

OREGON SOMALI COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Preliminary Report



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Authored by:

Abdikadir Bashir, MBA

Abdisalan Muse, MS

Ann Curry-Stevens, Ph.D.

The Somali Community in Oregon

INTRODUCTION

Somalia is in the eastern corner of Africa, neighboring Ethiopia and Kenya across the Gulf of Aden. Somalia is close to the same size as Texas. Most of its farmable land lies along the Juba and Shebelle riverine areas with limited supply of water across most parts of the country. The farmed land along these riverine areas is largely owned by the Somali-Bantu, who are one of the many Somali ethnic minorities in Somalia. The coastal line, mostly in the south, is inhabited by other ethnic minority communities namely Baravane, Bajuni, Markans and Benadiris. The country's climate largely reflects its geography – close to the equator, it is hot year round. The country itself is recognized as having a pastoral culture of nomadic communities with a rich oral history of linguistic complexity. The majority of Somalis are Sunni Muslims. Colonial occupation throughout the late 20th century introduced educational institutions that introduced English, Italian and French languages. Due to the legacy of colonialism and the Cold War, many educated Somali citizens are fluent in multiple languages and excel in what would be considered a high competency of social intelligence.



Somali immigrants joined Portland's population beginning in the 1970s as students in Oregon's universities. Subsequently, a large number of Somalis arrived in the United States and Oregon as refugees following the Civil War in 1991 which left devastating destruction to communities in Somalia. Many people were forced to flee to neighboring countries and into refugee camps. The State, nonprofit organizations and the Somali Americans have assisted families in their resettlement, providing essential yet limited resources.

The current estimate of Somalis living in Oregon is 12-15,000. Accurate figures are difficult to obtain, due to the fact that all Black Africans are included as "African American/Black" in conventional databases, and rarely is one's country of origin collected. We are, however, improving such information in our school districts. According to Portland Public School District, Portland has 582 Somali students, identified from the new data collection form used in the district. While we do not have the same numbers from each school district, we anticipate that Multnomah County contains about 822 Somali students. Here is how we created these estimates: earlier research (2011) identified that there were 387 Somali students (established from the language of origin data collected),ⁱ which establishes that there is a growth rate of 50% over the last five years. By applying this growth rate across the districts, the 2011 data identified 548 Somali students in Multnomah County; thereby estimating that today there are 822 students. The Beaverton School District, in dialogues, has identified they serve roughly 300 Somali students. The Somali community lives primarily in Multnomah County. This is a rapidly growing community for a number of reasons. The first is that there are many supportive resettlement agencies aided by multiple community-based organizations. Second, in-migration is significant. Oregon is ranked first as the most popular state into which to move, with this pattern being in evidence for the last three years.ⁱⁱ Third, the community is largely young, families are large, and the birthrate is high.

The challenges faced by the Somali community in Oregon are similar to challenges experienced by other immigrant and refugee communities but also face other unique challenges. Being the largest Muslim society as well as the largest African (black) immigrants, they have faced discrimination in their places of work, schools and hospitals owing to their religious backgrounds including their attire. Core priorities are to expand the availability of English language instruction, particularly in preschools and beyond school-aged youth, increase affordable housing, ensure that living wage jobs are available to the community, and extend refugee resettlement supports, without which acculturation and successful integration is delayed.

These barriers have prevented more vulnerable community members (seniors, single mothers, youth at risk, and preliterate adults) to gain the social support needed to thrive and contribute. The unfortunate consequence of barriers has been increased social isolation. This is of great concern to the self-sufficient, functional and vibrant existing Somali population as their determination to succeed is tremendous.

We hope that readers of this preliminary report come to understand the assets and challenges of the community, and to use the insights of this report to better serve members of the community. The community is open to continuing dialogue and exploring intercultural partnerships to foster greater understanding between Somali communities and government authorities, mainstream organizations and NGOs. It is hoped that the cultivation of such relationships will contribute to the ongoing collaboration efforts to improve the social, educational and economic sustainability of Somali children, youth and families in Oregon. We also invite local service providers who intend to improve existing resource systems to connect with Somali and African community organizations.

While the insights in this report are provided to help service providers “tune in” to the Somali community, encouragement is urged to see each client and family as unique. Space must be made for individual distinctiveness, and the information provided here must not become limiting or presumptive of what individuals and their families are experiencing. Gaining information on the community is intended to be suggestive, as opposed to limiting.

ARRIVAL CONDITIONS

The majority of Somalis arriving in Portland are refugees, fleeing civil war, famine and drought. While these occurrences are typically thought of as experiences of dynamics in Africa, they have many roots in western and American institutions. To a lesser extent, Somali distress was also influenced by Arab trade routes and slavery. The Somali Bantu community is a minority community that was first relocated as slaves into southern Somalia to serve the Sultanate of Zanzibar in the 1800s. Other Somali minority communities who have settled in Oregon include the Somali Benadiri and the Somali Bajuni who speak Swahili.ⁱⁱⁱ

The civic peace, yet relative isolation faced by these minority communities turned to persecution and violence when they have also become victims of the civil war in 1991, and thus subject to the common robbery of food stocks, rape and murder in the country. Understanding this turmoil is helpful to understanding the responsibility that the west carries for African economic woes.

Beginning with the colonization of Somalia by the British, French and Italian (circa mid 1800s), trade routes and community relationships were fractured, as territory structures were imposed on the country. While some independence movements occurred peacefully, others were fractious, and the USA provided military and economic support with the goal of opposing Soviet influence that was mounting in the country to its west, Ethiopia. The subsequent withdrawal of US aid, which occurred due to the civil rights violations by the governing military party, occurred on the eve of civil war, which had its early roots in 1988.

The advent of neo-Liberalism in the 1970s and beyond has additionally created strife across Africa, as indebted nations become required to create favorable economic conditions for western corporations and trade relationships (through institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF). The vehicle is known as “structural adjustment programs” that restructures domestic economies to support foreign access to both production and supply roles. Additional features impose prohibitions on public policy and supports for local communities and economies. Somalia had been relatively self-sufficient in food production up until the late 1970s, but the requirement for Somalia to import grain, followed by a devaluation of their currency, plunged the economy into severe trouble, and impoverished local communities. One of the first consequences was to ravage the assets of the Somali Bantu, and subsequently to further push farmers and rural inhabitants into cities. Urban life was simultaneously devastated by the destruction of the civil service. Writing of the devastation to Somalia and the disaster created by western financial interests, Chossudovsky (1993) gives details about the ways these dynamics intersect to also create drought:

Under the World Bank program, water was to become a commodity to be sold on a cost-recovery basis to impoverished farmers. Due to lack of funds, the state was obliged to withdraw from the management and conservation

of water resources. Water points and boreholes dried up due to lack of maintenance, or were privatized by local merchants and rich farmers. In the semi-arid regions, this commercialization of water and irrigation leads to the collapse of food security and famine... in the era of globalization, the IMF-World Bank structural adjustment program bears a direct relationship to the process of famine formation because it systematically undermines all categories of economic activity.^{iv}

The net result is that civic unrest is considerable in Somalia, with a government that has collapsed and the infrastructure required running a country in disarray. Think of destroyed water systems, sanitation, power, health care, schools and food systems being largely demolished. While the devastation has turned to immense personal insecurity, there is rebuilding as communities are working together to rethread systems and supports together to rebuild the nation. Somalia today holds the status as the world's region sixth least likely to be at peace, improving from last place in 2010.^v



Many Somalis fled the country into refugee camps in Kenya and Ethiopia. In 2013, these camps held more than 700,000 Somalis.^{vi} The largest, Dadaab, was developed for up to 100,000 refugees and now holds more than 360,000. It is the largest refugee camp in the world. Kenya wants the refugees to be sent back to Somalia, and to shut down the camp. Strife is building in Dadaab, and attacks are sometimes made on the refugee camp.

Somalia had now been in intense political turmoil for over a quarter century now. Its peoples have been forced to flee to various regions of the world. This circumstance coupled with their naturally resilient character endowed them with the ability to adaptive and assimilative to new environment much quicker than average other immigrants and refugees. They are considered highly hospitable as well and generally a collectivist community.

Locally, the African community worked with Portland State University's Department of Conflict Resolution in the "Diasporas in Dialogue Project" to address conflicts brought over with immigration. The success of this project has fostered capacity for collegiality among the range of African communities in Portland today.

For those who come to the United States from a refugee camp, uneven conditions will have been experienced. For some, life in the refugee camp was safer and better than what they had left in Somalia. Education was free and good, and students successfully graduated from high school with few afforded scholarships for tertiary education in Kenya and abroad. Some created small businesses. Others became writers, information technology specialists, and health care workers. And too, some will have also experienced persecution, violence and very harsh conditions while in the refugee camps.

The refugee experience, itself, will likely have lasting effects on the mental health of Somalis. In a synthesis of Somali mental health experiences,^{vii} troubling data is shared. Post traumatic disorders can be anticipated to be at a level between 39% to 100% of the population (compared to about 1% in the general population), and depression can be expected to be in the area of 47% to 72%.^{viii} The reason for the variation in that different studies have resulted in different levels being identified. Arriving and settled Somalis are thus likely to be facing some mental health challenges from the trauma of war and persecution from their lives in Somalia. Terrorizing experiences were prolific, and residues can similarly be terrifying. Seeking support may, however, be difficult both due to the thin resources available and the absence of culturally-specific mental health counseling for the Somali community. It also can be stigmatizing, both due to the difficulty in acknowledging such pain, as well as – for men – the additional patriarchal demands for strength which is interpreted as being able to provide for one's family, and being unscathed by one's history.

Know too that the very act of arriving into the USA creates its own mental health challenges. Simply being a newcomer serves as a risk to health, and immigration and the extensive time it takes to acculturate and gain social and economic footing is harmful to one's health.^{ix} Anxiety about one's ability to learn the language, navigate a new city, and learn the culture, are deepened by the struggles in getting one's basic needs met including housing, jobs, education and health care. While supports are in place for the first eight months of a refugee's arrival – made available through the federal government, and administered locally – the community must take the first job offered to them, even if it does not align with one's experience or credentials. In many situations, community members take a job far below their expectations and then are unable to secure improvements in working conditions because they are struggling hard to pay the bills, working at low wages and long hours, often at more than one job. Too few hours exist in the day to additionally find a preferred job or improve one's credentials.

COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL ASSETS

Compared to most other Africans, Somalis are considered a relatively homogeneous people in terms of ethnicity, religion, culture and language. Somalis are almost completely Muslim, they all speak Somali (broadly Maxaa and Maay dialects) and their culture is generally based on Islamic teachings and principles. Islam therefore plays a very important role in their way of life; the way most Somalis dress, the food they eat, and the way they raise their children are all based on Islamic principles and values. Their moral compass of faith serves as a continual renewal of development. Values that are emphasized in the culture include unity, family, loyalty, and deference to one's elders.^x

Somalis have an entrepreneurial spirit deeply rooted in them. Many Somalis have started their own businesses in diverse forms across Oregon. Despite this enormous spirit, they continuously confront numerous challenges in the creation and operation of their business ventures, including language and cultural barriers, finding capital, accessing the right networks, and learning about tax codes and other regulations at the city or state levels. Addressing the unique needs of Oregon Somali entrepreneurs holds potential to support community members to achieve their goals, expand our region's business community, and allow all Oregonians to more fully reap the rewards of the state's growing diversity.

Somalis are also deeply rooted in their faith and its traditions, the vast majority of whom are Muslim. The Islamic faith (and all who follow Islam are Muslim) recognizes a single God, called Allah. As Muslims, the Somali community adheres to strong beliefs about the importance of being people of faith. Features of Islam include recognizing God as gracious, merciful, and beneficent. Muslims are required to give to the poor and needy, and to additionally volunteer throughout the year. Muslims recognize spiritual leaders from other faiths, namely Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus, and understands them to be prophets who served to bring God's messages to humankind. Accordingly, the holy books of other faiths that flowed through God's messengers mean that the Quran, the Torah, the Gospels, the Psalms, and the Scrolls are recognized as holy texts by Muslims. The Quran remains their central holy book as it is understood to have been revealed by God to the prophet Muhammad who brought Islam into being.^{xii}

Prayer requirements connect Muslims with their God five times a day – in the morning, at noon, midafternoon, sunset and evening, although some Muslims combine these prayer times. Prayer is an act of “meditation, devotion, moral elevation and physical exercise.”^{xiii} The physicality is tied to turning to Mecca and putting one's forehead on the ground, demonstrating submission and humility before God. Says one Muslim, “It feels awesome to put my head on the cold, hard ground.”^{xiv} Making prayer space available in workplaces and education settings is a respectful accommodation to support people of Islam.

Fasting from sunrise to sundown is required of Muslims during the month of Ramadan, selected as a pious month during which time one is expected to read the Quran and demonstrate high spiritual integrity, avoiding lying, gossiping and being angry. Tied to the lunar calendar, Ramadan is typically in the spring or summer. Fasting is not required of children, and illness, age, disability or pregnancy may interrupt a fast.

Cultural practices flowing from Islamic faith includes modesty about personal appearance, and women cover their arms and legs in public, additionally wearing the hijab (head covering). This modesty also appears for men who typically cover their arms and legs, including through the summer heat. Specific care is taken to keep the area between one's navel and knees covered. Children have more flexibility and are encouraged to make decisions with their parents about how they will dress modestly. Girls will be encouraged to not wear the hijab until they commit to wearing it consistently.

Food and drink requires Muslims to avoid pork and alcohol, and to eat meat only when it is prepared similarly to kosher meat products. Barred as well is taking mind-altering drugs.

In short, Somalis hold strong kinship ties, with large families and strong communal affiliations, orienting to a collectivist culture. The community rallies around those in distress, and aims to shelter kin when they are unable to afford to pay rent or cannot find accommodations. One of the results of this is that the community rarely appears in homeless shelters or street counts, and we encourage those serving such populations to more effectively partner with the community to more flexibly connect with and support those who are in a housing crisis but who might be “couch surfing” or sleeping on the floor of their kin.

Alongside other immigrant groups (and detailed in the opening section of Chapter 5, “Policies and practices for newcomer integration”), the Somali community holds high aspirations for family, social and economic success. This is demonstrated in the effort that is expended in settlement processes, work ethics and doing what is necessary to pay the bills (including working two and three jobs), high numbers of adults who gain higher degrees (as demonstrated in the section in this report on education) and high expectations for their children to do well in school. Their drive to achieve much in the USA is a considerable asset, and one that needs to be met by policy makers and programs as assets to be tapped. So too these community assets need to be recognized by wider US society. The range of skills in the community include entrepreneurial activity, high education levels, experience with rebuilding an economy and governance structures following their collapse, and an experience of civil war and how to address longstanding conflicts between ethnic groups.

The range of Somali business contributions is significant, including small restaurants, grocery stores, home-based childcare, medical transportation and a cab company (profiled on p.15).

FAMILY LIFE

Arriving in the USA is often punctuated with relief as well as anxiety. New worries emerge as families aim to protect themselves as well as to sustain their cultural practices. Somali families were community-based, collectively-oriented in Somalia and also in refugee camps. Community members looked out for each other's children, and older children supervise younger siblings. Daily living typically served to support child development, through caring for farms, livestock, food preparation, getting water or doing other chores. The expectations that exist in the USA for parents to shoulder responsibility for child development, without many of the traditional opportunities for Somali parents to get help, can be difficult to navigate. This can be deepened by the challenges of living in apartments, and being inside more often due to cold winter months. One prominent resource identifies the importance of non-stigmatizing culturally-responsive resources to support parents in learning how to build small and large motor skills, and the need to track milestones in child development.^{xv} So too such supports may be helpful for parents who used to have extended community supports for raising children, given that the task in the USA becomes more individually oriented, and families need to cover the full range of parenting activities, including discipline, outings, and physical activity.

Social networks between Somali families serve to let the community resource each other. Sharing information, advice and instrumental daily living needs (from the proverbial “cup of sugar” to clothing to transportation) helps the community survive. Families are relatively patriarchal, with traditional gender roles influencing children and expectations placed on them. Women typically take care of the family, alongside child rearing, food preparation, care of the home and relationships. They also have had robust experiences in farming, particularly in rural areas, and

particularly among the Somali Bantu. And yet, with the tough economic times that the Somali community experiences in the USA, Somali women and youth will seek work when times are tough.

Although rarely discussed in public, polygamy is legal in Somalia, with about 20% of the population living in families with one husband and multiple wives, although second wives will typically have had their own homes.^{xvi} Prior to immigrating to the USA, men are required to select just one wife and divorce the others. As a result, a high level of Somali women arrived here without the support of a husband, and without the range of supports (including financial) that they provided to the family, which typically has large numbers of children. Adapting to such conditions, including the loss of the marriage may be additional settlement requirements. Perhaps out of sympathy, resettlement officers seem to have a preference over the families run by a single mother than by those where both parents are present.

It is important to note that while both patriarchal and strict Muslim identities suggest that women might be expected to be subservient, Somali women have larger economic roles, and have had freedom to work and travel, and have often headed their own households.^{xvii}

Elders are always valued and respected in Somali culture. The community, in particular, values elders who have made much of their lives – in terms of education, status and money. Such elders typically formed governing councils in Somalia, and are deferred to as leaders in the USA. Again, while elders attain broader influence in leadership roles, those with lesser status are afforded respect: “It would not be uncommon for a poor, uneducated nomad to feel comfortable approaching a high government official as an equal when discussing state affairs.”^{xviii}

CHALLENGES TO EQUITABLE ACCESS AND INTEGRATION

a. Education

Education is one of the keys for life success, and an important pathway out of poverty. In Oregon, schools are not only centers of education, but they are also centers of community, providing valued social services. Many students in public school face a number of challenges. Somali students face difficulty in the US education as they adjust to new education system and its requirements. Over the past decade, non-dominant children and youth (including immigrants and refugee students) have changed the face of Oregon classrooms, moving in Multnomah County from minority to majority presence in school, and more broadly in Oregon, becoming a third of the student population. English Language Learners (ELL) are the fastest growing segment of the student population in the United States. In Oregon, 10.2% of students are enrolled in ELL programs. Yet despite this need, provision of ELL programs has been woefully inadequate. Local narratives from Somali parents highlight concerns for how long their children are being kept in ELL programs, alongside a strong wish for Somali speakers in such classrooms to better bridge students to engagement with academic success. In the 2014/15 legislative session, ELL funding was revamped, aiming to improve the dynamic of only ¼ of Oregon’s students becoming fully proficient within 5 years, and less than half meeting the yearly expected gains in English skills. Several problems were present in the system: there was a financial incentive to schools to keep students in ELL programs beyond their appropriate time in the program (not inconsiderable when an additional \$3000/student is provided for ELL students), there were few requirements that funding for ELL needed to be spent on ELL, funding was too low, and the little was being done to ensure adequate progress through the ranks of ELL programs. Additionally, compliance reviews, including at Portland Public Schools, showed repeated violations of compliance with ELL requirements. A legislative win in 2015 strengthened the ELL program, requiring tracking of how ELL funds are spent, providing additional funds for ELL improvements, and transparency of ELL results for students.

Somali children face many challenges and struggle in schools, particularly around language which is a major barrier to learning. Until students become capable in speaking, understanding, reading, and writing English, they are significantly disadvantaged in the US education system which is not adequately prepared for immigrant and refugee children. Somali children often fall behind in U.S. schools. There are few programs intended for ELL students. While many programs have not been effective in moving students quickly to learning English, the advent of dual language



immersion where students can be understood as having considerable linguistic and cultural assets, as they are not required to discard their original languages. A Somali native language literacy program was introduced in Portland Public Schools in 2016, with teacher Salaad O’Barrow who would teach in both Maxaa and Maay dialects of the Somali language. PPS have also hired substitute teachers Ayan Ali and Nasteha Mohamed and Mohamed Mohamed for special education.

The children whose first language is not English find difficulty to participate equally because they cannot understand the teachers’ instructions and reading materials that they are provided. In American schools, it is believed that parent involvement is a

significant factor affecting a child’s educational success. However, many parents have been experiencing difficulty to involve their children education because of language barriers, lack of support from the schools and due to working various work shifts to earn living to provide one’s family. Non-native speakers such as Somali students are most at risk of academic failure while some view schooling as an estranging force that provides unequal opportunities. Given the difficult circumstances that Somali students and their families regularly face in schools and education system in general, the type and quality of education available to these students distressed to learn English.

Portland Public Schools released a progress report on Somali students in 2015.^{xix} In it, the educational needs of the community are identified: the graduation rate is only 58%, while the overall rate in the district is 70%. These students are, however, working hard to achieve. Their attendance rate is almost at the level of white students, at 92.7% of days attended regularly, which is better than most other communities of color. And the students are under-represented in more advanced classes (such as AP, IB and dual credit classes), and severely under-represented in the “talented and gifted” (TAG) program, at just six Somali students in the TAG program while they should hold 64 of such spots. This is the lowest level of any community of color represented in such spaces. Under-representation is the result of not being identified as a potential candidate by teachers, not testing well in these tests, and low levels of parent advocacy pressing for such services to be considered for their children. In a final urgent challenge, Somali students are over-represented in school suspensions or expulsions. While statistically they should only face 11 such discipline events, they face 20 such events. This is a longstanding problem in our local schools, with students of color being treated more harshly than their white counterparts. Prior research indicates that students of color are no more disruptive in class, but they receive harsher discipline for their actions.^{xx} This pattern of more frequent and harsher discipline exists as a result of implicit bias, and sometimes because they are over-surveilled and their behavior noticed and scrutinized by school authorities.

In response to these stark disparities, the Somali community convened to form an Education Task Force whose findings reinforced the data from PPS. For instance, the Somali Education Task Force report found out that 74% of the parents interviewed were not adequately or appropriately engaged with their children’s schools. These challenges altogether surface the need for effective parent support to understand the school culture and advocacy roles that can help students be more effectively included in school, and to press for the additional resources that can be helpful for the academic success. It is imperative for the Somali community to be understood as a community in grave need of effective supports and for community advocates to be invited to join policy tables to discuss their needs and priorities.



The Somali Education Task Force was formed by the community in response to the widening academic achievement gap for the Somali school-aged children attending PPS. In order to amplify their voices, the community subsequently formed the Center for African Immigrants & Refugees of Oregon (CAIRO). With funding from ODE’s Early Learning Division, CAIRO will be launching its first preschool for African immigrants & Refugees in fall 2016



Culturally responsive programs, teaching and parent involvement is an essential ingredient to this work, alongside efforts to undo institutional racism.

b. Health Care

The 1991 Civil War in Somalia completely destroyed the healthcare institution system, reducing the population to survival mode. Prior to the civil war, Somalia had a free public healthcare system where patients could walk into any hospital clinic to seek medical care attentions. A thriving private health care clinic system also existed.

Due to the civil war, many Somalis fled from their country to escape the destruction, hunger and the death that became widespread. Most of those who escaped made it in neighboring countries, namely Kenya, Ethiopia and Yemen where to this day some of the largest Somali refugee camps still exist. The Geneva Convention provided for the resettlement of Somalis from refugee camps to the USA and other parts of the world. Signatories to the Convention provided pathways to settlement, first requiring passing stringent background security checks, as well as health assessments prior to relocation to those countries.

Before departure from refugee camps and other countries, refugees are required to undergo a medical examination to identify health conditions that could prevent entry into the U.S. as defined by public health regulations. Within 30 days of arrival in Oregon, refugees must visit a refugee resettlement agency and go to the Mid County Health Center for an initial health screening which include an emotional and mental health screening following established guidelines established by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention.



After the initial health visit, Somalis (and other refugees) receive a more in-depth health assessment by the County health agency, required during the 8-month transition period. Most Somali refugees arrive in the USA with good health. With the deeper screening, previously undiscovered diseases and/or conditions may be diagnosed. These newly-identified conditions are frequently prevalent in the refugee's country of origin, but rare in the United States. For example, refugees may have tropical disease such as malaria, TB, typhoid fever, parasites, malnutrition, and psychological trauma. These health visits frequently pose hurdles such as language barriers and complex health care bureaucracy. When refugees arrive in the United States, there is an 8-month federally-determined program during which new arrivals are exposed to a number of opportunities including skill building, English classes, and self-sufficiency classes. During this time, all refugees are provided with the Oregon Health Plan, and a Medicaid plan that covers all expenses. After 8 months, this assistance ends and refugees are left on their own to become self-sufficient.

Due to disparate and variety of programs with complexity of network of providers for the whole family, Obstacles can be significant, causing them to disconnect from the system. Obstacles include income barriers, incomplete understanding of bureaucratic challenges such as appointment scheduling and navigation of the insurance and not understand the diverse specialties in the health care system. Other limitations faced by Somalis include how to address acute and chronic disease needs; language and cultural barriers further complicate access to health care. Chronic conditions, that may have been considered incidental to life in the refugee's original country, may be viewed as more serious in their adopted country. And a dietary constraint also challenges the community, as Somalis consume more carbohydrate-based food such rice and pasta at levels to which they are unaccustomed.

Preventative health can be challenging for Somali refugees. Many do not obtain preventative health care because they are unfamiliar with the medical services available to them. Also, Somalis may have limited understanding of the value of preventative care. This stems from experience in their original country's healthcare system which rarely addresses issues of preventative care. This pattern extends to prenatal care, and relatively few Somali women are accustomed to doctor's visits to check on the development of the fetus. As a result, most Somali refugees seek medical attention only when they get sick and this has become part of the Somali cultural norm. It is important to remember that many native-born Americans also neglect preventative health care and delay seeking health care until conditions have deteriorated.

Most Somali refugees lived for many years in refugee camps prior to coming to the USA, having traveled different routes, both geographically and psychologically. Good physical and mental health as well as ability to speak English language is critical to successful navigation of the stressful transition to living in a new culture. When Somali refugees arrive in poor health, their burdens are multiplied as they negotiate the health care system during their initial transition phase.

Mental health challenges can exist due to the experiences in Somalia and/or in subsequent refugee camps. The horror of violence, coupled often with grief and loss of loved ones, sometimes with survivor guilt, and occasionally with the terror of having watched the very worst torture of their family members – all creates trauma which can readily manifest as post-traumatic stress disorder. Estimates, as noted earlier, are at 39% to 100% of the refugee population facing this consequence.^{xxi} Trauma also exists with the integration challenges, which are much more draining than one had anticipated. While relief had been anticipated, instead economic and social stressors abound, along with worry for how one's children will be able to cope in school. Additional stressors are tied to reworking family relationships and patterns: children outpacing their parents in learning English and US culture, spousal challenges due to economic vulnerability facing men, particularly, when they are unable to fully care for their families, and severe isolation facing the elderly and single mothers. Shifts in culture and the ways that family and community are valued are also a source of stress: the individualist versus collectivist mindset heightens expectations on parents to raise their children without much support from others.

Without being well connected to health providers, and without having culturally responsive and culturally specific health care, the community remains vulnerable. Somalis value an integrated mind, body and spirit approach to health care, and non-conventional approaches to care are required: says one service guideline: "Helping professionals must be willing to get out of their offices and walk and work alongside their clients."^{xxii} It is important to know that Somali-specific resources are available for service providers. Begin by looking at the resources cited in this chapter.

Somalis are currently the largest African immigrant group living in tri-county population center of Oregon and they need specific health programs as they struggle with understanding how to navigate the local health care system and securing insurance coverage. The onset of chronic diseases such as depression, hypertension and diabetes that hardly existed prior arrival to USA, continues among the community. For health providers, the overarching recommendation is that sources of ill health will be tied not just to the conditions one experienced in their homeland, but also from the settlement conditions being faced in the USA, and that these factors are typically tied to inflexibility and unresponsiveness in the social institutions and discourses prevalent in the USA, and heightened considerably by the difficulty the community has in gaining an economic foothold to care for one's family.

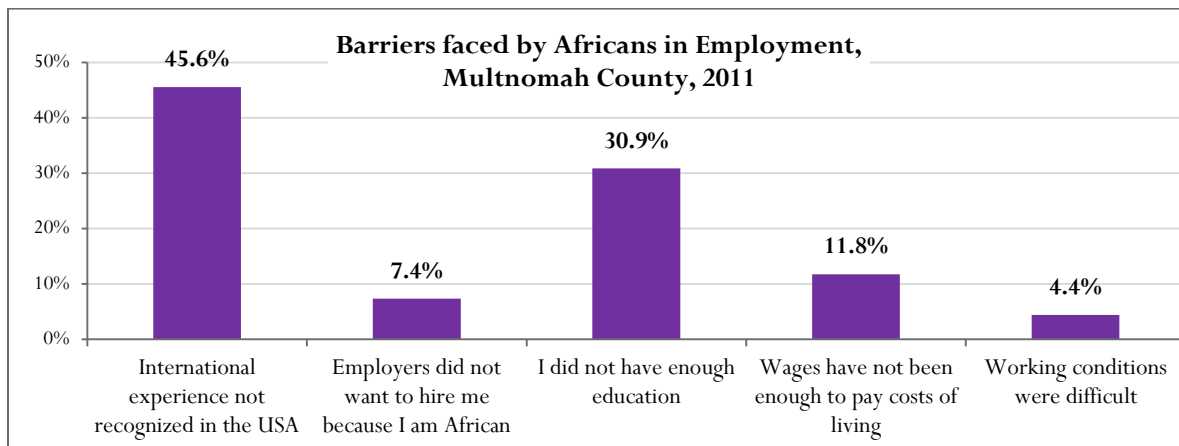
Locally, investments in creating Somali community health workers are growing, and significant outreach is occurring to reach women, particularly, to support maternal health.



c. Employment

Like most immigrants of color, Somali immigrants and refugees in Oregon face many barriers to employment. The most common ones include the lack of US experience, lack of information and networking, lack of access to professional licensing due to lack of recognition of their foreign credential, and most crucially, lack of English language proficiency. The majority of Somalis have limited knowledge of the job market in the USA, and getting a job in one's own field is particularly difficult. Add to this the requirement for refugees to take the first job offered to them (as a condition of receiving federal funds for the first eight months of arrival), and there is a "perfect storm" of economic vulnerability.

Only a few Somali professionals and trades people are employed in their chosen fields. Additionally, they face employment discrimination because of their ethnicity and religious background. Almost overwhelming majority of Somali professionals who have completed different levels of university degrees from abroad and here in the United States are either taxi or truck drivers. An earlier study of Portland's African immigrants and refugees identified that almost one half of Africans have difficulty getting relevant employment because their foreign credentials are not recognized in the USA.



Source: African Community Survey, 2011.^{xxiii}

A small number professionals are working in their trained field while others are working in other industries or/and running their own small business. In this regard, many Somali professionals have become frustrated and become hopeless. Most Somalis professionals who are underemployed or unemployed feel that these employment barriers are due to limited practical city, county and state government policies and lack appropriate networking and connections.

Moreover, because of family responsibilities here in Oregon and back home, a lot of professionals have to accept any job that becomes available to them to allow paying their household needs. As such, the issues of underemployment/unemployment and thus poverty continue to affect a high number of Somali families in Portland and Metro areas. This, along with language, housing and education issues, is a top-ranking problem encountered by the Somali community.

While transportation is not a major hindrance to employment for majority of Oregonians, it is a challenge for the Somali new arrivals to this city. Due to inefficiencies of service delivery, it takes them a while to figure out their way around Portland and Metro. This handicaps their employability and efforts to integrate. Additionally, there are not Somali professionals who are in senior management or supervisory positions in either public organizations or private enterprises who could have mentored our hard working young men and women to sustainable employment. This vacuum results about cultural competency gap with existing structures and systems in which they are forced to work for and/with.

d. Housing

While successful integration of immigrants into other communities is determined by the attainment of several basic needs, adequate and affordable housing remains top priority for the community development and economic progress. Research in the housing market shows that the lack of reliable housing information could be a major barrier when looking for affordable housing.^{xxiv}

Somali Oregonian's current challenges and future prosperity depends upon a looming linkage between affordable housing and economic development. When most Somali refugees arrive in Oregon they receive first eight months of rent assistance hence renting apartment units that are quite different from and had little resemblance their back home left dwellings. Finding an appropriate housing for the large sized Somali families can be challenging and cost sensitive. Renting four to five bedroom houses are the biggest challenges faced by Somali refugees as most of them start from low paying jobs in their first years in America.

It is worth noting that the majority of Somali families used to own their homes back home, and that is why, upon arrival, most of them yearn for a permanent place to call home. To make that reality, some apply to Habitat for Humanity although there is long waiting list. Most continue in low paying jobs and deal with rising rents, hence moving from place to place in an effort to find affordable housing. Others pursue Section 8 housing vouchers that take several years to obtain.

Lack of affordable housing creates immense hardships for most of the underserved Somali populations. For example in Washington County's Section 8 vouchers takes up to six to seven years forcing many Somali applicants to abandon their applications; in Portland it is about three to four years. In addition, the current housing crisis further exacerbates the situations while many low income Somali families compete with internal migrations and the investment boom in Oregon. The rental crisis has hit the community in unprecedented ways, worsened by the weak civil rights protections the community is provided – they often do not know their rights, and are unable to protect them due to language and information barriers, alongside legislation-based occupancy barriers that disallows larger families from living in small rental units. The abundant stories of discrimination and simply unfair practices give rise to the urgency of finding solutions to the housing crisis facing Somali renters.

Few Somali refugees might have made real progress in the housing market and middle income families have explored comfortable housing while others bought their own houses. For those who have, many became homeowners through Habitat for Humanity which offers affordable housing programs. Because most Somalis hold Islamic beliefs, families will not enter into traditional mortgages. The Islamic faith prohibits charging interest, yet this is how all America works. This prevents some Somali families entering housing markets with traditional mortgages. At the same time, Somalis understood that there is an alternative Islamic faith-accepted Halal way, such as La-Reba system, or “no interest mortgages,” which are available and perfectly legal in USA.

It is imperative that solutions be found to the low income Somali families housing crisis that is unique with many features: the intersection of language difficulties, cultural norms of occupancy that differ so much from that in US society, low incomes, vulnerability due to poverty, racism and bias of those involved, and the absence of culturally-specific services to assist them navigate the ever changing complexity of housing policies.

To address these challenges, public and private housing markets should explore various way to supplement the market needs for the impacted communities while at the same time immediately increasing the supply of subsidized housing to meet the needs of the low income Somali families. One of the Task Forces recommended in this report aims to address the urgent supply issue. Furthermore, it is necessity for expanded access to translators and policy that requires landlords and housing managers to ensure that conflict and disputes are comprehensible to Somali tenants. It is important that housing is understood as a human right instead of a simply market transaction based on supply and demand.

e. Criminal Justice System

A criminal justice system in a democracy functions only if the people believe it is fair and efficient. The triple constraints of being black, new immigrant/refugee and Muslim are resulting more youth/young male Somalis being prosecuted and convicted at higher rate than mainstream white communities. To worsen the experience, many who end up in jails do not receive culturally responsive services such as chaplains who can provide counseling while serving time.

Some of our youths have been sentenced under Measure 11 mandatory sentencing guidelines and serve many years in juvenile detention centers to be finally released under stringent conditions or face deportations back to Somalia. Often in these situations, they have lived in Oregon for years and return to a war-torn home which they do not remember nor where they have solid connections.

The criminal justice can be overwhelming and within the context of Somali Oregonians, it is quite intimidating and confusing to navigate. This applies to minor offences such as traffic violations or more major infractions. Locally, we know that Somali adults' encounters with the police is most likely for assault and for domestic violence, while assimilated Somali youth in Oregon commit similar crimes to their white counterparts. It is worth noting that the community lacks Somali attorneys that the community can relate to when seeking support in terms of understanding the entire criminal system. Currently, the community heavily relies on community-based organizations and an array of mainstream attorneys when seeking assistance in the justice and law related matters when they or their loved ones face trouble. Interpretation alone is not enough. In the post 9-11 era, many examples emerge of complaints include the phenomena such as "driving while Black" and of "flying while Muslim" particularly when traveling to an outside USA where almost all Somalis are pulled over and singled out from the airport lines upon their return for their dress, looks and names. Many in the Somali community are deeply concerned about this type of profiling and inequitable treatment.



Despite the experiences of racial bias, or the perception of racial bias, a significant step forward in law enforcement was made when Portland Police Bureau hired its first Somali police officer, Khalid Ibrahim, in Portland, Oregon. For many in the community, there is profound appreciation for this responsive gesture and hope for a genuine engagement with the Somali community as allies in our cities' efforts to combat crimes.

At the legislative level, the Oregon House recently passed House Bill 2002. This resulted from advocacy efforts to end profiling. Led by the Center for Intercultural Organizing, Oregon's House Bill 2002 (passed in 2015) prohibits law enforcement from the use of profiling based on race, color, national origin, and religious affiliation (as well as other identities). Profiling complaints will also be collected, as stipulated in the End

Profiling Act, and a yearly report will be distributed. The community awaits evidence that it is effective in reducing racial profiling.

f. Religious Discrimination

The United States guarantees religious freedom. But this is vastly narrowed for Muslims, despite also being covered under these protections. Juxtaposing two different sets of religious support aims to make our point: the outward expression of modesty in the Catholic faith can be practiced by women who choose this career. Modest loose clothing and head covering is worn by nuns. Catholic nuns who wear the veil can generally be encountered in secluded religious environments, and their head covering is part of their convention in public as well. Muslim women who practice modesty in the public sector are, however, questioned antagonistically about why they practice modesty. Both are a demonstration of faith.

Negative religious stereotypes are advanced by both media and employees in public institutions due to a lack of understanding of individuals who pursue a religious lifestyle. This lack of knowledge and respect for people who choose to live a religious lifestyle from a different faith and culture living in the public versus the private sector is a discrimination that Somali Muslims face as an acculturative stress in the experience of integration. It also adds to the risk of delaying full acculturation and integration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- a. Expand supports to refugees so that they can access improved income supports, alongside resources to achieve professional and business development.
- b. Develop family-friendly policies that address issues in education, employment, housing security and social integration that ensure long term sustainability for refugees.
- c. Invest in the economic development of the Somali community through micro-loan accessibility and urban renewal grants.
- d. Research all national and global models of successful refugee resettlement and social integration.
- e. Designate funding for at-risk refugee youth outreach programs to prevent gang involvement and other radicalizations by offering employment search, training and development as well as extending NGO networks to offer apprenticeships and internships.
- f. Recruit and hire Somali employees with bi-lingual and bi cultural competency as service providers in the health care, housing, employment, and education fields.
- g. Establish community partnerships with and build capacities of existing Somali non-profits to problem solve and offer support to service providers.
- h. Require cultural competency assessments and training for employees in the education, health care, police, court, human services and child protection systems to prevent racial, social and religious discrimination.
- i. Develop ongoing acculturation mentor programs for refugee families based on models used for exchange students being hosted by American families.

CONCLUSION

We are hopeful that this preliminary report sheds lights on the success, needs as well as struggles of the Somali community. While we seek to undertake a more comprehensive research on each of the areas identified in this report, this introductory report nonetheless generates knowledge for community leaders, natural helpers, service-providing agencies, and different levels of government to plan and develop more relevant programs, resources and strategies.

The Somalis are inherently talented, resilient, business-minded, hard-working and highly adaptable. Limited language skills, however, in addition to poor socio-economic status and multiple cultural barriers negate the Somali community to fully access and use available resources. We encourage readers of this chapter to reach out to the community, to listen deeply to needs and to identify and build up on strengths. Respect for the community and authentic partnerships hold potential to identify meaningful solutions in the face of adversity.

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