivation and aspirations also assist in the completion of tertiary education, which paves the way for competition with the local population for middle-class jobs.

The following case study illustrates the educational success that young Somali students can achieve when they work towards their aspirations, laying promising foundations for future employment, and setting positive role models for other Somali youth.

Shifa Hussein: An Example of an Aspiring Young Somali in Melbourne

Numerous magazines and newspapers have reported on the many achievements of Shifa Hussein (including the *VCE Bulletin*, *Education Times*, *VCAA Bulletin*, *Heidelberg Leader*, *Sunday Age* and *Herald Sun*). Reports highlight that Shifa Hussein, a Year 12 student and captain at Banksia Secondary College, has led her school and local community towards a greater understanding of tolerance. Shifa has won a score of awards for her efforts including the VCE Award for September. She has tirelessly helped others by providing counselling for Somali students, organising a Somali girls' play for multicultural week, and act-

ing as a liaison between her school and the Somali community, thereby creating strong community links. She has put her energies into making the world a better place and has become involved with many charities including World Vision, the Anti-Cancer Foundation and Wesley Do Care. She has coordinated forums and completed a leadership course for African youth and multicultural youth training with Visy Care. She has won several academic awards for her outstanding achievements. Professor Kwong Lee Dow, Chair of the VCAA, commends Shifa, stating "Shifa's efforts have certainly made a significant difference in overcoming cultural barriers and making the school and wider community more informed in creating a greater depth of cultural understanding." Shifa's motto is: "*Anyone can do what they want*." Indeed, both the Somali and broader Australian community need more young people like Shifa.

5.4 Barriers to Understanding How to Achieve Future Aspirations

Research highlights that while Somali students in Western countries often have high educational and employment aspirations, they generally possess little understanding or awareness of how they might attain their goals.[72] The students in this study expressed their desire to become programmers, engineers, accountants, doctors and so on. However, they had difficulty envisioning the steps they needed to follow in order to achieve these goals. Such difficulty may stem from:

- lack of understanding of how Western education and employment systems function;
- lack of knowledge and skills to plan ahead (most young Somalis are living in "survival mode");
- lack of positive role models, i.e., members of their community who are professionally progressing in Australia;
- difficulty in adapting to their new life in Australia;
- lack of solid educational background; and
- cultural influences, e.g., planning for the future does not hold great importance in Somali culture, as Somalis are originally nomadic people that tend to act spontaneously.

In spite of the fact that many young Somalis have trouble understanding the steps needed to pursue their educational and employment goals, some of the students in this study did have good awareness in

this regard. They were able to identify that attending good schools, working hard, having patience, and good organizational skills are important steps for achieving educational and employment success. In addition, they believed that having good friends who will lead them to the right place is important.

> "You have to know what to be, a professor or whatever job you want, and then you make the right choices regarding what subjects you want to take and the kind of work experiences you do. You need to have your university degree." (Male focus group participant)

5.5 Gender and Employment

Culturally, Somalis believe that males and females should be engaged in different occupations. Seven out of the twelve female students interviewed stated that they would like to become a doctor or nurse, while four female students indicated they would like to enter teaching, politics, the police force, or the fashion design industry. The remaining female student did not state the type of employment that she would like. In contrast, eight of the twelve male students stated they would like to work in the engineering sector or related fields, such as building, aeronautics, motor mechanics, architecture, interior design and decoration, civil engineering and industrial design. Three male students did not indicate the employment that they would like, and the remaining male student revealed he would like to be a policeman. Interestingly, when students were asked in the questionnaire, "do you know what job you want to do in the future?," only one female student and one male student stated they would like to enter the police force. The equal interest of one female and one male is noteworthy because, in Somali culture, a career in the police force is not associated with women, especially in a non-Muslim environment.

Overall, there was a strong correlation between the responses given by the students and those given by their parents with relation to educational and career aspirations, particularly between mothers and female students. Previous research confirms strong correlations between migrant parents' and students' educational and employment plans.[73] It is important to recognize, however, that there were a few cases in which the parents had higher aspirations for their children than the children had for themselves.

When participants were asked in an open-ended question why they chose their preferred profession, it was apparent that many of the female students are motivated by their compassion for others. Many expressed that they want to help others, for example, by teaching the illiterate, giving money to needy persons, and healing the sick.

Research conducted in Finland has found that young Somalis commonly desire to help in the rebuilding of Somalia, a theme that was also apparent in this research.[74]

> "I want to help my own people in Somalia one hundred per cent. They need help. Who else helps them if you can't help them you know…I want to go back and help them until they are civilised. Because they are too uncivilised now, because they can't even agree on having one President. They kill each other." (Female focus group participant)

A number of the male students expressed strong feelings of responsibility toward their families overseas, stating that they wished to help them once they secured employment and began to earn their own money.

Several other motivations were highlighted during the focus group discussion. One female student, who has decided to pursue a career in biology, attributed her choice to religious motives:

> "[I want] to see the miracles of Allah in the human body." (Female focus group participant)

A small number of students thought that status was an important factor influencing their choice of career:

> "[I want] to be a famous (fashion) designer in my future." (Female focus group participant)

Finally, many of the students considered personal interest and earning money as very important in their considerations.

5.6 Perceptions of Parents' Aspirations

Six out of the twelve female students interviewed stated that they believed their parents want them to become either a doctor or nurse, whereas only two male students thought the same. Five female students expressed their desire to work in professions different from those

chosen by their parents. To illustrate, a female student who wished to become a policewoman believed that her parents would prefer her to be a housewife. Another female student who wanted to work in politics said that her parents planned for her to become a nurse. When asked why she believed her parents wanted her to be a nurse, she replied:

> "I really don't know. Maybe one day I will go back and do something for my country (Somalia)." (Female focus group participant)

Two female students, who would like to work in science or medicine, emphasized that their parents would like them to study Islam due to the belief that religious work will help their daughters to succeed in this life and hereafter on judgment day. Unlike these female students, the two male students who believed that their parents had different plans for their future made no comment about what their parents' preferred employment would be or why. A paper presented at the 9th Congress of Somali Studies, held in Denmark in 2004, argued that compared with male children, Somali girls are raised with much greater restrictions regarding their future educational and employment opportunities.[75]

Overall, the results of this study indicate that while there may be some tensions, the majority of the students interviewed believed that their parents would support them in their future educational and employment choices.

5.7 Perceptions of Voluntary Work

A majority of students interviewed (8 females and 9 males) emphasized the importance of volunteering in order to pursue a successful career. Both male and female students had similar reasons for volunteering, including to help people, learn different skills, receive work experience, socialize with others, identify if they like a particular job or not, promote their skills to others, gather referees, get more *Ajri* (God's reward hereafter), have something to include in their resumé, have the opportunity to join waiting lists, or gain "real life" experience as opposed to theoretical experience.

Yet a small number of male and female students did not feel that volunteering was of any value. Some of their comments included:

> "Because you need to be at school to learn and volunteering is not that sort of subject." (Male focus group participant)

> "Because I don't need to." (Female focus group participant)

> "Because if a person wants to become something like a doctor, he doesn't need it." (Male focus group participant)

5.8 Level of Consultation with Parents

Both male and female students revealed that they often consulted with their parents, friends, teachers, and care givers regarding educational and employment opportunities because they believe these people have wisdom, valuable information, and more experience in life and study to help them succeed in their educational and employment pursuits.

> "Because our parents know more than us because they were born before us…because they are your parents…they should know what is good for you." (Focus group participant)

> "Your mum can read your mind…because your parents' decision makes you happier than your own decision." (Focus group participant)

However, some of the students acknowledged that while they respect their parents' views and give them consideration, in the end they made their own decisions.

> "You should respect your parents and their points of view and everything but at the end of the day it's up to you. It is your life. Your parents are not processing for you what you want to do and what you don't. You consider their decisions and they give an opinion…and I think your parents don't say: 'Let me decide your life for you'…" (Female focus group participant)

Previous research confirms that Somali youth have a high level of respect for their parents' opinion, although sometimes they feel the responsibility to make final decisions for themselves.[76] Research also highlights the great connection that Somali children have with their families, which derives from the centrality of family life in Somali culture.[77] Besides the aforementioned role models, a small number of students in this study indicated their willingness to consult with youth community workers or other welfare employees.

5.9 Financial Influences on Educational and Employment Choices

Refugees and asylum seekers in Australia, including Somalis, usually have to start from scratch and receive a monthly allowance from the government, which barely covers their most basic needs.[78] White confirms that the socio-economic situation of Somali youth in Australia is generally poor.[79] As a result, money for children's leisure activities and education is often limited. Scarce monetary resources are further reduced by remittances sent to Somalia. While research indicates that refugee children whose family was more secure economically in their country of origin often have a better sense of security and opportunities for schooling during settlement,[80] this study did not focus on the relationship between student learning and their family's economic background in Somalia.

The majority of the students in this study (10 out of 12 in each group) believed that financial considerations influence their educational and employment goals. Many felt that if they have the money to allow them to study at good schools and pay university fees, this will result in their receiving a good education and a good job. However, the students' current financial position and that of their families were not assessed in this study. Students' comments included:

> "…because money helps me to do anything I want, e.g., pay fees." (Male focus group participant)
>
> "I can go [to] good schools and can go [to] a university." (Female focus group participant)

A very small number of students (two students in each group) believed that money would not affect their educational and employment goals because their community and families would offer support regardless of the costs. As they put it:

> "Because my community would support me…the family will support you no matter how much money it is." (Female focus group participant)

5.10 Strengths for Achieving Educational and Employment Goals

Previous research found that many Somali women seek refuge in the Islamic faith during the settlement period in strange and hostile envi-

ronments.[81] According to the female students who participated in this research, faith and belief in Allah provides them great strength.

> "Having faith in everything that I do. Knowing that I will never give up as long as I have Allah (God) on my side." (Female focus group participant)

Female students also named their understanding, good memory, good intentions, and social skills as their strengths.

Male students, on the other hand, considered their abilities, educational skills, physical strength, determination, and willingness to face all challenges as their strengths:

> "I am smart, strong, fit, willing to accept any challenge that is coming to face me." (Male focus group participant)

5.11 Barriers to Achieving Educational and Employment Goals

A number of female students in this study believed that their domestic responsibilities were barriers to achieving educational and employment goals. One commented:

> "Yes, housework. Noisy house (is a challenge). I need a quiet place." (Female focus group participant)

Among the Somalis, it is also very common to hear remarks such as, "Why do they [waste] their time? At the end of the day they will be housewives and their husbands will take [over] their responsibilities."

Research that compared the roles and responsibilities of Somalis and Finnish girls found that Finnish girls tended to spend their time sitting and talking in cafeterias, dancing in discos, and shopping, whereas Somali girls tended to stay at home, help their mothers with the housework, and take care of the smaller children in the family.[82] Somali girls in Finland had to balance the demands of informal education at home, such as learning "women's tasks," with those of formal education.[83] For some Somali parents, the informal education of daughters at home is as important—if not more—as formal education.[84]

Overall, female students in the present research thought that their poor English language skills challenged their abilities to achieve educational and employment goals. Male students, on the other hand, con-

sidered the difficulty of the VCE exams in Year 12 and limited resources as the significant barriers. Both female and male students expressed the need for additional tutoring, good teachers, help with English and mathematics, more educational programs, family and financial assistance, and counseling to support their potential at school.

6. Settlement Issues

"*Geyiga ama geedka aadan aqoonin midna gabaad kuma siiyo*." (Somali proverb)
Neither the land nor the tree that you don't know and affiliate with will give you shelter.

6.1 Equity in Opportunities

According to Jupp's maximalist approach to settlement, an ethnic group can only be considered successfully integrated when the broader society is able to provide a range of social, religious, and educational facilities to the ethnic clientele.[85] When asked their feelings about future educational and employment opportunities in Australia, the vast majority of the Somali students reported positive emotions. As highlighted in Table 1 below, the students generally reported multiple feelings of hopefulness, excitement, and determination. According to one female student:

> "I am excited about future employment and education opportunities because I hope that it works out for me." (Female student)

While, overall, both female and male students were positive about their future opportunities, three male students felt completely hopeless regarding their future prospects:

Table 1: Students' Feelings about Future Educational and Employment Opportunities in Australia

	Hopeful	Determined	Excited	Confused	Anxious	Completely Hopeless
Female Students	7	4	7	2	2	0
Male Students	5	7	5	1	2	3
Total	12	10	12	3	3	3

> "Allahu Aalam (only Allah knows). No hope." (Male student)

The reasons for these males having a significantly negative outlook on their future in Australia warrant further empirical investigation.

When asked whether or not they felt Somali students had the same opportunities as other Australians in relation to all types of education and employment in Australia, the majority of students felt positive about their access to different resources. A small percentage, however, felt that opportunities are not equal within Australia, attributing this to their religion:

> "Because I am a Muslim woman, there are things that I can't do, so some fields of employment is not right for me, like places where you have to have short clothes." (Female student)

> "Racial tensions have risen and I am now not so hopeful of Australia's multicultural attitude because they might be hesitant to give foreigners jobs." (Male student)

While these results do not necessarily indicate inequity in access to services and opportunities for Somali youth in Melbourne, they do indicate that there are some barriers to Somali students, in particular males, perceiving and actively pursuing certain educational and employment goals. There is a need for greater work with Somali youth to identify why some students have negative feelings with regard to their future prospects and to collaboratively develop culturally appropriate and feasible solutions to students' self-identified barriers.

6.2 Alienation from Australian Society

Jupp and colleagues argue that successful emergence/integration may take up to a lifetime to achieve.[86] Taking the minimalist approach, they argue that at the very least a community cannot be considered to be integrated until its members are not alienated from Australian society and do not attract hostile attention from the majority.

The results of this study clearly indicate that many Somali students do not feel that they, or their family, are truly part of Australian society (see Table 2). The majority of students felt that they were more accepted by their school community and immediate neighbors than they were when in public places or services. Of those female and male students that expressed their alienation from Australian society, the

Table 2: Students' Perceived Acceptance of Themselves and their Family within Australian Society

	School	Neighbourhood		Public Places		Public Services
	You	You	Your family	You	Your family	Your family
Female Students	10	6	8	5	5	6
Male Students	10	10	6	6	3	5
Total	20	15	14	11	8	11

majority regarded their religion (Islam) and terrorism to be major factors precipitating their exclusion:

> "Since all those things that has happened in the world you feel like everyone is looking at you and scared of you." (Female student)

> "I don't know if people accept me or not because I am an African person, Muslim, and if they see me they run or walk as fast as they can from me because they think I am [a] terrorist or Muslims are terrorists." (Male student)

Many students also felt that the broader Somali community was also not accepted in Australia for reasons including race, religion, and skin color.

Positively, several students said that they felt accepted within Australian society because of their Australian citizenship and the multicultural nature of Australia:

> "Because I have got Australian citizenship and feel like I am accepted." (Female student)

> "Because Australia is a multicultural nation which accepts all people no matter what." (Male student)

Conversely, the vast majority of students interviewed (11 female and 10 male students) felt accepted as part of their local Somali community, while the three remaining students felt unaccepted. Perceived reasons for this acceptance were varied, but related to the sharing of a common culture:

> "We are Somali and Somali people and regardless if you know them or not, they will help you." (Male student)

> "Because it's my culture and I speak the same language and they make us feel welcome." (Male student)

Of the three students that did not feel part of the Somali community, two quoted tribal issues as the reason for their exclusion.

Clearly, more work is needed in order for individual Somali persons, as well as the broader Somali community, to feel included and part of Australian society. In order for this to happen, stigma and discrimination on the grounds of race and religion must be better understood and addressed.

6.3 Maintenance of Core Values and Beliefs

For an ethnic group to be considered integrated within Australian society, its broad social character should not be significantly different from the norm.[87] The group must also be able to maintain its culture and language without hostility from the majority.[88]

When asked to describe how they thought they were similar to and different from other Australians, the students participating in this research expressed a large variety of ideas. Many articulated the following similarities: speak the same language (English), attend the same schools, live in the same environment/country, and share common citizenship. In addition, several students commented on the issue of common humanity:

> "They are human and we are human." (Male student)

Despite articulating these similarities, the students contended that there were a large number of differences between Somali persons and other Australians. Cultural practices and beliefs, language, race, physical appearance, and skin color were all mentioned. By and large, however, religion and skin color stood out as the differences perceived as most significant between the two groups:

> "I am black, they are white, we have our own religion and the only similarity is that we live in the same country." (Male student)

> "My religion, I am black, my culture, and my religion does not allow me to be the same as Australians because they hate me." (Male student)

Clearly, these Somali students felt that they were culturally very different from the broader Australian society, and that they were not able to openly express their culture, and hence true self, without facing hostility from some members of the Australian community. Most students participating in this research had been living in Australia for more than five years, with several having been Australian residents for over ten years. As such, greater effort needs to be urgently directed towards ensuring that the environment in which these children are growing and developing is supportive and nurturing, rather than excluding and unwelcoming.

6.4 Social/Self-Exclusion

The majority of female students and minority of male students who participated in this research felt socially excluded in Australia. The difference between genders could be interpreted as resulting from males' increased capacity to integrate and adapt to life in Australia more quickly. For instance, in answer to the question, "Do you feel that Somali community is included in Australian society?," seven out of twelve girls believed it was not. In contrast, only five out of twelve male students believed Somalis were not included in Australian society. Interestingly, nine males and five females believed the Somali community was, in fact, included in Australian society, and they (Somalis) were part of this multicultural society, but Somalis were excluding themselves from the mainstream society.

Several students commented on how the Somali community may actually seek to exclude themselves:

> "Somalis are accepted by most Australians but Somalis make themselves felt out." (Female student)

Participant observation indicates that female students in particular seek to exclude themselves from the mainstream, the reasons for which may relate to their feelings of difference due to their wearing of the *Hijab* (scarf) and religious dress.

Similarly, research on Somali women in Denmark has concluded that members of this population were withdrawn from society, claiming that the visible differences they present (dark skin, being Muslim, and speaking Danish with an accent) create stigma and discrimination.[89] This research also revealed that while Somali women residing in

Denmark did not necessarily have personal experiences of discrimination in the labor market, many often had this perception.[90]

Such behavior seems to be commonplace among migrant women globally. According to Ward and colleagues:

> "In many cases women are more isolated from members of the receiving culture, particularly if they are unemployed or lack requisite language skills. In addition, women are often perceived as cultural gatekeepers, teaching their children about ethnic customs and traditions and nurturing identification with heritage, culture, norms and values.[91]

Some of the Somali students interviewed ascribed their exclusion to the belief that some Australians prefer that only white-skinned people reside in Australia. Furthermore, some students felt that some Australians talked to them in a way that served to exclude them and that recent media coverage of Muslims had created a divisive atmosphere:

> "The media perspectives have made all Muslims terrorists and they are now judged in that light." (Male student)

Some students also attributed their sense of exclusion to skin color and religion:

> "Because Somalis are black and on top of that they are Muslims." (Male student)

While the majority of students feel they were accepted by their schools and immediate Australian neighborhood, many of them did not feel they or their families were part of Australian society, particularly in relation to public institutions and places. For example, only eleven out of twenty-four students felt they were accepted in Australian public places, while even fewer (8 out of 24) felt that their families were part of Australian public places.

It is believed that the more young people adapt and interact positively with members of their receiving country, the more they will increase their chance of securing employment, developing social skills, and being accepted by the broader society. This belief is supported by research on refugees and migrant students who attended German schools and were influenced by the values and norms of German society. That study revealed that these students achieved higher educational and occupational success than those who had not gone to

German schools.[92] The researchers concluded that the social contacts the students had developed with their mainstream classmates influenced their adoption of mainstream values.[93] In contrast, social exclusion hampers young people's success in education and employment in the new environment. Elder and Kloproge confirm that poor contact between migrant families and mainstream society can lead to migrant children's poor cognitive development.[94]

6.5 Multiple Long-Term Plans

The results of our research show there are some differences regarding future working plans for male and female Somali students in Melbourne. The majority of the male students expressed their desire to live in Arab countries or Australia, whereas the majority of female students stated they want to work in Somalia. Interestingly, Australia was the second preference for employment for male students, ahead of Somalia. In contrast, female students placed Somalia as the first country in which they would prefer to live and work, while Australia lagged behind England as a place to work and live in the long term.

Many of the students interviewed had plans for working in more than one country in the future. Male students indicated their preference to work in Arab countries due to their belief that there are many job opportunities in these countries, coupled with the fact that they are Muslim-dominated counties. They also felt that Arab countries would value Australian qualifications:

> "I want to work in Arab countries because I am confident that they would like an Australian educated person." (Male student)

Some students believed that there were good working opportunities for themselves in Australia and considered Australia their home. Other students described Somalia as their homeland and therefore felt a desire to help their people, including curing sickness and teaching Somali children:

> "I want to work (both) in Australia and in Somalia because Australia is the place I grew up, and Somalia because Somalia is my homeland and I want to help them." (Female student)

Dichotomous future planning is typical in the young Somali diaspora. Research on Somali youth in Finland reveals that traveling backwards and forwards is an option that many consider, as they feel an obligation to make a contribution to Somalia.[95] Others prefer the option of staying in the resettlement country they know.[96] This confusion in making plans for the future may be ascribed to diasporic life and development of multiculturalism in young people.[97] It can also be attributed to their frustration and bleak vision of their future in Western countries.[98] Researchers in the United States discovered that, "their view of their future here (USA) was not hopeful. Indeed, many stated that in the future they hope to live in Africa, another Third World country, or go back to Somalia. What lies behind this concern is the bleak picture of their current situation. They talk about difficulties they face adjusting to life in U.S., and several expressed concern that they do not see members of their community progressing here in the U.S."[99]

Research in Norway indicates that the desire to return to Somalia may interfere with young people's motivation and ability to integrate into their receiving country, develop local skills, or establish a stable life. This is because those who view their stay in a new country and culture as temporary retain a stronger identity with their culture of origin and a weaker identity with the culture of contact, as compared to those who plan for their residence to be more permanent.[100]

7. Implications

Offering educational and training opportunities to parents is central to supporting students in the long term, as the educational status of parents greatly impacts their children's educational attainment.

In this small-scale study, those parents, in particular fathers, with higher levels of education had higher levels of unemployment. This type of situation may lead to the devaluation of education among the Somali community, and fathers may be labeled as being poor role models for their children. To ensure that well-educated fathers can be positive role models within the community, we strongly suggest that government and concerned groups offer training for parents and assist in the securing of employment that is compatible with an individual's qualifications, skills, and capacities.

While Somali parents are clearly very concerned about their children's education and future employment, they do not understand how they can concretely help their children in achieving educational

and employment goals. There is a substantial need for parents to be assisted in overcoming this lack of awareness. Somali parents would benefit from information that lets them better understand the differences between the two educational systems (Somali and Australian), as well as greater access to English language classes and awareness programs about Australian values and way of life and the meanings of diversity and multiculturalism.

The educational and employment aspirations that parents have for their children are similar to those careers that are highly valued and well paid in Somalia. Parents require support to assist their children in developing educational aspirations that are congruent with the needs of the job market in Australia, such as the requirements, value, and remuneration for different occupations. Parents also need advice and support in understanding that children need to have the freedom to choose their career trajectory, rather than being forced to pursue goals that are set by their parents.

In this research, a number of parents revealed that they have a strong preference and future plans for their children to work in Somalia or another Muslim country. Students also demonstrated similar preferences. This plan may appear unrealistic. As with other migrant groups that came to Australia in a similar situation, very few have returned to their countries of origin. In addition, the idea that "I will go back" undermines settlement efforts and opportunities to gain local experience, develop local job skills, integrate into the mainstream community, and seek employment in Australia. To avoid unrealistic plans of returning to Somalia, parents and students should be supported to build stable lives in Australia during the settlement period.

This research indicates that parents, in particular mothers, are frustrated about their children's exposure to Western culture. Therefore, we recommend relevant programs and events for Somali parents to help bridge cultural and intergenerational gaps. These programs should focus positively on diversity, the valuing of other cultures, harmony, acceptance, and tolerance. It is also very necessary to remind refugee parents, including those from the Somali community, that children who grow up in Australia will adopt much of the Australian culture.

A significant number of Somali students in Melbourne reside in single-parent families, i.e., mostly with only their mother. This may have an impact on their educational, professional, and behavioral development. In this regard, single Somali mothers and their children require special supports and continuing advice that will assist them in over-

coming the specific challenges they face in achieving educational and employment success.

Frequently moving to new schools can have a detrimental affect on children's learning, in particular their reading and writing skills. It is essential to increase awareness within the Somali community of the negative consequences of changing schools without valid reasons.

It is essential that we encourage successful and aspiring Somali youth to be good role models for other young people and support them in organizing events, ceremonies, and celebrations to promote their community's culture and capacity to contribute to Australian society.

Somali students have high aspirations regarding their future education and employment, yet often lack an understanding of how to attain their goals. I urge schools, other educational institutions, and the Somali community to assist them in better understanding the education and employment systems and the steps they need to take to achieve their future plans. For example, students need to be trained in how to develop strategies, plans, and priorities for their educational and employment trajectories, with a focus on the importance of teaching time management skills and encouraging opportunities for voluntary youth activities to gain local experience.

Somali students have high aspirations for their educational and professional future and these good intentions deserve to be preserved, retained, and utilized well. Young people need to be provided with opportunities to become involved in creative activities and inspiring youth programs so that they may develop their skills and capacities. For example, programs may include leadership seminars, discussion sessions, educational activities, student competitions, recreational activities, camping, arts, public speaking, creative writing, reading groups, and volunteering within and outside of the Somali community.

It is crucial to provide educational tools and learning facilities (such as computers, relevant books, video resources, and photocopying machines) within the Somali community, from which both children and parents can benefit.

Creating counseling services for young people and parents is essential. These services should be staffed by qualified people from the Somali community, as well as professionals from mainstream services.

A genuine commitment to implementing these recommendations will bring about significant positive changes within the Somali community as a whole and within the younger generations in particular.

This will help to address the social exclusion experienced by many Somali students in Melbourne, particularly female students, which will then encourage their professional ambitions and enhance their ability to feel included and valued in mainstream Australian society. The Somali community has the capacity to be a very productive part of Australian society and make a significant contribution to the country.

8. Conclusion

This research explored the educational and employment aspirations of Somali students in Melbourne, as well as parents' perceptions of the value of education and its impacts on their children's learning and achievement. The research found that a number of parents have strong preferences and future plans for their children to work and live in Somalia or another Muslim country; the students interviewed also revealed similar preferences. Lack of a stable educational background, clear vision for the future, and understanding of the Australian education system were found to be potential obstacles to students' achieving their educational and employment goals. While the majority of students expressed positive feelings in terms of access to educational and employment opportunities, many stated that they do not believe they are a part of the Australian mainstream. It is hoped that the implications drawn from this small-scale study will inform efforts to help Somali students achieve their educational and employment aspirations in Australia, which is likely to enhance their sense of inclusion in Australian society and improve their long-term settlement outcomes.

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