



Somali Youth Speak Out Summit

Saturday 12th May 2018

Recommendation

Overview

In 2018, London witnessed a rise of violence that traumatised the Somali community. The rise in crime has accelerated, with the latest figures showing a 13% increase in all police-recorded offences across England and Wales, and an even greater rise of violent offences including knife crime and violence against individuals. In recent years, many Somali youths have been involved in gang related crimes and

some have sadly lost their lives or have been lured into the cycle of criminality.

Two events that took place in 2018 and deeply shook the community were the brutal and unfortunate deaths of 3 male Somali teens who were all from the same family. Fowsiya Abdi shared the news of the loss of her two sons and her nephew at a community knife crime meeting involving the police and local representatives and the MP at Ealing town hall. Another sad case which was shared the case of a 15 year old Somali Boy (Abdulkadir Maye) who was killed in an East London youth centre also a direct result of knife crime.

On Saturday 12th May 2018, Anti-tribalism hosted a 'Somali Youth speaks out' event to create a platform where members of the community came together to find ways in combating gang violence and most importantly how to reach the most vulnerable. The event encouraged open dialogue and critical thinking through group discussions.

Stakeholders such as Elays, Anti-tribalism movement, bright education, Mohammed Hashi, Isbeddel and Ahmed Jama shared their work and their concerns for the community and gave recommendations and solutions on specific topics, which were given to each table to consider. Their conversations were then shared collectively with the wider group which created opportunities for more open dialogue.

The aim of the event was to promote a better understanding of some of the root causes of gang violence, while also creating an awareness of the negative paths in life it can pave for individuals and also through giving communities' assistance and support by providing practical guidance on how they can keep their youth off the streets.

The youth summit explored the following topics and issued recommendations as a solution

Education

The Somali community have recognised that education plays some role in the recent rise of young Somalis becoming intertwined with criminal activity. Since arriving in the UK Somalis have experienced countless difficulties in navigating their way through the education system, this is commonly the where many young Somalis first experience discrimination and social exclusion. This is often as a result of language barrier, cultural differences and a lack of representation.

Education plays a significant role in determining the future of young people in the UK. It is often the case that young Somalis that fall into criminal activity have had a negative experience within the education system.

Despite the fact that, there are no real figures in the number of Somali school exclusions in London. There is a real concern within the community that Somali students, especially Somali boys are disproportionately over-represented within school exclusion figures. Participants have expressed concerns that Somali boys who are excluded from schools are at extreme risk of crime and gang involvement.

The following are some the barriers and challenges that were highlighted by the contributors to the education group.

- A lack of Somali representation within schools such as Teachers, school governors and Somali students on leader boards which can causes an increase of the exclusion of Somali students and a lack of understanding of cultural perspective and awareness of the community.
- A lack of support for Somali students with learning difficulties. It was recognised that Somali students were often diagnosed with learning difficulties quite late in their education years due to various external and internal factors. This has contributed to a lack of support and understanding amongst teachers and was often led to the dismissal of students with learning difficulties and them being labelled as 'trouble makers'.
- Members also recognised the impact of discrimination and prejudice and how many BME students are more likely to be excluded. It was suggested that teachers lack cultural understanding of the different barriers and challenges facing the Somali community. Therefore, black students in particular black male students are more likely to be portrayed as being aggressive or non conforming.
- The lack of integration within the Somali community was also identified as a challenge. As the absence of parental involvement in children's education which contributes to the low attainment of young Somali students. British-Somalis struggle to provide support to their children's education as a result of poor understanding of how the system works. Therefore, many young Somalis are often neglected both at home and in the school.

- Another key discovery which was highlighted as a barrier to education attainment was poor housing conditions within Somali household. Somali students who come from low social-economic backgrounds were identified as being at risk of low education attainment and exclusion. Poor housing conditions not only impacted the performance of Somali students but also the types of opportunities that they can access.
- Participants also emphasised the lack of alternative opportunities for young Somalis who opt out of the education route.

Recommendations

- Schools can adopt a number of strategies to overcome some of the barriers to achievement, including parental engagement, effective use of Somali teachers, developing an inclusive ethos and inclusive curriculum, mentoring and monitoring performance of Somali pupils.
- To encourage more Somali representatives through providing opportunities to connect with board members and also become a board member within their children's schools.
- To encourage Somali parents to become more active in school extra curricular activities and to become more supportive in their children's education.
- Encourage teachers to become more aware of the different challenges and barriers facing young Somali students.
- To create afterschool clubs in Somali community centres.



Youth Unemployment

The Youth summit also recognised that a lack of employment opportunities was another key factor as to why many young Somalis are either resulting to criminality or struggling to leave or dissociate themselves from gangs. Youth unemployment in the UK is a huge problem, however participants have highlighted that there has been an

increase in youth unemployment within the Somali community. The following are some of the key issues which were highlighted:

Key points

- Many young Somalis involved in criminal activity lack opportunities and are not encouraged to gain work experience or seek employment early on.
- Young Somalis lack work experience, and the necessary skills needed to prosper in the employment field.
- There is a lack of role models, particularly for young Somali males who have become used to seeing the older generations reliance on the welfare system.
- It was also acknowledged that young Somali females were more encouraged to develop a strong work ethic due to a culturally ingrained belief that Somali women needed to be strong, Thus, allowing Somali girls to cultivate better coping skills. While Somali parents, particularly mothers are often biased towards their sons due to the deep rooted belief of a patriarchal system whereby males hold a social privilege, as a result Somali boys being spoon fed by mothers and often have no male figure to lean on, this has contributed to them t be less equipped with the necessary knowledge and ability to manage day to day life.
- Many young Somalis were inspired by the quick money lifestyle that is portrayed by the music industry.

Many young people are in fact living in relative poverty, and struggle to make ends meet so they resort to illegal activity.

- Young Somalis have experienced forms of discrimination when applying for jobs due to having multiple identities such as being black, Muslim, and female etc.

Recommendations:

1. To provide opportunities and help young Somalis to gain work experience or internships in charities or business.
2. To provide an early intervention strategy to prevent young Somalis in becoming vulnerable to illegal activities by showing them other routes to accessing money.
3. To conduct further research into the barriers and challenges that young people are experiencing when finding employment.

Family

The role of family was identified as another key factor relating to the issue of gang violence. While it has been acknowledged that Somali families experience different barriers depending on the location and social-economic opportunities. It has also been highlighted that there

are other common trends within Somali households which contribute to the increase in vulnerability of young Somalis. Participants have recognised that young Somalis who fall into criminal activity tend to come from broken families. It is often the case that this is because there is an absence of a father figure.

Another key issue that was highlighted was cultural misunderstanding and the breakdown of traditional family structures. Participants have emphasised the need to address some of the following issues which can be linked to the vulnerability of many young Somalis;

- Barriers between parents and children: Somali parents might not understand the problems that young people experience, this often causes a lack of communication between the generations.
- The breakdown of a family structure causes young Somalis to be exposed to feelings of isolation. Participants have highlighted the lack of male role models for young Somali boys.
- Somali parents are also struggling to navigate within society. It was suggested that most Somali parents lack an understanding of the law. This means that Somali parents often fail to recognise the signs of criminal involvement.
- Participants also recognised that Somali parents show more leniency to Somali boys compared to girls as a result of cultural factors. This plays a role in why Somali boys are more likely to fall into criminal activity.
- Mental health and addiction was also highlighted as a key issue in why young Somalis are vulnerable. While there is a lack of data highlighting the actual number of those who suffer from mental health difficulties. Participants expressed concerns that there has been a rise in mental health issues within Somali households. Those growing up with parents who suffer from mental health and addiction are forced to mature much quicker than their peers.
- Poverty was also identified as another reason why young Somalis are more likely to be exposed to criminality. Due to the social-economic disadvantage of Somali families, young people are more drawn to the expensive lifestyle that is portrayed through mainstream music videos and social media. Due to the limited financial capacity of parents, disenfranchised youth become more inclined to finding quick ways of earning money.

- Participants also emphasised that the demographic location of many Somali families living in London played a role in why young Somalis are more likely to be exposed to gangs and criminal activities. Many Somali families tend to come from areas in London that are high in socio-economic deprivation, as a result of government cuts and changes and a deficiency of community centres and youth clubs, many young BME teenagers find themselves on the streets.

Recommendations:

- To create a parental guidance programme that acts as a bridge between Somali parents and children. Through these parental guidance programmes Somali parents can learn about different approaches in how they can support their children.
- To explore the role of family structures as a factor within criminal activity with the involvement of Somali organisations and key stakeholders.

Institutional racism



Participants of the youth summit also recognised Institutional racism as a factor to why many young Somalis are experiencing bad encounters with the police. The Somali community have expressed concerns about the mistreatment of young Somalis boy by community officers, who have expressed that they often feel targeted. The following have been identified as key areas of concern, which should be further explored by key stakeholders.

- Racial profiling is likely to increase community tension and discontent between the police and minority communities e.g. stop and search.
- Participants highlighted that in many cases police officers would mistreatment Somalis boys during stop and search. Further highlighting the use of intimation as a practice to taunt Somalis boys.

- Somali mothers have also highlighted the mistreatment and disrespect shown by police officers during home raids.

Recommendations

- To cultivate better engagement between the MET police and the Somali community to discuss matters of racism and discrimination.
- To encourage Somalis community workers to play a key role in the decision-making within local authority bodies.
- To examine the role played by the police when implementing stop and search protocols and home raids.
- To ensure that the police are regularly monitoring how officers implement home raids and stop and search protocols, particularly when stopping young people.