Educational and Occupational Outcomes Amongst African Men From Refugee Backgrounds Living in Urban and Regional Southeast Queensland

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Abstract
Over the last ten years, approximately one third of refugee and humanitarian entrants to Australia have been adult men. To date, little research has been done on their health and settlement issues. Many of these men have come from the African continent. This paper reports on the educational and employment outcomes of a group of 173 recently arrived adult African men from refugee backgrounds who have settled in Southeast Queensland. Given the current government policy focus on regional resettlement, the paper compares key outcomes between the adult African men who settled in metropolitan Brisbane with those living in the Toowoomba-Gatton region. The study uses a peer interviewer model and a mixed method approach. Overall, we have found that African men who have settled in regional areas face significantly greater educational and occupational challenges than those who settled in the urban area. They report more negative experiences at educational institutions, are more likely to take jobs that are below their level of skills and qualifications, are more dissatisfied with their jobs, and report greater discrimination and difficulties while trying to secure adequate employment in Australia. A number of policy implications are discussed.

Background
Australia has continued to benefit from the human, social and economic capital contributed by immigrant resettlement over many years.\(^1\) Approximately 116 000 people have entered Australia under the refugee and humanitarian resettlement program over the last ten years; around one third have come from the African continent.\(^2\) Even though about 30% of all humanitarian entrants to Australia have been men aged 18 years and over, very little is known about the health and settlement issues faced by this population group. This is a significant gap given the emerging evidence from health care and welfare organisations regarding the range of social issues that impact on the wellbeing of men from

1 Carrington, Kerry, Alison McIntosh, and Jim Walmsley, eds. The Social Costs and Benefits of Migration into Australia (Armidale, NSW: Centre for Applied Research in Social Science (CARSS), University of New England, 2007)
refugee backgrounds which are not being adequately addressed by settlement services and programs.\(^3\)

In response to the 2003 evaluation of the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS),\(^4\) which recommended to seek further opportunities to settle humanitarian entrants in regional Australia, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) has since encouraged regional settlement to “address the demand for less skilled labour in regional economies and to assist humanitarian entrants to achieve early employment.”\(^5\) There is emerging evidence, however, of the many challenges faced by humanitarian arrivals living in regional areas.\(^6\) To date, no comparison of settlement outcomes has been undertaken between those refugee and humanitarian arrivals settling in urban areas and those living in regional areas. This paper focuses on the educational and occupational outcomes among 173 adult African men from refugee backgrounds and compares these outcomes between those men living in Brisbane and those living in the Toowoomba-Gatton region in Southeast Queensland.

**Methods**

*Study design:* The findings reported here are part of the SettleMEN project, a 2-year longitudinal investigation of the health and settlement experiences of recently arrived adult men from refugee backgrounds living in Southeast Queensland. The study uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. Ethics approval was obtained from the La Trobe University Human Ethics Committee.

*Participants:* The SettleMEN study used a quota sampling strategy, a non-random technique aiming at ensuring that participants were representative (at least in terms of age and region of birth) of the overall population of adult men from refugee backgrounds who arrived in Australia between 2004 and 2008, and settled in the Brisbane and Toowoomba-Gatton regions. The study used a peer interviewer research model, where eligible participants were recruited by trained research assistants from the same ethnic or cultural communities. Potential participants were informed about the study and those who agreed to participate were asked to sign a consent form. This paper specifically compares the educational and employment outcomes of the 173 African participants who were recruited at baseline.


\(^5\) DIMIA (2003: 9)

\(^6\) Taylor, Janet, and Dayane Stanovic. “Refugees and Regional Settlement: Balancing Priorities.” (Fitzroy, VIC: Brotherhood of St. Laurence, 2005); and Carrington et al. (2007)
Data collection: Prior to data collection, research assistants were trained in principles of research methods and ethical conduct of research. Surveys were administered face-to-face to participants either in the participant’s first language or in English if this was their preferred language. The majority of interviews took place at participants’ homes or in community venues. Interview sessions took an average of two hours.

Survey instruments: The SettleMEN survey included five sections: (i) sociodemographic information; (ii) education and employment; (iii) health and wellbeing; (iv) family and social support; and (v) life in Australia. This paper focuses on education and employment issues. A number of items were developed to assess participants’ educational outcomes both overseas and in Australia, whether or not they were involved in any studies at the time of the interview, and their perceived academic performance. A 2-item ‘educational aspirations’ scale was adapted from Rumbaut. The scale assessed the highest level of education the respondent would like to attain in Australia and the highest level realistically expected. Scores ranged from 1 (no more studies in Australia) to 5 (postgraduate degree). The scale reported a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.91. For the purpose of this analysis, the scale was dichotomised into 1 = low educational aspirations (lower tertile) and 2 = high educational aspirations (upper tertiles). A 7-item ‘positive educational experiences’ scale was developed from previous research with African students from refugee backgrounds enrolled in a tertiary education institution in Brisbane, Australia. The items assessed respondents’ learning difficulties including literacy, numeracy, computer skills and English language abilities, interaction with and support from teachers/lecturers, and experiences of discrimination from lectures and fellow students while studying at Australian educational institutions. Scores ranged from 7 (largely negative experiences) to 35 (largely positive experiences). The scale reported a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.65. For this analysis, the scale was dichotomised into 1 = mostly negative experiences (lower tertile) and 2 = largely positive experiences (upper tertiles).

The employment section included items assessing current employment status, perceived work performance, whether or not overseas skills or qualifications had been recognised in Australia, appropriateness of current job to the level of previous skills and qualifications, weekly total income, and satisfaction with financial situation. Also items assessing difficulties finding or securing adequate employment such as discrimination, problems getting qualifications recognised, requirement to have Australian work experience, requirement to have referees in Australia, lack of opportunities for work experience in refugee

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8 Onsando, Gerald. “Experiences of African Refugee Students at TAFE: A Phenomenological Study.” (Griffith University, 2007)
camps, breaks in working life, difficulties getting promoted, and necessity of having a car were included. Most of the items about employment were adapted from previous research conducted in Western Australia with recently arrived refugees. Respondents’ satisfaction with their current job was assessed using the 6-item ‘job satisfaction index’, which examines satisfaction with the nature of the work, organisational supervisor, interaction with co-workers, payment, opportunities for promotion, and overall satisfaction. Scores for this index ranged from 6 (very dissatisfied) to 30 (very satisfied). The index reported a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.85. The job satisfaction index was dichotomised into 1 = dissatisfied (lower tertile) and 2 = satisfied (upper tertiles) for the purpose of this analysis.

**Statistical analyses:** Differences in demographic and outcome variables between the two areas of settlement were assessed using chi-square tests for categorical variables. For binary variables, 95% binomial confidence intervals (CIs) were generated using Wilson’s procedure. Analyses were performed using version 15.0 of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences.

**Findings**

*Participants’ socio-demographic characteristics:* Of the 173 African men from refugee backgrounds, 116 (67%) were living in Brisbane, and 57 (33%) in the Toowoomba-Gatton region. Overall, 118 (68%) of participants were born in Sudan, 22 (13%) in Burundi, 15 (9%) in Democratic Republic of Congo, 10 (6%) in Rwanda, 5 (3%) in Liberia, and the remaining three were born in Congo-Brazzaville, Tanzania and Uganda. All but one participant living in the Toowoomba-Gatton region were born in Sudan. Participants’ ages ranged from 18 to 69 years (Mean = 30.9; Standard Deviation = 9.0). Their time since arriving in Australia ranged from less than one month to 57 months (Mean = 28.9; Standard Deviation = 14.9). Three quarters of participants reported good levels of English language proficiency at the time of the interview. Table 1 compares key demographic characteristics of participants by place of settlement.

Compared to those participants living in the city, men living in the regional area were significantly more likely to have spent most of their lives (before arriving in Australia) in a rural area (40% vs. 24%; P = 0.046), had lived longer

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12 SPSS, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Version 15. (SPSS Inc., Chicago)
in Australia (74% vs. 56% had lived in Australia for more than two years; \( P = 0.022 \); Difference [95% CI] = 18% [2, 32]), and reported better spoken English language proficiency (86% vs. 72%; \( P = 0.036 \); Difference [95% CI] = 14% [0, 31]).

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of recently arrived African men from refugee backgrounds by place of settlement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic*</th>
<th>Overall N = 173 (100%)</th>
<th>Urban N = 116 (67%)</th>
<th>Regional N = 57 (33%)</th>
<th>( P ) value**</th>
<th>Difference [95% CI]***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lived most of his life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City</td>
<td>45 (27%)</td>
<td>35 (31%)</td>
<td>10 (18%)</td>
<td>( P = 0.046 )</td>
<td>4% [−7, 19]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural area</td>
<td>50 (29%)</td>
<td>27 (24%)</td>
<td>23 (40%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee camp</td>
<td>75 (44%)</td>
<td>51 (45%)</td>
<td>24 (42%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age categories</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 to 39 years</td>
<td>145 (84%)</td>
<td>99 (85%)</td>
<td>46 (81%)</td>
<td>( P = 0.436 )</td>
<td>4% [-7.19]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 years and over</td>
<td>28 (16%)</td>
<td>17 (15%)</td>
<td>11 (19%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time since arriving in Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 years or less</td>
<td>66 (38%)</td>
<td>51 (44%)</td>
<td>15 (26%)</td>
<td>( P = 0.022 )</td>
<td>18% [2, 32]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 2 years</td>
<td>106 (62%)</td>
<td>64 (56%)</td>
<td>42 (74%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language proficiency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>41 (24%)</td>
<td>33 (28%)</td>
<td>8 (14%)</td>
<td>( P = 0.036 )</td>
<td>14% [0, 31]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>132 (76%)</td>
<td>83 (72%)</td>
<td>49 (86%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Valid cases; ** Chi-square tests for categorical variables; *** Binomial confidence intervals (CI) for binary variables

Educational outcomes: The main educational outcomes by place of settlement are shown in Table 2. Approximately half of the participants had completed high school overseas and 12% had an overseas college, trade or university qualification. Thirty eight percent had completed an English certificate and 14% had either a TAFE, college, trade or university degree from Australia. Participants’ educational aspirations were high with 92% of them wanting to obtain at least an apprenticeship or TAFE diploma. Fifty seven percent of the men were currently enrolled at an educational institution in Australia; of the 57%, 45% were undertaking a TAFE, college, trade or university degree. Just above 90% considered their academic performance either average or above average. Of those men who had been or were currently enrolled in an Australian educational institution, 45% rated their educational experiences in Australia as mostly negative.
Table 2: Educational outcomes among African men from refugee backgrounds by place of settlement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational outcome*</th>
<th>Overall N = 173 (100%)</th>
<th>Urban N = 116 (67%)</th>
<th>Regional N = 57 (33%)</th>
<th>P value** Difference [95%CI]***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highest educational level completed overseas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None/Primary school</td>
<td>61 (36%)</td>
<td>38 (33%)</td>
<td>23 (40%)</td>
<td>P = 0.045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary/High school</td>
<td>88 (52%)</td>
<td>56 (50%)</td>
<td>32 (56%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College/Trade/University</td>
<td>21 (12%)</td>
<td>19 (17%)</td>
<td>2 (4%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest educational level completed in Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None/Primary school</td>
<td>62 (36%)</td>
<td>39 (34%)</td>
<td>23 (40%)</td>
<td>P = 0.262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school</td>
<td>21 (12%)</td>
<td>15 (13%)</td>
<td>6 (11%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Certificate</td>
<td>65 (38%)</td>
<td>41 (36%)</td>
<td>24 (42%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE/College/Trade/University</td>
<td>24 (14%)</td>
<td>20 (17%)</td>
<td>4 (7%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational aspirations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>14 (8%)</td>
<td>12 (10%)</td>
<td>2 (3%)</td>
<td>P = 0.147 7% [-4, 15]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>158 (92%)</td>
<td>103 (90%)</td>
<td>55 (97%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently studying?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>73 (43%)</td>
<td>48 (42%)</td>
<td>25 (44%)</td>
<td>P = 0.827 2% [-14, 18]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>98 (57%)</td>
<td>66 (58%)</td>
<td>32 (56%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of educational institution currently attending****</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school/English course</td>
<td>54 (55%)</td>
<td>43 (65%)</td>
<td>11 (34%)</td>
<td>P = 0.004 31% [8, 50]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE/College/Trade/University (other than English course)</td>
<td>44 (45%)</td>
<td>23 (35%)</td>
<td>21 (66%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived academic performance****</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failing/below average</td>
<td>7 (7%)</td>
<td>6 (9%)</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
<td>P = 0.420 6% [-10, 17]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average/above average</td>
<td>90 (93%)</td>
<td>59 (91%)</td>
<td>31 (97%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational experiences in Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly negative</td>
<td>56 (45%)</td>
<td>34 (39%)</td>
<td>22 (63%)</td>
<td>P = 0.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Largely positive</td>
<td>67 (55%)</td>
<td>54 (61%)</td>
<td>13 (37%)</td>
<td>24% [3, 42]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Valid cases; ** Chi-square tests for categorical variables; *** Binomial confidence intervals (CI) for binary variables; **** Only those currently studying

When comparing across place of settlement, those participants settled in regional areas were significantly less likely to have completed an overseas college, trade or university degree (4% vs. 17%; P = 0.045), but more likely to be currently attending a TAFE, college, trade or a university course in Australia (66% vs. 35%; P = 0.004; Difference [95% CI] = 31% [8, 50]). Regional participants were also significantly more likely to have had mostly negative educational experiences while studying in Australia than those living in the urban area (63% vs. 39%; P = 0.015; Difference [95% CI] = 24% [3, 42]).

Occupational outcomes: Participants’ main occupations before arriving in Australia and currently by place of settlement are presented in Table 3. The most common occupations prior to arriving in Australia for both urban and
Regional participants were building/labourer/trade, community work, farming and teaching. Factory work (mainly in meat factories) was the most common current occupation for both groups of participants. Approximately one third of men living in the urban area and one third of those living in regional areas were working as labourers (building industry) and in farming (fruit/vegetable picking) respectively.

At the time of the interviews, 80 (46%) participants were unemployed (see Table 4). Among those who were employed (n=92), 61% were working more than 30 hours per week, 22% between 21 and 30 hours per week, and 17% were working 20 hours or less per week. Ninety one percent of those employed perceived their work performance as good, and 64% were satisfied with their jobs. Just over half of those who were employed believed that their current job was below their level of previous skills and qualifications.

Although half of the sample reported a total weekly income of less than $400, 57% of participants felt somewhat or mostly satisfied with their financial situation. When asked about whether or not they had experienced difficulties finding work in Australia, 57% of participants responded affirmatively. The most common barriers faced while trying to secure adequate employment in Australia were the requirement to have Australian work experience (66%), requirement to have referees in Australia (65%), necessity of having a car (60%), lack of opportunities for work experience in refugee camps (58%), difficulties getting promoted (48%), problems getting qualifications recognised (39%), and breaks in working life (38%). Only 18% of men had their previous qualifications/skills partially or fully recognised in Australia. Forty five percent reported having experienced discrimination while finding work or working in Australia. The most common reasons for discrimination were their accent (85% of those who had experienced discrimination), language ability (68%), physical appearance (63%), and their name (39%).

Participants living in regional areas were significantly more likely to consider their current job as being below their level of qualifications and skills (70% vs. 46%; P = 0.034; Difference [95% CI] = 24% [0, 44]), were more dissatisfied with their current job (67% vs. 22%; P < 0.001; Difference [95% CI] = 45% [20, 63]), had experienced more serious difficulties finding work in Australia (70% vs. 52%; P = 0.049; Difference [95% CI] = 18% [−1, 34]), had experienced more discrimination while finding work or working in Australia (77% vs. 32%; P < 0.001; Difference [95% CI] = 45% [26, 59]), and were less likely to have their previous qualifications recognised in Australia (0 vs 26%; P = 0.007; Difference [95% CI] = 26% [5, 41]).
Table 3: Occupation before arriving in Australia and current occupation among African men from refugee backgrounds by place of settlement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation before arriving in Australia</th>
<th>Urban (n=116)</th>
<th>Regional (n=57)</th>
<th>Current occupation</th>
<th>Urban (n=65)</th>
<th>Regional (n=27)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building/labourer/trade</td>
<td>19(16%)</td>
<td>Community worker</td>
<td>9 (16%)</td>
<td>Factory worker</td>
<td>21(32%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community worker</td>
<td>17(15%)</td>
<td>Teaching (school)</td>
<td>9 (16%)</td>
<td>Building/labourer/trade</td>
<td>19(29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farming</td>
<td>15(13%)</td>
<td>Building/labourer/trade</td>
<td>6 (11%)</td>
<td>Cleaning</td>
<td>4 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching (school)</td>
<td>11 (9%)</td>
<td>Farming</td>
<td>6 (11%)</td>
<td>Community worker</td>
<td>4 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business/sales</td>
<td>8 (7%)</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4 (7%)</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11(17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factory worker</td>
<td>7 (6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>5 (4%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>4 (3%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7 (6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student/Not stated</td>
<td>31(27%)</td>
<td>Student/Not stated</td>
<td>23(39%)</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>6 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>124*</td>
<td></td>
<td>57</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Some participants reported working in more than one occupation before arriving in Australia
Table 4: Occupational outcomes among African men from refugee backgrounds by place of settlement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational outcome*</th>
<th>Overall N = 173 (100%)</th>
<th>Urban N = 116 (67%)</th>
<th>Regional N = 57 (33%)</th>
<th>P value** Difference [95% CI]***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current employment status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>92 (54%)</td>
<td>65 (56%)</td>
<td>27 (47%)</td>
<td>P = 0.275 9% [-7, 25]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>80 (46%)</td>
<td>50 (44%)</td>
<td>30 (53%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perceived work performance</strong>****</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>8 (9%)</td>
<td>5 (8%)</td>
<td>3 (11%)</td>
<td>P = 0.689 3% [-10, 23]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>84 (91%)</td>
<td>60 (92%)</td>
<td>24 (89%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How appropriate to level of skills/qualifications is current job?</strong>****</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate/Above level</td>
<td>42 (47%)</td>
<td>34 (54%)</td>
<td>8 (30%)</td>
<td>P = 0.034 24% [0, 44]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below level</td>
<td>48 (53%)</td>
<td>29 (46%)</td>
<td>19 (70%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Job satisfaction</strong>****</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfied</td>
<td>32 (36%)</td>
<td>14 (22%)</td>
<td>18 (67%)</td>
<td>P &lt; 0.001 45% [20, 63]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>58 (64%)</td>
<td>49 (78%)</td>
<td>9 (33%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weekly total income</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than $400</td>
<td>87 (51%)</td>
<td>54 (47%)</td>
<td>33 (59%)</td>
<td>P = 0.156 12% [-5, 27]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$400 or more</td>
<td>83 (49%)</td>
<td>60 (53%)</td>
<td>23 (41%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Satisfaction with financial situation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfied</td>
<td>72 (43%)</td>
<td>47 (42%)</td>
<td>25 (44%)</td>
<td>P = 0.814 2% [-14, 18]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>97 (57%)</td>
<td>65 (58%)</td>
<td>32 (56%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Difficulties finding work in Australia</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all / a little</td>
<td>61 (43%)</td>
<td>48 (48%)</td>
<td>13 (30%)</td>
<td>P = 0.049 18% [-1, 34]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite a bit / extremely</td>
<td>82 (57%)</td>
<td>52 (52%)</td>
<td>30 (70%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overseas skills/qualifications recognised in Australia?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not recognised</td>
<td>58 (82%)</td>
<td>36 (74%)</td>
<td>22 (100%)</td>
<td>P = 0.007 26% [5, 41]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partially/fully recognised</td>
<td>13 (18%)</td>
<td>13 (26%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experienced discrimination while finding work/working in Australia</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>80 (55%)</td>
<td>70 (68%)</td>
<td>10 (23%)</td>
<td>P &lt; 0.001 45% [26, 59]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>66 (45%)</td>
<td>33 (32%)</td>
<td>33 (77%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Valid cases; ** Chi-square tests for categorical variables; *** Binomial confidence intervals (CI) for binary variables; **** Only those currently working

**Discussion**

Our research has shown that recently arrived adult African men from refugee backgrounds face a range of educational and occupational challenges upon resettlement. Overall, this group of African men report high levels of educational aspirations with many of them engaged in further studies, reporting good levels of perceived academic performance. However, a considerable number of those who have studied in Australia have had negative educational
experiences because of the unfamiliar socio-cultural environment and teaching methods, inadequate literacy, numeracy and computer skills, and difficulties in their interactions with peers and teachers.

This group also report high levels of unemployment and significant barriers while trying to secure work in Australia, including discrimination, requirements for Australian work experience and referees, and the necessity of having a car. Very few have been successful in obtaining recognition in Australia of their previous skills and qualifications. Most of those who are employed, work in low skilled and low paid occupations. Despite the fact that about half of the men had a total weekly income of less than $400, which was roughly the estimated poverty line for a single person in Australia in the 2008 September quarter, about 60% were satisfied with their financial situation. Moreover, having at least some sort of ‘safe’ income support (from welfare payments and work) can make a big difference if we consider the past experiences of dispossession and poverty during flight and displacement, and the long periods of time spent in refugee camps.

Some of our findings concur largely with the very few studies conducted in Australia to date investigating educational and employment outcomes among people from refugee backgrounds. Those studies have reported high levels of unemployment, significant structural disadvantages in the labour market including discrimination, and huge loss of human capital and occupational status. When compared with the African respondents (n=50) who participated in the study conducted by Colic-Peisker and Tilbury among 150 men and women from three different refugee communities (Former Yugoslavia, Africa and Middle East) who were settled in Perth, our study has found higher rates of unemployment, and a higher percentage of respondents who had experienced difficulties finding work and discrimination in the labour market. Colic-Peisker and Tilbury’s sample, however, had been longer in Australia (80% of Africans had lived in Australia for five years or more), and was skewed towards those with formal skills, functional English language levels, and who were or wanted to be part of the workforce. Our participants, in contrast, were recent arrivals (two and a half years in Australia on average), and our selection criteria did not include skills, language proficiency or workforce participation.

3 Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2007)
To our knowledge, this is the first Australian study that has quantitatively compared educational and occupational outcomes between recently arrived adult African men from refugee backgrounds resettling in urban and regional areas. Documenting settlement outcomes among this population group is of particular importance for two main reasons: (i) the African community is one of the main emerging communities in Australia, and (ii) the Australian government is currently focusing on regional settlement of humanitarian entrants. Overall, we have found that although those men settled in regional areas have been longer in Australia and report better levels of English language proficiency, they face significantly greater educational and occupational challenges than those settled in the urban area. A considerable number of these African men living in regional areas are engaged in tertiary/trade education aiming at improving their work prospects, but they are more likely to report negative experiences at their educational institutions. They are also more likely to report taking jobs that are below their level of skills and qualifications, are more dissatisfied with their jobs, report greater difficulties in accessing the labour market, and are more likely to experience discrimination while trying to secure employment in Australia. They are also less likely to have their previous skills and qualifications recognised in Australia than those men living in the urban region.

Our study has a number of limitations. First, we cannot claim that our sample of participants is representative of the overall population of recently arrived adult African men from refugee backgrounds. However, the quota sampling strategy used here has been quite successful in ensuring that our sample closely matches the population of African men from refugee backgrounds that settled in Brisbane and the Toowoomba-Gatton region between 2004 and 2008, at least in terms of age and country of origin. Second, although significant efforts were made to ensure consistency in the administration of the survey across participants from different ethnic and language backgrounds, such as the training of research assistants prior to undertaking the interviews, individual differences in interpretation could have occurred. Third, this is an observational study of refugee and humanitarian arrivals with no control group and therefore educational and employment outcomes cannot be compared with groups from other migration categories. The limited research conducted to date has found that humanitarian entrants face greater challenges in the labour market than entrants from other migration categories. Fourth, the regional component of our study interviewed men living in the Toowoomba-Gatton region and therefore may not be representative of other regional areas of humanitarian

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4 DIAC (Settlement Database, 2009)
6 DIAC (Settlement Database, 2009)
7 Richardson et al. (2004)
settlement around Australia. However, previous research across different regional areas has identified similar issues.\textsuperscript{8} Lastly, the current economic downturn and rise in unemployment currently being experienced in Australia and elsewhere may have impacted on the levels of unemployment and on the reporting of barriers to access the labour market. Nonetheless, previous studies conducted during stronger economic times and lower unemployment levels have showed similar findings.\textsuperscript{9}

**Conclusions and policy implications**

The overriding message from these findings is that recently arrived adult African men from refugee backgrounds face serious barriers and disadvantages when accessing the educational and labour markets in Australia. Those settled in regional areas face even greater disadvantages. Meaningful education and employment outcomes are fundamental for the wellbeing and social inclusion of refugee communities. The high levels of unemployment and the fact that about three-quarters of those men living in regional areas felt they had experienced discrimination and difficulties in accessing the labour market provides a grim picture of the viability of regional resettlement. These barriers should be adequately addressed at the host community, policy and service provision levels for a regional settlement program to succeed. Although policy recommendations to address these issues have been repeatedly made over recent years,\textsuperscript{10} the situation in the field seems not to have improved or may be even getting worse. Stronger and more effective policies and programs need to be developed to enhance the role that host communities (including educational institutions and employers) play in supporting the successful settlement of emerging refugee communities. Regional educational and employment services and programs that address the particular needs of men from refugee backgrounds and their families, including issues of discrimination and social exclusion, are required.

A recent review of regional refugee initiatives in Victoria concluded that these initiatives “have the potential to provide ‘win-win’ benefits to refugee communities and host communities if care is taken to ensure a well-planned, well-integrated and well-resourced approach.”\textsuperscript{11} Our findings indicate that, at least within an educational and occupational context, this approach has yet to benefit African men from refugee backgrounds.

\textsuperscript{8} Taylor and Stanovic (2005): Carrington et al. (2007)
\textsuperscript{9} Taylor and Stanovic (2005): Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2007)
\textsuperscript{11} McDonald, Brooke, Sandy Gifford, Kim Webster, John Wiseman, and Sue Casey. “Refugee Resettlement in Regional and Rural Victoria: Impacts and Policy Issues.” (Melbourne: Refugee Health Research Centre, La Trobe University, 2008: 8)
Acknowledgments

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Bibliography


