

Options UK

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Understanding East London's Somali Communities

A study conducted for the East London Alliance

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

BME	Black and minority ethnic
ELA	East London Alliance
EU	European Union
LA	Local Authority
LB	London Borough
LSOA	Lower Level Super Output Level
ONS	Office for National Statistics
OSCA	Ocean Somali Community Association
OUK	Options UK
PCT	Primary Care Trust
PLASC	Pupil Level Annual School Census
PEER	Participatory Ethnographic Evaluation and Research
RAMFEL	Refugee and Migrant Forum of East London

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report represent those of the authors, and not necessarily those of the various organizations that supported the work.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

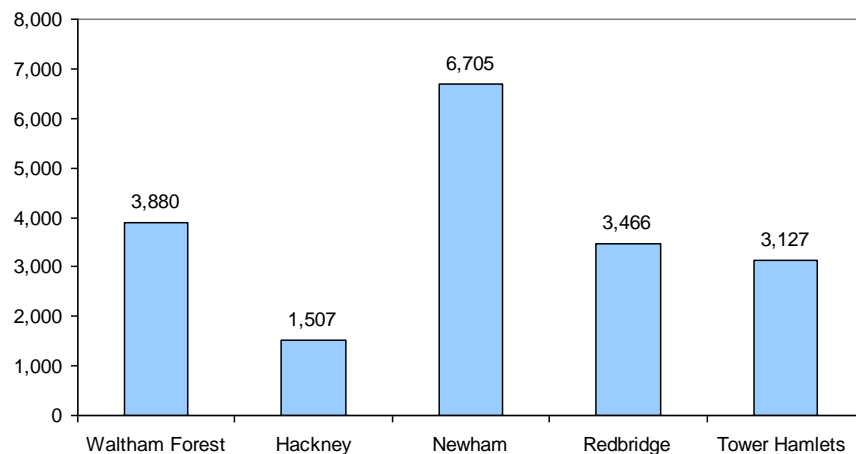
1 Introduction

The London Borough of Waltham Forest, on behalf of its partners (the London Boroughs of Redbridge, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Hackney) commissioned Options UK to conduct research to improve understanding of the Somali Community in East London. The research is part of a wider East London Alliance (ELA) programme, 'Building Somali Resilience and Leadership'. The purpose is to inform policy and future projects for the Somali community, and to support communities to build resilience to violent extremism. The research will benefit local partners working beyond the Prevent strategy, including youth services and education. The study estimates the size of the Somali population, and explores Somali community engagement, pathways to radicalisation, and social mobility.

2 Population Estimate

There is insufficient data to use orthodox methodologies to estimate the Somali population. Name analysis is the most robust alternative. Estimates of the Somali population from a Waltham Forest name analysis study¹ provide the best estimates in East London. These data are a conservative estimate, representing the minimum possible number of Somalis. They are useful for comparing the size and distribution of the population across East London boroughs. By applying a ratio (pupils:total Somali population in Waltham Forest) to the number of Somali pupils in other boroughs², a crude estimate of the total Somali population was calculated (see figure 1).

Figure 1. Estimated Somali Population, all Ages, by East London Borough (2009)



Source data: LB Waltham Forest nkm database, 30.09.2009

Newham has the largest number of Somalis (6,705) and the highest proportion of Somalis (2.7% of the total population). Hackney has the lowest number (1,507) and lowest proportion (0.7%). Redbridge and Waltham Forest have similar Somali populations (3,466 and 3,880; 1.4% and 1.7% of the population respectively). This method produces an estimated 3,127 Somalis in Tower Hamlets, or 1.4% of the population, a figure that is lower than previous estimates from community organisations,

¹ LB Waltham Forest nkm database, 30.09.2009

² Schools census data (PLASC) on Somali ethnicity are available for each borough.

though higher than the PCT's previous estimates. It is surprising that Tower Hamlets seems to have a smaller Somali population than several other East London boroughs, and this has implications in terms of service provision and third sector activity. At present, the majority of Somali-specific social, health, and voluntary services are concentrated in Tower Hamlets, which may no longer be where the greatest need lies.

The Somali population is extremely youthful: two thirds are under 20 years, and only 4% are over 50 years. The densest concentrations of Somali students are in Ilford in Redbridge, West Ham in Newham, and Leyton in Waltham Forest. In Hackney, the densest population is in the North West of the borough, by Finsbury Park. Higham Hill, Leyton, Cathall and Cann Hall wards show the greatest concentration of Somali residents in Waltham Forest.

3 Qualitative Methods

A combination of methods were used: a qualitative study with young people using a Peer Research approach, in-depth interviews and community mapping with 16 key informants, and a review of existing literature and data sources. For the PEER study, young Somalis were trained as *peer researchers*, and conducted in-depth interviews with friends. Twelve young Somalis (eight men and four women) aged 16 to 20 years took part, interviewing two friends each on three separate occasions.

4 Community Mapping

This focused on Somali-led organisations active in ELA boroughs. There are numerous small groups operating from people's homes (homework clubs, women's groups), and several well-established organisations which attract external funding. It was not possible to map all small groups, even if they were doing valuable work.

Response to the research: Engaging community organisations in the research proved challenging. Reasons for this include: being busy meeting the high demands of the community with few resources, research fatigue, lack of belief that anything would change as a result of the research, and poor relations with some Local Authorities. Concrete steps must be planned to implement the recommendations of research in order to avoid further such disillusionment. If Somali organisations are to be engaged in Prevent work, it is necessary to consider how such work can be linked to fulfilling practical needs of their organisations, such as providing funding or training opportunities.

Tower Hamlets hosts the widest range of Somali organisations working in a range of areas (health, education, housing, employment). Generally, groups feel they have been well-supported in recent years by the LA. The PCT provides Somali-specific services and works on issues such as khat misuse. There is a Somali-led mosque (Al-Huda), Housing Association (Karin), and several youth clubs. There is no general Somali community centre. Tower Hamlets had the first Somali Mayor in Britain (from May 2009). Somali residents of Tower Hamlets are active in the arts and business, including hosting an annual Cultural Week (which attracts Somalis from across London); publishing Somali Eye (a Somali focused quarterly magazine focusing on community issues); and publishing a glossy current affairs, lifestyles and fashion magazine (Sheeko). However, the lack of appropriate housing for many families is an ongoing concern, as is the low number of Somalis among public sector employees.

Hackney has few Somali community groups and reportedly none are currently funded. The overwhelming verdict of the borough's Somali residents is that Hackney has few, if

any, services for its Somali community. Hackney's proximity to two social and religious hubs (Finsbury Park and Tower Hamlets) may go some way towards explaining its relatively under-developed Somali sector.

Waltham Forest has a diverse Somali community, with a small Somali-run mosque, and is the home of Universal TV (aimed at Somalis). There are numerous small community organisations (which help with benefits claims, homework etc.) of which four are supported by the LA through an umbrella organisation. There are no youth clubs for Somalis specifically, but at least one group works with young people.

Newham: There appear to be few well-established Somali groups, and those that exist (such as the Somali Women's Advisory Network) are pressed for time and resources. The borough of Newham does not fund any Somali groups, reflecting its policy of not funding bodies that serve single ethnic/religious groups. Youth Services are beginning outreach work with young Somalis in Newham, trying to encourage them to access mainstream youth services.

Redbridge: Findings are limited in this borough owing to ongoing sensitivities between the LA and the Redbridge Somali Consortium, an umbrella organisation for several Somali groups. Somali groups in Redbridge want additional services such as Somali youth clubs and outreach services. The LA has encouraged them to apply for funds but with limited success owing to capacity limitations and communication difficulties.

5 Existing Information and Gaps in Knowledge

Numerous research reports on the Somali community exist, often in the form of grey literature (not books/journals) which is difficult to access. Educational data should be available to Somali groups, but it is also difficult to access. The lack of accessibility of data and reports means that researchers may duplicate previous efforts, and the ability of community groups and LAs to develop evidence-based strategies is limited. Good information is already available on the historical context of Somali migration, challenges to community development, educational attainment and successful initiatives for improving results, housing, intergenerational relationships, khat use, and employment. References and summaries for these resources are in Chapter 5.

6 The Somali Community's Resilience to the Threat of Violent Extremism

Among young people: there was no evidence that young Somalis interviewed were interested in (or even aware of, in many cases) radical ideas, let alone in pursuing extremist actions. Several pointed out that young people who had seen violence in Somalia are unlikely to be involved in further violence, as they came to the UK looking for peace. Most young people felt settled and satisfied in their area, and even those facing stress or hardship were relatively optimistic about their futures and did not feel out of place or lacking in confidence. They often contrasted this with their parents' generation, who they thought may have experienced such feelings.

Risks of radicalisation in the Somali community: Although there has been media speculation about young Somalis going to Somalia and being radicalised, there is little information about the risk of radicalisation among Somalis in the UK. No research participants knew cases of young people being radicalised. Several had heard rumours

of young people disappearing, presumed to have been recruited to fight for Al-Shabab³ in Somalia. Few details were known and we were unable to confirm their veracity. However, there have been eight referrals to the Channel Project (which identifies and supports individuals at risk of radicalisation) of young men born in Somalia across the East London Channel cluster since 2008. These referrals had vulnerabilities linked to criminality or mental health issues.

Young Somalis may travel (or be sent) back to Somalia for 'rehabilitation' at vulnerable times in their life (e.g. following arrest or drug use). There is no evidence that they are going for terrorist training or other violent purposes. However, such trips may pose **risks to young people** that well-meaning families do not anticipate.

Those interviewed saw the Somali community as being **no more vulnerable** to radicalisation than other groups. Preventing violent extremism is not an area that Somali community leaders are particularly familiar with, but they are **amenable** to learning more, especially if additional support is available. Reservations were expressed about the current focus of Prevent on Muslim communities. Caution was recommended when it comes to working with Somali families, who may worry that the Prevent strategy will result in undesired state involvement in family life.

Working towards a **stronger collective voice**, so that the Somali community can liaise more effectively with the authorities on security matters, will be an important step in increasing resilience, as will be counteracting negative representations of Somalis in the media. Mosque leaders stress the need for a safe space for young people to debate foreign policy and religious issues. Others argued that the arts and culture (and in particular, celebrating Somali arts) are alternative ways of promoting tolerance, non-violence and understanding.

Challenges to organisational development: In most boroughs, Somali community groups are relatively small, and experience difficulties in securing adequate, sustainable resources. Several factors limit their development, and their ability to respond to a range of social issues, including the threat of violent extremism:

- Among leaders, there is a **lack of clarity** and agreement about the nature of the **threat of radicalisation**, and likely pathways to radicalisation
- Many groups are **limited in their ability to establish, scale up and sustain activities** owing to limited access to funding, lack of grant writing expertise, the short term nature of funding, and lack of capacity to access strategic information
- Groups face **high demand for immediate service provision** reflecting high levels of need in the Somali community, making it hard to focus on longer term goals, such as building the capacity of volunteers

There have been several attempts to set up **Somali networks** and streamline funding mechanisms. However, according to participating groups, few have succeeded. The following factors lie behind this:

³ Al-Shabab is a group with links to Al-Qaeda which emerged from other Islamist militant groups who have been fighting in Somalia since 2006. They want to impose a strict version of Sharia law in Somalia, where they control most of the south and centre of the country (adapted from www.bbc.co.uk/news/10595332, July 2010).

- A strong **spirit of independence** in many groups, who feel that larger umbrella bodies do not represent them and stifle their development. They desire a direct, personal relationship with the LA/funder
- The **tribal identity** of different groups, which can limit groups' desire to collaborate with each another
- Smaller and newer groups are relatively unused to **collaborative working**, which requires a certain level of organisational development
- For successful organisations, it is **hard to see the benefits** of joining a network/forum
- **Negative past experiences** in networks (perceived mismanagement, conflict, lack of sense of common purpose)

Other factors limiting Somali organisations' ability to respond to complex social issues such as the threat of radicalisation include:

- Young people often felt '*lectured*' at rather than engaged in discussions in activities in mosques or religious talks. A **didactic style of delivery** is not the most effective way of tackling complex issues such as radicalisation. Several Somali-led groups are now challenging this didactic style, and are critically examining inter-generational relationships, and recognising the importance of listening to and empowering youth, through art, drama and discussion
- The **online presence** of Somali groups is weak. Where they exist, most websites are out of date. This limits groups' ability to inform and attract new participants
- In several boroughs (Hackney, Redbridge and Newham) **communications** between Somali community groups and the LA were either limited or required significant strengthening.

There are also **protective factors** within the Somali community which strengthen its ability to resist to violent extremism:

- The existence of several **long-established community organisations** with a track record of 10-15 years of supporting vulnerable people
- Strong **family networks** and **social and peer support** amongst Somali youth
- Religious and community leaders are **amenable** to working on Prevent issues
- Widespread commitment to **volunteering/informal mutual support** in the local community even in the absence of funding, e.g. assisting elderly people, setting up informal homework clubs
- Strong desire among community groups to **scale up their work**, reach larger numbers of people, and support young people in particular

7 Somali Groups and their Links with Somalia

Almost all Somali families and community groups have strong, living links with Somalia, including psychological ties, relatives, economic commitments (sending remittances, charity work), and political interests. These links are one reason why it is difficult to achieve unity among people of different tribes/regions in the UK, despite efforts within the Somali community itself.

The **impact of clan identity** on Somali groups is complex and contested. On the **positive side**, new arrivals in London (who may not feel comfortable accessing mainstream services) can quickly locate social support from people of their clan who are already established in the city. On the **negative side**, preferential treatment towards one's own clan members and reluctance to co-operate with other groups can stifle

growth and innovation of groups; create rivalry; exclude people; hamper the development of a united voice for the Somali community; make it hard for LAs to communicate and keep track of groups; and disadvantage people from recently arrived or minority clans who do not have well-established organisations of their own. However, none of the community groups interviewed suggested that they allowed tribe/regionalism to colour their work, and almost universally, people agreed that **tribal affiliation was declining in influence**, especially among the younger generation.

8 Everyday Lives of Young Somali People: Pathways to Engagement

Identity: Among young Somalis, gender, migration history, age, family situation, religiosity and social context have an important influence on identity, preferred activities and lifestyles. Religion (Islam) and Somali culture were the most important aspects of identity. It was difficult to disentangle these two aspects or to assign one as having greater importance. Young Somalis combine elements of Somali and UK cultures in creative and flexible ways, typified by their use of *Somlish* – English and Somali words and phrases combined to form a new dialect.

Young people perceived positive aspects of British life to be tolerance, multi-cultural communities and educational opportunities. Even though many lived in relatively deprived areas, young people described their communities positively. Their main complaint was that certain parts of their area were not diverse enough, in that there were either '*too many Asians*' (which could leave young Somalis feeling excluded or vulnerable) or '*too many Somalis*' (because everyone knows your business).

There are **gendered** differences in norms and expectations for young women and men. Although it is often said that Somali men have higher social status than women, the findings of this research do not support this. Rather, young men and women are seen to have *different* needs and vulnerabilities, requiring different parenting and rules. Young men have more freedom, and are more likely to spend time on the streets and come home late. Young women are meant to follow their parents' rules. They are described as being more purposeful, more eager to try new activities, and more focused at school. Indeed, they are said to be more trusted by their parents, but at the same time, more vulnerable to certain kinds of harm (particularly to their reputation). However, it was widely acknowledged that some young women disobey societal and parental expectations, and take steps to keep their activities secret.

Boys face different forms of harm, in particular, trouble on the streets, and educational underachievement. Young men who are seen to be serious about their education are teased by their peers. Other young men are at risk of dropping out of education (if they do not feel sufficiently guided or motivated) and into a life of shorter term goals (obtaining money, street credibility) which can lead to criminality.

One of the biggest divisions among young Somalis was whether they were seen as '*freshies*' ('fresh off the boat': new arrivals from non-EU countries), '*fish and chips*' (born/brought up in the UK), or '*eurotrash*' (born/brought up in an EU country). As crisis migration has decreased in recent years, most new arrivals already have family and community links, and are able to access existing community organisations. New arrivals are said to be extremely motivated to make a fresh start, and above all, to avoid further violence and secure an education.

Social life: Young Somalis prefer to do things in **groups of friends**, and are unlikely to attend events, activities or youth clubs unless in a group, or encouraged to go by a friend. Shisha cafes are a very popular activity for boys and many girls, as they are alcohol free and attract a friendly, diverse crowd. Although in some boroughs (Tower Hamlets) young Somalis mostly hang around with other Somalis, in most boroughs, and during school hours, they hang around with mixed groups of friends.

Young men enjoy hanging out in parks/on the street and being with their peers in an unstructured, unsupervised environment. The other central passion in young men's lives is **football**, which almost all of them play, at least in their early teenage years. Young men are also more likely to go to youth clubs. **Young women** are more likely to stay at home (studying, surfing the net, or helping with childcare and domestic tasks); visit friends' houses; or go shopping or to the cinema. Competitive team sports were not popular among girls; they preferred women-only sessions at leisure centres. Young women felt free to move around the city. **Mobility and security** were of greater concern to young men. They avoid areas where they do not know the terrain or the people. However, they felt that the situation in terms of gang or area based violence is not as bad in East London as it is in North or South London.

Tensions were reported between young Somali men and other ethnic groups, particularly in Tower Hamlets. Community groups also report long-running tensions between Bengali and Somali youths. Young Somalis felt vulnerable in their relatively small numbers when compared to groups of Asian youths. Young Somalis avoided areas that are not '*diverse*' or '*multicultural*'. In other boroughs, tensions were not between particular ethnic groups, but between rival postcode or area gangs.

Police: Young women feel comfortable approaching the police, while young men said that as long as they could deal with a situation themselves, they would not approach them. Yet in spite of young men's antipathy towards the police, several said they wanted more police patrolling their area. Being stopped and searched by the police was a common complaint (though they felt that such incidents were reducing in frequency). In many instances, young Somali boys felt that their behaviour was misinterpreted as threatening or anti-social, whereas they saw it as a manifestation of their social/cultural life (meeting up in large groups, being boisterous, hanging around outside the home in the public sphere).

Education and aspirations: In spite of Somali students historically underachieving in terms of exam results, respondents perceived few barriers to their full participation in the UK education system. There is a general expectation that their cohort will go to college and even University. This sense of increasing educational aspiration is in line with recent rises in educational achievement among Somali pupils in several London boroughs. Parents are strongly committed to their children's education, and push their children hard to succeed in school. However, young people feel that many parents are unable to adequately guide their children in how to achieve the desired success, leaving them feeling stressed by the pressure to succeed, when they are unsure precisely how to achieve this success, particularly if their parent/carer is not familiar with the education system, or fluent in English. There was a call for additional guidance and intensive support at school and at home, in order to combat education-related stress, and help to maintain the motivation required to succeed educationally

Young Somali men in particular are more likely to leave school with poor educational attainment. According to the young people, reasons for this include: desire to start earning money, high levels of stress, and being distracted from college by socialising. Young men face a conflict between living up to a version of masculinity which is not compatible with success at school, and experiencing parental pressure to achieve academic success. This difficulty is well-documented among many groups of young people, particularly those from BME backgrounds.

Family: young people said the most important role models in their lives were family members. Family and community events were central occasions in the year. Even if young people did not see their parents as direct role models (for instance, if they had not been to college or been employed themselves), they were nevertheless regarded as a positive influence. Mothers were said to have more of an influence on girls, and fathers on boys. Some boys said that they did not listen to their mothers, as they wanted direct empathy from men who had been through what they were going through. Young men who lacked such men to guide and motivate them found this difficult. Mentors and youth workers were one way in which young men could obtain additional support (this is already happening in some parts of Tower Hamlets).

Communication Channels:

- **Word of mouth** is of primary importance among friendship and family networks. However, relying on existing social networks to spread information risks missing newer arrivals or isolated individuals
- The **internet** was an extremely important part of young people's lives, and young Somalis are well connected to the internet. However, few (if any) organisations have up to date and comprehensive websites for young people to access information about activities or youth groups in their area
- There are a growing number of Somali **radio stations** (including internet stations) with young Somali contributors, the **Somali TV** channel Universal (largely watched by the older generation), the Islam TV channel, and two regular **Somali publications** in East London (Sheeko and Somali Eye)

Routes to engagement with young people:

- **Youth clubs** are of central importance, particularly for younger teens. Popular aspects include: residential trips, support with homework and finding work, the safe place they provide to chill with friends, sports provision, workshops, and the fact that they provide services for free. Young people want more of the same, and for such services to be more widely available in all boroughs
- Areas to improvement are ensuring that activities are provided for girls and for older teenagers, and more help with obtaining work experience and jobs

Faith locations: Both male and female respondents said that being at the mosque makes them feel '*happy, humble*', '*safe within themselves*', and as though they '*belong*'. Religious observance was very important to the vast majority of respondents: even the less religious young men go to the mosque at least once a month. Young men attend more regularly than women (who pray at home).

Young people divide themselves into rough stereotypes: the very religious, and the not-so-religious youth. The less religious youth, while still attending Friday prayers, are unlikely to go to extra lectures/events at the mosque and may feel negatively judged by

the religious community for their behaviour (e.g. smoking, hanging out in parks). This illustrates why it is important to conduct Prevent work in locations other than just the mosque, particularly as the not-so-religious youth may be at higher risk of the mental health or criminality vulnerabilities (which have been associated with youth thought to be at risk of radicalisation).

9 Recommendations

The following is a summary of recommendations:

Future monitoring of East London's Somali population: Somali community groups could liaise more closely with LAs in future to help them obtain schools census data for ongoing analysis of trends in the size of the Somali population. Community groups and LAs should encourage and support Somali participation in the UK census.

Working together on Prevent: An official briefing on evidence and concerns around Somali radicalization would be of benefit to Somali community groups. A sustained process of engagement, support and relationship building with Somali groups is required if Prevent work is to be successfully undertaken. The channels through which Prevent-related youth work is delivered in the Somali community should be expanded, by working with the media, arts, businesses and cultural organisations, as well as through traditional routes such as youth clubs and mosques.

Establishing the East London Somali Forum: Expert, external facilitation is recommended in light of ongoing tensions between tribes/regions. A clear Terms of Reference and strategic goal for the Forum is required, spelling out the aims and objectives of the Forum, and explaining its potential benefits. Building a culture of knowledge sharing should be prioritised, as there are many examples of innovative and successful work in some boroughs that could inspire work in others. The Forum should consider how it can work with statutory agencies, as there are several areas of joint interest (e.g. the Forum could provide guidance to statutory agencies working with Somali communities, and statutory agencies could use the forum to highlight initiatives, services, or resources in their boroughs).

General recommendations for Local Authorities: Avoid viewing the existence of more than one Somali group in a borough as intrinsically inefficient: Somali communities are complex and multi-faceted, and it is unrealistic to expect them to come together to form single, coherent groups. Support new, smaller groups in boroughs with under-developed Somali civil society. These may be well placed to reach individuals and families that are underserved by mainstream services. Communicate clear and realistic expectations of what the Local Authority can provide, and the policy rationale for this position.

Engaging with Young People:

- No single approach to engagement is appropriate for all young Somalis, who differ widely according to age, gender, religiosity, and where they grew up.
- Tensions between different areas, and in some cases ethnic groups, mean that young Somalis may not be comfortable accessing services outside their own area.
- Somali groups should be encouraged to question the assumption that Somali specific services are always the best way to engage with young people. In some

- boroughs, young Somalis are comfortable socialising with people of other ethnicities.
- Young people report high levels of stress and peer pressure, and voice demands for additional, intensive support, in the form of someone to talk to, ideally outside the family or school environment. Youth clubs, youth workers, mentors and sports opportunities are therefore very important, and existing services should be protected in order to help young Somalis realise their increasingly high aspirations.
 - Build on and support existing successful initiatives working with youth, and develop the means to scale them up.
 - Improve groups' online presence, including the use of social networking sites, and up to date websites. Young people themselves may be best placed to set up and maintain these facilities
 - Provide services/activities with tangible benefits for young people: educational and employment support are of high priority to older teenagers, trips away are particularly important to younger children and teenagers

1 Chapter One: Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

In January 2010, the London Borough of Waltham Forest, on behalf of its partners (the London Boroughs of Redbridge, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Hackney), commissioned Options UK (OUK) to conduct research to improve their understanding of the Somali Community across East London.

Since the late 1990s, the Somali population of the UK has grown rapidly. There are now estimated to be between 95,000 and 250,000 Somalis living in the UK, with around 70,000 in London (International Organisation for Migration 2006), making it one of the largest Somali communities in Europe. The earliest Somali settlers, mostly men working for the British Merchant Navy, arrived in the ports of London, Cardiff and Liverpool in the late 19th century; the majority from the British controlled north, Somaliland. However, most Somalis living in the UK have arrived as a result of ongoing Civil War in Somalia since the late 1980s and early 1990s (Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees 2007), arriving either directly from Somalia and surrounding countries, or, more recently, from other European countries such as Norway, Denmark and The Netherlands where they had initially settled.

There are a number of reasons why this research has been conducted with the Somali community. Various issues highlighted by previous research, by community organisations, and through work with the Somali community point to the need for greater attention to the specific requirements of this population. Somalis represent one of the most economically deprived ethnic groups in the country. In addition, young Somalis are among the lowest achieving groups educationally (Rutter 2004), and Somali adults experience the lowest rate of employment in the country (IPPR 2007).

However, this is not the whole story, and it is worth taking a fresh look at the Somali community across East London. In 2000, an academic study of community organisations found that the Somali community had *'failed to articulate a coherent social and political presence in East London'*, partly because of *'neglect and discrimination by Tower Hamlets council during the 1980s'* and partly because of social and economic marginalisation, clan divisions related to the civil war in Somalia, and competition for scarce local resources (Griffiths 2000). To what extent does this picture hold true across East London today?

Although a significant amount of research has been conducted in Tower Hamlets, little is documented about the Somali community in other boroughs. In addition, the mainstream media in the UK publishes a stream of negative stories relating to Somalia and Somalis in the UK. Like many other ethnic minority and Muslim groups, Somalis feel that they are negatively stereotyped in the media, as they are frequently discussed in association with piracy, illegal immigration, drugs, violent crime and terrorism. Even some well-intentioned researchers have focused almost entirely on the problems of the community, to the detriment of positive stories. This also applies to many journalists: The Guardian recently reported that *'[The] underlying psychological sense of loss, compounded by traumatic experience of war, has resulted in a collective withdrawal [of Somalis] from active society'*⁴.

⁴ www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/jun/05/immigration.immigrationpolicy (published 5/6/08)

These messages stand in sharp contrast to the everyday realities of numerous dedicated volunteers, hardworking students, artists, religious leaders and election candidates with whom we have worked in the last few months, and whose positive stories are too rarely represented. The Somali community itself is making efforts to redress the balance, through publications such as Somali Eye magazine⁵, which included the following comment in its Editorial in August 2007:

...if one was to believe the reports in the papers by some journalists they would be forgiven for thinking that all Muslims, or even individuals with a slightly darker complexion are strapped with explosives and ready to bear arms. For every negative story there is a positive story so while the mainstream press chooses to focus and feed on the negative aspects of multiculturalism, at Somali Eye we have chosen to bring you the success stories of people and communities benefiting from multiculturalism.

This report aims to examine current issues within the Somali community from a balanced perspective, recognising that it is just as important to document the strengths and resilience of the Somali community as it is to investigate their problems.

1.2 Terminology Used

There is no simple way of defining the term 'Somali'. Throughout this report, 'Somali' refers to a self-defined ethnic category (i.e. people who self-identify as being Somali). This includes people born in Somalia, and people of Somali heritage born in the Middle East, Europe or the UK who consider themselves to be Somali. Somalis do not necessarily speak Somali (young people raised outside of Somalia may not speak Somali, at least not fluently). This term does not preclude other forms of self-identification, such as being British or Swedish. 'Tribe', 'clan' and 'ethnic group/minority' are also contested terms. This report uses the terms interchangeably, reflecting the flexible ways in which study participants used them.

1.3 Policy Context

The London Boroughs of Redbridge, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Hackney are part of the East London Alliance (ELA), a partnership working to build resilient communities that reject violent extremism. The research is part of a wider ELA programme entitled 'Building Somali Resilience and Leadership', funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government. The programme also includes supporting the establishment of an East London Somali Forum and supporting existing Somali projects. The Forum will be deciding which projects to support. The aim of the research is to inform policy and future projects for the Somali community, as well as to support communities to build their own resilience to violent extremism. It is hoped that the research will also benefit local partners working beyond the Prevent strategy, including youth services and education.

The research was made up of two parts: firstly, obtaining an estimate of the Somali population of East London (excluding the borough of Tower Hamlets which has recently conducted its own Somali population analysis), and secondly, conducting qualitative

⁵ Somali Eye magazine is a quarterly publication, covering issues such as health, education, employment, crime, sport, music, role models, and children's stories, and aims to 'promote issues that positively affect the lives of the Somali community'. See: http://somalieye.co.uk/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=49&Itemid=62

research to explore a number of issues in-depth. These include Somali engagement⁶, pathways to radicalisation and social mobility.

1.4 Rationale for the Research

For a number of years, Somali-led community organisations have stressed the need for accurate estimates of the number of Somali people in East London. Local authorities (LAs) also need accurate information on population composition to plan appropriate services and resource allocations. At present, there are no official local figures on the size of the Somali population in East London, owing to the lack of routinely collected data that incorporates Somali ethnicity. The ELA has highlighted a number of factors pointing to the need for further insights into East London's Somali community, particularly within the context of Prevent, including:

- The fact that the Somali community is relatively small compared with other Muslim communities in the area, and is widely dispersed across the boroughs
- High levels of unemployment and deprivation as well as inter-generational tension within the Somali community
- Connections to the ongoing conflict in Somalia
- Local resentment and tensions between young Somali people and young people from other black and minority ethnic (BME) groups which may heighten their sense of alienation and vulnerability

These factors are thought to put the community at risk of, or at least weaken its resilience to, violent extremism. The purpose of the research is to inform efforts to increase the sense of leadership and collaborative working between different groups within the Somali community, and to provide greater understanding of the service needs and support systems required to achieve this greater collaboration and confidence.

1.5 Objectives

The research objectives were as follows:

1. To estimate number of Somali people in Newham, Hackney, Waltham Forest and Redbridge
2. To explore Somali engagement, pathways to radicalisation and social mobility; in particular to assess:
 - a) Existing information and gaps in knowledge
 - b) The nature of the community's mobility across the region and possible links to the threat of radicalisation
 - c) Different Somali community groups and their links with Somalia
 - d) The role of community groups, schools, public bodies and faith locations as key influences in the lives of young Somali people
 - e) Somali groups that are credible gateways to engagement

⁶ The definition of 'community engagement' is complex and variable. The definition used in this report refers to the extent to which local authorities, community organisations, housing associations and Somali residents (and young people in particular) work together to improve their overall quality of life. This includes the extent to which they are involved in decision-making in terms of the services they receive (definition adapted from the 'Community Engagement Toolbox' website, see: www.community-toolbox.org/Resources_for_Local_Authorities/content.aspx).

1.6 Our Approach to the Research Process

Throughout the five-month research period, OUK undertook several activities that were important for building a relationship with the Somali community, and for promoting the longer term usefulness of this research. These included:

- Recruiting two young Somali research assistants (one man and one woman) to assist with fieldwork, and training them in qualitative research methods
- Briefing community organisations about the purpose of the research and future activities (e.g. the East London Somali Forum), and noting their responses to this (e.g. concerns, recommendations)
- Developing a contacts database to share with organisers of the East London Somali Forum
- Compiling an annotated bibliography of previous work relating to the Somali community in East London, which will be shared with all interested parties.

1.7 Setting the Scene: The Somali Community in East London

The boroughs in this research, with a combined population of almost 1.2 million, boast some of the most diverse and youthful populations in London and in the UK. Each borough has its own character, both in terms of the physical and social environment, and in the ways that LAs relate to community groups and to the Prevent strategy.

The Somali community in Tower Hamlets was established before World War 1, and was largely made up of dockers, who were later joined by their families. The vast majority came from the British-controlled North of Somalia (Somaliland), rather than the Italian-controlled South, which includes the capital Mogadishu. Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, tens of thousands of Somali people have sought asylum in the UK from Somalia's civil war, with East London providing a natural landing point owing to existing settlement patterns and the handful of Somali services (e.g. the Seamen's Mission, which allowed Somalis to listen to the BBC World Service Somali Service). Since the 2000s, new arrivals have mostly been cases of family reunion or those who had gained residency in other European Union (EU) countries but then moved to the UK. There are a number of reasons for this shift, ranging from the desire to reunite with families, to the perceived higher quality and accessibility of higher education, to the desire to live in an English speaking country.

Almost all Somali people derive some form of affiliation or identity from their family's tribal or clan affiliation. The main clans are: Daarood, Dir, Isaaq, Rahanweyn and Hawiye⁷. However, Somalis nearly always place their self-identify as a Somali before their membership of a particular clan. Clan affiliation holds varying degrees of importance for individuals, particularly because it can reflect disputes within Somalia, many of which are ongoing. Many Somali people also identify primarily with either the north (Somaliland) or the south (Somalia), according to their family background. The majority of Somalis in Tower Hamlets are from Somaliland; but other boroughs are more mixed in terms of the area of Somalia and tribal affiliations represented. It is beyond the scope of this report to describe the intricacies of clan and sub-clan structures, or to provide a detailed history of the settlement of different tribal groupings across East London. Little has been published on this subject, and the situation is constantly shifting and evolving.

⁷ Source: <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTSOMALIA/Resources/conflictinsomalia.pdf> (accessed 14/5/10), a World Bank report, containing several versions of the overall clan structure according to different perspectives in Somalia. See page 55 onwards.

2 Chapter Two: Population Estimate

2.1 Introduction

The classification of ethnic groups in the UK is complex and contested. ‘Somali’ is not included in the official Office of National Statistics (ONS) ethnic group classification for the UK. It is therefore not possible to analyse Somali populations using the decennial UK Census of population. Most administrative data adopt the ONS ethnic group classification, and thus also fail to collect data specifically on Somali populations. Generally speaking, ethnic group data collected within administrative registers are incomplete, and cannot be used to construct robust population estimates by ethnic group. Consequently, there are insufficient data to use orthodox methodologies to estimate Somali populations.

Name analysis represents the most robust alternative to deriving ethnic group estimates from available partial population registers (e.g. GP registers, electoral roles). This involves assigning individual records to an ethnic group based on forename and surname data. There are three primary providers of population estimates constructed via name analysis in London: Mayhew Associates; Experian (Origins); and UCL CASA. However, based on a review of these methodologies, concerns regarding the methodological constraints of name analysis in relation to analysing Somali populations have detracted from the value of using these techniques within the context of this study.

Estimates of the Somali population extracted from a Mayhew Associates population study commissioned by the London Borough of Waltham Forest (LB Waltham Forest nkm database, 30.09.2009, Mayhew et al., 2010) provide the fullest estimate of Somali populations in the East London Alliance Boroughs. For the nkm database, the methodology for determining ethnic group via name classification involves outputting a decimal indication (from 0-1) of the probability of an individual being Somali, with values closer to zero indicating a weaker probability, and 1 representing a full match. The data included in this report refer only to individuals whose name was fully identified as ‘Somali’ (i.e. the record was assigned a probability of 1). As such, these data may undercount Somali populations, and should be understood as a conservative estimate. Even if they are an underestimate, these figures are useful for comparing the size and distribution of the Somali population across the East London boroughs.

The nkm database has been used to extrapolate Somali population estimates for Newham, Redbridge and Hackney Boroughs, by combining them with data from the Pupil Level Annual School Census⁸ (PLASC). This approach was considered the most appropriate given the available data and the cost implications and methodological concerns raised with regard to name analysis techniques. Further details on the Name Analysis methodology, and discussions on the completeness of PLASC data, are included in Annex 1.

2.2 Estimate of Somali Populations in East London

The nkm database for Waltham Forest provides a breakdown of the Somali population in the borough by five-year age bands and sex. However, similar name analysis data are not available for Hackney, Redbridge or Newham. Therefore, data on the Waltham Forest Somali population represent the best source of population data for the Somali

⁸ Includes data from maintained Primary, state-funded secondary and special schools.

community in East London. Schools census data on Somali ethnicity are available for each borough and represent the most complete and accessible source of ethnicity data.

The following estimates rely on the assumption that the structure of the Somali population, and in particular, the number of Somali school children relative to the overall size of the Somali population, is similar across East London. Crude estimates of the Somali population in Newham, Hackney and Redbridge have been extrapolated according to the following steps:

1. Comparing the number of Somalis counted in the Waltham Forest nkm database (3880 Somali people) with the number of Somali children in PLASC data for Waltham Forest in January 2009 (1030 Somali children). This is equal to **3.77 Somali people for every Somali child** at school.
2. Applying this factor of 3.77 to PLASC data from Newham, Hackney and Redbridge, generating the results in table 1 below.
3. Calculating the percentage of each borough that is Somali based on mid-2008 ONS population estimates.

The estimates are based on the following assumptions:

- a. That the Waltham Forest nkm database is a relatively accurate estimate of the Somali population, as this provides the basis for the other estimates.
- b. That the PLASC data represent a relatively accurate count of Somali children at school in each borough (see Annex 1 for further discussion of this point).
- c. That the majority of children attending school in one borough live in the same borough.
- d. That the age structure of the Somali population (the proportion of the total Somali population that is at school) is roughly similar to that of Waltham Forest across the four boroughs.

Assumption (c) may be tested later in 2010 when additional name analyses commissioned by Newham are completed. If the ratio of school students to total population is similar to that in Waltham Forest, then we can be confident about using this factor as a rule of thumb to estimate the total Somali population in East London. If the factor is significantly different, then name analyses would be necessary on a borough-by-borough basis to draw firm conclusions about the size of the Somali community.

Table 1 (overleaf) provides a crude estimate of the number and proportion of Somali people in each borough.

Table 1. Estimated number and percentage of Somalis in four East London boroughs

	Somali students (from PLASC)	Estimated number of Somalis	ONS mid-2008 population estimate [#]	% Somali
Waltham Forest	1030	3,880*	223,200	1.74%
Hackney	400	1,507**	212,200	0.71%
Newham	1780	6,705**	249,500	2.69%
Redbridge	920	3,466**	257,600	1.35%
TOTAL		15,558	940,400	1.65%

*Number of Somalis in nkm database

**Based on the ratio of *Somali students:Somalis* found in Waltham Forest (1:3.77)

[#]Mid-2008 Population Estimates, Office for National Statistics

Using this estimation method, Newham has the largest number of Somalis (6,705) and the highest proportion of Somalis (2.69% of the total population of the borough). Hackney has the lowest number of Somalis (1,507) as well as the lowest proportion at under 1% (0.71%). Redbridge and Waltham Forest have similarly sized Somali populations (3,466 and 3,880 respectively), making up 1-2% of the overall population.

2.3 Somali population in Tower Hamlets

In December 2008 Tower Hamlets Primary Care Trust (PCT) produced an overview of existing data on the borough's Somali population. The report estimated the borough's Somali population at anything from 1,353 (people born in Somalia, Census 2001) to 12,000 (this is an estimate from the voluntary sector, and the methodology used to make this estimate is not reported in the literature, so should be regarded with caution). Figures as high as 25,000 have been suggested as a 'rough guess' from the voluntary sector (e.g. in Karin Housing's 2003 report). Again, such estimates should be treated with caution in the absence of a reported methodology or rationale for the estimate.

Using Experian Origins software to analyse the names of individuals registered with GPs, the PCT reports an estimated 2,081 Somalis in the borough, which is significantly lower than the figures above for Redbridge, Newham and Waltham Forest, despite the area being a hub for Somali social activities, community organisations and a longstanding area of settlement. The figure is probably low because the estimate was based on people registered with GPs, which is likely to underestimate certain sections of the population (e.g. young men).

According to PLASC data, 830 Somali students were recorded in Tower Hamlets in 2008. The methodology used to generate Table 1 would produce an estimated 3,127 Somalis in Tower Hamlets, or 1.38% of the population⁹. This number is significantly lower than previous estimates from community organisations, though higher than the PCT's estimates from GP data. This estimate suggests that there is a smaller Somali population in all other boroughs in East London apart from Hackney.

⁹ According to the mid-2008 Population Estimates, Office for National Statistics, there are 226,800 in total living in Tower Hamlets.

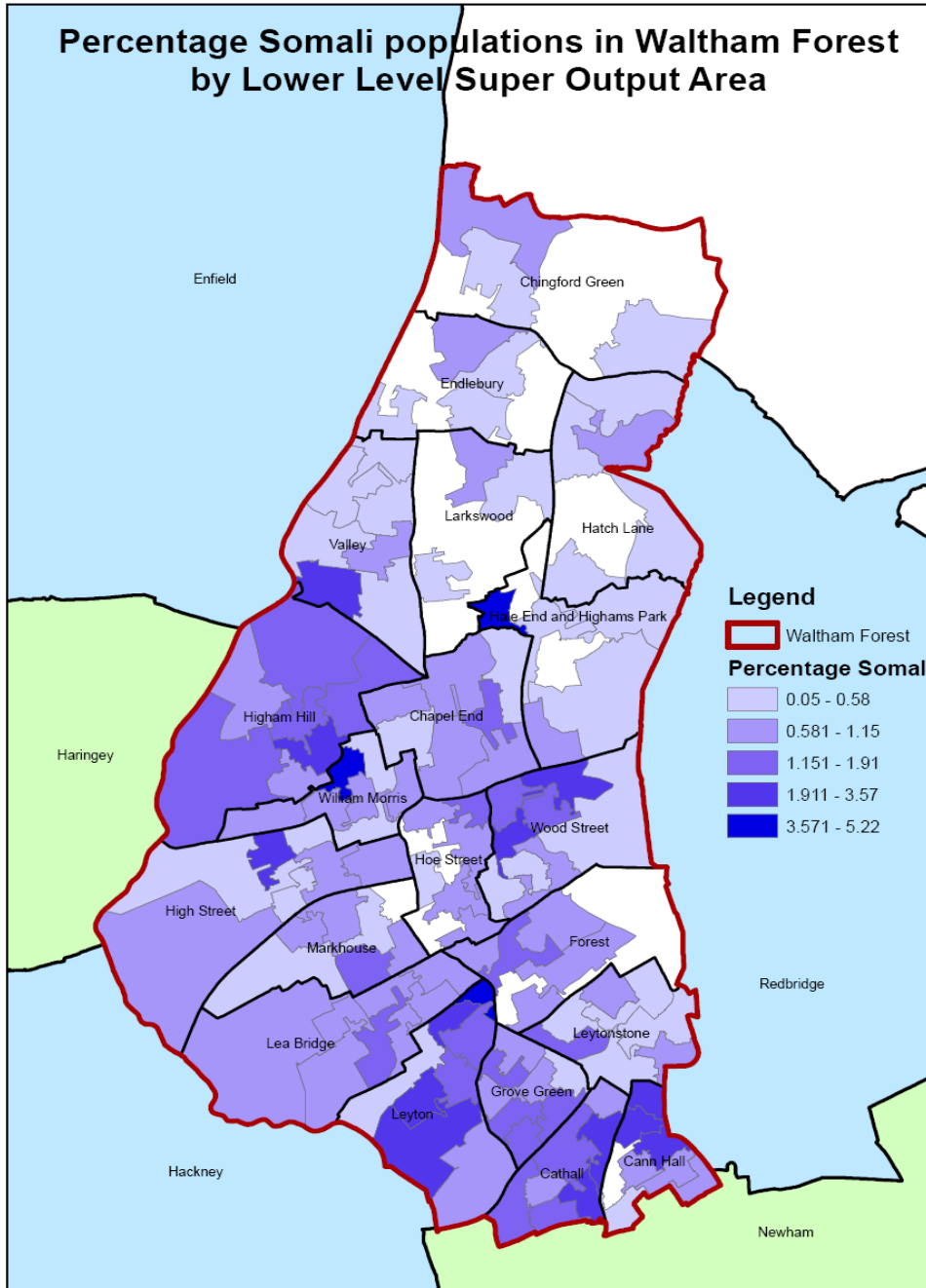
It is surprising that Tower Hamlets seems to have a smaller Somali population than several other East London boroughs, as it has always been thought of as the centre of East London's Somali community. It may be that Somali pupils in Tower Hamlets are recorded in a systematically different way than in other boroughs (e.g. perhaps families in Tower Hamlets have lived in the UK for longer, so are less likely to self-identify as Somali, and instead classify themselves as Black African). However, it could be that Tower Hamlets is no longer the residential centre for the Somali community, and that Somali households are increasingly moving into outer London boroughs (this is supported by anecdotal evidence from key informants interviewed during the course of this research). If the Somali community is bigger in Newham, Waltham Forest and Redbridge, this has implications in terms of service provision and third sector activity, for at present, the majority of Somali-specific social, health, and voluntary services are concentrated in Tower Hamlets, which may no longer be where the greatest need lies.

2.4 Further Analysis of Waltham Forest Estimates

Figure 1 (overleaf) shows the estimated percentage of Somali populations (all ages) mapped by Lower Level Super Output Level (LSOA) in Waltham Forest. The proportion of Somali residents is low across all LSOAs in the Borough, ranging from 0.05-5.22%. Clustered Somali populations are evident predominantly in the South and West of the borough, with Higham Hill, Leyton, Cathall and Cann Hall wards showing the greatest concentration of Somali residents. More northerly wards, conversely, show very sparse Somali populations.

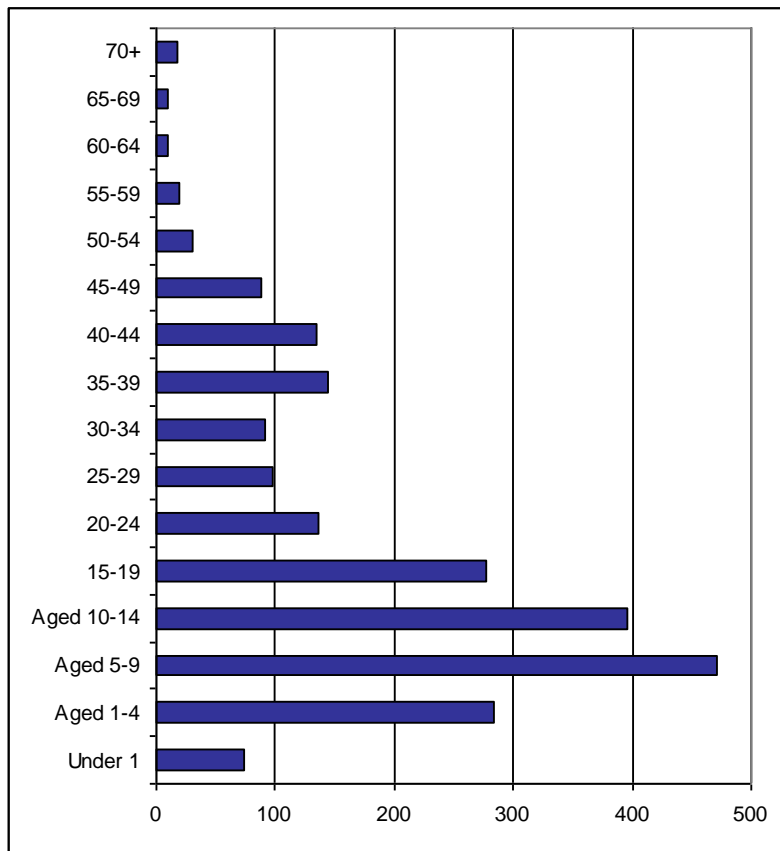
Figure 2 (page 24) illustrates the estimated Somali population structure by age group in Waltham Forest (using the nkm database). The data suggest a very youthful population, with two thirds of the population aged under 20 years, and only 4% aged over 50 years.

Figure 1: % of population who are Somali in Waltham Forest by LSOA



Source data: LB Waltham Forest nkm database, 30.09.200

Figure 2: Somali population in Waltham Forest by five-year age band

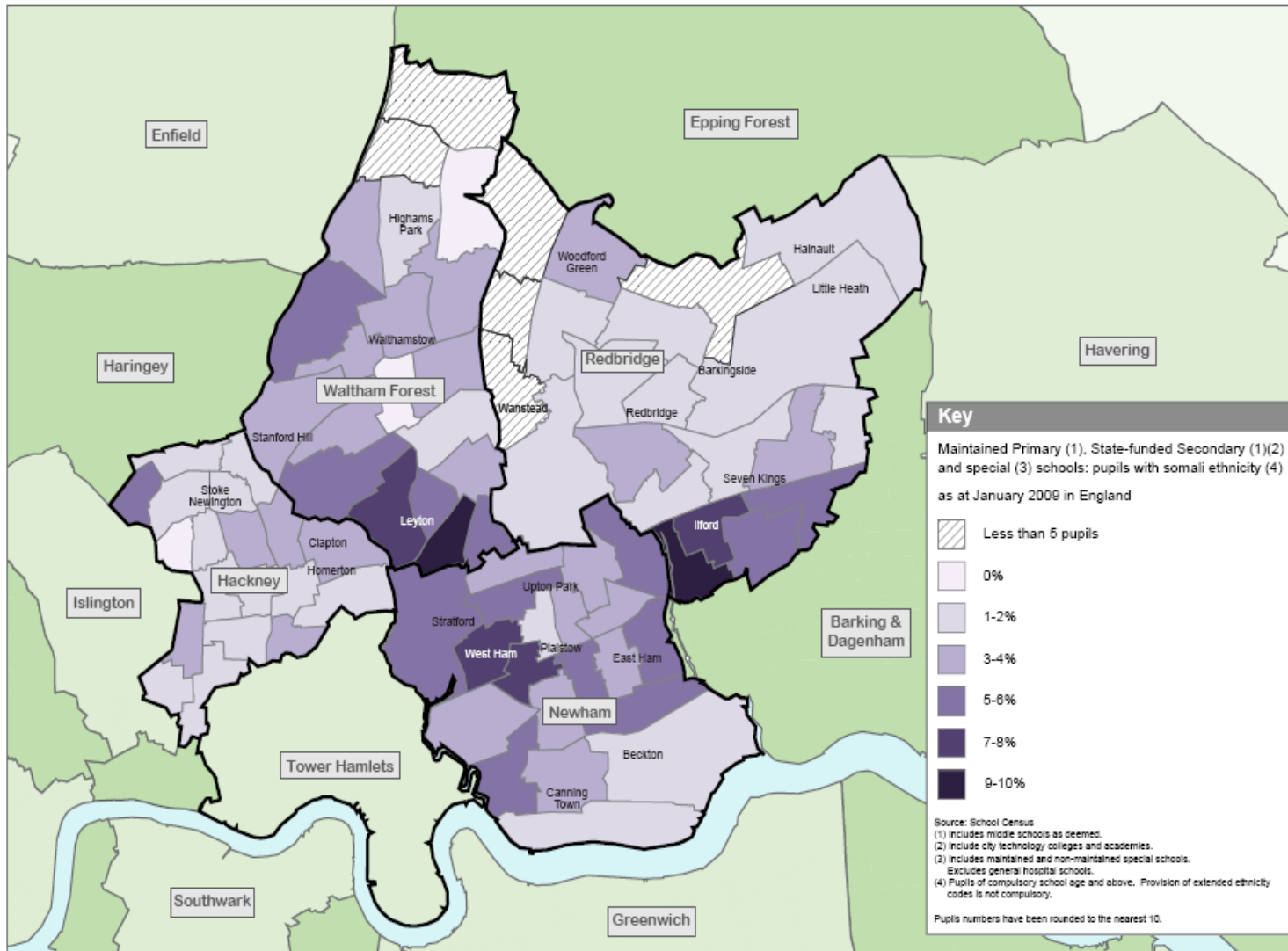


Source data: LB Waltham Forest nkm database, 30.09.2009

2.5 Mapping the Somali Population

The PLASC data is the primary source used by the Mayhew estimation methodology, as it is the only partial population register that is readily accessible and records ethnic group robustly. PLASC data have been mapped at ward level for all four Boroughs, providing an indication of the sub-local authority level geography of Somali populations (figure 3). While this provides only a partial spatial representation of Somali populations (as it only includes school pupils), when the full nkm database for Waltham Forest is mapped and compared to PLASC data for the Borough, a good spatial match is apparent, suggesting that PLASC provides a good proxy measure for the geographical distribution of the Somali population at ward level. The densest concentrations of Somali students are in Ilford in Redbridge, West Ham in Newham, and Leyton in Waltham Forest. In Hackney, the densest population is in the far North West corner, adjoining Finsbury Park.

Figure 3: Percentage Somali School Pupils mapped by Electoral Ward areas in Waltham Forest, Redbridge, Hackney and Newham,



Source data: PLASC (January 2009)

3 Chapter Three: Qualitative Methodology

3.1 Introduction

There were four components to the qualitative research:

- A qualitative study with young people using a Peer Research approach
- Informal meetings and telephone calls with representatives from community organisations and service providers to map out key players and organisations in East London, and to invite people to participate in in-depth interviews
- In-depth interviews with 16 key informants
- Tracking down and reviewing existing literature and sources of data on the Somali community

It is important to note that this was not a comparative study, so it is not always possible to say which findings are unique to the Somali community, and which are issues for urban migrant or BME communities more generally.

3.2 Methodology 1: PEER

The study used PEER (Participatory Ethnographic Evaluation and Research), a well established qualitative research method which has been widely used in developing countries and the UK to investigate sensitive issues. PEER generates data that reflect the world view, everyday realities and social context of the population in question (Hawkins & Price 2002).

In PEER, ordinary community members identify and investigate what they consider to be important issues in the lives of people like them. They are trained as *peer researchers*, and conduct in-depth conversational interviews with people from their social networks. In this case, PEER was carried out with 12 young Somalis (eight men and four women) aged 16 to 20 years living in Tower Hamlets and Newham. Each conducted in-depth discussions with three friends about a variety of topics. Several of their friends lived in other East London boroughs including Hackney and Redbridge. Peer researchers reported their findings back to the research team, and explored issues through drama and discussion.

The PEER study focused on young people because the voices of young Somali people are absent from much of the existing literature, and the perceptions and experiences of young people are particularly important given the overall objectives of this research. The study sought to understand the everyday lives, attitudes and perceptions of young people, and to gain insights into the social context in which they live. The PEER method was used for the following reasons:

- PEER generates in-depth, contextual data on a range of issues related to the research topic
- Existing relationships of trust between peer researchers and their informants mean that findings are more detailed and insightful than if they had been gathered by an outside researcher
- PEER involves the participation of the target group from the early stages, building ownership and involvement
- The method is particularly suitable for carrying out research on sensitive topics owing to the use of 'third person' questions, which enable respondents to talk about delicate issues without personal attribution

- By participating in PEER, peer researchers become ‘lay experts’ in important issues in their community, and form a pool of expertise who can be involved in future activities (e.g. materials testing, participation in networks)

One focus group discussion was also held in Waltham Forest as none of the peer researchers or their informants were from this borough. Two young women and five young men aged between 17 – 20 years took part.

Recruitment

Efforts were made to recruit peer researchers from across East London. The research team distributed flyers in person and by email, publicising the opportunity to take part. Visits were made to internet cafes, youth clubs, Somali shops and cafes, and a Somali youth conference. The Somali research assistants also made use of their own social networks to recruit young people. Several Somali community organisations were asked to assist with recruitment. The benefits of participating were highlighted (learning new skills, boosting their CV, and being paid £75 to attend workshops, as well as transport/refreshment expenses). The research team aimed to recruit a typical cross-section of young Somalis, and not just those who are actively engaged in volunteering or youth networks. Selection criteria were:

- That they were a woman or man aged 16-24 years and willing to take part
- That they were not already a youth worker, youth leader etc. (to ensure that the data collected represented the voice of typical young people)
- That they be available for training and to conduct conversational interviews with their peers over a four week period

A three-day training workshop was held for peer researchers in Oxford House, Bethnal Green. Although twenty-eight different young people attended the training workshop at one point or another, twelve participants completed the training. Despite efforts to recruit a broad range of people (by gender, length of time lived in UK, borough of residence), the final group was relatively homogenous, and mostly consisted of young people born or brought up in the UK, living in Tower Hamlets or Newham, and whose families were from northern Somalia. There are several reasons for this lack of diversity. Firstly, the training was in Bethnal Green, making Tower Hamlets and Newham convenient areas to travel from. Youth in other boroughs may have felt uncomfortable travelling into a different area. Secondly, these boroughs have large Somali communities. Thirdly, the young people who completed the training mostly knew each other and had been recruited through a youth worker in Tower Hamlets, and had motivated each other by attending in a group. Lastly, attracting relatively new arrivals to the UK to participate in workshops or research is particularly difficult, owing to language and other barriers (some of which will be discussed later in the report).

Training

During the training workshop, peer researchers learned about the aims of the research and practiced open-ended interviewing skills. They designed an interview schedule with the research team, reflecting what they thought to be the most important issues in their communities relating to everyday life, social networks, and influences and motivations (see Box 1 for sample questions, and Annex 2 for a full list of interview prompts). Participatory design of the research tool ensured that the study focus was both relevant to the commissioning client, and framed within the conceptual understanding of the peer researchers. During the training workshop, peer researchers and members of the

research team shared numerous discussions, games and dramas about everyday life and the issues that young people faced, which helped the research team to build trusting relationship with the peer researchers.

Box 1. Example of interview prompts

Examples of prompts used to guide discussion with informants:

- How do young Somali people choose to spend their weekend? Describe a typical weekend for young people.
 - What do girls get up to?
 - What do boys get up to?
- Role Models
 - Who do young Somali youth look up to? Why?
 - Can you give any examples of successful Somali people? Why are they successful?
 - How do the successful people influence the younger generation and why? (for example, educational influences, religious influences)
- What do young Somalis think of education and why?
- What are the good things and the bad things about your area? Can you give me some examples?
- What do young people think of the police? Can you give me an example?

Data Collection

After training, peer researchers carried out in-depth interviews in either English or Somali with two friends, on three different topics (six interviews each in total), over the course of four weeks. Rather than asking for personal information, peer researchers asked questions about what other people say or do (the 'third person'). Some peer researchers wrote brief notes about key issues or stories immediately after interviewing their friends to help them recall their conversations. Supervisors from the research team met up with peer researchers every week to collect their findings through a de-briefing interview, and wrote detailed notes.

At the end of the study a final workshop was held. This provided an opportunity for peer researchers to share their views on the data collected and contextualise/add further insight to the underlying meaning of the data.

The final PEER dataset contains a mixture of the following:

- Third person data (stories and examples from the wider community collected by peer researchers)
- Information that peer researchers volunteered to share about themselves or other people they knew
- Notes made during workshops with peer researchers

Data Analysis

Data analysis was undertaken by the Options UK research team which included an experienced social scientist. A coding framework was developed after a preliminary reading of the data. The data were then broken up into 'text units' (stories or paragraphs) and coded for emerging themes. Each separate data component was then arranged and

further analysed within the coding framework. Data were then re-read, and quotations were selected to capture the essence of each code.

Qualitative data, like those generated by PEER, give insight into how people construct meaning and make sense of issues (as opposed to simply recording 'facts'). The data also reveal what they see as significant and important. Gaining an understanding of prevailing social narratives (e.g. anecdotes shared among friends, scenarios that people know from their homes or streets) helps us understand social norms, concerns, fears and hopes.

3.3 Methodology 2: Key Stakeholder Mapping

The research team used a number of approaches to draw up a contacts database: recommendations from the commissioning client; internet searches; speaking with other researchers in the field; snowballing (asking interviewees to suggest other people to contact); compiling existing contacts from previous work with community organisations; and gleaning information from voluntary sector organisations such as Community and Voluntary Services (CVS).

The research team tried to make contact with all names and organisations that they discovered. However, it was only possible to make successful contact with a relatively small proportion of them. Some contact details were obsolete, and others did not respond to invitations to participate in the research, or were not available for interview. Those who were interviewed were extremely helpful and provided a wide range of information, opinions and insights into the Somali community. Indeed, a small number of very committed, extremely hard-working people repeatedly contribute to studies such as this, and shoulder a disproportionate amount of the burden of supporting research.

Meetings, held in English, were conducted in person with a selection of stakeholders including:

- Prevent leads and their colleagues in LAs (police, research and policy)
- Leaders and staff of Somali-led community organisations and networks/fora
- Somali leaders in media and the arts
- Somali service providers in health and youth services

See annex 3 for a list of key informants.

The following topics were discussed during in-depth interviews:

- Patterns of community organisation/leadership within the Somali community including relationships between different community groups
- Historical and social context of the Somali community in East London
- Whether they knew of and could share copies of previous research/consultations
- Their involvement with young people: activities, services, key issues
- Ideas and recommendations for strengthening collaborative working across the Somali community

Interviewees raised a wide range of additional issues that concerned them. The data generated do not neatly reflect the research objectives, particularly on sensitive issues of identity (which is relevant in the context of understanding how different Somali groups relate to each other) and resilience to radicalisation. Rather, they expressed what they wanted to communicate to LAs and service providers.

Challenges to Ensuring Participation

The difficulty in ensuring participation in this research can be interpreted in several ways. It is important to outline these reasons as they are likely to be encountered in any similar process of engagement with the Somali community.

Some small groups are simply too busy with the everyday running of their organisations. People running these organisations are almost always volunteers, combining their work with other commitments, and often working with little or no funding. Others felt research fatigue, believing that the study was just a *'tick box exercise'*, one of many that regularly took up their valuable time. They reported that too many consultants had delivered their research and recommendations without resultant benefits or changes, and that they were not kept informed of the results of the research that they had contributed to.

Some individuals and groups did not want to participate because of tensions or poor relations with their LA, particularly in boroughs where they felt unsupported. A certain amount of cynicism about the motives of the researcher/commissioning client also played a role: people understand that money has been spent on research, which they suspect will yield little in terms of practical benefits to their community. The money spent on research may be quite substantial in comparison with the income (if any) received by their community organisation.

In response to these challenges, the research team spent a sizeable proportion of their time describing the aims of the research, the additional activities that would be linked to the research findings (e.g. the development of a Somali forum, and supporting activities such as a Somali youth leadership programme). This led to some people acknowledging that the research could bring benefits. However, progress in effectively communicating the potential benefits of research will be required before the wider Somali community is persuaded to participate in such initiatives.

In sum, there were numerous challenges in collecting accurate, detailed data about the status and activities of Somali community organisations. In future, unless resources are allocated and concrete steps are planned to implement the recommendations of research, then further efforts to conduct research are likely to be met with similar levels of scepticism.

This lesson should be borne in mind in relation to Prevent work. The disillusionment felt in relation to research, and indeed in relation to several LAs in general, might discourage community groups from engaging in the Prevent agenda. It is therefore necessary to consider how Prevent work can be linked to fulfilling practical needs of community organisations, such as by providing funding or training opportunities.

4 Chapter Four: Community Mapping

*Quotations from key informants and peer researchers are italicized. Some are edited for clarity or concision, and are followed by an **F** or **M** (female or male) and, if a key informant, by a broad description of their role (e.g. community worker).*

4.1 Scope of Community Mapping

The community mapping exercise focused on Somali-led community organisations actively engaged in delivering services in ELA boroughs. It was necessary to distinguish between the dozens of small community organisations that operate from someone's home (often homework clubs, women's groups etc.), and the well-established organisations which attract funding from external sources (including charities and the LA), which have their own premises, and work with a larger number of people with some degree of continuity. This is not to say that the smaller organisations are not engaged in valuable work, but given the time limitations of this research and the informal nature of many of these groups, it was not possible to identify all of the smaller Somali-led groups across East London.

4.2 Tower Hamlets

The Borough of Tower Hamlets is sometimes referred to as the '*mother of the Somali community*' in London, reflecting both the longstanding community settled there, and the relatively large number of community organisations, businesses and services for Somali people. The majority of Tower Hamlets' Somali population is originally from Somaliland, the northern self-declared autonomous region. They are also said to be largely members of the same clan, the Isaaq. The section of Mile End Road to the west of Stepney Green tube station contains the greatest concentration of Somali businesses (internet cafes, restaurants and cafes) and is the location of the Somali-run Al-Huda mosque. In terms of area of residence, the Somali population is spread quite evenly across the borough (with the exception of Canary Wharf where the concentration is low).

Reflecting the longstanding Somali presence in Tower Hamlets, and the fact that it functions as a hub for the Somali community (not just for East London but across the capital), numerous Somali-led organisations catering for different sections of the community exist, including:

- Several groups or youth club nights targeted at Somali youth
- A Somali-run mosque (Al-Huda)
- A Housing Association (Karin Housing Association)
- Numerous community organisations with interests in: supporting educational activities (e.g. homework support), advice on a range of issues (benefits, housing, immigration, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)), sports and dance, arts and cultural activities, health issues, and many more.

In spite of there being numerous organisations, there is no general Somali community centre in Tower Hamlets, although there are venues that are regularly used for Somali events, such as Oxford House in Bethnal Green.

The Tower Hamlets Somali Organisation Network also exists in the borough. This network has a number of local organisations as members, and among other activities has recently organised a Job Fair specifically aimed at Somalis. Several of the larger community organisations are not members of the network.

There are also Somali-focused services in Tower Hamlets related to health and social care, run through the PCT and LA. These include a bilingual health advocacy and interpreting service; Somali social workers; and a project dedicated to supporting individuals and families affected by khat (*Catha edulis*, a herbal stimulant). There are several public and third-sector organisations with special interest and expertise in Somali mental health (e.g. Mind, OSCA, Praxis, Somali Mental Health Forum) which are described in the recent Somali Mental Health Needs Assessment (Ahern 2008).

Other notable achievements in recent years include Tower Hamlets having the first Somali Mayor in Britain (Bow East councillor Ahmed Omer, in May 2009). In addition, following years of pressure from community organisations, Tower Hamlets LA now includes the category 'Somali' in its equalities monitoring. In general, most interviewees felt that the LA was relatively supportive of the Somali community in the borough:

There are so many opportunities in Tower Hamlets, meeting with councillors, meeting your local MPs, meeting directors of organisations – they want to listen to you. They ask, 'what do you want?' For example, each ward recently voted on what they wanted to spend their community budget on – it was called 'You Decide' (...) this borough honestly does a lot for its people – the council celebrates community groups with awards in health etc. (Woman community worker, Tower Hamlets)

Somali residents of Tower Hamlets are also active in a number of arts and business initiatives, including hosting an annual Cultural Week (which attracts Somalis from across London); publishing Somali Eye (a Somali focused quarterly magazine focusing on community issues); and publishing a glossy current affairs, lifestyles and fashion magazine (Sheeko, see Box 2 below).

Box 2. The Story of Sheeko Magazine

The following is adapted from an interview with a founding member:

Four of the 21/7 failed bombers were from the Horn of Africa. Many of my friends felt frustrated and misunderstood by all the negative press, and some people went through a phase of disassociating themselves from being Somali. Then we decided to try to paint a truer picture, to project out to wider British society. I found out that my grandfather had fought in World War 2, and I did some research and found that because of all the internet shops set up by Somalis, the cost of calling abroad had fallen a lot. So there were positive stories to tell.

So, how do we do it? We did market research, and recruited volunteers with different skills: writers, photographers, website designers – and found a wealth of talent within the community. We just needed a platform to express it. Some of us felt frustrated by community organisations – we felt that they didn't think like us. We were given support in kind, worked from bedrooms, and only paid for the printing. Then we got a grant from the British Council Youth Initiative Foundation.

Now 60% of our subscribers are non-Somali, and we get thousands of hits per month on our website. We've been invited to Sweden and the USA where we've been given awards, and we've created role models for the younger generation. We get emails

from people saying they've been inspired by reading about professionals, teachers, and so on from the Somali community.

We get lots of requests for work experience which we can't accommodate – we just don't have room in the office, and we all have other jobs we do. But several people have launched their career here.

There are financial difficulties now – a drop in advertising revenue associated with the economic downturn - so we are going down the route of making Sheeko a social enterprise. We'd like more space to accommodate young people. I'm also working on setting up a mentoring scheme – putting young people together with professionals.

A lot of people are proud of Sheeko – we hold events where everyone dresses up – we do things that the community isn't used to. We show that you can keep your culture and integrate at the same time. We faced some resistance initially from community elders, saying we weren't being Somali, or we weren't being Islamic. But we set out to paint a picture of the variety of youth: we show a mixture of covered and uncovered women, for instance'.

Despite the range of services, and evidence of the Somali community having a relatively strong voice within the borough, one community worker warned against holding up Tower Hamlets as an example of 'best practice', explaining that many issues still required urgent attention. The lack of appropriate housing for many families is a particular concern, with impacts on health and educational outcomes. There are still few Somali people working in local government or other public services, although the PCT does have some Somali employees. Many people feel that the Somali community need a physical base such as their own community centre before they consider themselves fully established. Several interviewees compared the situation of the Somali community unfavourably with that of the much larger Bengali community (who make up one third of Tower Hamlets' population), who are felt to be more organised; better equipped with community centres and youth activities; and better represented politically, even taking into account their much larger numbers.

Most groups we spoke with in Tower Hamlets were simultaneously pleased with their borough, whilst levying accusations of discrimination and strongly arguing for more resources and better services. This simultaneous recognition of support, alongside accusations of neglect, is summed up by the following quotation:

'I feel like the LA doesn't really want to measure the number of Somalis, because if they knew how big the community was, they would have to provide for them, and make a strategic plan for them. The LA knows exactly what the problems are, but they don't want to do anything about it. We have been promised things so many times, and nothing ever materialises. Tower Hamlets is one of the best LAs: at least they try to understand and try to do something'. (Male community worker)

Although there is general recognition that provision for the Somali community is improving, and that Tower Hamlets are seen as one of the better LAs in terms of their relationship with the Somali community, community organisations still perceive that their needs are systematically disregarded. Alternatively, they may express this view because they feel that they have to keep strongly voicing their demands, in order to keep

improving access to resources. However, there is a danger that this dynamic leads to confrontation and frustrated efforts at communication, rather than co-operation.

Organisations in Tower Hamlets

Note: these are limited descriptions of a small number of the organisations working with and for the Somali community in Tower Hamlets, to illustrate the range of projects, activities and issues being supported in the borough.

Ocean Somali Community Association (OSCA)

OSCA is the largest and best known Somali voluntary organisation in East London. It delivers a wide variety of services, activities and programmes (often in association with other organisations/agencies), including:

- Sports activities and youth clubs for young people (with its own boys' and girls' football teams)
- Working with youth NEET (not in education, employment or training) (e.g. offering support, helping them towards accredited certificates)
- Supporting families with members in prison
- A new female genital mutilation prevention project
- Promotion of healthy lifestyles and wellbeing (e.g. smoking cessation, cooking, Somali folk dance, gardening)
- Working with young girls and their mothers, trying to improve communication
- Residential trips for children/families (e.g. to Degmo Centre for Somali Heritage and Rural Life in Wales, where children and families stay on a hill farm and take part in traditional activities and learn about the environment)

OSCA has won Third Sector awards in Tower Hamlets for their work with both employment and skills, and health and wellbeing. The young people at OSCA have conducted their own successful fundraising, recently securing a grant to refurbish OSCA's offices. OSCA also run women's sessions in Newham. They encourage participation in sport and there is high attendance at their football matches, with 160 people regularly attending sessions. OSCA's work has caught the attention of the media, with its football team filmed for a TV documentary and its work partnering with a Somali cultural centre in Wales being written up in *the Guardian* newspaper¹⁰.

Owing to its broad portfolio of activities, and the fact that it is well known across East London, young people from other boroughs come to OSCA hoping to access services. While staff avoid turning young people away, they cannot include people from outside the borough in their monitoring data for many of their projects. If a young person travels across East London to access services only to be told they are not eligible (when for them, LA boundaries are not necessarily meaningful) then they may be deterred from accessing other services in future. This scenario illustrates the potential importance of cross-borough funding of the sort that the ELA might be able to offer.

Karin Housing Association

This Somali-led association manages properties in North and East London boroughs. It has been established for 22 years and is one of the oldest Somali-led organisations in

¹⁰ See www.guardian.co.uk/society/2009/aug/12/somalis-degmo-centre-wales-osca (published 12/08/09)

London. The Association regularly commissions research to support their work. Karin has an up to date website at www.karin-ha.org/.

Somali Integration Team (SIT)

This organisation was established in 2004, and works with women and girls in Stepney Green and Bethnal Green. It runs several projects, including a mentoring project (linking professionals with young girls); running BTEC work skills courses (e.g. interviewing skills); and helping people apply for courses and jobs. SIT has made a conscious effort to be a diverse and professional organisation, and to overcome some of the negative aspects of tribalism, such as according preferential treatment to members of one's own tribe (which is still said to exist in certain organisations). For instance, one of the senior project workers is from a non-majority tribe in Tower Hamlets; the chair is a white British person; they have an advisor from the Sikh community; the staff includes non-Somali Muslims; and their payroll is administered externally. All of these steps have been taken partly to improve accountability and transparency.

KAYD – Somali Art and Youth Entertainment

www.kayd.org Oxford House, Bethnal Green

Kayd is an arts and cultural organisation based at Oxford House, which helps to produce plays and uses art to explore different themes, including promoting tolerance, liberty, and equality for young people. Kayd works with community groups to host events, and organises the annual Somali Week event which showcases Somali culture, poetry, music and literature. Kayd reports that over twenty young people a year want to volunteer to help at Somali week, but that owing to the small size of the organisation (one part time worker) they cannot accommodate them all. However, Kayd is planning to structure the event such that in future, young Somali people run the whole festival. They are also trying to get successful and motivated volunteers linked with the Canary Wharf Group, a charity in East London that arranges work placements for young people. Kayd report that lots of Somali people come to their events who do not typically come to Somali community events.

Al-Huda Mosque and Cultural Centre

Mile End Road, Stepney Green

Al-Huda is the largest Somali-run mosque in East London. It was set and funded by the Somali community, and between 400-600 people attend every week. Al-Huda, in partnership with other local Somali organisations (including OSCA) have been delivering a Prevent project, named *Al Hikma*, which means 'wisdom', since 2009. The concept behind the project is that scholars create an environment in which issues such as foreign policy, radicalisation and extremism can be debated in a safe space. The project works with groups of women, and young people aged 15-19 and 20-25 years, aiming to build leadership and capacity. Some of the project's activities are new to the mosque, such as visits by the police, where young people are asked to take the place of the police and to decide what to do when faced with a police problem to solve. They are also arranging a football match where the police and Imams will play together. David Miliband MP visited the mosque in early 2010, to discuss politics and answer questions about British foreign policy. The mosque reports that young people are been very interested in getting involved in the project. They try to respond to young people's needs, for instance, by holding residential courses (which are popular) and mixing activities such as football in amongst more serious discussions. Al-Huda is also leading a move to try to establish a London-wide Somali Resource Centre, where information and expertise could be located.

MIND

The Khat Project at MIND covers Tower Hamlet and Newham, and has had several referrals for khat misuse from Hackney recently, who have come to use their drop-in service. The service is for 18-65 year olds. Most clients have spent repeated periods of time in mental health units. Some families have had their children taken into care through khat and other substance misuse. However, if people are referred to the khat project and join the programme, this can help them to get their children back. The project worker at MIND suggested that if other community organisations knew that the service existed, then they could help a larger number of people. MIND recently got a Somali advocacy officer in Newham. However, they knew of no other Somali-specific services in Newham – be they drop-in services or social events – for people with mental health issues, so these clients get referred to Tower Hamlets. MIND did not know of any similar initiatives in the other ELA boroughs either.

4.3 Hackney

Although Hackney lies just north of Tower Hamlets, the situation in terms of Somali-led community groups and services for Somali people is very different. Despite extensive enquiries, the research team could only meet with one Somali-led group, and one housing association. A Somali organisation, the International Somali Community Trust, existed in Upper Clapton until recently, but is reported to have closed down or moved. There is also a Somali women's group in the borough with whom we were unable to meet. The groups in Hackney are not well known in other East London boroughs among Somali community workers and service providers, most of whom when asked knew of no such groups in Hackney. Hackney Somali community groups are not linked with fellow East London groups in spite of their geographical proximity to Tower Hamlets, although Sahil Housing Association regularly works with Karin Housing.

Hackney has a population of at least 1,500 Somali people, who are said to be concentrated in Dalston, Stamford Hill, Mare Street, Queensbridge Road, and the area to the east of Finsbury Park (where there are two mosques with Somali Imams, attended by Somali people). There are several Somali-run businesses in the borough (internet cafes, money transfer services) though there is no restaurant/café, and most of the owners of businesses that the research team spoke to did not actually live in the borough. Somalis are said to attend Turkish and Bengali mosques in the borough.

The young participants in this research said that young Somali residents of Hackney do not socialise much in the borough; they travel to meet friends in Stratford, Haringey, Plaistow or Tower Hamlets – depending where their friends or cousins hang out. There were some complaints that a youth club they used to go to (which was not a Somali-specific club) has closed down (it was said to be on Kingsland road).

The overwhelming verdict of Hackney's Somali residents – including several young people, and older people in businesses and community organisations in or near Hackney – is that Hackney has few, if any, services for its Somali community. There is an expectation that there *should* be Somali-specific services or organisations, perhaps because these are so prevalent in the neighbouring borough of Tower Hamlets. Indeed, Somali residents are said to use services (e.g. luncheon clubs for elderly people, youth clubs) in neighbouring Tower Hamlets or Haringey, both of which have larger, well-

established Somali populations where many of Hackney's Somalis will have family members and friends. Hackney's proximity to two social and religious hubs may go some way towards explaining its relatively under-developed Somali sector.

The Somali residents of Hackney interviewed had mixed perceptions of the borough. One adult man felt that although some people have negative perceptions of the borough, they like it if they actually live there, because of the good shops, the relative affordability of cost of living, the new houses being built, and it being in general '*a nice place to live*'. However, as across London, a community volunteer says that overcrowded housing is a common complaint with many people being regularly moved from one house to another, and that '*everyone's on a waiting list*'. Young Somali people in Hackney also faced worries about security, which will be discussed further in Chapter 8.

Organisations in Hackney

Hackney Somali Community Association

This group was established in 2006 as a voluntary organisation, with the aim of helping children to tackle low educational attainment, which the group feel is partly a result of high levels of non literacy among their parents. The group has seven or eight active volunteers and is a member of the Hackney Refugee Forum. In 2007 a grant from Team Hackney allowed them to run 12 weeks of after-school classes for forty children, which parents were keen to see continued. However, the group have struggled to obtain grants to fund their work, and have found it hard to pay for tutors and rent a classroom. The group have a hot desk for one day a week at Hackney CVS. Future ambitions include setting up a Somali Parents' Forum to improve communication between parents, young people and schools. They would also like to have a place for the Somali community to meet, and a cultural event lasting for several days where the whole Somali community gets together. In the meantime, the group's founder acts as an intermediary if problems arise at school, such as dealing with children who have been entered into the wrong exams because their parent or carer was unable to read and sign the exam entry form correctly. When asked about the diversity of Somali people in Hackney, the group's founder says that a mixture of people have used their services, and that in Hackney '*90% of people come together regardless of tribe*'. They are still getting a lot of new arrivals in Hackney from other parts of London, the UK, and European countries including Italy.

Sahil Housing Association

This organisation was established in 1995 in Hackney, though it works in other London boroughs, mostly with Somalis and other African refugees (Congolese, Eritrean, Ethiopian). They deal with housing and related problems, providing advice and information, working with large housing associations and the council. They support people with issues such as anti-social behaviour, rent arrears, benefit problems, council tax etc., taking '*a holistic approach*'. The organisation reports a good relationship with Hackney LA, who fund one of their part time advice workers. They work with the Hackney housing forum and housing partnership; signpost service users to other BME organisations if necessary; link with Karin Housing and other Somali groups in Islington; and are members of the African Community Forum in Hackney.

Sahil manage properties on behalf of larger associations and work on community development, for example by working to 'engage tenants'. One example of this from an ELA borough was housing owned by LMQ (a large housing association) on the

Beaumont estate in Walthamstow. The estate had been regenerated, but it was felt that the 200 Somali tenants were not engaged – in other words, they were isolated, faced language barriers, and were not accessing services provided (for instance, skills training for young people was being provided but the Somalis did not know about it). This meant that Somali tenants only met with the Housing Association when there was a problem. Sahil met with the community there and made a set of recommendations focusing on how to communicate with the Somali tenants, including through after-school clubs and community organisations.

4.4 Waltham Forest

The Somali community in Waltham Forest is thought to be relatively new. One interviewee had moved to the area in the early 1990s and said that at the time, only a dozen Somalis lived in the borough, most of whom were single men staying at the YMCA in Walthamstow. This situation has changed rapidly, and the borough now has close to 4,000 Somali residents. Many of Waltham Forest's Somali residents did not necessarily choose to settle in the borough, but rather were housed there by the LA. This helps explain the regional diversity of Somalis in the borough; there is said to be no single predominant tribe.

There is a small Somali-run mosque in the south of the borough, and restaurants and cafés have started opening in recent years in Leyton. Universal TV, a channel aimed at the Somali audience, is based in Walthamstow.

There are said to be over fifty small community organisations in Waltham Forest (according to the Refugee Advice Centre in Waltham Forest), and of these, four are supported by the LA. At least three of the groups have been established for around 15 years. This large number of groups has grown up as a result of the very mixed Somali community in the borough: each clan or family is said to have set up their own 'community' (which is how community organisations are described). The original founder of each group gives the community its identity in terms of clan, and new arrivals to the area will then turn to the group that they most closely identify with.

Although there are several well established groups in the borough, some of which have office space, again there is no community centre or youth club specifically for young Somali people. A Somali Umbrella organisation was established in 2005, although several representatives from Somali groups said that the Umbrella organisation had failed in its aims, owing to differences between the groups, including differences linked to politics '*back home*' and resentment arising from the Umbrella group being placed under a wider BME Umbrella organisation.

Organisations in Waltham Forest

North London Islamic Centre

This is a small mosque (30 square metres) with a screened area for women and a small office but no function room. Many young people and people of other nationalities/ethnicities (approximately 20% of all attendees) attend prayers. The mosque is entirely financially supported by its members. It runs other activities including:

- Seasonal after-school sessions for primary school students and for GCSE revision
- Sessions for the elderly on Saturdays
- Religious education

- Sports for young people

The mosque has also arranged meetings and conferences on the subject of violent extremism, where '*people of religion*' tell young people that '*we're against violence*'. Leaders at the centre also perceive there to be a great need for services for elderly Somalis in the borough. The mosque reports that they are keen to integrate and mix with people of other faiths and ethnicities: they have Pakistani Imams speaking at the mosque, and were planning to attend a multi-faith event at a local church. The mosque is chaired by a Bravanese man though he considers himself as Somali, and Somalis of other backgrounds also attend the mosque. The mosque is linked to the nearby **Somali Bravanese Action Group**.

The Bravanese are an ethnic minority within Somalia, who speak a different language, and who are said to have faced discrimination from other clan-based groups in Somalia. Many Bravanese do not self-identify as Somali but have their own distinct ethnic identity. Within the group of peer researchers, one young man who was Bravanese struggled to communicate with the other peer researchers when they were speaking Somali, so unless both parties also speak English, there may not be easy communication between the groups. Some Bravanese may have faced discrimination and persecution in Somalia from larger clan-based groups, so there may be reluctance on their behalf to identify with the wider Somali community.

Waltham Forest Somali Welfare Association

This community organisation was set up 15 years ago and has a voluntary executive committee, one part-time member of staff, and several volunteers. Like many similar groups, securing funding has been an ongoing challenge, as has retention of staff and volunteers who know how to write winning bids for grants. The group have premises in Community Place, where they run a drop-in service to support people with form-filling, day to day problems, interpreting, health, immigration, housing, schools, and bills. More complex cases are referred to other services. The group was established in response to the barriers faced by Somali people arriving in the UK: the few Somalis in the borough who spoke English decided to help support others. Their main funding is from the LA through SureStart, which is based within the same building, as they often employ one of the Somali women in the group. They are also supported by the Refugee Advice Centre in terms of rent and basic costs.

The group have been involved in other research on issues such as integration (with Liverpool University) and Class A drugs (with the BME Alliance in Waltham Forest). They are also currently writing up their own research on a survey of khat use (how often people use it, how it affects them financially, and a profile of usage by age and sex). The group have various plans for the future: they would like to use their in-house journalistic skills (of one of their volunteers) to develop a Somali journal/newspaper with the involvement of youth. They are also interested in setting up a community radio station.

Another Somali organisation is also based in Community Place, the **Somali Banadir Welfare Association** (Banadir is a region in the south of Somalia). Although the Welfare Association report that they work with the Somali Women's Group, Bravanese and Banadir groups in the borough, in the past, attempts to form an Umbrella group were not successful. They found that it was logistically difficult to get everyone together in the same building. Several respondents also felt that particular groups who felt poorly treated or discriminated against historically (or recently) are not comfortable working with

people who share aspects of their identity with the perpetrators: the civil war in Somalia remains a contributing factor in the failure of such initiatives. However, the group believes that *'as time goes by, and with help from the local authority, it'll help Somali people to mend those wounds. It will also improve their integration into the mainstream society'*.

Waltham Forest Women's Association is an organisation led by women that undertakes a range of community-based programmes, including work with children and young people and provision of sporting and recreational activities. They are keen to scale up their work with engaging young people, but have experienced challenges accessing adequate funds to do so.

4.5 Newham

It proved particularly challenging to make contacts in Newham. As in Hackney, most other interviewees, including those within the LA, did not know any active community organisations in the borough. However, internet searches suggested that some groups existed, though it was difficult to make contact by telephone. Despite speaking to representatives from several organisations, it was not possible to meet any of the groups in Newham during the course of the research. Another Somali researcher, recently working on housing research in Newham, shared similar experiences and was also unable to meet any groups in Newham. Considering there are at least 6,700 Somali people thought to live in Newham, it was surprisingly difficult to make connections. There appear to be few well-established community groups, and those that exist are pressed for time and resources.

Several factors may have mitigated against the formation of Somali community groups in Newham, and may have contributed to the reluctance of such groups to engage in this research. The borough of Newham does not fund any Somali groups, reflecting its policy of avoiding funding organisations that serve single ethnic or religious groups. Rather, the LA invests in activities to promote 'bringing people together and shared goals' (e.g. English classes, events that people from different ethnic groups can attend together). This is intended to reduce perceptions of unfairness if one ethnic group is funded over another. Reflected in this, Newham do not translate leaflets published by the borough, although they do have a translation service. Having said this, if there are identifiable service needs, such as ESOL in particular groups (e.g. among Somali women), they may be eligible for financial support. Respondents from Somali organisations in other boroughs had strong opinions on this policy. One accused the LA in Newham of *'deliberate neglect'* of the Somali community, and said that most of the Somali groups that had existed in the past had been *'destroyed'*. Interviewees claimed that Somalis in Newham were among the most disadvantaged of Somali communities across the whole UK, with long housing waiting lists (often waiting over ten years) and few services to support their specific needs.

Peer researchers reported that there was one Youth Club in the Forest Gate/Upton Park area that young Somalis attended, though they did not know its name. It was said to have computers, snooker/pool, and provide help with Maths and English. Mixed ages and ethnicities were said to attend. Youth Services in Newham reported that they are beginning outreach work with young Somalis in Newham, trying to encourage them to access mainstream youth services, and have started this process by recruiting a young Somali to work as an outreach volunteer.

Organisations in Newham

Somali Women's Advisory Network

SWAN is run by a woman volunteer, and is youth- and women-focussed. SWAN looks at the family unit holistically and also works with parents. The organisation concentrates on school attainment, providing support, and linking clients with the right people. SWAN has extensive experience of liaising with social services, reporting that in general the experience has not been positive, as many of the procedures can feel alienating and unhelpful. However, they would very much like to improve their partnership with social services. Common problems dealt with by SWAN are the need for interpreting services, lack of understanding of the educational system by Somali families, school exclusions, youth offending, parenting, and family members going to prison. SWAN has a mentoring programme where young volunteers are trained to support other youth.

SWAN is completely supported by volunteers with no support from the LA, which is a source of frustration: *'I feel like we're working for the local authority, doing their job and not getting anything for it'*. This places a heavy burden on volunteers owing to the high levels of need in the community. People call with problems at weekends, at night, and at any time. The issue of funding is of great concern to them, as they feel they do not know who the decision makers are, or how to get their attention. They would like to scale up their services, but feel this is not feasible without external support. Currently they are setting up a website, and are trying to produce leaflets to make their work more visible. SWAN are keen to be kept informed of the results of this research so that they can pursue the issues raised.

4.6 Redbridge

Of all the boroughs in this research, progress in terms of working with young people and engaging with community groups was most limited in Redbridge. Although the research team had one meeting with RAMFEL and a representative of the Redbridge Somali Consortium, it was not possible to make further investigations through this avenue owing to sensitivities between the local Somali community and the LA. Because it was important not to jeopardise the LA's relationship with the Consortium at a delicate stage in their relationship, the research team conducted no further activities in Redbridge, so findings are limited in this borough.

The Redbridge Somali Consortium has existed since 1997 as an umbrella organisation for several different Somali groups. The Consortium is said by both people who know it outside the borough, and people within the Consortium, to represent groups of all regions/tribes within the Somali community. It sits within RAMFEL (Refugee and Migrant Forum of East London), the organisation through which the LA supports various BME and refugee and migrant groups.

We were able to learn that there is no Somali mosque in the borough, and although Somalis attend other mosques it is reported that they do not feel as though they are playing an active role in the management of the mosques. There is also some concern that Somalis are discriminated against by other groups in terms of accessing community resources such as booking a community centre for events. There is a Somali football session every Sunday in Leyton with forty to fifty young people attending, and we also heard of a Somali Imam in Redbridge who does mentoring work with young people.

Key informants in the Somali community say that Somalis started to settle in Redbridge in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Somali is now the sixth most commonly spoken language in the borough's schools with 754 speakers¹¹. The highest concentration of Somalis is in the south east of the borough, along the border with Barking and Dagenham.

Although the police are aware of young Somalis being involved in 'gang' issues (which the police see as being 'loosely affiliated groups' rather than true gangs, and which involve a mixture of young people rather than having Somali-only groups) and street robberies, they are not seen to be the most vulnerable to involvement in criminal activity among groups of BME young people in the borough. A Somali youth worker who lives in Redbridge said that the situation with groups or gangs in Redbridge was much calmer than in Tower Hamlets where she works.

As in other boroughs, Somali groups in Redbridge are said to want their own specific services such as Somali youth clubs and outreach services. The LA has encouraged them to apply for funds but with limited success. The reasons why Somali groups have not taken up funding opportunities are not clear, but are likely to include limited capacity to write funding applications, and lack of clarity in terms of communication and expectations about the respective roles of the LA and community groups in community development. For example, while the LA might be able to fund a youth mentoring scheme, the community might demand a youth centre. Thus the demands and expectations of community groups might be beyond the immediate resources of the LA.

Engagement with the Somali community on the Prevent agenda is at an embryonic stage. Redbridge has started by building on a series of previous meetings held with community members, the police, the fire brigade, and the LA. Issues including fire safety, housing, ward panels, volunteering, youth opportunities, and Redbridge's conception of the Prevent agenda have been discussed. The LA also works with far-right extremists and does not conceive of radicalisation as being solely a Muslim issue. Participation at these meetings has been steadily increasing from a base of about forty people, to around eighty people at the last meeting. A mixture of men, women, young and old are said to attend.

All Prevent projects are judged and approved by the 'Understanding Redbridge Communities' group. No member of the Somali community took up the opportunity to sit on this group, however, a representative from the Somali Consortium sits on the Police Independent Advisory Group (a panel of community members who act as a 'critical friend' to the police, overseeing their activities).

Organisations in Redbridge

The Redbridge Somali consortium is made up of several community groups¹². The consortium has always worked with a relatively small amount of funding, carrying out small-scale projects, mainly with Somali children. The consortium was established by the

¹¹ In 2008, 3.4% of EAL pupils were Somali speakers (718 pupils). In 2008 this percentage remained the same, but the number rose to 754 speakers. Source: Redbridge Borough Research and Data Team.

¹² It was not possible to obtain details from the Redbridge Somali Consortium on the names and details of these individual groups.

council as a way to co-ordinate the different Somali community groups that were emerging in the borough. In 2010 the consortium gained its first part-time member of staff, and a website is planned. The consortium is a focus point for statutory bodies to communicate with the Somali community, and there are quarterly community meetings. At present they also hold children's mentoring sessions on Sundays. The consortium has limited links with other East London Somali groups at present.

5 Chapter 5: Existing Information and Gaps in Knowledge

5.1 Existing Information and Gaps in Knowledge

Over the course of this research, a number of reports have been identified that look at aspects of life for Somali communities in East London, and in Tower Hamlets in particular. Resources were found through: searching academic databases and the internet; asking interviewees if they knew of previous research reports; and searching the resources pages of community organisations (e.g. www.bwhafs.com/html/icar.html), which has a thorough if slightly out of date list of publications).

5.2 Lack of Accessibility of Research and Data

There is good reason for users of research – including other researchers, local planners, and community organisations – to be dismayed at the lack of accessibility of many of these research reports (which do not appear to be systematically stored/indexed by LAs who have commissioned them, and are often difficult to track down) and of basic data (e.g. PLASC data), particularly in the age of the internet and Freedom of Information requests. It was difficult and time consuming even for OUK, an experienced research organisation with a long track record of accessing these types of data, to retrieve many of these reports and sources of information.

For example, the PLASC data about the number of Somali pupils are a routine source of information that give a crucial insight into population trends. If these data were easily accessible to community organisations or routinely published by LAs, this could support many community organisations in their work (e.g. seeing what proportion of youth in the borough their services were reaching). One well established Somali organisation was informed (it was not clear by whom) in late 2009 that they could not access PLASC data, and were surprised to hear that OUK had successfully obtained the dataset.

The lack of accessibility of some sources of routine data, and of previous reports commissioned by LAs, has two negative consequences: firstly, it contributes to the feeling that any new researcher may be duplicating previous efforts. Secondly, it does little to enhance the ability of community organisations to develop evidence-based strategies and therefore make an effective case for resources.

5.3 Annotated Bibliography

The publications accessed by the research team are listed in the annotated bibliography accompanying this report. This is not an exhaustive list. It is hoped that the bibliography will provide a starting point that will grow over time. In the absence of a dedicated centre for Somali research/resources in London (or indeed the UK), it is not clear who might take on the responsibility of collecting and storing resources relating to the Somali community. However, until this happens, community organisations will continue to face similar sets of questions, simply because those commissioning the research, or even the researchers themselves, have not been able to make the most of existing knowledge.

5.4 Summary of Information Available

The following section summarises information available on the Somali community in East London by thematic and geographical area, followed by a discussion of information gaps. The review focuses on documents/data published after 2000, but other useful documents from previous years are available, such as *'Somali Community of Tower Hamlets: A Demographic Survey'*, commissioned by the LB of Tower Hamlets in 1991, which presents an interesting insight into the recent past. Many of the challenges

described in the report remain stubbornly similar (e.g. overcrowded housing, language barriers to accessing healthcare), while others have improved substantially (e.g. experiences of violent racism at the hands of the local white British community were said to be commonplace in the early 1990s, but are not perceived to be a problem among young people today (see Chapter 8)).

5.5 Background Information on the Somali Community

The ICAR (Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees) Briefing (July 2007) '*The Somali Refugee Community in the UK*' is a useful and succinct introductory document for anybody working with or for the Somali community. It gives a brief overview of the history of Somalia and of Somali settlement in the UK; statistics on the Somali community in the UK; and key issues including health, employment, housing and community relations. It represents a summary update of Harris' comprehensive 2004 report about Somalis in the UK:

Publication: Harris (2004) *The Somali Community in the UK: What we know and how we know it*. ICAR UK

Methods: Literature review (and critique)

Key Findings: Harris' report represents one of the most comprehensive reports written on the Somali community in recent years, although now six years old. Her literature review is extremely thorough and Harris not only summarises key findings reported but critiques currently available research. She highlights that while we purport to know little about Somalis in the UK the body of literature about this community is much larger than might be expected given the size of the population here (her bibliography includes 139 substantive references all published since 1990), but that many reports and articles can be difficult to access. Half of the available literature cited is general, with mental health representing the most discussed 'specific' subject area explored in papers (particularly if *Khat* use is considered under the banner of mental health).

Harris highlights the impact that 9/11 and resultant *Islamophobia* has had on the attention paid towards and efforts to integrate by the Somali community before moving to explore the more 'mainstream' issues of:

- employment and training
- education and youth
- physical and mental health
- *Khat* use
- women and gender roles
- female genital mutilation
- fragmentation and unification within the Somali population

A more recent but slightly less comprehensive report exploring Somalis in England was published by the Department of Local Government and Communities (DLGC) in 2009.

Publication: DLGC (2009) *The Somali Community in England*

Methods: Literature and data review; interviews with 21 members of the Somali community, one focus group with Somali men in Leicester, one with women in East London

Key Findings: While Harris' (2004) report is more comprehensive and takes a more critical look at the literature, the DCLG report is more up to date and explores both the (lack of) capacity of Somali community-based organisations and lack of collective voice

for Somali communities across the country. It also explores the impact of media on Somalis and integration.

In 2006 the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) also produced a mapping study which, while conducted specifically to inform IOM's own outreach and communications strategies, provides a reasonable profile of the Somali community in the UK:

Publication: IOM (2006) *Somali Regions: Mapping Exercise*, London.

Methods: Key informant interviews, community consultations, service provider interviews and interviews with 63 Somalis resident in the UK.

Key Findings: Of the findings relevant to a wider audience the IOM reports a number of features characterising the Somali community in the UK: a culture of mistrust, dissension within Somali communities, fears of deporting and a lack of evidence of Somalis returning to their homeland voluntarily. According to key informants spoken with during the course of the research, fewer than 50 of as many as 300 Somali community organisations in the UK are effective and/or fully-functioning.

5.6 Education

Perhaps because Somali pupils have historically had low educational attainment compared with other groups, there is a reasonable amount of literature available on Somali children and education. Much of this literature is summarised in the general Somali reports already mentioned above (DCLG 2009; Harris 2004).

Publication: Rutter J (2004) *Refugee Communities in the UK: Somali Children's Educational Progress and Life Experiences*. Multiverse/London Metropolitan University.

Methods: Literature review, data analysis and observations exploring educational attainment in five schools across five Local Education Authorities (schools and boroughs not identified)

Key findings: Rutter presents a clear and concise summary of the available literature relating to the Somali population in the UK, including that discussing children's education and welfare. While the available literature focuses upon the underachievement of and school exclusions experienced by young Somalis, Rutter seeks to explore the reality of such negative tales and asks 'have their been improvements in Somali children's achievement since 1999?'. At key stages One to Three, Somali students were the lowest or second lowest achieving ethnic groups in the period 1999-2003. However by GCSEs, in two London LEAs, Somali students outperformed white students in 2003. Somali children whose families came from northern Somalia in the period 1988-91 appeared to be the least well-achieving group, despite having been in the UK the longest. Rutter reports many factors that might limit educational progress among Somali pupils, highlighting maternal illiteracy in particular.

Publication: Feyisa Demie, Kirstin Lewis and Christabel McLean. *Raising the achievement of Somali pupils: Challenges and School Responses*. Lambeth Council 2007¹³ and *Raising Achievement of Somali Pupils: Good Practice in London Schools*. Lambeth Research and Statistics Unit. March 2008.

¹³ www.lambeth.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/49D2ECB5-E948-4580-8A1C-F22C78E9F2F7/0/SOMALI_final.pdf

Methods: Analysis of statistical data on pupil background and educational attainment, case studies, focus groups with parents.

Key findings:

These reports provide a good overview of existing literature on the key challenges to Somali students' attainment. They also analyse current statistics, and examine recent efforts to improve outcomes in schools, discussing what factors underpin improvements. The authors point out that by addressing the specific needs of the Somali community, exam results can be hugely improved (in one school in north London, the proportion achieving five or more A* to C grades rose from 27% in 1994 to 100% in 2007). This required making concerted attempts to reach out to parents, to overcome language barriers and to improve their knowledge of the education system.

Local Authorities also hold databases from which it should be possible to extract data on educational attainment by ethnic group over time. However, it was not possible to access data for all five boroughs in the time available for this study. Data from Waltham Forest¹⁴ show that the percentage of Somali pupils achieving five or more good GCSE passes has increased from 14% in 2006 to 31% just three years later in 2009, significantly narrowing the gap between Somali students and the average results for pupils in the borough (which was 39% in 2006 and 46% in 2009). The regular production and dissemination of such data would be valuable for schools, community groups, and LAs, in order to monitor continued inequalities and to acknowledge positive achievements.

5.7 Housing

Publication: Hassan MA, Lewis H and Lukes S (2009) *No Voice, Little Choice: The Somali Housing Emergency in North and East London*. Karin Housing Association Ltd.

Methods: Household survey of 158 individuals.

Key findings: This recently published report describes results of a comprehensive study of the housing situation of Somali families across North and East London (including households in the five boroughs included in this research), updating available research from 2002. The report concludes that the housing situation facing the Somali community constitutes an emergency, and that the Somali community's lack of voice and representation (both in terms of decision making, and the fact that they are not routinely monitored as a distinct community) means that they continue to be 'at the bottom of the housing heap'.

Publication: Tony Soares and Associates (2003) *Research Report into the Housing and Support Needs of the Somali Community in Five London Boroughs*. Karin Housing Association Ltd.

Methods: Literature review, secondary data analysis and community-based survey (convenience sample of 200) across Tower Hamlets, Newham, Haringey, Hackney and Waltham Forest

Key Findings: Suggests a combined Somali population of 55-60,000 across the five boroughs, among which there was a considerable level of overcrowding and homelessness. Almost two thirds of survey respondents felt their housing was unsuitable citing concerns relating to overcrowding, disrepair, lack of heating and feeling unsafe.

5.8 Identity and Inter-Generational Conflict

¹⁴ Key Stage 4 and 5 Results for Somali Pupils in Waltham Forest Maintained Schools and 6th Forms.

Somali identity and family relationships have been the subject of much research. Two particularly useful documents are listed below:

Publication: Sporton D and Valentine G (2005) *Identities on the Move: Experiences of Somali Refugee and Asylum-Seeker Young Children*. University of Leeds, University of Sheffield, ESRC.

Methods: 2-year qualitative and quantitative study exploring the lives of young Somalis (11-18yrs) living in Sheffield (and Aarhus, Denmark): participant observations in Somali community spaces, in-depth interviews with children, parents and stakeholders (e.g. school and LA representatives), online discussion forum and art workshops

Key findings: Experiences of forced mobility and lack of attachment to place result in the 'Muslim' identity becoming, for many young Somalis, the most central part of self-identity; young people often report feeling their parents do not understand their experiences of attempting to integrate in the UK resulting in conflict; young males experiencing a crisis of masculinity contributing to an increased risk of involvement in anti-social behaviours; emerging (hidden) culture of smoking and drinking among some youth.

Publication: Harding J, Clarke A and Chappell A (2007) *Family Matters: Intergenerational Conflict in the Somali Community*. London Metropolitan University

Methods: Focus groups and one-to-one interviews with young Somalis and Somali parents (one focus group with parents, one with youth; interviews with 11 youth and 11 parents) living in Tower Hamlets

Key findings: Both parents and young people talked about changes in family structure and dynamics alongside the potential loss of culture, family values, language and religion resulting from enforced migration. Respondents called for the provision of training programmes for parents (including educational and emotional support for single mothers), summer schools and activities for youth, language classes, and counselling for fathers.

5.9 Khat Use

Several studies explore Khat use among the British Somali population. The 2008 paper represents one of the most recent and balanced publications:

Publication: Patel SL (2008) *Attitudes to Khat use within the Somali community in England*. In *Drugs: Education, prevention and policy*, v15(1): 37-53

Methods: Review of previous studies and, 602 questionnaire-based interviews, focus groups with peer researchers (who conducted the quantitative interviews), and 6 semi-structured interviews with Somali community workers across 4 sites – Birmingham, Bristol, London and Sheffield

Key findings: Mixed attitudes with regards to Khat use within the Somali community in the UK, women were more likely than men to oppose its use. Majority of sample (including equal numbers of men and women aged 17 to 74 years) did not use Khat at all; those who did use it mostly reporting only moderate use. Khat users tended to be male and had a mean age of 38 years. No evidence that Khat use has increased upon migration to the UK.

Publication: Mohamud Ahmed, March 2005, Tower Hamlets Somali Population: Research into Substance Use/Misuse.

Methods: 74 survey respondents, 20 focus group participants (men and women).

Key findings: Almost all Somali men and 25-30% of women thought to chew Khat, with potentially negative health consequences (disrupted sleep patterns, unbalanced diet, depression). Respondents were generally reluctant to seek support/counselling, believing it to be a waste of time or inaccessible owing to lack of interpreters. Somali social workers believe Khat usage to be rooted in feelings of being uprooted and trauma. The mosque and religious practice was seen to be a good way to 'keep out of trouble'. Improved community awareness, housing security and sporting opportunities for youth were proposed as potential avenues to reduce levels of drug misuse.

5.10 Employment

There is no local, up to date and representative information on levels of unemployment and deprivation in the Somali community. Likewise, there appears to be routine misreporting of data on the economic conditions of the Somali population. During the literature review, one purported fact (that 95% of Somalis are unemployed) was frequently reported in the literature, despite its limited applicability to the current situation (it seems that it was the finding of a small study in a south London borough in the early 1990s). The most recent and robust estimates of employment come from the following Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR):

Publication: Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah, Laurence Cooley and Tracy Kornblatt. *Britain's Immigrants: An economic profile*. A report for Class Films and Channel 4 Dispatches (September 2007). IPPR.

Methods: Analysis of the 2005/2006 Labour Force Survey, a nationally representative sample survey.

Key findings: 19% of people of working age who were born in Somalia were employed (excluding students and retirees) and only 10% were classed as unemployed. The remaining 71% were classed as 'inactive'. The high level of inactivity includes women at home with children; those ineligible to work; and those with disabilities or long term health problems. The Somali population has one of the lowest levels of employment of immigrant groups in the UK. However, there are signs of improvement, as the employment rate has risen since 1995/1996 when it was only 12%. The IPPR report, citing Bloch 2004, says:

'This unusually low figure [of adults in employment] is indicative of the fact that the majority of Somalis in the UK will not have come here through labour migration channels, but rather because they are fleeing violence and persecution in Somalia, and of the relative newness of the Somali community (...) Given that a large proportion of Somalis in the UK are likely to be refugees, this low employment rate may reflect the difficulties such groups have in accessing employment once they have gained refugee status (Bloch 2004).

5.11 Local Authority-specific Publications

The following publications relate to East London Boroughs. No specific research was found about the Somali community in Redbridge.

5.11.1 Hackney

Publication: Holman C and Holman N (2003) *First steps in a new country: Baseline indicators for the Somali community in LB Hackney.*

Methods: Data review and analysis (data sources include: Census, Survey of English Housing, Labour Force Survey, General Household Survey, British Household Panel Survey and the British Crime Survey); community-based survey (n=77)

Key findings: Report criticises the current approach to ethnic monitoring which subsumes 'Somali' within the 'Black African' category making it difficult to assess the needs of this specific group. It further highlights the concentration of Somalis in poor quality housing (though sample was recruited through a housing association); the lack of access to advice services, translation facilities, and English language courses and insufficient training programmes necessary to support the Somali community to progress towards employment. Finally the authors highlighted a need to enhance stronger relations between statutory services and the Somali community so that LB Hackney might better understand the particular needs of this population.

5.11.2 Newham

Publication: Harriss K (2000) *Muslims in the London Borough of Newham.* Background paper for the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society, University of Oxford.

Methods: Analysis of local and national data

Key findings: Paper suggests that in 2001 there were around 6000 African Muslims in Newham, most of whom were Somali, Nigerian or Tanzanian. While little analysis focuses specifically on the Somali population, the paper does suggest that Newham's Muslim residents are particularly likely to live in more deprived areas, be underperforming in education and/or be unemployed. The report provides an annex giving details of local mosques, Islamic, ethnic and refugee and asylum seeker organisations. The report notes that although Somalis attend mosques throughout the borough, they are unlikely to be involved in the management of the mosques and are under-represented in local politics.

Publication: Case Study: *Somali Engagement in Newham Libraries* (See Newham 'Welcome to your library' website¹⁵).

Methods: Summary of a library participation project

Key findings: This library project worked with refugee and migrant groups, including the Somali community, to improve participation. Members of the community were consulted in choosing Somali materials to stock, and in launching the project at an event with Somali speakers and singers. Over a hundred people attended the event and over fifty people joined the library. The following lessons were learned:

- The work was not achieved in isolation – success of the event depended on engagement with the community to spread the word
- It is important not to be seen as favouring one particular group and Somali organisations are often divided along clan/tribal/geographical/political affiliations
- The work involved in organising such an event is very labour intensive
- Long-term processes are required to sustain and develop relationships - projects like this cannot succeed overnight.

¹⁵ www.welcometoyourlibrary.org.uk/editorial.asp?page_id=56

5.11.3 Tower Hamlets

Publication: Tribal Group (2009) *Needs of Older People from the Somali Community in Tower Hamlets*. Study conducted for Tower Hamlets Council.

Methods: Literature review, service provider interviews, community engagement (interviews and focus groups with 110 older Somalis) and secondary data analysis

Key findings: Using GP registration data, the study suggests that there are fewer than 200 Somalis over the age of 50 years living in Tower Hamlets, representing under 40% of the total resident Somali population. Particular health issues identified among older Somalis include the high prevalence of diabetes, obesity and female genital mutilation (FGM); reportedly high rates of depression, mental ill-health and dementia, as well as family breakdown and a high number of men living alone. In spite of these issues analyses suggest that older Somalis are receiving broadly equitable access to social care assessments and services though greater access to interpreting and advocacy services are needed.

Publication: Warsama I (2009) *Tower Hamlets Somali Community Research*. Tower Hamlets Partnership

Methods: Literature review, interviews with service providers, focus groups and interviews with resident Somalis (total of 85 people), secondary data analysis of locally available service access data

Key findings: Paper highlights the difficulty in accessing reliable information sources about demographics and geography of the Somali population in Tower Hamlets, but GP and schools data suggest it to be the second largest non-white ethnic community group in the borough after Bangladeshis. The author highlights three key barriers to the use of public services by Somalis in Tower Hamlets: 1) language, especially when it comes to using services such as GPs and health clinics, 2) culture (though the paper does not explain how culture is inhibiting service access) and 3) communications/lack of awareness of services. In terms of Somali youth the author highlights an apparent lack of youth clubs as contributing to anti-social behaviours.

Publication: Clifford N (2008) *Somali Population in Tower Hamlets: A Demographic Analysis*. Tower Hamlets PCT.

Methods: Data analysis and synthesis

Key findings: Study compared population estimates drawn from using 2001 census data, Experian Origins software, hospital admission, LA housing and schools data as well as through academic studies. Lower end estimates were 1,353 (2001 census data) and 2,081 (Experian Origins 2008); higher end estimates were achieved using local area data: 4,114 (Hospital admissions data 2008), 5,808 (LA housing data 2008) and 5,324 (Schools data, 2008). Clifford concludes that the true number of Somalis living in Tower Hamlets is probably around 5,500 residents, representing about 2-3% of the total population.

Publication: Ahern M (2008) *Mental Health Needs Assessment of the Somali Population of Tower Hamlets*

Methods: Review of existing literature on Somali mental health, community consultation, focus group discussions

Key findings: Important issues in terms of mental health in the Somali community are: lack of understanding of how to access appropriate health care; difficulties with interpretation/translation services; stigma around mental health leading to reluctance to seek treatment; the role (if any) of Khat in mental illness; lack of systematic recording of

ethnicity data; concerns about cultural competency of health professionals; and concerns about overrepresentation of Somali in-patients. There is a great deal of research and debate about the effects of Khat, but very little evidence that regular use has a detrimental effect on mental health. However, regular Khat use may reflect other underlying emotional, psychological or social problems. The report concludes with a detailed list of recommendations to be implemented by the PCT in conjunction with stakeholders. There is currently a group chaired by the PCT that meets regularly to take forward these issues.

Publication: Warner R (2006): *'When you lived in Somalia...'* Somali pupils interview their parents. LB Tower Hamlets/Globetown Action Zone.

Methods: 16 Somali primary school pupils (Years 5-6) trained to interview their parents

Key findings: Young Somalis interviewed their parents and then reported what their parents had told them about various aspects of their lives in Somalia. The aims of this project included helping to strengthen links between Somali pupils, parents and schools and to develop stronger understanding between generations.

5.11.4 Waltham Forest

Publication: iCoCo (2007) *Breaking down the 'walls of silence': Supporting community engagement and tackling extremism in the London Borough of Waltham Forest.*

Methods: Service provider interviews, focus groups with resident Muslims including young Somalis

Key findings: Focus of the report was on understanding Waltham Forest's Muslim population. The authors note that most Somalis in Waltham Forest practice the Shafi Madhab and Salafi strands of Islam and that some young Somalis may be involved in Muslim-only gangs. The document includes a useful annex exploring Muslim diversity in the Borough; this highlights the many strands of Islam that residents adhere to and includes a list of mosques and other Islamic associations in the Borough.

Publication: Dr Les Mayhew and Gillian Harper. *Counting with confidence: The population of Waltham Forest.* March 2010.

Methods: Neighbourhood knowledge management analysis

Key findings: There are at least 3,880 Somalis living in the borough, of whom 1,960 are aged 19 or under; 1,807 are aged 20-64 years; and 114 are aged 65 and over. Of these, 2,823 are living in households on benefits of some kind (a measure of income deprivation). This represents 73% of the Somali population, which is the highest proportion of households on benefits of all ethnic groups (followed by former Yugoslavia and Albanian at 59%, and Turkish/Cypriot at 52%).

5.12 Research in Progress

Several pieces of research are in progress across East London which either focus on or include the Somali community.

Hackney:

- Mapping of Muslim communities (University of Lancashire)

Newham:

- Analysis of perceptions of Prevent /review of current Prevent work (Office for Public Management)
- Mapping of Tamil/Muslim/white working class which will include reference to Somalis (out to tender at time of writing)

- University of East London: research related to the experience of being a refugee, including working with Somali women's group in Newham
- Analysis of population using name analysis, which should give an estimate of the size/age structure of the Somali population in the near future (Mayhew Associates)

Tower Hamlets:

- Karin Housing commissioned research in 2009 about housing and other social issues, including the Choice Based Lettings Policy, which is believed to be an obstacle to many Somali households securing appropriate housing (pending publication)
- Karin Housing is conducting research into intergenerational issues across seven boroughs (interviews and group discussions) (pending publication)
- Tower Hamlets and Haringey are conducting a poverty and ethnicity consultation through the Centre for Local Policy Studies which involves focus groups with Somali residents

Chapter 9 discusses remaining gaps in research.

6 Chapter Six: The Somali Community's Resilience to Violent Extremism

The report now addresses the degree to which the Somali community is resilient, or vulnerable, to the threat of violent extremism. It describes how this research question has been interpreted; limitations in the data available; and what conclusions can be drawn from this study.

6.1 Considerations behind Radicalisation

Firstly, it is important to set out the model of radicalisation against which the analysis will be framed. The following summary of 'factors behind radicalisation' (Box 3) is adapted from the MI5 Security Service's 'Countering International Terrorism' Overview¹⁶:

Box 3. Considerations which may influence radicalisation

Identifying the factors which may lead to radicalisation is important in terms of focusing initiatives to reduce the risk of terrorism. Key points include:

- Radicalisation is a **two stage process**. An alienated individual who has become highly radicalised is not necessarily a terrorist. Only a tiny minority of radicalised individuals actually cross over to become terrorists.
- There are a **range of potential factors** in radicalisation. No single factor predominates. It is likely the catalyst for any given individual becoming a terrorist will be a combination of different factors particular to that person.
- Potentially radicalising factors include the **development of a sense of grievance and injustice** linked to the process of **globalisation; anti-Westernism**; the belief that the West does not apply **consistent standards** in its international behaviour; and **specific events** (e.g. actions in Afghanistan and Iraq).
- Another potential factor is a sense of **personal alienation** or **community disadvantage**, arising from socioeconomic factors such as **discrimination, social exclusion, and lack of opportunity**. While an individual may not be relatively disadvantaged, he or she may identify with others seen as less privileged; also different generations within the same family may have significantly different views about these issues.
- An important factor is **exposure to radical ideas**. This may come from reading **radical literature** on Islamic and other subjects or **surfing the Internet** (where many types of radical views are strongly promoted), but more often radicalisation seems to arise from **local contacts and from peers**. Exposure to a forceful and inspiring figure, already committed to extremism, can be important here. This person may be associated with a particular place (e.g. a mosque) or can be a national or international figure, seen on video or heard on tapes.
- None of these factors is conclusive and they are probably best viewed as considerations which may influence radicalisation.

¹⁶ www.mi5.gov.uk/output/tackling-radicalisation.html

6.2 The Research Question

OJK were asked to investigate pathways to radicalisation, and in particular, *‘the nature of the Somali community’s mobility across the [East London] region and possible links to the threat of radicalisation’*. Following discussion with the commissioning client to clarify this question, the hypothesis became clearer: it is well known that many Somali families face a high degree of housing insecurity when they first settle in the UK. Many are on housing waiting lists for five, ten or more years (according to the latest Karin Housing research), and families may be moved between temporary accommodation and from borough to borough. We therefore understood the question to be: might this high degree of residential mobility contribute to vulnerability to radicalisation, perhaps linked to feelings of social exclusion or not belonging, or grievances against the state? These factors could conceivably fit into what is known about risk factors for radicalisation.

Ultimately, the research findings proved inconclusive about this particular question. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, the majority of the young participants in the in-depth qualitative research were from families that were fairly well-established in the UK, and who had lived in London for several years, if not for most of their lives. Those that had moved house had either moved within their borough, and did not report feelings of dislocation, or had moved once or twice, but found it relatively easy to settle into their new environment. They reported temporary disturbances (of up to about a year) following a move to a new area, such as feeling nervous when walking on the streets at night, but all said they eventually settled in – and the risks they experienced were related to postcode/area gangs rather than radicalisation.

6.3 Young People’s Views of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism

Secondly, when the issue of vulnerability to radicalisation was discussed with young people, there was no evidence that they were interested in (or even aware of, in many cases) radical ideas, or had ever met anyone who was involved with these ideas, let alone progressed to the stage of pursuing extremist actions. Several young people pointed out that young Somali people who had seen violence back home are unlikely to get involved in further violence, as they came to the UK looking for a peaceful life. The following selection of quotations illustrates the young people’s responses to discussing these issues:

I didn’t even know what the word [radicalisation] means, but there’s no way that you ever hear people talking about that kind of thing in Tower Hamlets. (M)

It’s not in our nature. People who blow up themselves, or buses, or trains – we don’t class them as Muslim. (F)

If they have lived in Somalia and seen the violence then when they come to a peaceful country they don’t want to be violent. They see what it does. (M)

I’ve seen them at Elephant and Castle – black converts – trying to talk to people about this kind of stuff, but I’ve never seen them in East [London]. They were talking about it [radicalisation] at the mosque but I wouldn’t want my little brothers to even know about it, because it’s against the religion. (F)

People who blow themselves up, they’re not normal in the head, they’ve got a microchip in their head or something, they must be mad to do something like that...[the issue of violent extremism] never even comes to my mind. (M)

It is possible that young people would not disclose the fact that they – or someone they know - holds radical ideas, even if they were among the research participants. However, it is worth noting that the young research participants were willing to share other sensitive issues with us, including experiences of committing petty crime, being arrested, spending time in police cells, and having pre-marital relationships. In addition, at no time did they express sentiments that could be seen as precursors of radicalisation, e.g. anti-western sentiments. The most ‘extreme’ ideas that were expressed during the research were not linked to violence or grievances. A small number expressed opinions such as *‘being an atheist is just like being an animal’*, or expressed the desire to ban all cigarettes and alcohol as they are not permitted in Islam. However, when prompted, the young people spoke out against violent extremism, and said they could not understand how people could act in that way.

In general, however, the issue of radicalisation was simply not on the radar of the young participants. As discussed later in the report, they had many other more pressing issues on their minds. In fact, young people in Tower Hamlets in particular felt settled and satisfied in their area. Most of the young people – in spite of facing various stresses and hardships – were relatively optimistic about their futures and did not feel out of place or lacking in confidence. They often contrasted themselves with their parents’ generation, who they felt had experienced some such feelings.

6.4 Evidence for Radicalisation in the UK Somali Community

The phenomenon of young Somalis returning to fight and/or train in Somalia has been reported in other countries, but there is little information in the public domain about the threat of radicalisation specifically among Somalis in the UK. Up to twenty men of Somali origin are thought to have left Minnesota in the USA between 2007-2009 to fight with militants in Somalia, with fourteen people facing related charges linked to supporting terrorism¹⁷ (23 November 2009), and similar cases have been reported in Sweden¹⁸. Two of the failed July 21 bombers in London in 2005 arrived in Britain from Somalia as refugees (although they were radicalised after their arrival¹⁹). There was also a case of a young Somali man living in Ealing, West London, carrying out a suicide bomb attack in Somalia²⁰ (February 2009). Around this time, the head of MI5, Jonathon Evans, raised related concerns (see box 4 below). An article in the Times Online (in January 2010) made unsubstantiated claims that several students from London universities had been recruited to fight for ‘Somali Jihad’ and that community leaders claimed that up to 100 youth could have been recruited²¹. This is clearly an area that requires close attention by the security services, but it is beyond the scope of this study to confirm or deny the speculation surrounding this sensitive issue.

Box 4. Extract from the Times article about suicide bomber from Ealing

A 21-year-old student from Ealing, West London has blown himself up as a suicide bomber in the war-torn country in the first reported incident of its kind. Jonathan Evans, the head of MI5, voiced his concerns over increasing numbers of young men travelling to the East African country in an interview with the Daily Telegraph (...) He

¹⁷ news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/8375526.stm

¹⁸ www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5i028ZS0hs26jW5Yix6BS5AD9FPB4680

¹⁹ www.channel4.com/news/articles/society/law_order/tracing+the+217+bombers/593357

²⁰ www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/crime/article5741300.ece

²¹ www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article6999929.ece

talked of "networks that help individuals go and take part or provide support to extremist gangs in Somalia" and may return to attack Britain. Michael Hayden, the outgoing head of the CIA, has said that the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia has "catalysed" expatriates around the world. An audio message from Osama bin Laden last month urged Muslims to send money or go to Somalia to fight.

Source: www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/law-and-order/4638987/Growing-number-of-British-men-joining-Islamic-radicals-in-Somalia.html

A small number of young Somali men have been referred to the Channel project in East London. The Channel project seeks to identify individuals at risk of radicalisation and link them to support in the community, ensure that they receive appropriate social or health services, and/or address grievances. A Channel referral requires two elements to be present. The first is a vulnerability to be drawn into violent extremism. Vulnerability can be linked to mental health issues, housing, or other forms of grievance. The second is a link with extremism in some form. There have been eight referrals of young men born in Somalia across the East London Channel cluster, which includes the ELA boroughs. All are male, aged between 15 and 27 years, with vulnerabilities classified as follows: three within criminality and five within mental health. These referrals have been made from 2008, with the majority made in the twelve months before May 2010 as a growing number of boroughs became involved in the programme. This is the extent of data available. It suggests that the criminal justice system and mental health services are two pathways through which cases potentially vulnerable to radicalization are likely to appear.

Findings from this study also raise the possibility that young Somalis in Britain are potentially placed at risk by travelling (or being sent) to Somalia at vulnerable times in their life. Participants in the research, and in similar research recently conducted by OUK in West London²², reported that it was relatively common for young people (and young men in particular) to be 'sent back home' if they are in trouble (e.g. arrested, or involved in substance misuse). This may be without the individual's prior knowledge or consent. The young person stays with relatives in Somalia, with the intention that they 'fix up' and gain an appreciation for both their Somali culture and the opportunities they have in the UK. These trips are different from family holidays, which are shorter, consensual visits, often with a parent or other relative, and which are not concerned with rehabilitating the young person. Young people seem to think that this response to adolescent troubles actually works, and that people come back to the UK 'more mature'.

It has happened to a couple of people I know myself – they were taking things for granted – they bring them back [to Somalia] for a few years. They go and stay with family. And it does work – they are more calm, more mature, more keen to do something with their life. (M)

It definitely happens, that young people get sent back to Somalia – some of them go for two years and then come back. I know this boy, he used to be really fat and came back really skinny. They just want to sort out their behaviour. That's why a lot of kids won't go to Somalia, because they are worried that their parents will leave them there. They would be left with their family. (M)

²² *Understanding Somali Youth in the London Boroughs of Hounslow & Hillingdon: A PEER Study.* Conducted for Hounslow & Hillingdon Local Authorities July 2010. Options UK.

Most people come here to learn. They have come here to learn, their dad and mum wants them to learn. If they stay on the streets, get arrested, they might get sent back home, if they can - if they've got family back there. That happened to one of my friends - he did a robbery, got arrested and was on bail. Because he was going down for four years, his dad bought him a ticket straight away. He came to the UK when he was eight or nine, and he's been back there for two years now. I don't think he will come back. (M)

I had one friend who got deported because he was too naughty, his parents sent him home (F).

It is important to stress that no research participants suggested that such young people were going back to Somalia for terrorist training or any other violent purposes. In almost all cases, they were said to be staying with family. However, going back to Somalia may pose threats to young people that well-meaning families in the UK might not even know about. One Somali community worker expressed his disappointment that sending young people back home was used as a 'rehabilitation strategy' within the Somali community, saying that *'it can only make things worse, it's totally lawless there, they will just sit around chewing khat'*.

6.5 The Somali Community's View of Vulnerability to Radicalisation

We also looked to the views of Somali community groups to see whether they could throw further light on pathways to radicalisation among young Somali people.

None of the respondents knew any specific cases of young people being radicalised. Several had heard rumours of young people disappearing from areas including Islington and Leicester, presumed to have been recruited to fight for Al-Shabab²³ in Somalia. However, few details were known about these cases and we were unable to confirm their veracity.

We haven't actually seen any youth who have taken action. There might be some sort of misunderstanding in the Islamic text that we need to clear up the interpretation of. (M religious leader)

Key informants differed in the extent to which they felt violent extremism was a threat to the Somali community. They expressed different ideas about who is at risk, what factors might be important in causing people to become radicalised, and how to prevent radicalisation. Several discussed the relationship between Western foreign policies and the likelihood of people being radicalised, but did not consider this to be a specifically Somali problem.

There will be no solution to terrorism while the West continues to act like they do. This is a concern for the whole Muslim community. (M community leader)

We're Muslim, we won't change that, but since terrorism/Iraq there has been a lot of negativity in relation to Western foreign policy, people believe it isn't fair.

²³ <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/africa/2009/08/20098432032479714.html>

Radicalisation is a hot issue – what fuels it is what’s happening in the world, it’s a fragile world, with fires burning in Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, and our government is involved, which fuels it. When it comes to understanding Islam, some might misinterpret it, and couple that with what’s happening around us (...) The Somali community is no different – you relate to your fellow Muslim. (...) Young people are questioning all this, and it’s understandable. But they aren’t taking the next steps to action, I don’t know of any cases of this. (M religious leader)

However, in general, those interviewed did not see the Somali community as being more vulnerable to radicalisation than any other group:

The Somali community have been Muslim for 1000 years and never been involved in any political activity outside Somalia. (M religious/cultural leader)

Ninety percent of Somalis here and there are against Al-Shabab. (M Community worker)

Although preventing violent extremism is not an area that many community leaders are familiar with, they are amenable to working towards solutions, especially if additional support is available. None of the individuals interviewed were opposed in principle to working on the issue of vulnerability to violent extremism, even if they expressed reservations about the way that the strategy currently stands, especially the fact that it focuses almost exclusively on Muslim communities.

Al-Huda is already strongly supporting Prevent, they have taken over preaching in the mosque about this subject, and we have no problem with this, we know what’s right and wrong anyway. (F community worker)

Our children are vulnerable and need protecting from falling into a wrong category. They must be protected from this. [Are there any specific worries that parents have?] You don’t know where they’re meeting them [proponents of extremist ideology] but this is a problem around the world. What is going on in the Middle East etc. – this is the main issue that they are selling them. Parents do worry about them falling into this ideology. (M religious leader)

One potential barrier to working with Prevent-type issues that has arisen in some Somali communities is that parents already have many fears for their children (e.g. fear that they will be taken into care, be arrested, be assaulted, etc.), and care must be taken not to add to this high level of anxiety, especially if it is perceived to involve the state interfering further with Somali families. There has been a heated debate in Redbridge that Prevent will be used to take away children:

People are very scared of having their children taken. Teenage girls on the bus say ‘I will be free! Now I am 16 I’ll go on my own’. Those who go out of the house are the most vulnerable [to radicalisation], they will give them money. A mother would never accept this, you see. (...) But living free at 16 he will do everything he wants, he can’t hold himself, he’s young. (M religious leader)

Working towards a stronger collective voice, so that the Somali community can liaise more effectively with the authorities on security matters, was felt to be one important

step in increasing resilience to violent extremism, as was counteracting negative representations of Somalis in the media:

There is a crisis in leadership in the Somali community, the LA or central government cannot communicate effectively about terrorism, al-Qaeda. No one can claim 'I represent the whole Somali community'. The reason we have so many stories [negative stories in the press] written about us is because we have no single voice. (M housing worker)

We feel bullied: [people say] 'you're a pirate, holding the British couple'. There is no leadership to fight back, and no structure to fight back, so you're an easy target. Even in mosques people look at you differently, you're a stranger, the media are putting on pressure and creating tensions between the British mainstream and Somalis. (M community leader)

Somali people are not anti-UK now, but could the media turn them that way? (F Health worker)

Mosque leaders also stress the need for a safe space for young people to debate foreign policy and religious issues:

We thought carefully about the name [for our Prevent project], Al-Hikma – wisdom. What is missing when it comes to violence is wisdom. When you are angry, your wisdom goes, and then you do something silly. But what causes the anger? The aim is to bridge the gap with the youth on one side, scholars and politicians on the other. To create a ground where they come together to discuss key issues – the effects of, and causes of, a lack of wisdom. If you ignore the people who voted for you (for instance, on the issue of Iraq) then you will cause anger. (Male religious leader)

Other community workers questioned the fact that Prevent funding should be centred in mosques, arguing that the arts and culture can be an alternative way of promoting tolerance, non-violence and understanding: *'How better to challenge fundamentalist ideas and extremism - on both sides - than through art?'* (F community worker).

The London Somali Youth Network's representative in East London also described the approach that they are taking to working with the Prevent agenda, which involves working with Somali media to strengthen the links between young Somalis of different backgrounds, and between young Somalis and the UK:

We need to look for something to define and bind young people together – for example, the combined identity they have here. Growing up here, they are part of two societies, but they want to predominantly build their lives here, as opposed to their parents. We are looking at doing pilot programmes looking at British Somali values, with the Home Office and Prevent funding, working on the 'Somali Voices' slot on Universal TV. We'll focus on the educational and historical connection with Britain. (Somali Youth Network representative)

The lack of data on pathways to radicalisation does not mean we can confirm there to be little or no risk of radicalisation among young Somalis. Rather, more targeted research with individuals with proven links to extremism would be required to answer this

question. This study employed a broad, community-based research strategy rather than identifying and analysing case studies of individual young people thought to be vulnerable to radicalisation. Finding such individuals in the case of the Somali community would be a difficult and sensitive process, and would require working with the security services and/or services supporting young people at risk of radicalisation, such as those referred through the Channel programme.

6.6 Re-framing the Research Question

This study did not find any case studies with which to explore how and why individual young Somali people might be vulnerable to radicalisation. However, it is possible to consider whether they are exposed to any risk factors that might make them vulnerable to radicalisation, such as poor mental health, or involvement with the criminal justice system. Both of these factors are implicated in the Channel referrals, as well as being of wider social concern, particularly within the Somali community. As one community worker explained, *‘if we leave [young people] in the street [i.e. no opportunities], they’ll be radicalised – they will do crime, and damage themselves and others – that is also radicalisation’* (M community representative). In other words, vulnerability to violent extremism is of concern, but so is vulnerability to other forms of harm.

In addition, it is necessary to consider whether characteristics of the wider Somali community, and in particular, its community organisations, are likely to enhance or limit resilience to violent extremism at the community level. The following section considers this question.

6.7 The Extent to which Somali Community Organisations are in a Position to Build Resilience to Violent Extremism

A strong community response (e.g. willingness to work with the Prevent agenda; the ability to work with youth; strong channels of communication; strong community support structures; and links with local government/security services) is thought to be a key element in terms of resilience to violent extremism. This section examines the position of Somali community groups in East London, and the extent to which they are in a position to respond to and engage with Prevent -type work as well as other initiatives.

6.8 Areas where Resilience could be Built

In most boroughs, the majority of Somali community groups are relatively small, and experience significant difficulties in securing adequate, sustainable resources (including financial and human resources) to carry out the ambitious programmes of work that they say they would like to do. Several factors limit the development of Somali organisations, and hence their ability to mount an optimal response to a range of social issues, including the threat of violent extremism.

6.8.1 Differing Perspectives on the Presence of Risk Factors

The community leaders and organisers interviewed expressed a range of views on risk factors for radicalisation: some were concerned that young Somalis are exposed to radical ideas while in prison or Young Offenders’ Institutes, and that pathways to criminality placed young people at greatest risk:

If they have failed in school, they may go to Islamic school, they are radicalising there and in jail. The seven-seven bombers were failures in school and rejected by their fathers (...) they feel guilty and want to prove themselves. They don’t like

the establishment, they become fanatics (...) All young Muslim people are vulnerable in jail, they have their own groups in jail and try to convert others too. (M community worker)

Others felt that University students were most vulnerable to recruitment by organisations such as Al-Shabab, who were looking for the most able and intelligent young people. Others said that they were not aware of any vulnerability to extremism within their community, and that *'the fact that some of us have seen violence [back in Somalia] means we want to avoid it at all costs and live peacefully'*. There is therefore a lack of clarity and agreement about the true nature of the threat of radicalisation. In the absence of concrete facts about radicalisation in the Somali community, this is not surprising.

6.8.2 Accessing Resources to Tackle Vulnerability

Many Somali organisations were initially set up to address the vulnerability of Somali youth to poor outcomes, especially in education. Groups have set up homework clubs, mentoring schemes, youth clubs, residential trips and days away, all of which require financial resources. However, many Somali community organisations (particularly the smaller groups) are limited in their ability to establish, scale up and sustain these activities owing to the following combination of factors:

- Very limited availability of funding in some areas
- Not knowing how to access funding when it is available
- Lack of capacity to access funds (e.g. lack of grant writing expertise)
- In some boroughs, only short term funding is available (e.g. one year at a time) making it difficult to plan for the future
- Lack of capacity to access strategic information (schools census data, unemployment figures, sources of funding)

In addition, the burden of immediate, day to day service provision that small organisations are faced with (e.g. assisting people with housing and benefits emergencies), reflecting the high levels of need in the Somali community, means that some groups are not able to concentrate on longer term strategic goals, such as building the capacity of their volunteers or improving their capacity to work with the most vulnerable young people.

6.8.3 Lack of Networks

Building networks is one approach to developing smaller organisations. There have been several attempts to set up Somali networks and in the process streamline funding mechanisms. A Somali network exists in Tower Hamlets, and an East London Somali Consortium has been recently set up. We also heard that there are currently efforts underway to set up a London Council of Somali Organisations, which will meet regularly. However, according to the participating groups, few have succeeded.

This is partly to do with a **strong spirit of independence** evident in many of the groups. Some boroughs want to work through Umbrella organisations or consortia so that they have a single point of contact. However, community groups often feel that larger bodies do not adequately represent them, and might stifle their development. They want a personal relationship with the council, and feel excluded if they do not have a line of communication with them.

Secondly, there is the issue of the **tribal identity of different groups**, which can limit groups' desire to collaborate with each other (particularly among older generations). It is very difficult to get an accurate picture of these dynamics. However, during the course of the research we heard numerous examples of clan issues having an adverse effect on the ability of groups to work fairly and effectively with each other. This is understandable considering the ongoing nature of the conflict between factions in Somalia. The fragmented nature of Somali civil society has long been recognised as limiting the development of a coherent voice for the community (Griffiths 2000). As one community leader explained:

No one can claim 'I represent the whole Somali community'. That's the reason we have so many [negative] stories about us [in the press] – because we have no single voice. Although we live here, lots of us carry around what we had before...They bring their experiences and their relationships with them. They share the same language, and almost the same culture in the north and south [of Somalia] but the differences among themselves are huge. (M, Head of a Somali organisation)

Somalis haven't learned from the tribe mentality and civil war (...) Young people are wisening [sic] up and seeing 'enough is enough'. My grandparents may not speak English, and only fled because of war, and want to go back, and want the country to be better. But young people? Forget it, they are thinking about their future, and don't want to go back to Somalia. They have a sense of belonging here – and want to stay in London. They are detached from tribalism – but you have to understand that due to age, and culture, older people are still going to be hung up about it. (F community worker)

At present, few Somali groups work together across different boroughs in East London (with the exceptions of Housing Associations and several organisations in Tower Hamlets). This is linked to several factors: East London is a large area and it is not always practical for community workers (usually volunteers) to leave their organisation to travel to meetings, as it leaves their own service under-staffed. Most organisations are also still relatively unused to collaborative working, which tends to come at a later stage of organisational development, and which requires the management skills associated with higher levels of funding and more permanent structures (including premises in which to meet, and administrative support). The stage at which relatively new migrant communities can turn their attention to the time-consuming business of establishing networks tends to be when they have already secured the basic requirements of housing, accessing health and educational services. Many of the smaller Somali groups are still dealing with basic problems in their communities. As one community leader put it, *'It's the poor competing with the poor for scarce resources'*, which makes establishing networks particularly challenging.

Several organisations reported negative experiences when working in a network or forum in the past. The networks involved will not be named, as these concerns have not been substantiated, but the following challenges are likely to be faced when trying to persuade community groups of the benefits of joining a network or forum:

- Tribal or regional factions operating within the network (e.g. preferential treatment towards people of their own clan or area)
- Arguments and people losing their tempers in meetings. This criticism was of particular concern to women, as there was felt to be a 'macho' environment

- Mismanagement of funds, not sharing out funds fairly or in a timely fashion to member organisations, or member organisations not feeling comfortable with their lack of financial autonomy
- The sense that meetings are a waste of time when there is little prospect of reaching a consensus
- For the more successful organisations, it is difficult to see the benefits of joining a network/forum when they are doing well on their own
- From a woman community worker: *'We are so busy, even fifteen minutes spent on the phone to you right now is fifteen minutes taken away from our clients'*, i.e. finding the time to go to meetings is a challenge

Several interviewees expressed mixed feelings about a Somali forum: they thought that the idea of working together was good in principle, but they did not want to be in a position where they are forced to apply for funds through a network or umbrella organisation, as this was seen to stifle the potential for their organisation's growth, especially if the administering organisation is not thought to be transparent and fair.

6.8.4 Community Scepticism

Although several Somali organisations are widely acknowledged to offer excellent services and support to their communities, others are dismissed by community members as being 'briefcase organisations' with leaders largely interested in personal gain. Several interviewees complained that community groups are not adequately monitored by funders, or are expected to manage projects beyond their organisational capacity, such that they are bound to fail. This widespread lack of confidence within the Somali community means that organisations' ability to deliver Prevent work could be limited.

6.8.5 Limited Number of Somali-led Mosques

There are a small number of Somali mosques in East London. In addition, in other mosques that they attend, Somalis are said to rarely stay behind for extra discussions and activities such as lectures, or to participate in the management/planning of the mosque (Harriss 2000). This limits the capacity of the Somali community in wider East London to address the issue of vulnerability to violent extremism in a religious context. Although Al-Huda attracts people from across London, young people in Redbridge or other similarly distant parts of East London are unlikely to attend youth activities in Stepney Green (where Al-Huda is located). To scale up Somali mosque-based activities would require approaches such as outreach strategies by Al-Huda; supporting Prevent work in smaller Somali mosques; or targeting Somalis attending other mosques.

6.8.6 Inter-generational Dynamics

The cultural norm that young people must listen to and demonstrate respect for Somali elders still holds great relevance for Somali people of all ages. In relation both to parents and speakers at mosques or talks, young people reported that they often felt they were being *'lectured'* rather than engaging in discussions.

The older generation - from brothers all the way up to grandparents - give them [youth] lectures all the time. If a boy is walking in the street and sees an older Somali man in the street, who will still lecture him even though they don't know each other, the young boy will still respect him and listen to him. It doesn't mean he will change his behaviour, but he will listen to the elder. (F)

When they get lectured, they agree with what they are saying but the next day they don't take it serious. (M)

Several young people said that lectures ‘*went in one ear and out the other*’ or that while they might listen and agree at the time, they found it hard to change their behaviour following a lecture.

This didactic style of message delivery may not be the most effective way of encouraging young people to think through complex issues such as those relating to radicalisation. While challenging the hierarchical age dynamics characteristic of the Somali community might feel threatening, it is essential that effective ways of engaging youth – and getting them to think about issues rather than lecturing them – are found. Indeed, many Somali-led groups are successfully reaching out to young people, critically examining inter-generational relationships, and recognising the importance of listening to and empowering youth, through art, drama, discussion and debate.

6.8.7 Limited Communications

At present, the online presence of Somali groups is negligible. Most websites of groups that are on-line are out of date. Groups promote their activities through word of mouth, printed materials, and occasionally through telephoning/texting people. This makes it difficult for both young people and LAs to know about what is going on in their area, unless they are already connected to social networks, and limits groups’ ability to draw in new young participants. In addition, in several boroughs (Hackney, Redbridge and Newham) communications between Somali community groups and the LA was either limited or required significant strengthening.

6.9 Protective Factors

The preceding section discussed areas in which the Somali community’s ability to respond effectively to Prevent-type work could be improved. However, it is also important to outline protective factors within the Somali community, which strengthen community organisations and their ability to resist to violent extremism. Although there are numerous strengths within Somali organisations and communities, the following are perhaps the most relevant to this discussion:

- The existence of several long-established community organisations with a track record of 10-15 years of supporting vulnerable people
- Strong and extensive family networks which include cousins, aunts and uncles, and often neighbours
- Strong social and peer support amongst Somali youth
- Somali religious and community leaders are generally amenable to working on Prevent-related issues
- Although Somali communities are often considered to be relatively closed to outsiders, *within* Somali communities there is a great of communication. If there were examples of young people being radicalised or attending training camps in Somalia, it is difficult to envisage that these stories would *no* be discussed within the community, although this does not mean that such cases would immediately come to the attention of the authorities
- Strong spirit of volunteering/informal mutual support in the local community, e.g. assisting elderly people, setting up informal homework clubs, even in the absence of funding

- Strong desire among community groups to scale up their work, reach larger numbers of people, and support young people in particular.

7 Chapter Seven: Somali Groups and their Links with Somalia

Links that Somali organisations have with Somalia are expressed in three ways: the relationships that individuals within groups have with family and friends back home; the activities that the groups support in Somalia; and to clan or regional identity of the group, if it has one.

Almost all Somali families (and therefore Somali community groups) have strong, living ties with Somalia. There are ongoing psychological and economic aspects to these ties, include anxiety about the situation of loved ones in Somalia; and financial hardship as families on low incomes continue to send remittances to Somalia. The ongoing conflicts and political situation in Somalia are debated and watched with close attention. These personal, immediate links to the conflict in Somalia are one reason why it has been so difficult to achieve reconciliation and unity among people of different tribes/regions of Somalia in the UK, despite efforts within the Somali community itself (e.g. the establishment of networks/forums in the past).

In terms of supporting activities in Somalia, the only examples that were discussed by key informants were the organisation of an arts events in Somaliland (by Kayd, the arts and culture group), and various fundraising activities to send money to Somalia for humanitarian assistance, libraries, schools etc.

The **impact of clan identity** on Somali groups is complex and contested. While most, if not all, community groups are associated with a particular clan, reflecting the identity of the founding member(s) of the group, this does not mean that the group only serves or welcomes members of the same clan. Many groups now pride themselves on being open to all, and state that, *'we are more united than ever before now'* (F, community worker). None of the community groups interviewed for this research suggested that they personally allowed tribe/regionalism to colour their relations with other Somali groups or individuals.

Several examples were given of both the positive and negative aspects of group members being affiliated to a particular clan. On the positive side, new arrivals in London – who may not know how to or feel comfortable accessing government or broader third sector services – can quickly locate social support from people of their clan who they trust and who are already established in the city. This can help them access advice, housing, education and other essential services. On the negative side, preferential treatment towards one's own clan members and reluctance to co-operate with other groups can stifle growth and innovation of groups (e.g. not sharing skills or best practice); create rivalry; exclude people; hamper the development of a united voice for the Somali community; make it hard for LAs to communicate and keep track of groups; and disadvantage people from more recently arrived clans or minority clans who do not have well-established organisations of their own. As one community worker explained:

Divisions in Somalia are always transplanted here, tribe group, region group. Every community group in Tower Hamlets has allegiance with a tribe and family group. There is no mix up even in management, they don't bring in expertise from other groups. That's why our organisations don't grow up. (M, Housing worker)

The negative side of clan identity is limited to reluctance to work together rather than outright hostility to one another: no evidence was found of vendettas or violence between different clans in the UK.

For some older people, clan affiliation is still a significant issue, particularly for those with personal experience of clan conflict. Others, especially the young, are actively promoting unity (e.g. the Anti-Tribalism Movement (ATM), which is a youth led network, actively trying to eradicate tribalism and improve cohesion within the Somali community (theatm.org). Some of the younger generation brought up here simply say that they are simply not concerned about clan affiliation:

I came here 18 years ago, the issue is the different ethnicity of Somali people, we are still politically divided. But the new generation don't have that diversity. It's very important to involve young people in the forum as they don't have the mentality of the old generation. They might hear their parents talking about 'tribes' but they want to be with their friends regardless of their tribe. (Male, Chair of mosque)

It is not possible to map out the complexity of clan or regional affiliations of groups in East London. Community organisations are unlikely to be entirely open about their own affiliations if they hold them, and there are good reasons for this. Tribal/regional affiliation is a private and personal matter, and people do not necessarily want to be judged on the basis of where they came from or their tribal identity. It can be considered rude, especially by young people, and especially if asked by a non-Somali, to ask 'what tribe are you?' Somalis in London do not necessarily have an accurate idea about who is living in an area (e.g. in Waltham Forest, people had conflicting ideas about which were the major clans). Even if tribal affiliations were to be mapped out exhaustively, this would not adequately represent the true complexity of relationships between groups, as within tribes there are sub-tribes and families; and tensions within as well as between any of these groups.

7.1 The Relationship Between Older Community Groups and New Arrivals

Several key informants felt that Somalis who lived in East London before the increase in immigration in the early 1990s were well integrated into wider British life, but that newer arrivals were more likely to want their own services, to move in tight-knit Somali circles, and to be more socially conservative. Reasons for this include the fact that earlier immigrants tended to be from wealthier, urban, and educated backgrounds, as they could afford to leave Somalia. Following civil war, the backgrounds of immigrants changed and diversified, as people with less education, from rural and nomadic backgrounds, and often having experienced traumatic events arrived. Despite this increasing diversity, interviewees said that almost any new arrival in London would have recourse to family members and some form of community group (even if informal, or run by individuals associated with a different clan) already established in the city.

There is a relationship which all communities provide to newly arrived communities, they give guidelines and instructions, but it isn't up to a high standard. Those groups who have the British Empire link [from Somaliland] are well linked, they know the language more than others, and have some knowledge about the British way of life (...) they understand new arrivals because they share the same language and culture (...) The existing community did really support the new arrivals, they did translation services, filling in

applications, they still supported them even if they were from different parts of the country (...) But there is room for improvement [in the way in which established communities support new arrivals]. (M community worker, Waltham Forest)

A young interviewee mentioned one exception to this: the case of ethnic minorities within Somalia who had experienced persecution, and who lacked a culture of setting up community organisations, owing to the political situation back home. He spoke about the case of the Bravanese community in particular:

I'm Bravanese – and back home they don't tend to get involved in politics. You can see their own village is ruled by another person. They know they are Somali, but because they have their own language, and don't live in the capital, and just live in small villages like islands. They tend to claim that they are a mix of Arab (...) the reason they don't claim to be Somali is the conflict they have with Somalia, which robbed their wealth and family, since the civil war. Their clan is very minor so they were targeted. (...) Certain Bravanese tend to keep to themselves. There are two different Bravanese tribes (...) my clan tend to communicate with Somalis, get involved with Somali communities. The others don't at all. (M, peer researcher)

8 Chapter Eight: PEER Study

8.1 Introduction

The following chapter presents results from the PEER study, which sought to understand the opinions and perspectives of young people. Results describe the everyday lives of young Somalis; how they view themselves in terms of identity; who influences them; what they worry about; and what they aspire to. The aim is to provide background knowledge for people working with young Somalis, so that the most appropriate strategies for reaching and engaging with them can be identified.

Although this qualitative research draws on a relatively small sample, the findings share many similarities with recent research in West London. They have also been compared with the perspectives of key informants. Although the following picture is necessarily a generalisation, and does not claim to speak for all young Somalis, it gives a broad outline of the main issues in their everyday lives.

8.2 Variability among Young People

Even within the relatively small sample of peer researchers and the friends they interviewed, there was significant variety in the experiences and outlooks of young people. Gender, age, family situation, migration history, religiosity and social context have an important influence on their identity, preferred activities and lifestyles. The following sections describe the main ways in which young people differed.

Identity: The issue of self-identity was discussed with peer researchers. It is important to understand where young Somalis place themselves in terms of their identity: do they think of themselves as being Somali, Muslim, British, or a mixture of the above?

What emerged was a multi-faceted and complex vision of identity, in which the everyday elements of life – food, music, social and family relationships – were the most immediate ways in which young people defined themselves. Box 5 (overleaf) contains the results of a brainstorming exercise that a group of young men did during a workshop, which illustrates the numerous aspects of identity that they felt to be important. Of all the elements, religion (Islam) and Somali culture were said to be the most important parts of their identity, although the peer researchers said it was difficult to untangle them from one another.

Although elements of Somali and Muslim culture and social life were of central importance, they were combined with elements such as ‘postcode’ and ‘rap music’. The peer researchers combine elements of Somali and UK cultures in creative and flexible ways, typified by their use of *Somlish* – English and Somali words and phrases combined to form a new dialect, primarily used for chatting and joking with peers (such that neither parents nor teachers can properly understand what they are saying). Young people’s ideas about ‘what makes them who they are’ were similar to those expressed by a slightly older group of young Somalis involved in recent, similar research in West London, suggesting that even among young Somalis born and brought up in the UK, a clear and shared sense of what it is to be Somali remains.

Box 5. Young Men's Responses to the Question: What makes you who you are?

- Tag (nick name)
- Culture
- Khat
- Civil War
- Music: UK/US rap, Somali love songs
- Appearance: Colour, African vs. Arab (vs. look like Bengali to outsiders) – others are not sure which group they belong to
- Dance: Somali dance with lots of clapping, especially at weddings
- Weddings, gold
- Independence Day, especially May 18th
- Country of birth (Somalia, UK, other countries)
- Postcode
- Respecting elders and mothers
- Football (especially which team they support)
- Food: rice, pasta, pancakes
- JSA (job seekers' allowance) (especially in terms of what others think of you)
- Women's dress: for special occasions; some women wear hijab
- Generations, tight families, including cousins, especially on your mother's side
- Religion (all agree it's of central importance)
- Immigrant
- Area of Somalia or Somaliland, Tribe (elders know about this)
- Somlish (language – English/Somali mix)

Based on peer researchers' brainstorming, with some explanatory notes added in brackets taken as the young people were explaining what they meant by each point

The country in which they were brought up, and the stage at which they came to the UK, also has an impact on young Somalis' identity. Those who spent much of their youth in EU countries are said to be less attuned to Somali culture and 'more westernised' than those growing up in East London, because there are fewer Somali community organisations and youth clubs in these EU countries.

Although the young Somalis did not talk directly about 'being British', their discussions made it clear that they do consider themselves as part of British society. The positive aspects of British life that they highlighted were tolerance, multi-cultural communities and educational opportunity:

It's not difficult to marry the two cultures. They're [the British] lenient and understanding, so it's the only place where you can go about your business and have your religious side as well. Like if you were in France, you can't wear your hijab or anything. It's not like that here. So it's fine. There's no problem. (F)

Educational status of the family was another key influence on the lives of young people. Young Somalis with well-educated families are said to be much more likely to succeed at education because their parents can offer them the support and motivation they demand. The positive influence of educated older people extends beyond their own

children, however, and numerous stories were told (and examples encountered through meetings with community organisations) of educated adults making great efforts to support other children in their extended family and community.

There are clear gendered differences in behavioural norms and expectations for young women and men. The following descriptions of these gendered roles represent how young Somalis see them, but these roles are not necessarily actually played out in day to day life, as young people constantly challenge cultural expectations of them. Although it is often said that young Somali men have higher social status than young women, and that they occupy a 'special' place in the family, the findings of this research do not unequivocally support this. Rather, young men and women are seen to have *different* needs and vulnerabilities, requiring different parenting and rules. Just because young men have more independence, it does not follow that they have higher social status or value.

The first way in which young men and women differ is the amount of freedom and independence of movement that they are accorded. Young men have more freedom, and are more likely to spend time on the streets and come home late. Young women, however, are meant to follow their parents' rules: '*the day you can do whatever you like is the day you get married*' (F). However, this does not mean that young Somali women sit passively at home. They are described as being more purposeful, more eager to try new activities, and more focused at school. Indeed, they are said to be more trusted by their parents, but at the same time, more vulnerable to harm: '*The girl is more fragile and has more to protect.*' (F), thus their independence of movement is restricted. As one young man described:

The first thing in our culture that it isn't good to do: you cannot hang around on the streets if you're a girl, its embarrassing, you will ruin the reputation of your family, they will get a bad name, Somalis talk about each other all the time, they know your face after two minutes, they get to know each other so quickly. Your mum will be embarrassed. It's not good for them to be on the street in their religious clothes as they are representing the religion too. They should be at home. Fifty percent are at home, and fifty percent aren't, to be honest. It's good for them to be at home, their mum can keep an eye on them, they can focus on their education rather than on when they are going to meet their friend. (M)

In spite of these strong norms (what society expects), it was widely acknowledged that some young women disobey societal and parental expectations, but may take steps to keep their activities secret (e.g. by telling their parents they are going to the library when in fact they are visiting a shisha café).

Boys, on the other hand, are said to be much more likely to hang around on the street, which entails a heightened risk of getting into trouble. This description does not fit all young Somali men, such as those who are more focused on religion or their education. Boys feel that they are more likely to be left to their own devices, and to be '*trusted to make their own mistakes*'. This is partly because girls are seen as representing the honour of the family, and so have to be protected and supervised to prevent their reputation being spoiled, whereas boys are thought to be able to look after themselves. This is connected with ideas of sexual vulnerability and purity:

Man is a man, he can't lose his respect. Woman can lose her respect easily if she gets up to no good and it will be difficult for her to get married in the future because of her history, what she used to get up to in the past, it will always haunt her. (F)

Differences between the genders are also evident in their experience of education. As with the general population, Somali girls' educational attainment has recently overtaken boys (IPPR 2007). The peer researchers talked about this in terms of girls 'respecting themselves' enough not to drop out of school, and to go on to University, whereas boys might drop out, or choose a less academic route such as an apprenticeship.

If girls drop out [of school/college] then it's disrespectful and shameful. If he's a guy, he will learn from mistakes, he can do a lot of things, and he can be out and about (...) but as a girl, she has to be respectful to herself and not put herself down. For girls, they are encouraged to go onto college and university. They [boys] are given the same encouragement but boys don't tend to take that opportunity. (F)

Those young men who were seen to be serious about their education faced being teased by their peers. One peer researcher who had chosen to go to a college with a high academic reputation was teased about his uniform, and rushed home to get changed every day before seeing his friends. Several of the male peer researchers said that they would like to be able to concentrate in school and have better attendance, but that peer pressure affected their ability to do so.

Somali girls take education seriously and more so than the boys. That is because there is less pressure on the girls to misbehave in class. Other friends pressure boys to misbehave. (M)

There are boys who stay at home who do their homework, we call them 'sweet boys' – that's an insult. They hang around with other people, black boys, white boys – the ones who do their stuff, the geeks, only once in a blue moon would they hang out with other Somali boys. The girls wouldn't take the mick out of each other for working hard. (M)

The peer researchers described a social and economic context in which young men are at risk of falling out of education (if they did not feel sufficiently guided or motivated) and into a life of shorter term goals (obtaining money, street credibility) that could quickly lead to criminality. This is a well documented challenge for many young people in inner cities, not just Somalis:

I've seen many of them [young men] dropping out of college. They don't see the price of education, the future; [that] the more you work, the more you get paid – they see now that you are young, you need to hustle; you need to be on the street. They don't have the understanding of the fundamental importance of education to their lives – which is free while they are young. They want to be big and respected when they are young, they want to be familiar and famous. If they are in a gang – even though they are a bad person, they will be seen, they become more famous, being bad on the streets. When they walk on the street everyone knows and respects them. (M)

Tribe: Almost all young participants said that people's tribal affiliations were not important to them personally, but that because of the older generation's attitude towards tribe, their lives could still be affected by these issues.

For those who lived in Tower Hamlets, tribe was not seen as an important issue, as almost all Somalis there are of the same tribe. One respondent explained that even within the tribe, Somalis could fall out with each other anyway, so tribe did not make a difference in terms of how people get on with each other. In Waltham Forest, the young people (who were a mixture of Bravanese and other different Somali backgrounds) said that tribal affiliations or part of Somalia that they came from made no difference to who they hung around with. The following quotation is a typical illustration of the attitude of most young people towards the issue of tribe: not only are they not particularly interested in the issue, but they are keen to away from what they see as the older generations' concerns:

The elder people would say something about it [tribe]. We tell ourselves we don't give a monkey's about tribe. To be honest, it isn't good to be tribalist. (...) I even doubt I would find that many of my tribe in this area. HJ, HY [abbreviated names of tribes], I am friends with all different kinds of people. The elder generation, they were going around giving a monkeys about everything, (...) if someone is HY they say 'they are rude, bad, people', and then HJ will say something back about them. We grew up thinking 'we don't give a toss, and if we don't, our kids won't'. (M)

Although tribal identity was not one of the most important issues in young people's lives, several stories were reported where young people were personally affected by the issue. One young woman told how she had recently attended a Somali wedding, where she was seated on a different table from other guests and not offered any food because of her tribe. When she shared this story in a group, the other young people were shocked, which suggests that such experiences are relatively rare. Another young woman said that although she did not fully understand the complexity of tribal affiliations, she felt the issue of regionalism still has a large impact on young people's lives:

You've got Somaliland and Somalia, they're like two completely different cultures – even though they are all Muslims (...) The older generation, if you are from Somaliland and you want to marry someone from Somalia, your parents will be against it, because they don't have the same culture and have different accents and everything, so they think we don't speak the same culture (...) It's a problem because it affects the older generation, they believe in different cultures. (F)

Both in East London and in a recent PEER study in West London, a number of young people had not discovered their tribal identity until adolescence, often because their parents had not wanted to tell them (in a deliberate effort to avoid ongoing tribalism). They had found out from neighbours or family back home.

Even me, I never really understood Somali, couldn't speak it, I didn't know what all the differences [between tribes] were. In 2004 I went on holiday to Somalia (...) My mum and dad never taught me, but when I went back I got told. My parents never believed in this, being against each other's culture, at the end of the day we are all Somalis - it doesn't really matter, but when I came back my Mum was shocked that I knew what tribe I was from. (F)

Age: This report focuses on youth aged 16-20 years, but even in this relatively short space of time, young people go through many changes. Younger teenagers are more likely to attend youth clubs and structured sporting events, whereas older youth say that they are too busy with college and socialising to attend many organised activities.

Another change that comes with age is in composition of friendship groups: after leaving school, or at college, young people who may have had ethnically mixed groups of friends at school are more likely to start hanging around with other Somalis, partly because friendship groups begin to diverge according to the types of activities that they do (e.g. young Somalis are unlikely to go to the pub which is where many of their fellow students socialise). They are also increasingly drawn to people of a similar background as they have more in common, and '*help each other as they stick together*'.

Length of time in the UK: One of the biggest divisions among young Somalis was whether they were seen (in young people's own words) as 'freshies' (short for 'fresh off the boat', i.e. new arrivals to the UK from non-EU countries), 'fish and chips' (born or predominantly brought up in the UK), or 'eurotrash' (born/brought up in an EU country before moving to the UK). Each of these groups has potentially different support needs and outlook.

In recent years, new arrivals from Somalia or other intermediary countries (Ethiopia, Kenya) are mostly the result of family reunion, as crisis migration has decreased significantly in recent years. Therefore, most new arrivals will already have family and community links in the UK, and will be able to access existing community organisations through this local knowledge. However, 'freshies' can be a source of amusement for young British Somalis, owing to perceived differences in how they talk, walk, act, and dress. Yet in spite of this, they also command respect for having endured hardships back home. They are seen as having a more serious and mature attitude to life:

There are a lot of different lifestyles due to the people who wasn't born here. They have seen the real life back home in Somalia, such as there isn't any free education, or easy-to-get food and clean water. However, everyone who gets everything easy will take everything for granted as they haven't seen real life. [Those who grew up in Somalia] they've seen people struggling back home, and they've just had the luck to come here, so they're taking everything seriously.'
(M)

Those brought up here may drop out of college and choose to be a gangster. But the one who came here has already seen hardship and violence and so they take this as a good opportunity to do something about their life. (M)

New arrivals are also said to spend more time in the mosque, and to hang out with other newcomers as they have more in common. In short, this is a very different picture of new arrivals than that painted by the media, which has suggested that young people are brutalised by years of war, and arrive in the UK ready to join criminal or terrorist gangs²⁴. On the contrary, new arrivals are said to be extremely motivated to make a fresh start, and above all, to avoid further violence and secure an education.

²⁴www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/features/2912750/Sun-immigration-survey-day-2-Violence-on-the-streets.html

Furthermore, young Somalis feel that any trouble that 'freshies' get into is likely to be linked to their new life in the UK, rather than trauma experienced in Somalia. Several peer researchers reported that new arrivals are more likely to join a gang as they seek a sense of belonging. Naïve and eager to please, they may then be exploited by other members of the group:

She said that there is a difference in the way they talk and act and they get picked on a lot, coming from Somalia). It might cause them to join a gang to get recognized and to show that they are just like everyone else. She had a friend that was with her a lot, and started hanging out with her group of friends, but this girl had just come from Somalia and because she didn't know anything about the culture and the laws, her other friends used to tell her to do stuff that was wrong because she didn't know any better. She had to stop her and fill her in on the law and everything and they are still friends now. (F)

A boy I know, he was called a freshie, but he started mingling with the bad boys who stay in the park, wearing his trousers down, wearing labels and talking slang. Which is bad because he's gone down a bad route, not studying and getting into trouble. He's not a freshie anymore, but when he was he was good. They just get in more trouble and they become street rats and don't do anything with their lives. You have to make the right friends (...) The freshies are the real men - they are doing something with their lives and not wasting their time. (F)

8.3 Social Life

Like other teenagers, young Somalis prefer to do things in **groups of friends**, and are unlikely to attend events, activities or youth clubs unless in a group, or encouraged to go by a friend. Respondents said that young Somalis (again, like any other teenagers) are heavily influenced by peer pressure, which can manifest itself in positive ways (such as playing sports) or more damaging ways (such as taking up smoking):

One will start smoking, and then two weeks later he tells his friends, 'have some', he influences them, just to make them look part of the group, so that they don't feel left out in the group. Now all of us are all in the same thing, we used to all play football back in the day, but we all influenced each other to smoke, chew khat (...) We are asking ourselves, 'why we are doing this thing that our fathers and grandfathers are doing?' (M)

While many young Somalis hang around with **groups of friends of mixed ethnicity** (and indeed, during school hours and in several boroughs this was the norm), the peer researchers and their interviewees in Tower Hamlets said that they were more likely to hang out in groups with other Somalis, partly because this feels the most comfortable, as they understand each others' jokes, backgrounds, and 'Somlish' (a hybrid of Somali and English); and partly because there are lots of Somalis around. In Hackney and Newham, young Somalis said that they hang out with all other ethnic groups (white, black, Turkish etc.). Some young people even avoid hanging around with other Somalis, explaining that they gossip too much ('*Somalis got a big mouth so your business will get around*' (M)); or that peer pressure will have a negative impact on them:

Some of the younger generation like to show their talent, that they are capable of something in their lives – they don't hang around with other Somalis because

they don't want to get into gangs, start smoking and stuff. To get away from that style they hang around with non-Somalis. (F)

Shisha cafes are a popular hangout for a segment of young Somalis, with Plaistow and East Ham favourite locations. They are enjoyed because they are cheap (a shisha pipe shared with a friend costs £2-£2.50); discreet (your parents' friends will not see you there); you chat with your friends, enjoy yourself, and are able to '*be yourself*'; and later in the evening there may be dancing and music. A mixture of ages, women and men, and different ethnicities hang out in shisha cafes, though they tend to attract Muslim youth because they are alcohol-free. Young people stressed that they were not going to shisha cafes because they particularly wanted to smoke: rather, it was for the atmosphere and socialising. Somali youth enjoy the mixed, friendly atmosphere, and the diverse community there. They are also open late, though most girls come home earlier than boys of a similar age. Young women said that they were a more important social activity for boys than for girls. The popularity of shisha cafes shows that a significant proportion of Somali youth enjoy hanging out in mixed, diverse groups.

Some parents and more religious youth disapprove of shisha cafes as they involve smoking (which they argue is un-Islamic) and mixing with people of both sexes ('free mixing').

Young men's socialising, particularly while they are still at school or college, tends to take place outside the home, in parks; in the stairs in blocks of flats (not the flats where they live themselves); or simply out on the street. These choices of location are not always simply because there is nothing else to do, but because young men sometimes positively enjoy being with their peers in a relatively unstructured, unsupervised environment:

We would rather be out on a street, I hate sitting still. They call us street rats – that's what we are. They say 'what you doing there? Why do you do it?' But it's so funny! (M)

It doesn't appeal to the youth these days to just sit in the mosque and just sit and talk about stuff. They wanna go outside and play around and stuff. (M)

The other central activity and passion in young men's lives is **football**, which almost all of them play, at least in their early teenage years. They play in formal leagues, informally with friends, and in Somali teams organised by groups such as OSCA. They also watch matches on TV in Somali cafés. Some play football overseas (e.g. Scandinavia, Canada) in Somali leagues. Most young men said that there were plenty of football pitches (five-a-side) in their area, but that they are too expensive for them to book themselves (c. £5 an hour for each player). It is important for them that youth clubs or leagues organise and pay for bookings, otherwise they might be tempted to enter the pitches illicitly and risk getting in trouble (as had happened in the past to several young participants). Although Somali groups such as OSCA book football pitches, young men are welcome to bring their non-Somali friends, which many of them do.

Young women are more likely to stay at home (studying, surfing the net, or helping with childcare and domestic tasks); visit their friends' houses; or go shopping or to the cinema. They said that they were less likely to go to youth clubs, although some of them had taken part in activities with the Somali Integration Team (SIT). Most said that

competitive team sports were not popular among girls, but women-only sessions at Mile End Leisure centre were popular for swimming and saunas. Young women felt free to move around the city, visiting friends and family in other areas. Unlike young men, *'most girls are more free to go to any area - no girls will go to another girl 'where you from, how old are you?'* (M).

Mobility and security were much more relevant issues for young men. Younger boys can visit other areas, for instance for football matches, but by the age of about 17 years, they feel vulnerable when venturing into other areas. For young men from Tower Hamlets and Newham, staying in these areas was seen to be safe, as the Somali community in these boroughs knows each other. However, they avoid areas where they do not know the terrain or the people, as they fear there would be no one to help them if they faced a problem, and want to avoid being questioned by local boys, *'why are you here?'*, which could lead to conflict.

In Mile End, we know the backways, the alleyways, we know how to catch them. If we were in their territory, we would get caught straight away. (M)

When you go out of your area, there is always someone asking you where you are from, so you stay in, you stick in your area. (M)

For me it's safe to go to any other place in East [London], but when you go outside East that's when you get into risky territory. (M)

In spite of these concerns, young people felt that the situation in terms of gang or area based violence was not as bad in East London as it is in North and South London. Areas to avoid were said to be Peckham, Brixton, Hackney, and Shepherds Bush. The young men from East London would not venture into Camden unless they were with a cousin or friend who lived in the area:

Camden town and North East people, from 2005, they don't like each other. If they were to go to Camden, they wouldn't come back alive. (...) Even if I'm innocent something would happen to me. There are literally thirty of them walking around with bats, bandanas, driving around in cars with hockey sticks; they are walking around like no one can stop them. (M)

Boys in Tower Hamlets and Newham are said to have a particular 'beef' with young men in Walthamstow, Leyton and Leytonstone. The fights they described were linked to relatively minor personal disputes rather than criminal activity, or tribal/regional affiliation. Likewise, they did not involve formal 'gangs' of Somali boys, but rather friends or family members retaliating together against a perceived slight. Box 6 gives an example of a typical story of rivalry between young Somali men.

Box 6. Example of Confrontation between Somali Youth from Different Areas

There was once a big fight between Forest Gate and Leyton. It started on the first Eid in 2009. We were all coming on a bus from central [London], and they [the boys from Leyton] had a little argument with a girl from Forest Gate. One of the boys must have spat in her face or pushed her or something.

Then one day, there were four of us [boys] and one girl, and we were in Waltham

Forest – we were in their territory, and my friend got hot tea thrown in his face, in the street. Someone must have rung the police. The police stopped and searched everyone, and took us to the bus stop in case anyone jumped us.

The beef was going on for two or three weeks: the Forest Gate people would go to Walthamstow, beat people up, and they would do the same back. There was no young people involved; it was older lot, 18 to 21 year olds. It just ended out of the blue. One of their friends got stabbed, one from our estate got stabbed, so there were two of them in hospital. Leyton got stabbed first, and they must have caught someone from Forest Gate on his own in their territory and stabbed him twice in the legs.

Then two people were going to have a one on one [fight] to end it, but it must have extended to a big group – and there was a big fight on Romford road, lots of people got arrested. After that, people got tired of people getting stabbed and arrested. (M)

Many young people, both men and women, want to socialise away from areas with lots of Somalis (as these areas are likely to include their parents, other relatives and family friends), to avoid being gossiped about. Therefore, young Somalis do not necessarily want to spend time in the parts of town with the highest concentration of other Somalis.

Girls mainly avoid family areas – they avoid mainly where there’s a lot of Somali community. Maybe they just want to go out and don’t want to bump into the family – they report back to your mum, ‘she was there with a boy’ – maybe he’s just one of your Uni or college mates – but they think it’s something else and jump to conclusions basically. (F)

8.4 Tensions Between Ethnic Groups

Tensions were reported between young Somali men and some other groups, particularly within Tower Hamlets (this may reflect the fact that the majority of respondents came from Tower Hamlets). Community groups are also aware of long-running tensions between Bengali and Somali youths, particularly in the Whitechapel area. Peer researchers told of periodic run-ins with Bengali youths, particularly during the summer holidays when both groups spend time hanging around on streets and in parks. Young Somalis described encountering large groups of up to fifty Bengali youths, and felt vulnerable in their relatively small groups of around fifteen Somalis. Many young Somalis said that they avoided areas that are not ‘diverse’ or ‘multicultural’ (i.e. areas that are predominantly Bengali or Somali):

There are too many Bengalis in the area. They can gang up on you. Now, it’s calmed down, but before there were a lot of fights going on – it’s usually in the big [long] holidays. Even in the autumn this year, one of my friends got hit by a hammer on the head – the police got involved but nothing happened. In school you would be friends with them, no problem – there are others that you see and they give you a dirty look. There are some I have known since primary school. Some of them play football with us. But no one ever goes to their houses. Outside of school there’s nothing [no relationship]. I know one boy who is close friends with Bengalis – he understands them easily, he can speak basic Bengali, he always grew up with them, and he has a few Somali friends now that he’s older – but he’s an exception. (M)

My friend said the bad thing about this area is the gangs and violence – it's very Asian based. It's very good to be multicultural, but she feels this area isn't very multicultural. (F)

He avoids the areas that have a majority of Asians so they don't start conflict. (...) He was walking in Brick Lane and it's mainly Asians, and he was walking through and they jumped him and put one guy in hospital. (...) This happened in the summertime in the middle of the day. (M)

There were some examples of friendships between young Somali and Bengali men, but the majority of the young participants from Tower Hamlets had no close Bengali friends. Relations were said to be amicable in school, although one male peer respondent said that Somali youth felt that it was *'not a nice environment'* at school if the majority of students chatted to each other in Bengali rather than English. However, outside of school there was said to be very little positive social contact between Somali and Bengali youth: respondents noted that Bengali youth tended to play their own sport (cricket, in this particular area) and had their own youth centres which Somalis did not attend.

There was only one mention in the data of concerns about tensions with white British people. Considering the extreme forms of racism experienced by the Somali community from white British people in Tower Hamlets in the 1990s, it is noteworthy that none of the young people flagged this as an issue in their own lives (with the exception of relations with the police).

In other boroughs, tensions were not between particular ethnic groups, but between rival postcode or area gangs, in particular in Hackney, where one young male respondent said that there were some housing estates that he would never walk through, even if he was walking with his mother to the local shop. Young men from Newham said that there were concerns about young Somalis being involved in drug-related gangs.

8.5 Relationship with the Police

Perceptions of the police force varied between young men and women. While young women said they would feel comfortable approaching the police if they needed to, young men said that as long as they could deal with a situation themselves, they would not *'snitch'* to the police. In cases of fights between young people, parents might also intervene to try to resolve the problem:

Parents help on the education side and if there is any trouble and stuff, like fighting and stuff with other Somalis and other people - but mostly with us it's with other Somalis - so our parents will get in contact with each other and sort stuff out. Somehow they find out and sort it out. (M)

In spite of young men's proclaimed antipathy towards the police, several male respondents (including one who lived in Leyton who had been in trouble with the police himself) said they wanted more police patrolling in their area. Another young man who had expressed his frustration at being regularly stopped and searched also said he liked the fact that there were lots of police patrolling his area (Bow), because it feels safe. On the occasions when young Somali men had met police officers outside a context in which they were in trouble themselves, they had a positive response about the police:

Two of the police used to work with our school, they used to meet us and stand at the gates. They were nice, we used to trust them, they were from Bow police station. They stopped us leaving school at breaks. (M)

Me, I don't think police are interrogating [young Somalis], they are becoming more friendly with people and communities; they are building a relationship and will stop and ask you how your day was. Before they didn't really care. This has changed in recent years. (M)

Stop and search, and being moved on from places where they wanted to hang out, were the subject of most young Somalis' complaints relating to the police. They argued that the police do not stop 'the bad guys', but stop and search all young Somali boys if they are in a group. If members of the public see them being searched, they presume the young man (and it was always reported to be young men who were stopped) in question is 'a bad boy', which is embarrassing for them. Several respondents argued that racist stereotypes account for the fact that they are searched regularly:

The police expect it [trouble/criminality] when there is nothing there, because that image is all over the place. It's always African or Somali this, or black this. We do have some good black youths too, but they just all get judged the same. They are all painted with the same brush. For example, my friends wear hoodies but they don't get up to bad stuff – they are good people. It's not fair. (F)

Here's one example: they will be sitting down making no trouble, and police will say 'oh, we need to search you for weapons, because there has been a lot of knife crime or cannabis in the area', and they get fed up of being searched, that's when they get in trouble for arguing with a police officer. They recognise the police, and the police recognise the people they are searching, and they always like coming back – they search you one day, don't find anything, yet come back the next day because they know that you will be in the area. But Somalis aren't really involved in knife crime. (M)

The bad thing about this area is there's more police interrogation towards Somali youth nowadays. If the police see a group of people, Somalis, aged 16-19, they will stop and search them for no apparent reason – if you are just getting a bus on the way home. They are rude as well – some of the police officers grab you and literally throw you to the wall – search inside your hat, everything. (...) They don't come up with a valid reason. It's just because of the [type of] hat [you're wearing]. (M)

Young people believed that in recent months, the number of times that young Somali men had been stopped and searched had decreased since the summer of 2009, when some boys said they were stopped every day:

Most boys don't like or appreciate the police, because they haven't had positive experiences before, it's all negative. (...) In the summer holidays, at least once a day we would get searched, but I haven't been searched in a while now. If you are in a group of more than four people, you get searched. Like in the middle of the road. It slows you down. If you had something on you [if you were in possession of something illegal] it would be different, but you don't. (M)

Young Somalis felt that some of the confrontations between young men and the police were due to the police or the general public's misinterpretation, or lack of tolerance, towards their behaviour. While young men may feel that they are simply meeting up with their friends, and perhaps being slightly loud and boisterous, the external observer might feel threatened by this behaviour. If the said group of boys is then confronted or asked to move on when they feel they have done nothing wrong, this leads to resentment and tempers flaring, which can get them into even more trouble.

*When they are just chilling in the park, the police come and search them, they tell them to leave the park, but the park's a public area where they should be able to stay. They might just be playing around, but the public think that they're fighting.
(M)*

In some instances, the large congregations of Somali youth are a manifestation of social occasions (see Box 7 below), which can still attract unwanted police attention, illustrating the risks of cultural misinterpretation.

Box 7. Confrontation between Young Somalis and the Police

One of the Somali boys in the area was getting married. My sister and I were going to the wedding and we came out Mile End station, and there were 30 boys waiting around in a group. They were all Somali, and were all waiting to go to this wedding. And then something started up. The police were there, and maybe some of the boys in the group matched a description [of someone the police were looking for], so the police came in and started asking questions. My little brother was involved and I went to them, 'what is going on?' They [the boys] should let the police just come and ask the questions and if they stay calm and have nothing to hide then they will just go away.

All these 30 boys versus seven police (...) The boys became very angry that the police were questioning them and altercations picked up with the boys resisting, shouting, and heckling the police. (...) The police are only trying to do their job. If you have a tantrum then you will get taken away. The police are really nice people – they let that guy go because I spoke to them. If you are nice to them they will let you go. It's so ridiculous. They just overreact for no reason and one by one they were getting handcuffed. But they [the police] didn't find anything so they let them go and they all went to the wedding. (F)

8.6 Perceptions of their Areas

While many of the young participants lived in relatively deprived areas, and were concerned about safety on the streets, overall descriptions of their areas were positive. Tower Hamlets and Newham (the areas from which most of the data were collected) were seen as good places to live, with all the amenities required as a young person, a Muslim, and a Somali, including mosques, halal shops, shisha cafes (for those who enjoy visiting them), colleges, universities, and accessible parks and leisure facilities. In spite of worries about crime, they felt that these were relatively safe places to live in comparison with other parts of London. Their main complaint was that certain parts of their area were not diverse or mixed enough, in that there were either 'too many Asians'

(which could leave young Somalis feeling excluded or vulnerable) or ‘*too many Somalis*’ (because then everyone knows your business).

8.7 Education and Aspirations

In spite of young Somali students historically underachieving in terms of exam results, respondents perceived few barriers to their full participation in the UK education system. They saw education as being open to all, with many options available to young Somalis as to all other young people. Among the young Somalis in this research, there is a general expectation that their cohort will go on to college and even University. Several pointed out that this is in contrast with the ‘*generation*’ immediately above them (people in their mid to late twenties). This sense of increasing educational aspiration is in line with recent sharp rises in educational achievement among Somali pupils in data from several London boroughs. One frequently voiced aspiration is to be able to support your family in future if older relatives are not working:

Nowadays because of the recession, because the older generation aren't working, children think that education is more important [than in the past] because they want to help their parents in future. (M)

Several peer researchers also thought that because of the economic downturn, more young Somalis are now studying for longer rather than looking for jobs, owing to high levels of unemployment.

One area discussed at length by the peer researchers was their parents’ approach to their education. They felt that the vast majority of their peers’ parents were strongly committed to their children’s education, and consequently pushed their children hard to succeed in school. One of the main reasons that families are said to come to the UK is for its education system, so children are pushed to make the most of opportunities their parents did not have. However, the peer researchers felt that many parents were unable to adequately guide their children in how to achieve this much-desired success. For example, while children may be encouraged out of the house in the morning to go to school, some parents are not able to talk through their homework with them:

[Do parents talk to their children about what they expect for them in the future?] Parents give you a basic target: they don't go into depth about how to succeed in it, they might say, 'go to university' or 'get a job' but they don't tell you how to get there. (M)

The relationship between children, parents and the educational system varied according to the length of time that families had been established in the UK or Europe; their ability to speak English; and their educational and social background in Somalia (i.e. whether they came from urban and professional or rural backgrounds).

It depends, because you get olden-days parents who grew up in Somalia, so they have lack of interest in their child's education. They do push them but they don't really guide them and don't know how to help them. The modern parents will guide you into different opportunities open to you, and encourage you to fulfil your goal. They will sit down and help you and go over your homework and read over your work. (F)

To compensate for their perceived inability to support their children with their homework, many Somali parents send their children to extra private tuition classes (in English), in spite of the financial costs that this incurs. Other mothers walk their teenaged sons to college to ensure that they actually go inside, as some boys were said to leave the house only to go to the park.

If their parent or carer is not familiar with the education system, or fluent in English, Somali teenagers are left feeling 'stressed' by the pressure to succeed, when they are unsure precisely how to achieve success. The series of exams and options available to young people requires careful navigation, and an experienced adult to help them negotiate the system successfully:

When I went to school, I knew I wanted to study science, but I wasn't sure what area – I didn't know, nobody came to me and discussed, 'I want to be this', no one discussed with me how to get there, until I met one of the teachers after two years, she explained that I needed to do my GCSEs. I had just come to this country and been put in higher level and didn't know what I was. (M)

In line with increasingly high educational expectations of both parents and young people, there was a call from young people for additional guidance and intensive support at school and at home, in order to combat education-related stress, and help to maintain the motivation required to succeed educationally:

If you haven't got the help you need and the support, you just lose interest and will not be motivated and if you haven't got that motivation around your house then forget it. You'll become lazy as well. If the family take education seriously, that really makes a difference. (F)

They need someone to lecture them and touch base with them every week. (M)

Three male peer researchers, all of whom had spent some time in Pupil Referral Units (for children suspended from school) stated that they had preferred their time in these units because they had smaller classes with specialist teachers, explaining, 'you can listen more and they listen to you more', 'your friends aren't there so there aren't bad influences'. Several other young men described their appreciation for other types of support, such as the educational maintenance allowance, and the system of visiting a Somali 'PA' (believed to be a 'Personal Assistant', part of a council-funded project in Tower Hamlets) each week to receive financial support for educational expenses or trips, payable if the student achieved high attendance at school or college (discussed in section 8.9).

In spite of recent rises in educational achievement, young Somali men in particular are more likely to leave school with poor educational attainment. According to the peer researchers, reasons for this include: desire to start earning money, high levels of stress (especially in relation to exams and written work), and being distracted from college by socialising:

The workload and the pressure you get from the teachers to finish your work becomes too much and people want to drop out. (M)

[Interviewer: Are there any challenges that remain in education, being a Somali boy?] Yes, being with each other, jamming, rather than going to lessons, like if I was meant to be going to a lesson and my friend wasn't, I would rather stay with my friend than be at the lesson. So attendance tends to fall. (M)

London is just too much. People can't handle it. People get stressed out about the streets, their mum, essays they have to hand in, people thinking they are terrorists, [thinking] are you going to get arrested – thinking about your life – so much different things that you get stressed about – you think about going to visit your Nan in hospital, where you going to get money. (M)

Several young men told of deliberately attending colleges away from the majority of their friends so that they could avoid distractions, such as peer pressure to 'muck about' with friends, as they felt this disrupted their studies.

Another pressure that peer researchers and community workers discussed was the fact that in the Somali community, families are often judged on the successes or failures of their children. A good family is seen to be one in which the children graduate and have no criminal record. Parents may feel ashamed if their child does badly in school, or has had contact with the criminal justice system. This lessens their willingness to seek help for problems, and places great pressure on children to succeed, not only for themselves, but for the sake of their family.

Young Somalis, and young men in particular, face a conflict between living up to a version of masculinity which is not compatible with success at school, and experiencing parental pressure to achieve academic success. This difficulty is well-documented among many groups of young people, particularly young men and those from BME backgrounds.

8.8 Influence of Family

It is widely acknowledged that intergenerational tensions exist within the Somali community. However, almost universally, young people said that the greatest influence and most important role models in their lives were their family members. Somali family and community events were central occasions in the year (Eid celebrations, weddings, and cultural events such as poetry readings). Even if young people did not see their parents as direct role models (for instance, if they had not been to college or been employed themselves), they were nevertheless regarded as a positive influence:

Parents have a big effect on Somali youths as they have a lot of respect for their parents and brothers and sisters. Brothers and sisters are like their friends, and older brothers and sisters have been through things that younger siblings are going to go through, and always speak to younger siblings as they want them to do well with life. (M)

Mothers were believed to have greater influence than fathers, as they are more present in everyday life, talk to their children more, and get the children up in the morning and out of the house to school:

My mum is always on my case, she never leaves me alone, if I come [home] late or come home in the morning, she gives me at least an hour lecture (...) Our mums try harder than our dads to influence us, to go to college. (...) [My friend's]

mum would come to his room at 8am and say, 'get up, it's college' – she would say, 'no, get up now!' Dads really don't care because of how they are now – they do care, but they don't care at the same time. Say the son would say 'I don't have college', the dad would say 'OK, OK' – the son could lie for two weeks, unless the mums come in. Some Somalis – most of them don't have no fathers – they have fathers but they get divorced – and might only come around once in a blue moon to check the family and the kid. (M)

The influence of parents was **gender specific**: mothers were said to have more of an influence on girls, and fathers on boys. Some boys said that they did not listen to their mothers, and she could not tell them what to do. Some added that *'she hasn't been through what we've been through'*. Young men expressed the desire for direct empathy from adults or older youth around them.

Boys, they need a father there. If they don't have a father, well they won't listen to their mother 'cos she doesn't understand what they are going through, so they do like crazy things and get influenced by others. (F)

The ones that don't want to look up to their brothers but don't have a father, then they don't have someone. It's a problem... most boys are more scared of their dad and not as much of their mother and without that figure around it means they can do whatever they want. They don't take what their mum says seriously – they don't come home when they are meant to come home or do what they are told. They don't have someone to be afraid of. (F)

Big brothers were also very influential on young men, partly because they have 'been through' what their younger siblings are going through. While some big brothers, who had gone to university or into employment, were described as positive influences, other young men gave examples of older brothers leading their siblings into criminality, including *'shooting'* (drug dealing) and gang-related violence. However, younger brothers could react against the negative influence of older siblings, *'learning a lesson'* from them and trying to live differently, by going to college and avoiding crime. Young men without a father or older brother looked up to other male relatives such as cousins or uncles, who could also provide a positive influence (e.g. going to university, working), or a negative influence. Most of the stories recounted in the research about young men who had ended up in trouble (such as drug dealing) were said to have been influenced by seeing older men, often relatives, who were making *'easy money'*.

Many of the young Somalis and other key informants said that the lack of older male family members as role models or to offer support is an important issue for young men. While there are no reliable data for the number of single parents (who are likely to be almost entirely mothers), a significant proportion of young people are thought to grow up in houses without a father figure, either because their parents are divorced, their father is largely absent from the home, or their father is still in Somalia or has died. In households without a father, the eldest son may be expected to take on many of the roles and responsibilities of a father at a young age (e.g. disciplining other siblings).

The impact of this on young men is difficult to single out. A similar debate has existed for many years in the Afro-Caribbean community, namely, does the lack of father figures lead to social problems, including lack of discipline, mental health problems, drug abuse and educational under-achievement? Or is it too easy to blame lack of father figures,

when the underlying causes of poor outcomes for young black boys are political in nature, including institutional racism, negative stereotyping, poor housing and schools, and low income? While this report cannot claim to resolve this question, it offers recommendations for the types of male role models and sources of support that young men said that they would like to see (see section 9.3.1).

8.9 Other Influences

Youth workers have an important role in guiding young Somalis: they help them find jobs, develop their CVs, and decide which colleges and courses to choose. The 'PA' system in Tower Hamlets was also regarded by young people as a good scheme for encouraging Somali youth to attend college regularly, giving them a motivational boost:

They pay for stuff that your mum can't pay for, such as lunch money, expenses, college expenses, take you out on trips – there's one on Bow Road, it's a Somali man – a local businessman - who helps. If your mum doesn't know English very well he helps her fill in forms. He gives you £10 every Thursday and gives you a one-to-one conversation that you wouldn't have at home. (M)

Several of the peer researchers had **mentors** while at school or college, and views on mentoring were mixed. Some found it useful, whereas one young man said, '*they are too picky, they bug you, and ask you hundreds of questions*'. The advice given by peer researchers was that mentors should not be part of the school system, and they should be someone they can relate to (though they do not necessarily have to be Somali. One young woman said that because her mentor was also originally from Africa, she felt she could empathise with her). Young people wanted mentors to be able to liaise with their parents and advise them how to support their children.

Young Somalis look up to **role models** within and outside their community. However, while famous Somalis were admired, their influence on respondents' lives was minimal compared to the immediate influence of their families. For some girls, Iman, a Somali fashion model, is a source of inspiration (though others thought her immodest and unIslamic). Other figureheads include Rageh Omar (although most respondents did not know his name and referred to him as '*the man on the news*'), Mohamed Farah, the British Somali athlete, and Ahmed Omer, the Somali Mayor of Tower Hamlets (though some thought him an MP). These people are seen to be important '*just to show that we can do it too*'.

They look up to other older generation even though sometimes it's bad that they look up to them and if they see them smoking then they will smoke as well. There are other good roles models: Omer, the Olympic runner, and when he sees people that run in the Olympics he thinks that whatever he wants to do is possible and he can get it. (M)

Positive role models from within the community are not just aspirational figures, however: they are actively involved in efforts to improve young Somalis' lives, encouraging them to work hard, and recognising their successes in public ceremonies:

They [the community] do certificate ceremonies to recognise they [the youth] achieve something. [What do the ceremonies recognise?] GCSEs and exam results are the main thing, and the Uni graduates. Also the mayor comes and sometimes the news anchor. That makes a difference because they [the young

people] want to show what they are capable of doing in front of them – it's a boost for the young people. (F)

Figureheads outside the Somali community regarded as aspirational by some young Somali men tend to be associated with a generic, American-influenced urban lifestyle and identity: street culture, famous MCs and rappers, and in particular, those people who are perceived to have high status, money, cars, and clothes. The widespread adoption of fashion and music tastes associated with this urban street culture may be alarming to parents, but for young men, it may be the easiest way to fit into social groups in East London, and does not necessarily mean that they have lost sight of their Somali identity. As discussed earlier, young people have a facility for combining and re-inventing aspects of their cultural identity, and even for those young men who ostensibly appeared to have adopted a western street-culture identity, their Somali heritage remains a central and important part of who they are.

8.10 Khat

Khat is a sold in Somali grocers across London. It is consumed mostly by men (though there are concerns that women are increasingly chewing it) in Merfesh (private rooms, often in basements or at the back of shops), outdoors in parks or at home. Khat is considered a big problem by most young people (even though some of the young men chewed khat from time to time). They are unsure of its health impacts: they suspect it ages you, ruins your teeth, and stops you from concentrating. Their main objection to khat is the disruptive influence that it can have on family life, as people who chew khat for long periods on a daily basis are not able to participate fully in family life.

Young men are reported to start chewing for one or two hours at a time when around 15-18 years old; some are influenced by newer arrivals from Somalia who bring the habit with them. They do not start chewing for longer periods until later in life; most daily consumers are said to be 25 years or older. In spite of the role of khat in Somali culture and social life, particularly for men, young Somalis query why the drug is unregulated in Britain, when it is illegal in so many other countries.

8.11 Media Representation

In recent research with Somalis in West London, OUK found that the representation of Somalis in the media was of great concern and frustration to the young people. From local newspaper stories about links to gun crime and fare-dodging on buses, to national media portrayal of terrorism suspects, young Somalis felt unfairly portrayed as violent criminals, drop outs, and drug dealers, which was upsetting for many of them.

However, in East London, few of the young people mentioned concerns about media representation. This may be because participants in this study were slightly younger, and may have been less likely to read or watch the news. It may also be that there are several initiatives in East London to present positive stories about the Somali community which counteract negative press (e.g. Somali Eye). Those that did talk about the media, however, were equally frustrated by the coverage. The following is a typical reaction from a young person to negative news coverage about Somalis in the UK:

I don't know if you guys read in the newspapers yesterday about how the Somalis are violent, how they don't care because they have already seen violence at home, so they are not as soft as most of the gangs from here; about the Woolwich Boys and things. But those who have seen killings and things, they

will have seen what happens and will be less likely to get involved (...) I don't know how they get their information, they only spoke to two people. Some of what they wrote I couldn't believe, that we just want to get money, that you see us driving good cars and things; but I believe we achieve this through doing business not through selling drugs and stuff; there will be a minority who do this but not the majority of them. I strongly disagree that we are not that soft because we have seen violence at home, that this means we don't get scared by gangs here; as soon as we come here we have seen peaceful and see what it means to life and our family. (M)

The way Somalis are shown in the papers makes me very angry, I want to call but I ain't got time to complain, and they won't listen. (M)

Several male peer researchers felt that coverage of this type contributed to incidents when they had been accosted in public, and been called 'you pirate', or asked 'you carrying a bomb?' on public transport.

8.12 Channels of Communication

Initiatives to work with youth need to understand how they prefer to communicate. Word of mouth is of primary importance among friendship and family networks ('news travels faster than the wind in Tower Hamlets' (F)). However, word of mouth cannot be relied on to reach all people. On a number of occasions during the research process, relatively well-connected people in community groups and LAs had not heard about local services or organisations for Somali youth. Several young people believed there to be no Somali youth clubs in their area, when in fact there were several in the vicinity. Relying on existing social networks to spread information risks missing newer arrivals or isolated individuals.

The internet was an extremely important part of young people's lives, and young Somalis are relatively well connected to the internet. If they do not have access at home, they can access the internet relatively easily through local Ideas Stores, internet cafes, libraries, or their school or college. Email, internet calls and instant messaging are common ways to keep in touch with friends and family in other countries, and social networking sites, chatting online, and Somali oriented forums and chatrooms are used extensively. However, few (if any) organisations have up to date and comprehensive websites for young people to access information about activities or youth groups in their area.

Other modes of communication include the increasing number of Somali radio stations (including internet based stations such as Nomad Radio²⁵) with young Somali contributors, the Somali TV channel Universal (although this was largely said to be for the older generation), the Islam TV channel, and at least two regular Somali publications based in East London (Sheeko and Somali Eye), aimed at different target audiences and subject matters within the Somali community.

8.13 Potential Routes to Engagement with Young People

Community groups: Young people in TH were very positive about the presence of several Somali groups in their area. Almost all community groups mentioned were

²⁵ See www.nomadradio.co.uk

Somali-focused, with the exception of Splash²⁶ (a housing and community association where one of the young men volunteered). The peer researchers considered Somali-oriented groups to be particularly important to new arrivals (whether from Somalia or other EU countries) because of the support offered in terms of accessing services, or to those who want to learn English or other skills. However, even for young people who were not new arrivals, community groups and youth clubs in particular had played an important role in their lives, particularly during their early teenage years (12-16 years).

Youth clubs with specific provision for Somali youth in Tower Hamlets are said to be concentrated in Mile End and Whitechapel, and include Roman Road, Chicksand/Chicken Shed, Wessex Centre, and Multi-youth.

The research participants highlighted the following benefits of Youth Clubs:

- They provide a chance to **go on trips** away from everyday inner-city life. For a number of young people, these trips were the main attraction for attending the youth club:

At the youth clubs, it's a place to hang out after school, and they take you on trips, that's the only reason that people go. They take us on residential [trips] sometimes: go-carting, cinema trips, theme parks, bowling, ice skating. We stay there for a few days or a week, they are the most fun. [Activities might include] abseiling, archery, quad biking. (...) It's all free. The problem is that they take their regulars [Interviewer: how do they decide who is going?] They usually take ten people on a trip (...) that's why people would come regularly, to secure their space. Right before the holidays everyone would start coming because there would be a lot of trips coming up, as soon as holidays pass, numbers start to dwindle... Most people think they are good, very good, they give you something to do in the holiday. (M)

Youth clubs give a positive influence because they give the kids activities, and in school breaks, instead of them doing nothing, they take them on trips and take them out of London and speak to them as well. They focus on kids from the same group, area and age, and the workers are from a similar background so they can relate and talk to them, so it's not an older person trying to speak to them. (F)

- They provide **support** with homework, vocational qualifications, finding work placements, and CV writing. Young people particularly valued direct, intensive, and one-to-one support of this kind:

They helped me; the Uni didn't do that for me. (...) [OSCA] asked me what kind of job I wanted, but I said I was more interested in a placement and they said 'take our number'. I sent them my CV and they took it and fixed it, all in one week. I went into the OSCA office and within a week they had some options and I called the school [where the placement was] and he drove me there to meet the teacher, and that was it. They have a lot of contacts. It was so quick. A lot of other community centres say that they can help you and they just leave it or don't get back to you. They did all the work for me – the other places want you to do

²⁶ See www.splashcd.co.uk

everything, but with OSCA they just say 'this is the job option, this is the interview, done'. They know that if they do not give that level of help that people will just think it's too much work, and really you're doing it on your own basically, so you just give up and don't use them again. (F)

- They provide a **safe place** to 'chill' (socialise, relax), as opposed to the streets or parks where clashes with other youths or the police were anticipated; somewhere to **meet** other young Somalis.
- They organise/provide facilities for **sport** and leisure activities (usually football, pool):

When I was younger I was in the football team, and there was a youth worker at OSCA, and at the same time he used to help us with football. It can boost your confidence to have someone like that coaching you. (M)

- They hold **workshops/lectures**: the most popular of these are the sessions that have a tangible benefit for young people, e.g. talking about finances at college, gaining skills that enhance employability such as First Aid.
- They organise activities for **young women** (the Somali Integration Team was mentioned): activities that young women had particularly enjoyed were a fashion show, street dancing, and role plays exploring everyday issues to raise awareness (e.g. domestic violence).
- They provide activities and services for **free**, which was said to be very important.

OSCA deserves special mention as the community organisation that was referred to time and again as providing valued services for young people. As one young man said, '*OSCA leads to everything, basically, all the fun*'. Another peer researcher found that the friends he interviewed talked about OSCA all the time: '*OSCA, OSCA – it's been popping up every question, OSCA. Everybody goes, all young people. They go for GNVQs, job support and a bit of pool, snooker, play station. (...) OSCA is always open, every time I go past*' (M).

Generally there was a positive response to the work of community groups and youth clubs, with several peer researchers commending them to simply '*keep doing things as they are*' or '*we don't have many complaints*'. One agreed: '*Our friends, education and football. That's fine. We don't want anything else.*' (M)

Areas for improvement were also discussed by peer researchers. These included:

- Girls' perception that there is a focus on activities for boys, to the detriment of girls. They felt there to be a lack of sporting/leisure activities for girls, who do not tend to feel comfortable playing sport in public
- After the age of 16-17 years, young people no longer felt welcome or comfortable at youth clubs, or no longer wanted to attend because their younger siblings were also there
- Some workshops were considered to be boring, and young people preferred to take part in activities or play games rather than just listen to lectures
- They would like more help finding summer jobs and work placements

- They would like more youth workers to be available: *'you can talk to them, even about personal stuff'* (F)

In one workshop, several male peer researchers said that they would not go to Somali-specific youth centres for help and advice on personal matters, as they feared that word would get around the community and *'you would be dissed'* (spoken about, insulted). Young people had different preferences in terms of who they felt most comfortable speaking to:

One boy said he did speak to a white female youth worker a lot, even about personal stuff, she was good and very non-judgemental; he felt comfortable with her and like he could trust her. Others wanted Somali youth workers because they speak the same language. (M)

Public bodies: At the start of the peer research training, the young people were asked what they knew about the council. One answer was that they are *'the people who take away your house'*. Yet after the research process, when the young people had interviewed their friends and had discussed issues at length with the research team, the overwhelming response was that *'the council are doing a pretty good job'*, in terms of the youth, sports and educational services they provided.

I reckon the council are doing a good job really, honestly, they are really good at their job. I don't think there is nothing missing. (M)

In terms of public services, about half of the peer researchers said that they used **Connexions** to help find jobs. Some had had a good experience, and there is said to be a Somali officer at the Mile End office. Others found OSCA to offer a better service.

Connexions? (...) They kept taking my CV but I never got anything back. So that's when I shifted to OSCA. I'd always known them, but I hadn't seen Somalis achieve success through community centres like them. They get funding to help but don't necessarily do it (...) But since OSCA helped me with a placement now I know they will do what they say and I can go to them for other things. (F)

Those who are *'into their education'* are said to make frequent use of libraries, including Ideas Stores, to study and use the computers.

Faith locations: Both male and female respondents said that being at the mosque makes them feel *'happy, humble'*, *'safe within themselves'*, and as though they *'belong'*. Religious observance was very important to the vast majority of respondents: even the less religious young men felt that there was something missing from their life if they did not go to the mosque at least once a month. However, they also said that there were many distractions that can divert young Somalis from regularly going to the mosque, including friends and shisha cafes.

Attendance at mosque varied by age and sex. The young Somali men in this study were likely to have gone to the mosque regularly as a child, infrequently as a teenager, and more regularly again in their late teens/early twenties. Parents want their children to be brought up in Islam, so encourage them to attend extra classes after school/at weekends, to learn Arabic and study the Koran from the age of six or seven years. By the time they are a teenager, they are left decide how they want to follow their religion.

Somali women do not attend the mosque as regularly, and rather pray at home, sometimes with a religious teacher present.

Every boy goes every Friday for prayers. For most girls they probably wouldn't remember the last time they went – they pray at home. Teachers come to their house to teach them and pray with them. They are always separated, men and women – you're comfortable and you can take your scarf off and just be more comfortable when you're separate. (F)

There are many reasons for attending the mosque, including Friday prayers, lectures, reading the Koran, advice about marriage and jobs, and organised trips to other mosques. The majority of the peer researchers, even those who described themselves as not particularly religious, attended **religious lectures** or similar events (e.g. videos of Imams talking from Somalia) several times a year, and sometimes in other cities including Birmingham and Liverpool²⁷. Another motivation for attending was to achieve a sense of belonging not felt elsewhere:

Mosque offers something that school or wider society might not: it makes them feel comfortable and at home and welcomed. Everyone is equal and everyone is welcome and it teaches them the important aspects of the religion. It guides them. (F)

Some peer researchers were interested in the themes discussed at religious talks, including 'street talks' (given by someone who has '*been there, done that*' (i.e. used to get in trouble/hang out on the streets)); learning Arabic; learning about Somali history and life '*back home*'; how to be a good woman; and the afterlife. However, other said that such talks were for '*boffins*' – in other words, they did not appeal to the young men who call themselves '*street rats*'.

Ideally [talks are given by] someone who was on the streets that came off the streets because it's different when you have actually been there and come out of there. Someone who has overcome and can tell people 'that's the wrong thing to do, and you won't get anywhere in life'. (F)

Religious Identity

Peer researchers described young Somalis as being divided into two groups according to how seriously they follow Islam. While most young men regularly attend Friday prayers, only a small proportion are said to be '*very serious*' about their religion. While their descriptions of religious/not-so-religious young men are likely to represent exaggerated stereotypes, they nevertheless give an insight into how young people see themselves, and the different identities available to them. The following descriptions applied to young men, as young women were not described in terms of being either religious or not-so-religious.

²⁷ Because most mosques in East London are not run by Somalis, young Somalis do not stay behind for extra talks after prayers, especially if they are not conducted in Somali or English. They therefore travel to different Somali-run mosques or groups around the country, or go to Al-Huda in Tower Hamlets, for religious lectures.

The **not-so-religious youths** were described as attending mosque most Fridays, but sometimes only because their friends were there. They go to shisha cafes where they free-mix (hang out with boys and girls together), smoke, and listen to music. They hang around on the streets or in parks in their free time; might go to betting shops; speak in slang; and generally do not apply strict standards of behaviour to their everyday lives. Some of them call themselves, tongue in cheek, '*street rats*'. This is seen as a more western lifestyle; the result of integrating more closely with British youth. However, few even in this group were said to drink alcohol.

The young people's description of **religious youth** was very different: they are said to become more religious as they get older (from age 17-18 years for young men); they are more modest, disciplined, respectful, quiet and polite; they are less likely to get in trouble at school or with the police; they spend their time in the mosque, at college, at religious talks, or at home studying (and not on the street or in parks where they might encounter trouble or violence); they avoid places with free-mixing (e.g. shisha cafes).

There's a big difference [between the religious and not so religious youth] because the ones that are more religious are more disciplined and more respectful, and they care about what other people think about them (...) They don't waste time – they don't just stay on the streets doing nothing, they could be doing something. Non-religious [youth] are really rude and they haven't got that much respect for anyone, even their parents. (M)

Several peer researchers told how more religious, older youth tried to persuade them to change their ways (see Box 8). Most young men at one time or another had aspired to be '*more religious*' but find it very difficult to maintain the standards of behaviour required. While attending prayers provides a sense of refreshment, cleansing and renewal, other influences can quickly dispel good intentions: one respondent described feeling '*fresh after praying, but then you go have a cigarette and feel dirty again*' (M).

Box 8. Case Study: Religious Youth reaching out to Younger Somalis

There were people who used to hang around with us, used to smoke, smoke shisha (...) and all of a sudden they changed, praying five times a day, trying to get people to go to the mosque, to get people to change in a way that's good for them. They [start to] like education, want to go to Uni and college – everything has changed. They might have older or younger brothers that they want to talk to and change them.

We go to the mosque every Friday but don't pray five times a day. We wouldn't say we were as religious as them, as [if we were], we wouldn't smoke or be on the streets, we'd be reading the Koran 24/7. Even though we know what we're doing isn't good for us, we still do it.

One day we were all in the park, and the older generation who started going to the mosque came by – they are aged about 19 to 21. One of the boys used to smoke weed, then he stopped, and we used to see him at the mosque. One day at 9pm, it was dark, we were sitting on the bridge [in the park], the older lot came after mosque and talked to us for ages. They were saying things like, 'In the afterlife, what's going to happen to you? You might burn in hell'. They [the older ones] were saying stuff like, 'you all know that I used to do what you do, you know that I've changed for myself, I want to see all of you in the mosque tomorrow'.

I wasn't really paying attention (...) The next day, none of them came to the bridge, it was just three of us, we were thinking 'what the hell?' One of our mates said 'give it a couple of days, they will be back'. Four days later they all came back again, they said 'it's too hard, I can't stop'. Seven of them came back, and one of them still went to the mosque. This one person had got shocked, scared, now none of us see him any more. One by one they all came back slowly. They thought it was boring. (M)

An analogy used to illustrate the difference between religious and non-religious youth was that of the 'bad apple': the religious youth is seen to be pure, whereas the non-practicing youth is rotten.

You find someone that's practising [their religion] and you find someone that's not – It's like getting a full apple and a half apple where inside is rotten. When you open a full apple it's clean but with the half apple the inside is dirty. Their whole life is messed up and they've been up to no good at all. The full apple is clean and fresh, they have a full life that is pure and good with religion and stuff. The rotten person is drinking, smoking, sleeping around. All them things you are not supposed to do as a Muslim person, they do. The full person, even though they might have done those things, they are changing their lifestyle. In Islam, when you come back to the religion and go on pilgrimage it's like starting a new page, your past will be forgiven. (F)

Analogies such as these, and the strict dichotomy between good and bad young people, reflect the moral universe that young Somalis experience. One result of this is that some young men do not feel the mosque is a natural place for them to spend time or seek support (beyond attendance for Friday prayers), either because they do not maintain the standards of behaviour expected, or because they feel judged by others. This is how one self-declared 'not so religious' young man felt:

Al-Huda Mosque is owned by Somalis. I know them, my friends know them, we are all friends – but they don't like us sometimes. When they see you, they smile and laugh with you, but when they go away they are two-faced, saying 'why is he not in his religion?' (M)

This further illustrates why it is important to support Prevent work outside mosques, particularly as the not-so-religious youth may be at higher risk of the mental health or criminality vulnerabilities (which have been associated with youth thought to be at risk of radicalisation).

The idea that youth who have taken the wrong path can be redeemed through religion featured strongly in young people's discussions of religion. Some young men were said to have become more religious after behaving 'badly' in the past. Among the peer researchers, religion is seen as the solution to a troubled lifestyle, offering redemption from past misdemeanours:

They have seen the bad things in their life, what it means to them, how it affects their life. The most religious are the ones who used to be bad – they have already seen everything bad. They became very strict because they don't want to go back to the bad life. (M)

Such men, who are seen to have *'been through it all'*, are accorded particular respect and are listened to by younger people. They represent a particular pathway to masculinity and adulthood: that of a boy who goes off the rails, but redeems himself through religion to become a respected man. Inadvertently, this pattern of behaviour (which is by no means restricted to the Somali community) may perpetuate the idea that a troubled period is necessary to claim authenticity as a man, as the following quotation illustrates:

Young Somalis (...) they think 'we only live once, why not have fun when you're young? You're not going to have fun when you're older'. By the time you get kids and that, the next generation, we can show them more support, 'cos we went through the stages, up a ladder, step by step through it. We went through khat, fights, gangs, we are all seeing it, (...) so when our generation comes up, if we make them good, they will follow us. (M)

It is important to recognise that young Somali men who are going through a troubled time may be influenced by this wider social pattern, and may feel expected to go through a difficult period before emerging as a 'real man'. Anticipating that young men may experience this pressure provides an opportunity to develop alternative pathways to adulthood. Critical reflection on this pattern of behaviour is a possible starting point for discussions with young men.

9 Chapter Nine: Conclusions and Recommendations

This report has discussed a wide range of issues relating to: Somali community development, perceptions of violent extremism, what young Somalis think about living in East London, and ideas about how young Somalis can be further engaged. The East London Somali Forum will be asked to consider these findings, and decide how to take forward these ideas. This Chapter provides concluding remarks, an analysis of information gaps, and sets out a series of recommendations.

In conclusion, this report has described varied Somali communities across East London. In boroughs where groups have been longest established, and where there is existing tribal/regional unity and the support of the LA, community groups are having a positive and widespread impact on the lives of young people. In Tower Hamlets, for instance, the Somali community is well placed to respond to social issues including the threat of violent extremism. In other boroughs, there are numerous embryonic Somali groups who would like to be supported to scale up their work with young people and social issues, but this is likely to require significant capacity building and strengthening of ties with both LAs and other, well established, community groups.

The Somali community does face numerous and complex challenges, but, as one community worker put it, *'Somali people are strong, and we help each other: considering where we came from, we are doing well'*. Young Somali people are not, on the whole, disengaged and vulnerable. They are active community members, as students, volunteers, carers, footballers, employees, worshippers, and many other roles. Within the Somali community, many are already taking proactive efforts to counteract negative media coverage and promote higher self-confidence within the community. Such initiatives should receive continued support.

9.1 Research Gaps

Most community groups say that the problems of the Somali community are well known, and what is needed is action. Yet there are some gaps in our understanding of the Somali community. The question is whether further resources can be justified to fill these gaps, or whether the priority should be to tackle well-known problems and to focus on translating existing evidence into accessible information and strategies. The latter could include briefings on Somali culture for professionals designing or providing services for the Somali community; guidelines on how to manage cultural issues such as khat misuse; or taking forward the 'Best Practices' in education with Somali pupils such as those outlined in Demie et al (2008).

The following research questions deserve greater attention, as they could either be investigated with secondary analysis of existing sources of data (e.g. criminal justice data) making them cost-effective studies, or address important new issues that have not been adequately addressed in the existing literature:

Radicalisation:

- Are Somali youth vulnerable to radicalisation and other risks if they are sent to Somalia with inadequate support, especially if it is at a time of crisis in their life, and possibly against their will?
- How and why (if at all) are Somali youth being radicalised? At present, there is little concrete evidence on this issue, which needs to be investigated by

professionals with closer access to suspected cases, for example, security services, community organisations working with Channel referrals.

Community Development and Youth Engagement:

- How have Somali community groups successfully developed as organisations and engaged with young people? How can the lessons they have learned be shared more widely across East London?

Crime:

- Are young Somali men over-represented in the British criminal justice system? If yes, for what crimes, and why are they over-represented?

9.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations represent areas for further attention by the East London Somali Forum and their colleagues in LAs:

Future monitoring of East London's Somali population

- Community groups could liaise more closely with LAs to obtain PLASC data (as well as other data such as educational attainment by ethnicity). Regular analysis of PLASC data will provide information on **trends** in the size of the Somali school population. This provides a good proxy measure for the total proportion of Somali residents at ward level, which is adequate for most population monitoring purposes.
- Concerns about the **quality of PLASC data** could be addressed by involving Somali parents/groups (e.g. Somali parents could request and corroborate data from schools and report on the completeness/accuracy of the data).
- Community groups and LAs should encourage and support participation in the **UK census** (though this will only capture those 'born in Somalia'). In the ethnicity section, people can choose to write 'Somali' in the '*Any other Black/African/Caribbean background*' option of the ethnicity category, which could provide another valuable source of data on the Somali population.

Working together on Prevent

- At present, there is little clear evidence on the nature and scale of the problem of radicalization in the Somali community. It would be useful for Somali community groups to receive an **official briefing** on concerns around radicalization, complete with the most up to date evidence.
- It is unrealistic to expect Somali groups to fully engage with a single issue like Prevent without addressing groups' other concerns (e.g. the fact they feel their existing work is unsupported). A **sustained process of engagement**, support and relationship building is required.
- **Expand the channels** through which Prevent-related youth work is delivered, by working with sectors that excite young people and that they can relate to (e.g. media, arts, businesses and cultural organisations), as well as more traditional groups such as youth clubs and mosques.

Establishing the East London Somali Forum

N.B. Some of these recommendations may already be underway by the Forum.

- **Expert, external facilitation** is recommended to help Somali organisations from different backgrounds work together, in light of ongoing tensions between tribes/regions.
- A clear **Terms of Reference** and strategic goal for the Forum is required, clearly spelling out the aims and objectives of the Forum, and explaining its potential benefits.
- **Build the network slowly**, ensuring that the infrastructure is in place before expecting significant outputs/results.
- Avoid being seen as an **'implementer'** of services: this will cast the forum as yet another group competing for scarce resources.
- Try to reach out to groups who have **not been involved** in previous networks/research: they may benefit most from inclusion in a wider network.
- Encourage **young people and women** to be more involved in community leadership (to counteract current tendency towards older men running organisations), and explain the benefits of wider participation to current leaders.
- Prioritise building a **culture of knowledge sharing** (between organisations, with the wider community, and with stakeholders in local government and other third sector organisations). At present, some groups avoid sharing information, fearing that other groups will 'steal' their ideas. One way to do this is to support the development of a Somali Resource Centre, which could help build the capacity of community groups to use strategic information, and to professionalise consultation and research skills within the community.
- The Forum must **avoid being Tower Hamlets-centric**, which will require considered efforts to engage with groups in other boroughs.
- Consider the **role of statutory agencies** within the forum (e.g. mental health trusts, local education authority, local authority). There are several areas of joint interest where statutory agencies and community groups could work together and strengthen relations. For example, the forum could provide guidance to statutory agencies on working with Somali communities, and statutory agencies could use the forum to inform community groups about initiatives, services, resources, training etc in their boroughs.

General recommendations for Local Authorities include:

- Avoid viewing the existence of more than one Somali group in a borough as intrinsically unhelpful or inefficient: Somali communities are complex and multi-faceted, and at this stage in the development of many community organisations, it is unrealistic to expect them to come together to form single, coherent groups.
- Support **new and smaller groups** in boroughs with under-developed Somali civil society. These may only be small homework clubs or women's groups, but they are well placed to reach individuals and families that are underserved by mainstream services.
- Communicate **clear and realistic expectations** of what the Local Authority can and cannot provide, and the policy rationale for this position.

Engaging with Young People

- **No single approach** to engagement will be appropriate for all young Somalis. Even if a young person identifies strongly as Somali, this does not necessarily mean that most of their friends are Somali, or that they choose to hang out in Somali youth clubs or mosques. Young people differ widely according to age, gender, religiosity, where they grew up etc.

- Tensions between different areas, and in some cases ethnic groups, mean that young Somalis may not be comfortable **accessing services** outside their own area, where they know people and feel safe.
- Somali groups should be encouraged to **question their assumption** that Somali specific services are always the best way to engage with young people. In some boroughs, young Somalis are comfortable socialising with people of other ethnicities. Somali elders may claim to speak on young people's behalf and lobby for Somali youth clubs, as they believe this is best for young people (e.g. for preserving their identity, or avoiding the wrong sort of friends), but these assumptions need to be questioned according to the local context.
- In some instances, Somali groups *are* best placed for reaching certain groups of people: Somalis who do not speak English, or who are unable or unwilling to access mainstream services, or who seek the companionship of other Somalis.
- Young people report **high levels of stress and peer pressure** at school, and voice strong demand for additional, one on one, intensive support, in the form of someone to talk to, ideally outside the family or school environment. Youth clubs, youth workers, mentors and sports opportunities are therefore very important, and existing services should be protected in order to help young Somalis realise their increasingly high aspirations.
- There are opportunities to tackle **several issues simultaneously** with young people, for example: young people are interested in celebrating and exploring their Somali heritage; and also want more opportunities to get work experience and jobs. The organizers of Somali Cultural Week are overwhelmed by requests from young people to help volunteer, so they are looking at ways of handing over more of the organization of the event to young people.
- **Build on and support existing successful initiatives** working with youth, and work out how to scale them up if they prove successful.
- Improve **online presence**, including the use of social networking sites, and up to date websites. If maintaining an up to date website is too time consuming and technologically challenging, use other internet channels to keep young people informed about activities/services on offer, e.g. a facebook page. Young people themselves may be best place to set up and maintain this facility.
- Be willing to call and text young people on their **phones** (i.e. build up a phone database) to inform them, and remind them about, activities.
- Ensure balanced provision of services in terms of **gender**, in particular, not excluding girls.
- Provide services/activities with **tangible benefits** for young people: educational and employment support are of high priority to older teenagers, trips away are particularly important to younger children and teenagers.

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Worldbank [Conflict in Somalia: Drivers and Dynamics, January 2005, Appendix 2, Lineage Charts](#), pp. 56–58

Annex 1. Additional notes on Name Analysis methodology

Ethnicity classifications are often vigorously contested, and still greater problems arise from the quality and availability of ethnic classifications within administrative data, which limits our ability to subdivide accurately populations by ethnic group. Name analysis and classification has been proposed as one efficient method of achieving such subdivisions in the absence of ethnicity data (Mateos, 2007).

This technique involves assigning an ethnicity to individual data records, based on the name of the individual. Two primary components are required – a population register (source data set), and a database assigning names to ethnic groups. The source data are generally formed from partial proxy population registers. These data include GP registers, electoral rolls, annual school census data, benefit claimant data sets and housing data sourced from local Primary Care Trusts and LAs. The names on these registers are matched to an ethnic group, enabling the extrapolation of ethnicity data upon which population estimates by ethnic group can be based.

This approach offers advantages over traditional information sources such as the UK Census of Population, since it: develops a more detailed and meaningful classification of people's origins categories (in particular the methodology employed by the UCL Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis (CASA) which uses cultural, ethnic and linguistic indicators to arrive at an ethnic group classification); offers improved updating (annually through electoral or patient registers); better accommodates changing perceptions of identity than self-classification of ethnicity (through independent assignment of ethnicity and or cultural origins according to name); and is made available at the individual or the UK postcode unit level (average of 30 people) rather than the Output Area (150 people) (Mateos, 2007). UCL CASA also represents the best value estimates in terms of licensing cost and methodological soundness (as outlined in the technical annex).

The assignment of ethnicity to an individual involves some level of uncertainty and some assumptions. Each of the three dominant name analysis methodologies used in the UK (described below) vary in the way they assign names to an ethnicity, these variations are discussed more fully in the following sections. Generally speaking, uncertainty arises where a name cannot be assigned to one individual ethnic group. This is of particular concern regarding names with Islamic origins, such as Somali names. In these cases a *probability of origin* is assigned to the name based on the frequency of occurrences of the name within each ethnic group. With this process in mind, the robustness of the name database improves the greater the range and volume of data used to compile it (i.e. a name database compiled using many data sets from multiple regions/countries will arrive at a more robust conclusion as to the ethnic origins of a greater variety of names). Name analysis is not without its limitations, therefore. In the absence of ethnicity data, however, it remains the most robust method of constructing population estimates disaggregated beyond the top-tier ethnic groups offered by the Census 2001.

Due to the reliance of name analysis methodologies on locally collected data, there are no official population estimates constructed in this way at the national level. Instead, these estimates are predominantly constructed and provided by private companies, and licensed to end-users. The primary providers of these data are Experian ('Origins'); Mayhew Associates; and the UCL Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis (via the London Profiler website www.londonprofiler.org). The remainder of this section will summarise and review the methodology adopted by Mayhew Associates to construct population

estimates by ethnic group via name classification and analysis, as this is the data source that our own Somali population estimate is based on.

The ‘Neighbourhood Knowledge Management’ methodology: Mayhew Associates

There are two primary differences to the estimation methodology adopted by Mayhew Associates, compared to UCL and Origins. Firstly, the compilation of a geographically referenced population register (source data) is achieved via a process referred to as ‘neighbourhood knowledge management’ or *nkm*. This method involves ‘matching’ administrative data to the Local Land and Property Gazetteer (LLPG), an address database maintained by LAs that grid references all properties within the LA boundary. By linking administrative data sources (such as GP registers, electoral role etc.) to the LLPG, a ‘confirmed minimum’ population figure is achieved. This process effectively ‘cleans’ the source data sets, removing any records where the individual cannot be confirmed as resident within a particular London Borough. The result is a more accurate population register upon which name analyses can be undertaken.

Second, Mayhew Associates rely primarily on the School Census (PLASC) data set to assign ethnic group by household. This means all individuals living in a household are assumed to be of the same ethnic group as the child recorded as living there in the PLASC data set. Of course, there will be many households without school-age children, and these cannot, therefore, be assigned an ethnic group by this method. In these cases, and for households where ethnicity information is incomplete within PLASC, surname analysis is used. Thus, the Mayhew methodology hinges on three main stages, as summarised below:

1. Children on the School Census are assigned to their stated ethnic group.
2. Adults living at the address of children on the School Census are assigned the same ethnicity as the child.
3. Adults at addresses with no children are assigned the most probable ethnic group based on their surname using a wider surname:ethnicity lookup database.

Limitations arise within this methodology where the assumption is made that all other individuals living in a household share the ethnicity of the resident child, as recorded in PLASC. The emergence of increasingly non-traditional household compositions, and the increasing significance of ‘Mixed’ ethnic groups in the UK (Rees, 2009) suggest that this assumption may not enable the most robust assignation of ethnicity.

Mayhew Associates report that testing indicates that the method adopted enables the assignation of an ethnic group to between 80% and 90% of all households, with an accuracy of over 90% (depending on how many ethnic groups are defined at the outset). Generally speaking, nine top level ethnic groups are used in the first instance (see list below), and further analyses drill down to reveal estimates for smaller ethnic groups, including Somali. Thus the accuracy reported above relates to assigning records to the nine broader ethnic groups listed below. Further disaggregation, required to achieve an estimate of Somali populations, is most likely to lessen this accuracy.

1. White British
2. White other
3. Asian
4. Black Caribbean

5. Black other (mainly African)
6. Mixed race
7. Other (including Chinese)
8. Unknown ethnicity
9. Surname not on database

A further criticism of the Mayhew Associates methodology arises from the name database used to assign ethnic groups to those records that cannot be matched to a child within the PLASC data set. The name database has been compiled predominantly from data sets collected in London. Given the general rule regarding the robustness of name databases being reliant upon the use of a broad range of data sets from multiple regions/countries (Mateos, 2007), this marks a limitation to the Mayhew *et al.* approach, particularly when compared to that adopted by the UCL CASA. This limitation was noted by Mayhew *et al.*, in a recent study commissioned by Waltham Forest Borough Council which stated that:

“The range and diversity of surnames is very large and in most boroughs there will be names that appear on local databases which have no comparator on the master database. In the methodology it is thus necessary to include a ninth group which consists of surnames whose ethnicity is not represented at all in the database.” (Mayhew et al., 2009: p.31)

The ninth group referred to in the quote above accounted for 10% of the population of Waltham Forest (or approx. 25,000 people), thus having significant implications for the ethnic group estimates produced.

PLASC data

The School Census (PLASC) data set is one of the most complete records of ethnicity in London. Although there are few missing values in the dataset (less than 2.5% of values are missing according to the APHO, 2005) the accuracy of the data is not known. There is still some concern among Somali community groups consulted during the course of this research that PLASC data do not accurately record the ethnicity of Somali children. One informant reported that in the previous year, his local primary school had under-reported the number of Somali children, saying that there were 27 children when he claimed to personally know 39 Somali children at the school. Somali children may be classified under the ‘Black African’ rather than the ‘Somali’ category which is another option on the School Census form. If we discount the likelihood that non-Somali children would be mistakenly recorded as Somali in PLASC data, then we can anticipate that the true number of Somali children may exceed the numbers presented above. The population estimates therefore represent the minimum number of Somali people in each borough.

Annex 2. Interview Topic Guide for Peer Researchers

Theme 1 – People and Community

1. Who do the young Somalis tend to hang out with and why? Where?
2. Who influences how young Somalis behave?
 - How do young Somalis influence each other?
 - How does the family influence them? (mum, dad, brothers, sisters, cousins)
3. What are the good things and the bad things about your area? Can you give me some examples?
4. What areas do young Somalis avoid and why? Can you give me an example?
5. Are there any problems in your area? If so, can you describe them?
6. Is there a difference between the lives of young Somali people depending on the country they were brought up in? Can you give me an example?
7. Is there a difference between the lives of young Somali people depending on whether they are a boy or a girl?
8. Is there a difference between the lives of young Somali people depending on how religious they are? (for example, in the activities they do, or their social life?)

Theme 2 – Education and support

1. What do young Somalis think of education and why?
2. What do young Somalis do after they leave school or college?
3. What are the opportunities open for young Somalis? Do young Somalis think that education is open to them?
4. What roles do the parents play in education? What kind of support do the parents give their children?
5. Who do you feel offers help to Somali youth? Can you give an example?
6. What kind of influence do mosques have on youth?
7. Role Models
 - o Who do young Somali youth look up to? Why?
 - o Can you give any examples of successful Somali people? Why are they successful?
 - o How do the successful people influence the younger generation and why? (for example, educational influences, religious influences)

Theme 3 – Activities and Organisations

1. Where do the young Somali people hang out?
2. How do young people choose to spend their weekend? Describe a typical weekend for young people (girls/boys).
3. What kind of sports do the Somali youth engage in?
 - o Where?
 - o Do both boys and girls engage in sports?
4. What facilities does your area provide? Which ones do young Somali people use? Why or why not? (e.g. Community centres, libraries, Connexions etc.)
5. Which youth clubs do young people go to?
 - o Why?
 - o Who goes?
 - o What do they do in the youth clubs?
 - o What kind of support do the youth get there?
6. What do young people think of the police? Can you give me an example?

Annex 3. Individuals and Organisations who Contributed to the Study

1. Director of Sheeko magazine
2. Clinical psychologist (Somali)
3. Women's Project worker, OSCA
4. Director of Somali Cultural Week
5. Director of the Karin Housing Association
6. Three members of the Tower Hamlets Somali Network
7. Two members of the Somali Integration Team
8. Director, Sahil Housing Association
9. Director, Waltham Forest Women's Association
10. Director, North London Muslim Centre
11. Co-ordinator of Waltham Forest Somali Welfare Association
12. East London representative of the Somali Youth Forum
13. Representative from Hackney Somali Community
14. Police officers in Waltham Forest and Redbridge
15. Outreach worker for Redbridge Somali Consortium