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Unaccompanied Somali girls in Sweden – a follow up study

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European Refugee Fund



The first study 1999, in summary



- Interviews with 14 unaccompanied Somali girls
- Father died
- Mother difficulties to manage the situation
- Afraid of rape of the girls





- Choose one child – to survive
- Collected money – smuggler
- Knew nothing about Sweden

- Good experiences of the reception in Sweden
- Longed for mother





- The picture of the Somali women did not correspond to our experience
- Financial support from European Refugee Fund (ERF)



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Aim



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To identify important factors for good reception
and integration of unaccompanied children in
Sweden

Focus on successes more than problems



Method



- Individual interviews with 6 of the women in previous study
- Interviews with 6 other women who arrived in Sweden as unaccompanied children
- Had been in Sweden 6 – 24 years
- Nima Ismail cultural bridge
- Thematic analysis



How has your life been in Sweden so far?

- **All women thought they had succeeded with their life in Sweden**

“ I think I have fulfilled some of my dreams, like educated myself. I feel part of the society”

- **All but one had a family with children**





Sweden and Swedish people



- Running people with a singing language
- Dead trees
- Darkness





Housing



- **Important not to change place to stay**

"One should come to the place where one is supposed to stay... then one do not need to change school and friends"

"It is hard for a child to meet new adults all the time. They have already met so many"

- **Good to live in a small place**

- **Difficult to become 18 years old - supposed to manage on their own**



Staff



- **Some staff in the group homes had been engaged**
- **Many others needed education about Somalia, a country in war, the culture etc.**

“I thought ‘Do they not know why Somali people come to Sweden?’”



Key persons in their life

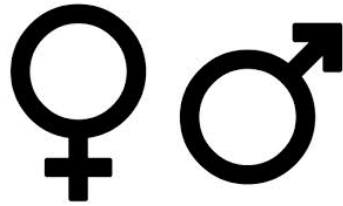


"She was like an extra mum, encouraged us all the time, believed we would manage"

" He saw each individual, the possibilities"

Could be: teachers, social workers, foster mother, etc.

Today: key persons for newcomers



Gender



- **Girls manage better than boys**

“Girls are taught to take care of themselves and others”

“Boys can continue to play”

- **Appreciate the freedom for women**
- **More equal than Swedish women today?**



Work



Difficult to get a work when one wears a veil

*“When I applied for a job in 2004 ...they said :
‘You will meet customers. You will represent the
company. Have you thought about that?’... So I
took off the veil and immediately, two employers
wanted to employ me. It did not feel all right”*

Today they work as:

Nurse, medical doctor, social worker, economist, teachers of different kind, doctoral student etc.



Health care system



Good general treatment

Did not understand the system

"I did not know what maternal health care was"

Need different kind of information

"It is meaningless if you do not adapt the information to the pre-knowledge of the target group"





Conceptual framework for integration

(Ager and Strang, 2008)

Markers

And

Means

Employment

Housing

Education

Health

**Social
Connection**

Bridges

Bonds

Links

Facilitators

Language
Cultural knowledge

Safety
stability

Foundation

Rights
citizenship



Important factors

Mama



Came from stable families

“ We had a good childhood. We had loving parents. We received a stable foundation and it was very good. I think that has helped us very much”



Mothers - role models

- educated
- business women
- took care of family



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Important factors **Swedish people**



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**Met engaged person/s
who encouraged and
supported them**

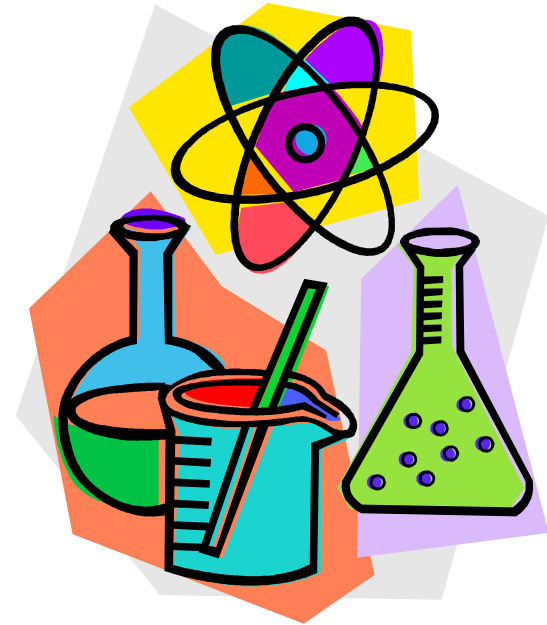




Important factors

Strong motivation

- to fulfil mother's expectations
- to educate themselves and manage on their own
"I had a goal - to get an education"





Recommendations from the women



- **Key person to relate to “a parent” (Somali if possible)**
- **Appreciate them as strong individuals, not as a group**
- **Do not let them move too much between places**
- **Educate the staff in the group homes**
- **See the women as resources not problems!**



To feel integrated



Football match Sweden – Somalia

” I would say Sweden since my children often play football “

” Spontaneously I would support Somalia, because I will always be a Somali”