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## The Impact of Intergenerational Trauma and Structural Abandonment on Somali Youth's Agency and Migration Aspirations

Muktar Abdi Hussein<sup>\*</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

This paper looks at the role of intergenerational trauma and systematic neglect on the sense of agency of Somali youth and how these affect their plans to migrate- often through hazardous and irregular pathways. Using survey respondents of 50 youth in Mogadishu who either tried irregular migration or are potential migrants, the study revealed that migration is not necessarily tied to economic benefit but rather to address the psychological trauma and institutional void left in their inheritance. Findings have shown that there is a lot of exposure to conflict, displacement, and loss of family, which leads to a profound feeling of psychological burden and invisibility. Migration goals are closely connected to structural neglect, either in terms of access to education, healthcare, legal identity and protection; perceived agency has proven to be the most important predictor. Instead of passive victims, the young Somali people are agents created in crisis, and they view migration as a courageous action, reclaiming identity and opposing invisibility in the system. The research presents the Belonging-as-Survival model, which is the relocation of migration discourse beyond securitization and economic preoccupation and the enigma of mobility as dignity seeking, recognition, and the right to be a human being. The paper proposes policy interventions such as urging changes to address the issues by expanding safe and legal migration pathways, investing in culturally competent mental health care and making Somali youth an active participant in the solutions. Finally, this study reinvents the so-called migration crisis as a crisis of belonging--and demands a more global response based on justice, not deterrence.

### INTRODUCTION

This research aims to look at the role of intergenerational trauma and systematic neglect in shaping the sense of agency among Somali youth, which leads to their dreams of migration. The study will be used to address a gap in the literature since there is no known relationship between migration, intergenerational trauma, and systemic neglect as of today. When discussing communities affected by conflict and displacement, we cannot overlook the role of past injustices and the existing societal order in the ongoing debate on migration and identity.

The Somalia community, which has been significantly impacted by decades of violence and the perception of asylum and migration by the world, is an ideal case study to comprehend how these factors play a role in shaping the ambitions of youth. According to recent research, the trauma of the older generations is reflected in the present, which determines how young Somali generations understand themselves, their behaviors, and their opportunities not only in their country but also in other countries (Darby *et al.*, 2024; Parmar *et al.*, 2023).

To understand the importance of this study in its entirety, we need to refer to two major notions: the psychological consequences of trauma that cannot be forgotten and the negligence that is often perpetuated by the system towards marginalized communities. Historians have demonstrated how war, famine and widespread immigration have shaped the identity of Somalia, both in loss and in endurance (Trujillo, 2021; Denov *et al.*, 2019). This historical context

has a notable effect on young people who grow up in such situations with different levels of influence on their lives, and such influence is usually shaped by the narratives they get in their families and communities (Abdi *et al.*, 2023). Besides, the entire idea of systemic abandonment helps to develop a sense of hopelessness and powerlessness in young Somali people, which once again makes it difficult to foresee the future of these individuals (Kilbride *et al.*, 2023; Hartonen *et al.*, 2021). It is by the intersection of these two notions: intergenerational trauma and systemic neglect, that a very vital field of research is created in which the psycho-sociological and structural elements must be considered in an attempt to comprehend why youths might want to migrate.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the African Youth Charter, a rights-based policy framework adopted by the African Union (AU) to ensure that young people on the continent are empowered, developed, and fully participate, the term youth is defined as any person between 15 and 35 years of age and youth are not passive recipients but primary drivers of the peace, prosperity, and sustainable development of Africa (African Union, 2006).

The Horn of Africa is a region marked by a young demographic, prolonged displacement, economic instability, and climate vulnerability, which often leads to youth migration. IOM specifically rejects characterizing youth migration as a crisis or security threat, instead

<sup>1</sup> Independent Researcher, Somalia

<sup>\*</sup> Corresponding author's e-mail: [muktarfodey3@gmail.com](mailto:muktarfodey3@gmail.com)

viewing it as a potential catalyst for development - when it occurs safely, orderly, and with dignity. Migration within the region and across borders has historically been a way for youth to sustain themselves and is sometimes used to combat poverty, access education, or escape conflict and environmental shocks. It emphasizes that migration can have positive effects on both sending and receiving communities through remittances, skill transfer, and diaspora involvement (IOM, 2021).

Despite its long history of war, climate disasters, abject poverty, and elevated unemployment rates among the youth, Somalia serves as a key source, passage, and destination nation by international migration, and the relative stability has led to the resettlement of more than 137000 refugees and thousands of economic migrants since 2014. Nevertheless, the process of reintegration is undermined by the lack of state capacity, stigma, and support systems (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, 2023).

Literacy and school enrolment in Somalia is in a critical situation, and especially among girls and nomadic groups, with no more than 40 per cent of the population aged 15 and above literate, with a large proportion of young people way beyond their grade level. To make these educational difficulties more serious, early marriages are also common, with 15-17-year-old girls being the most likely to experience this problem: 9.4% of them have ever been married, in contrast to only 4.9% of boys. This weakness is further complicated by the fact that the youth lead 42 per cent of all households though most lack formal education which diminishes their ability to earn decent livelihoods. Despite the 60% youth contribution to the labour force, unemployment rates are high among youth (33% between ages 15-24) and workers within the informal or primary sectors are youth; despite tertiary-educated youth having trouble securing employment that matches their qualifications. Consequently, internal migration, and international movement, such as risky irregular migration referred to as *Tahriib*, is a norm due to conflict, drought, unemployment, and the hope of better opportunities in the foreign country. Young people are significantly out of the political and economic decision-making despite their numbers and promise, due to the established system of corruptionibility based on clan rules, severe gender regulations, and lack of inclusive forums, where their active participation may be meaningful (United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA] Somalia, 2015).

The National Youth Policy of the Federal Government of Somalia acknowledges the youth bulge of Somalia: 81% of the population is below 35 years of age; and considers youth as a value rather than a liability when empowered (FGS, 2017). It also helps to deal with root causes of irregular migration, violent extremism, and unemployment and connect them to systemic failures instead of individual inadequacies. Although the policy mentions such psychological stressors as khat addiction and exposure to violence, it does not work with the

concept of intergenerational trauma which is an essential gap when considering the years of civil war, displacement, and state collapse in Somalia (Federal Government of Somalia. (2017).

An outflow of Somali youth across the Mediterranean Sea often at fatal cost is being increasingly viewed not as a resultant effect of economic desperation in itself, but rather as a more complicated reaction to long-standing psychological and structural fractures. The human cost of irregular migration across Mediterranean Sea especially to vulnerable groups such as Somali youth cannot be overstated as adolescents have to undergo inhumane conditions: imprisonment in deplorable institutions, rape, blackmail, famine, and perilous journeys in over-congested and unreliable ships. Migration is not voluntary but rather of desperation - because of war, climate collapse, state failure, and lack of safe legal means. To most of the Somali youths, crossing the Mediterranean is the sole solution to the recurring trauma, desertion, and systemic disappearance (Medecins Sans Frontieres, 2015). Urban social media has a complicated and ambivalent position in the development of the aspirations and the sense of (im)mobility among the youth. Although social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram feed the aspiration to migrate with their portrayal of a curated image of the diasporic life, including dreams of success, romance, and opportunity, they also expose their users to serious digital threats, including refined scams, fake news, and blackmail schemes that leverage people's dreams of mobility. These are digital threats that have disparate effects on people who are already disadvantaged in terms of limited legal migration routes, indicating how connectivity may reproduce instead of decreasing structural inequalities (Chonka, P. (2024)

According to recent studies, the Somali young people not only carry with them the effects of loss, but also somatic and emotional trauma that characterize their migration desires and identify them (Cavallera *et al.*, 2016; Darby *et al.*, 2024). The fact that the NYP lays stress on the concepts of patriotism and Islamic values as the safeguarding elements jeopardizes the process of interpreting the complicated psychosocial reality and making the youth who would prefer to find their dignity beyond the national boundaries pathological. Anyone who is also an advocate of the youth agency and, according to the position, wants to minimize illegal immigration by means of deterrence messages and using the diaspora testimonials (FGS, 2017). That implies the latent dimension of tension: despite the labelling of youth as the change makers, their wish to leave the country is framed as a loss to the state and not a right to dignity and existence. This is contrary to the emerging scholarship defining migration as a sovereign act, when it concerns a structural abandonment.

It is a preexisting conflict and the emergence of the militant group, Al-Shabaab combined with the decades of violence that have resulted in psychological trauma in communities in Somalia, affecting not only those directly affected but also the generations to come. Some advocates

urge a change in the views of the international community towards Somalia and demand attention to the healing and resilience aspect as opposed to overwhelming attention to security issues (The New Humanitarian, 2023).

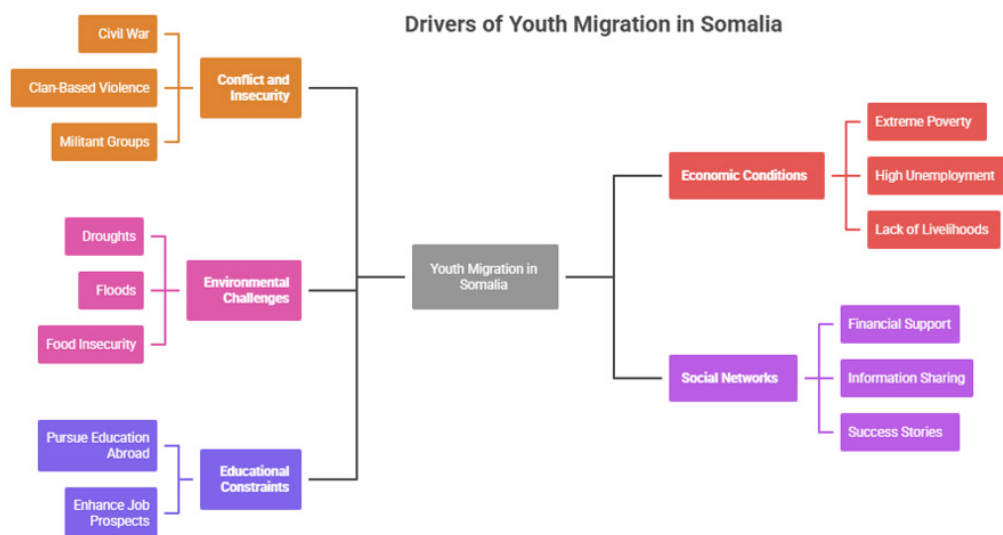
Cavallera *et al.* (2016) believe that the combination of intergenerational trauma caused by civil war and state collapse and the ubiquitous structural abandonment of national institutions by both national and international actors, alongside the strengthening of reliance on clan networks and Islamic healing rituals such as Qur'anic recitation (cilaaj) and spirit possession rituals (saar) has undermined social support systems and bolstered such dependency. Of greater importance, the authors claim that migration desires among Somali young people are not just economic but existential forms of resistance against the erasure and invisibility of the system, in which emigrating is seen as the sole option toward recovering dignity and personhood.

The forced displacement has the effect of affecting the migration intentions of the next generation, and these experiences result in the intergenerational passing of the so-called family migration capital. People whose parents or grandparents were forced to leave their homeland are much more likely to say that they also have an intention to migrate, decades later. This observation confirms the hypothesis that migration capital, which is a collection of skills, attitudes, social norms, and a taste towards portable goods, such as education, is accumulated during the disruptive experience of forced migration and transmitted and that future migration appears more viable and normative to descendants and that forced migration is less self-selected than voluntary migration, it gives more reasons to believe that migration capital exists

and has been transmitted.

Some of the reasons that are contributing to the growing number of migrants include armed conflict, human rights abuse and economic opportunities particularly in the perilous journey between Puntland and Yemen, encounter human rights abuse and insecurity (Mixed Migration Task Force Somalia, 2008). The International Organization of Migration (IOM) in its report titled the World Migration Report 2024 provides an overview of the migration patterns all over the globe with a keen interest in the complexity of migration on the basis of various factors such as climate change, human security, and gender-based factors. It also indicates how migration can be a cause and a solution to the socio-economic issues and that is why there is a need to understand the complexity of the relationship between migration, development and security. Findings also show that occupational opportunities, social factors, and climate-related issues (17%) are the main causes of migration (Salam & Kiron, 2024).

The role of the Mediterranean Sea as a location of violence against migrants, where the European border policies have transformed it into the most hazardous migration path in the world, has not gone unnoticed. The Mediterranean is an actor and bystander of necropolitical strategies employed by European states to deter immigration leading to the death and loss of millions of migrants. Securitization policies have uniquely been interwoven into national humanitarian discourses that capture the way that both these frames have continued to perpetuate violence and invisibility of migrants and allow European institutions to evade responsibility over the tragedies that they bring (Motte, 2024).



**Figure 1: Drivers of Migration**

Source: International Organization for Migration (2017). *Enabling a better understanding of migration flows (and its root-causes) from Somalia towards Europe: Desk-review report.*

The high unemployment levels (75%), and lack of employment make many people seek irregular entry to

Europe through Libya. Although the prospects of such travel remain quite uncertain and risky, such trips are

lure youth because of the charm of social media, who idolize the life in other countries and the desire to have a better future and the complicated nature of circumstance involving financial lack and the bonding of the family and the role of smugglers to help this migration, but also underline the necessity of a more effective legislative framework and humanitarian intervention to help solve the problem (Barasa, 2014). In reference to 2022, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre confirms that more than 59 million individuals became internally displaced in 2021 because of the war, violence, and disasters (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), 2022).

Emigration of young people in Somalia is caused mostly by a high unemployment rate, poverty, low quality and unavailability of education, discrimination along clan-lines in hiring, hiring of the diaspora returning home, insecurity, peer pressure, and well-organized smuggling networks. 68% of the youths consider levels of migration within their communities to be high or very high with Europe as the most preferred destination despite the high risks-death, imprisonment, torture, and ransom payments by the smugglers (Magafe). Although the diaspora remittances are playing a very important role in the livelihoods of the households (about 1.4 billion dollars a year), most of the migrants are going through a lot of realities out there such as unemployment, homelessness and asylum seeking. (Wasuge, 2018).

On the aspect of migration intentions, about 21 percent of the youth stated that they were planning to migrate to foreign countries, and 7 percent of the youth indicated that they were planning to migrate to internal areas of Somalia. Unemployment is also a common factor that drives the desire to migrate, as most young people are under the perception that there are no opportunities and they are under pressure to move away to find better opportunities. Young people tend not to report their migration intention as they fear confrontation by their parents or government (Samuel Hall, 2015).

A history of warfare and governance instability combined with ineffective governance allow transnational criminal networks to thrive, especially in the main migration pathways between the Horn of Africa and Yemen and other countries, with poor legislation, inadequate law enforcement, corruption, and absence of mechanisms to protect victims exacerbating the situation (Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (RMMS), 2016).

Studies indicate that limited availability to good education, lack of jobs and insecurity is one of the push factors that lead young Somali to want to leave the country and the social networks in the countries where they intend to migrate to the country are the facilitating factors. Interestingly, the study's observation that higher education is associated with greater emigration intent challenges simplistic beliefs that improved education decreases migration, but it may instead prepare young people with the knowledge, resources, and ambitions to take advantage of opportunities in other countries. (Ibrahim & Sasaka, 2018).

Gender influences the experience, perpetration, and criminal justice response to aggravated migrant smuggling, especially in the cases where the journey ends up causing death, sexual violence, or exploitation. It claims that women and girls are unproportional targets of sexual and gender-based violence on transit, they are frequently forced into sexual acts in response to charges to pass or become victims of human trafficking, whilst men and boys, in the meantime, are exposed to increased risks of forced labour, imprisonment, and fatal violence (UNODC, 2021).

In those who, in any way, found their way to Europe or America, there is still a connexion with those on whom he left the impress of his stamp. The Somali diaspora keeps in touch using the innovative remittance systems, which are often more influential in the local development and economy than the traditional aid. The paper makes it clear that poverty is only one of the factors that motivate migration, but that political struggles and economic prospects are inseparable. Besides, it highlights the major contribution of remittances in sustaining livelihoods and enhancing political stability in Somalia (Gundel, 2002). Africa has shown how the diaspora networks may be used to contribute to knowledge transfer, investment, and innovation in major sectors, such as agriculture and green energy, which will in turn improve climate change adaptation and decent employment (African Development Bank Group (AfDB) & International Organization for Migration (IOM). (2023). Gunes-Ayata (2008) discusses the dynamics of migration and security, showing how migration is affected by economic, political, and social elements, and discusses the necessity of having policies that will accommodate both security interests and humanitarian values.

Considering the experience, African Union Commission (2020) says that the youth play a crucial role in ensuring peace and security on the continent and even though most people consider young people to be either the perpetrators or victims of violence, most young Africans are busy in peacebuilding efforts, community resilience, and social change advocacy.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research is rooted in a combined theoretical approach that transcends the traditional economic or push-pull migration theories in order to provide an understanding of the sophisticated forces that push Somali youth to dangerous Mediterranean ventures. The research uses the concept of structural abandonment which is a form of structural violence (Farmer, 2004). Furthering the idea of structural violence presented by Farmer (2004) as systematic modes through which social, political and economic organization imposes harm on the poor, the research hypothesizes structural abandonment as the designed, institutionalized withholding of care, recognition and opportunity by the Somali youth. Decades of civil war, large-scale displacement of the population, and state failure have formed the

topography of collective trauma in the Somali context. Violence and loss are also passed down to children and adolescents through somatic expression of grief and internalized shame (Cavallera *et al.*, 2016). Abandonment, as opposed to poverty, which means scarcity, means betrayal: the awareness of oneself as something not worthy of protection. This will take the form of lack of legal identity documents, as well as non-provision of access to education and health, displacement due to climatic conditions without government intervention and international assistance that has integrated donor publicity at the expense of sustainable development. The traditional theories of migration, including the ones that are founded on the rational choice theory and the neoclassical economics, perceive migrants as rational beings and therefore optimize their utility. The rational choice theory attributes the migration to the behaviour of an individual. Migrants are regarded as actors who are resourceful and choose among sets of alternatives in order to maximize their net benefits. By assuming comparisons of the expected utility (benefits less costs) of remaining and migrating, migrants are expected to make decisions. Migration takes place when the utility of the destination is seen to be better. Among these is the model by De Jong and Fawcett whereby migration intention is described as the aggregate of the expected utilities in dimensions such as wealth, status and affiliation. In addition, the neoclassical approach to economics, which is a major driving factor in the rational choice theory here, views migration as a behaviour that will maximize individual net gains, and it tends to be human capital oriented, job opportunities and wages (Haug, 2012).

### Research Gaps

The current literature often analyses the structural factors and trauma separately. Further investigation is required into the interaction of intergenerational trauma caused by conflict and continued structural neglect, including lack of access to education, health care and economic opportunities, in a unique influence on the agency and migratory desires of Somali youth (Halcon *et al.*, 2004).

A major part of the research is about drivers of migration, and it is concentrated that the migration in Somalia is mostly caused by complex interplay of factors such as economic opportunities, conflict and climate related hazards. The International Organization of Migration (IOM) estimates that about 61 percent of young migrants claim to have moved because of economic factors, secondly as a result of services and as thirdly because of conflict. Surprisingly, of all migrants who are young, only 6% of them cited environmental causes as their main point of motivation, which implies that climate change effects are experienced, but they do not constitute the dominant factors behind the move. There is also high population of migrants who feel that they have been displaced as a result of a disaster or conflict meaning that these conditions are highly likely to attract migration (The

international organization for migration, 2024).

Although the importance of climate change on migration is gaining traction, the direct and immediate mental health effects of climate-driven displacement on Somali youth, especially the intergenerational trauma, is a subject of further research. (International Organization for Migration, 2024). Thus, there is a knowledge gap regarding the agency with which Somali youth can take action when they have few safe immigration choices. What is their experience of walking the fine line between their hopes of a better life and the dangers of their irregular migration and what is the impact of intergenerational trauma on their choices?

### Research Objectives

This study aims to assess the Impact of Intergenerational Trauma and Structural Abandonment on Somali Youth's Agency and Migration Aspirations, with the following specific objectives:

- To assess how intergenerational trauma from civil conflict affects the psychological and emotional well-being of Somali youth.
- To examine the effects of state collapse and climate-induced displacement on the lived experiences of young Somalis.
- To explore Perceptions of Migration by understanding how Intergenerational Trauma and Structural Abandonment shape young Somalis' perceptions of migration as a viable path to dignity and agency.
- To explore the coping strategies employed by Somali youth in response to trauma and structural challenges.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopted a quantitative research design as it aimed at determining the effects of intergenerational trauma and structural abandonment on the perceived agency and migration aspirations of Somali youth. A structured survey questionnaire was used as the primary data collection tool, targeting a specific population of Somali youth in Mogadishu. Since in Somalia, migration activities are sensitive and illegal, a snowball sampling methodology was used in recruiting participants. This approach to non-probability sampling was considered suitable because it enables the researchers to reach social networks that are difficult to reach by other means. The last sample was comprised of 50 respondents with an attempt or completed migration journeys to Europe or other parts of the world. The time interval of data collection was January to April 2025. All the responses on the survey were anonymous. None of the personally identifiable information was documented or stored.

According to Table 1, the researcher developed the survey questionnaire to assess five major composite variables: Intergenerational Trauma (IGT), Structural Abandonment (SA), Perceived Agency (PA), Migration Aspirations (MA), and Coping Strategies (CS) measures. The instrument was based on and modified the items

of the known scales, such as the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire, the PTSD Checklist according to DSM-5, the Generational Trauma Inventory, UNHCR Needs Assessment Tools, and the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale that guaranteed the cultural anchoring of the

Somali context. There were a series of Likert-scale or frequency-based items used to operationalize each construct as follows. The consistency of all scales was high with Cronbach alpha coefficient of more than 0.85 which affirms the reliability of the measures.

**Table 1:** Questions used for each variable

Construct	Items Used	Scoring Method	Range	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Intergenerational Trauma (IGT)	22 items	Mean score of all 22 items	1-5	$\alpha = 0.93$
Structural Abandonment (SA)	15 items	Mean score of all 15 items	1-5	$\alpha = 0.91$
Perceived Agency (PA)	5 items	Mean score of the 5 selected items	1-5	$\alpha = 0.89$
Migration Aspirations (MA)	12 items	Mean score of all 12 items	1-5	$\alpha = 0.94$
Coping Strategies (CS)	Frequency ratings for 6 strategies	Mean frequency score across the 6 strategies	1-5	$\alpha = 0.87$

Source: Survey, Author 2025

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used in the analysis of the data. All composite variables were summarized (calculation of descriptive statistics) to determine accurate central tendencies and variance in the test population (means, standard deviations, minimum, and maximum values). Pearson correlation analysis was the main method of analysis which was applied to test the bi-variable relationships between the main constructs of the study (IGT, SA, PA, MA, CS). Statistical significance

at  $p < .01$  was tested on all the reported correlations. Migration Aspirations (4.31) and Structural Abandonment (4.27) have the highest mean scores, as in Table 2, which implies that there is an overwhelming agreement that migration is regarded as a necessity and that structural abandonment is widespread. The Coping Strategies (3.89) is lower than the rest indicating that coping mechanisms are available but not wholly effective or are not used extensively.

**Table 2:** Inferential Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Intergenerational Trauma	4.12	0.58	2.5	5
Structural Abandonment	4.27	0.52	2.67	5
Perceived Agency	4.08	0.61	2.2	5
Migration Aspirations	4.31	0.54	2.58	5
Coping Strategies	3.89	0.65	2.17	5

Source: Survey, Author 2025

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Demographics of Respondents

Table 2 indicates that seventy-six (76) percent are 15-20 (40 15-17 and 36 18-20) and, therefore, the study has the voices of a critically vulnerable and formative life stage. The above-mentioned fact about the 76 percent composition of the sample consisting of adolescents and young people aged 15-20 directly correlates with the theme of the research on Somali youth. This group of people is such a huge target due to a variety of reasons which are all intertwined. Firstly, these young people are in a pivotal stage of life where their identities are being formed, their agency as people is being formed, and their future goals, including their desires to migrate, are being figured out.

Moreover, many of them are second- or third-generation children of Somali refugees or migrants, which makes them the focus of the intergenerational trauma discourse:

the psychological and emotional inheritance of their parents and grandparents who have gone through war, displacement, and adverse loss. Their experiences are not only dictated by these inherited family histories of trauma but also the structural conditions they encounter in their host or home countries- systemic discrimination, inaccessibility to good education and economic opportunities and social marginalization.

**Table 3:** Age of Respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
15-17	20	40%
18-20	18	36%
21-24	9	18%
25-30	3	6%
Total	50	100%

Regarding gender of respondents, there are slightly more male respondents (54%), compared with female respondents (46%), as shown in Table 4. The gender composition of 27 men (54 per cent) and 23 women (46 per cent) is a more or less even distribution of gender with a minor majority in the first instance. Such close parity is not in vain in the context of the research, *The Impact of Intergenerational Trauma and Structural Abandonment on Agency and Migration Aspirations of Somali Youth* and can be applied to define and analyse the connection between gender and trauma, structural marginalization and migration aspirations in Somali young people more specifically.

Cultural and social norms of Somalia tend to build the specific experience of young men and women, especially in diaspora or post-conflict situations. As an example, young Somali men might experience increased surveillance, racial profiling, or coercion to be economic providers--elements that can only intensify feelings of alienation and encourage migration hopes as a way of finding dignity, a way of finding opportunity, or escape of systemic exclusion. Young Somali women, on the other hand, can also be labelled to negotiate problematic demands concerning modesty, family honour, unemployment and care giving, which restrict and transform their agency. Simultaneously, they can also turn to education or transnational networks as a means to independence, having in some cases manifested migration desires based on gendered liberation or safety against oppressive social worlds.

Of vital importance, both groups are the offspring of the same displacement and loss psychologically, but they might be affected by the traumas and articulate them based on gender. As an example, young men may out-migrate or take risks as an expression of distress whereas young women may take distress in and make it internal, valuing family stability over mobility- except when the structural conditions (in the absence of security or option) prompt them to migrate as a survival strategy.

**Table 4:** Sex of Respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Female	23	46%
Male	27	54%
Total	50	100%

In terms of the displacement status of the respondents, almost 50% of the respondents (46 percent) are returnees, 40 percent are part of the host community, and 14 percent are IDPs just at the moment of intergenerational trauma and structural abandonment. This allocation demonstrates that most of the subjects are in the process of settling back in their places of origin or living in the host societies, with only a smaller but not in significant proportion still in active displacement within the territory of Somalia.

The saliency of the returnees, as disclosed in Table 5, indicates that a portion of the sample is residing in

post-return environments, which are usually marked by deep instability, unfulfilled expectations and rediscovered vulnerability. Although these young people have returned home, they are often faced with destroyed infrastructure, lack of livelihood prospects, unresolved clan disputes and little state assistance. The hope of returning as a way of resolution or as a way of healing more than as a way of disillusionment takes the place of the promise of a return in such places. In the case of the youth, this may add to a sense of structural abandonment since after repatriation, the state and international actors often pull out, and the families are left to reconstitute under the conditions of scarcity. In addition, youth returning after a few years might not just be carrying the trauma of the initial displacement of their parents but the secondary trauma of their inability to return to their homeland- triggering a new wave of migration desire as a way of avoiding the cycle of displacement and stagnation.

**Table 5:** Displacement Status of Respondents

Displacement Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Host Community	20	40%
Returnee	23	46%
IDP (Internally Displaced Persons)	7	14%
Total	50	100%

As Table 6 shows, a rather high percentage of respondents who indicated that their highest level of education was university or college is relatively high (52 percent). It means that despite the structural barriers, a significant percentage of Somali youth represented in this sample has become a major resilience and future-making instrument by obtaining higher education.

Conversely, 24 percent of the respondents (12 youth) have never completed their primary or Koranic studies, and 6-percent have never received any education at all. They are disproportionately represented among IDPs, returnees, and those not in attendance at school- showing that structural abandonment (e.g. lack of schools in camps, poverty, forced labour, or gender-related factors) continue to deny access to education to the most marginalized. In their instance, the ambitions of migration can be exacerbated by trauma, but also by the closed gateway of educational movement 14% secondary education.

**Table 6:** Highest Level of Education

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage
None	3	6%
Koranic (Qur'anic school)	6	12%
Primary	6	12%
Secondary	7	14%
Vocational	2	4%

University/College	26	52%
Total	50	100%

### Intergenerational Trauma and Psychological Well-Being

The data presented in Table 7 demonstrates that the concept of intergenerational trauma (IGT) is not a discrete psychological burden, but it is rather entrenched within the systemic voids of systemic abandonment and systemic disillusionment. Young people who bear the emotional burden of the trauma in their families do not feel it in a vacuum but feel that their pain is reflected in the lack of institutional support. The government, aid systems, and the rest of the world are perceived as being distant or indifferent to the feeling of isolation and neglect.

This emotional legacy is very powerful in determining psychological and behavioural outcomes. IGT is positively correlated with anxiety symptoms ( $r = .778, p < .01$ ), indicating that family trauma that is not resolved increases internal distress. Likewise, it is highly associated with migration intentions ( $r = .721, p < .01$ ) - meaning that to many young people, the motive to depart is not only economic or expedient, but highly therapeutic. Migration is consciously or unconsciously presented as a process of healing: physical and metaphorical flight out of the atmosphere that is filled with unacknowledged grief and hereditary suffering.

Nevertheless, resilience is also impaired by this trauma. There is a negative relationship between IGT and constructive coping ( $r = -.483, p = .01$ ), which means that the more deeply people are traumatized, the less they tend to use constructive coping strategies to cope with stress. Such loss of coping ability can represent a more general breakdown of hope and agency - when trauma is long-term and unresolved, the young people start to believe that they are not in control to alter their conditions in their present settings.

The findings can be linked to those of other studies, which show that the outcomes of migration in Somali youth are inherited by conflict and displacement, which is highly associated with the intention to migrate, as the impact of premigration trauma on mental health and acculturation is severe among displaced populations, and the long-term psychological effects of conflict and displacement (Jorgenson & Nilsson, 2021).

### Effects of State Collapse and Climate-Induced Displacement on Migration Aspiration

Young Somali people do not need to read about the breakdown of the state as history, as it is the air they breathe. Extreme weather events, lost livelihoods, lost birth certificates, closed clinics and closed-down embassies are not abstract policy failures. They are close, everyday treachery-- experienced in the flesh, inscribed in the soul, and transmitted like bruises.

The migration of youth in Somalia is a result of climate change, poverty, and institutional failure, which focuses

on generational lines and structural susceptibility (Villa & Belli, 2024). The October 2021 White House report, Report on the Impact of Climate Change on Migration, looks at how climate change has become an increasing cause of internal and cross-border human mobility, usually in combination with conflict, economic instability, and governance issues. It points out that although the majority of climate-related displacement is now internal (especially to urban centres), intercountry movements are on the rise, especially in situations where climate stressors exacerbate violence or vulnerability (The White House, 2021).

As illustrated in Table 7, Structural Abandonment (SA) has more relationship with Migration Aspiration (MA). The most strongly correlated in the whole set of data ( $r = .795, p < .01$ ), this relationship demonstrates a shattering truth: once institutions disappear - once governments deny identity, once aid circumvents communities, when the world turns its back - migration ceases to be a choice. This turns into an ethical obligation. A self-preservation, which is rational. Soft resistance to obliteration.

This desertion does not only drive but it cuts. SA is directly related to Intergenerational Trauma ( $r = .778, p < .01$ ), demonstrating that systemic neglect is not just political or logistical - it is highly traumatizing. When a young person fails to reach healthcare due to lack of papers or their land of their family turns into dust and no one does anything about it, it is a service gap, and it is a personal rupture. A message: You do not matter.

And as that message sinks, then coping starts to fail. SA exhibits a negative correlation of significant value with Coping Strategies ( $r = -.537, p < .01$ ). The more neglected the young person becomes, the less he/she will turn to instruments of resilience, prayer, journaling, community support, not because they have forgotten how to do this, rather because hope has faded. People begin to whisper into a void when it seems that systems are always failing.

### Perceptions of migration as a path to dignity and agency

Table 7 demonstrates that Perceived Agency (PA) is the belief that one can make a difference in the world and is more strongly correlated with Migration Aspiration (MA) than any other variable in the data set ( $r = .812, p < .01$ ). This is not incidental. It is revolutionary. Young people are not migrating since they have surrendered.

Migration is not flight--it is progressive movement. Not defeat but defiance. And not the failure of hope but its ruthless reworking. As well as here the paradox that redefines victimhood: both Structural Abandonment (SA,  $r = .691$ ) and Intergenerational Trauma (IGT,  $r = .642$ ) are strong predictors of this perceived agency. The forces that are to smash them, inherited grief, statelessness, climate collapse, institutional silence, are turned into the smithy where the will of these people is hardened. Such young people do not sit back and receive the tides of suffering. They are crisis agents. Their feeling of power does not come out despite trauma, but out of it. Pain becomes purpose. Neglect becomes fuel.

A combination of IGT and SA explains about 65 percent of migration aspiration variance ( $R^2 = .65$ ). This is not random movement. This is not impulsive escape. This is an understandable, logical, profoundly human reaction to the accretion of injuries - personal, family, systemic. The logic of migration in failures in institutions is migration. The rebellion of the mind is rebelling against the non-existent future that history provides. Migration is not an agency-free flight but an agency-led action, particularly among the young with strong perceived agency as conflict and goal of education influence migration choice with agency playing the key

role in restricted contexts (Erdal *et al.*, 2024). The results can be considered the research that considers migration as a people-focused policy in the light of the principle of human dignity the natural and equal value of all people. It recognizes six main areas that are particularly important to the protection of migrants during the migration process: (1) the freedom of movement, (2) protection against violence and exploitation, (3) equality and non-discrimination, (4) a sufficient standard of living, (5) access to essential services including healthcare, education, and legal assistance, and (6) civil and political rights including freedom of expression and religion.

**Table 7:** Correlation of Variables

Variable	IGT	SA	PA	MA	CS
Intergeneration Trauma	1				
Structural Abandonment	.778	1			
Perceived Agency	.642	.691	1		
Migration Aspiration	.721	.795	.812	1	
Coping Strategy	-.483	-.537	.451	-.589	1

### Conflict Exposure

Most of them 74 per cent have been directly affected by armed conflict and their experiences vary between observing violence, being recruited forcibly or being sexually assaulted. Most of the respondents, 74% (37 of 50) report being a direct victim of armed conflict themselves, which underlines the large scale and deep-rooted character of violence in the life of the Somali young generation. It is not merely a chance fact that these people have been exposed to a great degree of conflict it is the reality of their lives and a very significant situation that characterizes them and their strength as well as their future ambitions. The trauma that the affected suffered is not only diverse, but also severe: 10 of them had to witness acts of violence themselves, 4 of them had lost a family member, 9 of them had to join armed groups at an early age, 8 of them had to leave their homes, and 6 had experienced sexual trauma which is a very stigmatized and underreported form of trauma in most Somali cultures. These experiences are overlapping and enriching the legacies of intergenerational trauma and the reality of structural abandonment. To illustrate, youth that was recruited or witnessed deaths through coercion may experience severe psychological trauma that will be reflected in their distrust of institutions, their attitudes towards their safety, and their ability to lead a normal future. According to the same, the victims of loss of relatives or displacement tend to have disrupted education, severed kinship and economic stress - realities that limit them and reinstate a feeling of not belonging. The fact that the survivors of sexual violence were included in the sample, though in smaller proportion, stresses an otherwise especially vulnerable subject of trauma connected with conflict one that tends to be worsened by silence and shame and deficiency of appropriate support networks. Most importantly, these first-hand experiences of

violence are a continuation and reenactment of historical trauma transferred down generations through parents and grandparents who survived the civil war and mass displacement in Somalia. By doing so, the population of the present generation is not simply receiving the narratives of suffering but re-enacting them in different shapes and introducing the element of conflict to the context of their lives. This periodical vulnerability can be used to explain the fact that the migration desires of these young people are so strong: to many, it is not just a matter of opportunity, but a matter of survival, of healing, and escape out of the conditions where violence continues to be a constant threat.

Also, the fact that more than a quarter of the respondents (26) indicate that they have had no exposure to direct conflicts does not reduce the aggregate effect; it is an uneven geography of violence in Somalia and its diaspora. Although they were not their victims, many people end up living in a society that is permeated with trauma, where no state security exists, armed participants are present and loss is normalized into shaping a common mood of insecurity.

**Table 8:** Affected by Conflict

Affected by Conflict	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	37	74%
No	13	26%
Total	50	100%

This is why 52% of them have lost an immediate family member due to conflict, famine, or displacement, which tells about the personal and intimate essence of trauma. The statistics indicate that more than half of the participants (52 per cent, or 26 of 50) have lost a relative - a loss that, in the conditions of constant war and anarchy in Somalia, is scarcely an accidental or natural

occurrence. Instead, usually, they can be linked to violence, displacement, lack of healthcare, or the accretion of the effects of systemic failure, and bereavement is not just a personal loss, but an intergenerational and social wound. This almost even divide, 52% affected, 48% not, however, indicates a very shocking fact: one out of every two Somali youths have already experienced the devastating shock of the loss of someone close. This loss probably happened at childhood or adolescence when such a trauma may significantly interfere with emotional security, identity, and confidence in the permanence of the world. In cases of a deceased parent or sibling or primary caregiver, like those found in conflict-affected environments, the effect is not only grief, but also economic loss, disruption of education, excessive care giving (particularly to girls), and the vulnerability to exploitation or recruitment.

Of paramount importance, the loss of a relative is usually a catalyst that increases the level of intergenerational trauma and structural abandonment. On the one hand, it can also be a manifestation of historical violence transmitted to the descendants physically, that is, a father who was killed in the civil war or a brother who was shot during the flight in the conflict. On the other, it often reveals the lack of institutional/state assistance: no death benefits, no psychosocial services, no safety net to buffer the fall. Within this vacuum, young people are left to grieve individually, where loss is usually absorbed and internalised as an indicator of their vulnerable position in society.

In addition, this loss may create migration desires directly. To others the impulse to migrate comes as a tribute--to create a life that the beloved one could not, or to leave a place that is heavy with painful recollections. To others, it is an expedient reaction: one of the providers has disappeared, now it is the time to migrate, in order to get the rest of the family by. In both, death is not necessarily a conclusion, but rather a reason to recreate the future, and it is significantly outside the frontiers of a nation that did not manage to defend its own.

Therefore, the reality that family bereavement concerns slightly more than half of the sample is not a demographic bit of information--it is a credit to the ubiquitous spectre of loss that looms over the Somali youth. It stresses the fact that individual mourning is intertwined with political, historical and structural influences of a larger scale. It is part of the awareness of this fact that any intervention directed toward supporting youth agency: curing the trauma is not only necessary but honouring a life that was to be lost: and the future that is being constructed in its absence.

**Table 9:** A family member died

Family Member Died	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	26	52%
No	24	48%
Total	50	100%

### Affected by Displacement

The presence of 92 percent of people who have been displaced by climate shocks within the last 5 years indicates that environmental factors have taken the centre stage of instability and this magnified the effects of war. The numbers produce a strong and obvious reality among the young Somali people who took part in this investigation: 92 percent (46 of 50) of them have themselves been displaced as a fact so immense that displacement comes to be not an isolated incident, but a near-universality in their life. This overbearing of superiority throws into relief that to this generation uprootedness, either once or more than once, is an undoubted inheritance, the root of identity, of belongingness, and of dreams.

These youths were displaced in many different ways: some were displaced during full-scale war, others were just born in a refugee camp or informal settlement, others have been displaced more than once because of violence or environmental shock or economic breakdown. Regardless of the course it follows, the shared experience of displacement of home, community or rootedness brings about profound disruption in not only their developmental but also social continuity. Home to most people is not a permanent place but a traveling, often impossibility ideal--worsened by the reality that even those who are back (as in the displacement status data above) are unable to find their native places familiar or friendly.

This exposure to displacement, which has been nearly total, is what actually collides with the primary themes of the study, which are intergenerational trauma and structural abandonment. On the one hand, these youths are exposed to the discourse of exile and loss when their parents or grandparents fled the civil war in Somalia in the 1990s; on the contrary, they are exposed to the trauma as an experience of the past and as of today. At the same time, they are never in one place because they are in a state of institutional abandonment: ineffective or absent state institutions, limited access to humanitarian aid, and weaker law protection provide them with no long-term solutions or means of stability. It is not just a side effect of conflict in this vacuum, but also a symptom of more structural abandonment--in which the state and international systems fail to provide the most basic right, to safety and belonging.

What is more important, the power of pervasive displacement is a powerful generator of the impulse to migrate. As inner mobility is defined by the insecurity and exterior confines seem like the only route to permanence, many youths will start viewing international migration as the only available means of re-settlement, not because they want to, but because they have to. They have a more abstract motive of opportunity, but they are fleeing a sense of impermanence to which they have been subjected occasionally.

Even the 8% (4 people) who affirm that they have never been displaced are likely to be young people living in comparatively stable urban or clan-guarded places-but

even their lives are likely to be affected by the pervasive influence of the culture of displacement in Somali society on a mass scale. In effect, displacement becomes a collective experience, either through its direct or indirect experience through the family, society, and national memory.

**Table 10:** Experience of Displacement

Experienced Displacement	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	46	92%
No	4	8%
Total	50	100%

Over 70 per cent are attending school or training and this shows that they are willing to take a step to better themselves in spite of the hardships. The data indicates that three quarters of the participants (35 out of 50) are either attending school or other vocational training, but 30 percent of the participants (15 youth) are not in school or any other skills training. Within the framework of the study, *The Impact of Intergenerational Trauma and Structural Abandonment on Agency and Migration Aspirations of Somali Youth*, this pattern of enrolment shows how commitment to education can be long-term and how structural neglect and trauma remain a barrier to youth development.

Education appears to play a significant role as an anchoring device to most of those who still attend school or train, as a source of order, hope and potential mobility in otherwise displaced and lost lives. When schooling is carried on with minimal state subsidies, when there is the perception of future insecurity, sometimes schooling is among a few ways of agency, dignity and social recognition. Attending school may also be one of the ways of resistance to the Somali youth it is a means to keep remembering the sacrifices made by their family, against the scripts of victimhood and take control of their lives despite inherited trauma. Moreover, the effect of educational institutions, which, in their turn, may offer psychosocial support, peer bonding, and a break of the demands of the survival, may also be reflected in their enrolment.

What is more important, the absence of interest in education is closely related to the rise of migration intentions. Juvenile delinquency is often characterized by a feeling of restricted possibilities in fruitful futures in the

available conditions, and migration appears to be the sole viable option of self-realization or economic existence. In this sense, the 30 percent not enrolled may be the type of people most in the arrangements of structural abandonment, the people who institutions have failed to hold on to or even sustain and are exposed to exploitation and idle lives or even hazardous migration experiences.

**Table 11:** Currently in Study

Currently Enrolled	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	35	70%
No	15	30%
Total	50	100%

**Migration as the Only Pathway to Dignity**

Across all 12 statements, there is an overwhelming agreement, with 84-96 percent of people either agreeing or strongly agreeing to the fact that migration is not just a preference, but a non-negotiable way to a better life, based on its perceived need to survive and retain dignity. Of special interest is the 94 percent concurrence with the statements that put migration in the perspective of the future, which situates a deep-seated hopelessness and lack of systemic opportunity in their present conditions. This is further reinforced by the appalling readiness to take extreme risk: 90 percent would take the life-threatening voyage given an opportunity and 88 percent would prefer to die on the way than to live an unpromising life at home, indicating the level of desperation and the huge prize that death represents during the voyage.

The idea of reclaiming humanity and agency is also closely connected to migration with 92 percent attributing it to reviving their dignity, 94 percent to affirming their primal right to live and 90 percent to personal courage and autonomy, turning it into an existential need rather than an economic decision. Digital stories are a source of hope because 96% of them are inspired by success stories they came across online and 92% think that survival will make them feel like full human beings and not refugees. Although social pressure of the family or community are still the highly influential factor (84% agreement), it is the most insignificant rated item, and it signifies that the main driving force behind the migration is not some external pressure, but the inner strong personal belief based on the idea of the search of life, dignity, and self-determination.

**Table 12:** Perception on Migration

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total (Agree or "Strongly Agree)
	Frequency				Frequency	
I believe migrating to Europe is my only chance to build a dignified life.	1	1	1	12	35	47
Even though I know the journey is dangerous, I would still go if I had the chance.	0	4	1	11	34	45

I think going to Europe will allow me to honour my family's suffering by succeeding.	0	2	2	13	33	46
I feel that staying here means accepting defeat leaving is an act of courage.	0	3	2	10	35	45
I believe Europe will give me something Somalia never did: safety, respect, and a future.	0	1	2	11	36	47
I have seen videos or stories online of other Somali youth living well in Europe and that gives me hope.	0	0	2	10	38	48
I think if I survive the journey, I will finally be seen as human not just a refugee.	0	3	1	9	37	46
I feel pressure from my family or community to leave they believe it's the only way to make things right.	0	3	5	14	28	42
I believe migration is not just about money it's about reclaiming my right to exist.	0	2	1	10	37	47
I feel like my voice doesn't matter here but maybe it will matter somewhere else.	0	2	3	11	34	45
I think dying trying to reach Europe is better than living here without hope.	0	3	3	10	34	44
I believe my generation has no choice but to cross the sea there is no other path forward.	0	1	2	11	36	47

**Coping strategies employed in response to trauma and structural challenges**

Somali youth do not merely bear the pain of their heritage and the breakdown of the institution but turn back to themselves. They pray. They compose poems in notebooks that nobody would put in print. In dark and gloomy nights, they confide their anxieties to their friends. These are the silent practices of survival: coping strategies (CS) which sew together intervals of rest in a world falling apart.

But these are not indefinite plans, these strategies though holy. They are neither substitutes to justice, stability, and belonging. These data demonstrate that there is an evident tension: Coping Strategies demonstrates a great deal of negative correlation with Migration Aspiration ( $r = -.589$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The stronger the youth ideal of departure, the less they depend on local processes of residence. It is not that they do not know how to cope - but because coping is now starting to seem like moving the furniture in a house on fire.

Dominant Strategy: "Use social media to connect with others abroad" is the most frequently selected coping mechanism (selected by 24 out of 50 respondents). This is not just socializing; it is a form of digital escapism and future-imagining, allowing them to visualize and mentally

inhabit the life they aspire to.

Internalization: Other common strategies like "Stay silent and keep feelings inside" and "Think about revenge or justice" point to internalized pain and a lack of safe outlets for expression.

Effectiveness: Despite the limitations of these strategies, 86% of respondents feel they help them survive emotionally. This speaks to their resilience but also underscores the absence of more robust, therapeutic support.

Formal Help is Rare: Only one respondent selected "Seek help from a counsellor or NGO worker," highlighting a critical gap in mental health and psychosocial support services.

**Table 13:** Copying Strategies employed by Youth

Coping Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Use social media to connect with others abroad	20	40%
Talk to friends/my peers	8	16%
Pray or turn to religion	4	8%
Write in a journal or draw	4	8%

Listen to music or watch videos	4	8%
Work or try to earn money	3	6%
Stay silent and keep feelings inside	3	6%
Think about revenge or justice	3	6%
Seek help from a counsellor or NGO worker	1	2%
Total Responses	50	100%

Youth with a higher level of Perceived Agency (PA) are much more likely to use coping strategies ( $r = .451$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This implies that agency does not, invariably, hold the youth in place- but it does prepare them to breathe, reconsider and marshal strength prior to moving. Resilience, in this case, does not mean holding on, but getting ready to go, purposefully, deliberately, with a sense of self.

That the coping mechanisms of most of the respondents, 86 percent (43 of 50), themselves provide emotional relief points to a great story of survival against the odds with the strong backbone of Somali youths. This discovery is both promising and enlightening within the framework of intergenerational trauma, displacement, loss, and structural abandonment: it is implied that, despite their lack of access to formal mental health services and the fact that this system has ignored their needs, these youths have still worked out or borrowed strategies to cope with their emotional distress and ensure mental balance.

These coping mechanisms probably include a broad spectrum of culturally based and adaptive mechanisms. Faith and religious practices (prayer, Quran recitation, communal worship, etc.) might be used by many Somali youths as focal points of solace and sense exclusion. Alternatively, other people can use social networks, such as peers, extended family, or community elders, to divide the burden and remind people of belonging. Somali culture has longstanding traditions such as poetry, music or storytelling which are also important avenues to express grief, anger or hope. Also, other young people might discover their meaning and emotional support in education, movement, or caring, and convert their own misery into social action or responsibility.

That such a high percentage of them consider these strategies to be useful highlights one important point: agency is not inaccessible when dealing with trauma--it is redesigned. These youth engage in emotional agency, that is, they seek or invent or maintain practices that can bring them inner stability even in the face of structural systems that fail them. This tenacity must not be idealized. Individuals who report that coping strategies are not helpful (14% with 7 persons) are a minority vulnerable group who might be in the depths of distress, complicated trauma, or loneliness. Their reactions sound an alarm of

a dire necessity of the availability of culturally competent psychosocial assistance that transcends informal coping to professional care.

In addition, coping is likely to relieve emotional pain in the short run but is not always a solution to the underlying causes of trauma or structural abandonment. A young adult might find a short-term comfort in prayer or friendship but still feel the need to go forth to migrate to a place where they are safer, have a chance, or a future free of having to carry the stigma of the inherited suffering. Therefore, emotional coping and migration aspirations are not exclusive, and, in most cases, they go hand in hand as parallel reactions to the same circumstances one inward, the other outward

**Table 14:** Helpfulness of Coping Strategies

Do coping strategies help emotionally?	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	43	86%
No	7	14%
Total	50	100%

However, when the trauma is deep-rooted - when Intergenerational Trauma (IGT) and Structural Abandonment (SA) stack like cairns on graveyards - then coping starts to diminish. Both the IGT and the SA are negatively related to CS, and it appears that we have an inverse relationship with the load of the thread of local support: the thicker the thread, the more weight it must support. Young people are not losing the desire to heal- it is just that the systems of healing have been broken down. No counsellors. No safe spaces. No legal recourse. No one to witness the pain. This is not an attack on a system, which doesn't hurt but kills the instruments that should be used to heal.

Having the family as the most powerful stabilizing force, faith and the strong connection to culture and personal identity as the insulator, and active acculturation without heritage loss, there is a beneficial and disruptive family story that can help to reduce intergenerational trauma and promote resilience, which is in line with the theory of self-differentiation offered by Bowen and the protective nature of cultural pride and parental guidance among the youth of refugee origins (Lewis, 2016).

### **Belonging-as-Survival for Somali youth**

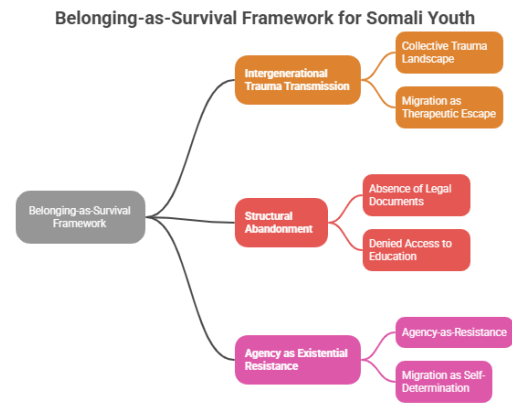
Belonging is revealed to be an essential aspect of survival among Somali youth in a variety of migration settings not a social or emotional desire but an underlying approach to psychological well-being, self-formation, and eventual assimilation. It is well documented in the literature that Somali youth face deep social exclusion with perceived discrimination, language barriers, cultural in-betweenness and a weakened family or community support system, which adds acculturative stress and increases their susceptibility to mental health issues such as PTSD, depression, and substance use (Ellis, 2009; Wilhelm *et al.*,

2022). As a reaction, young people are energetically trying to build or find ways of belonging which is mostly through education, religion, and transnational relationships. Education, specifically, can both de-stress and activate a sense of agency and future potential (Osman *et al.*, 2020); and cause restrictive forms of asylum, such as in Turkey, to increase marginalization and drive young people towards informal labour or dangerous migration (Tibet, 2018).

This often places the Somali youth in a transitional identity that starts to create hyphenated identities (e.g., Somali American, Somali Australian) that mediate the realities of the host cultures and homelands (Omar, 2016). Islam is commonly used as a transnational anchor that offers continuity and a community in the times of displacement. But this bargaining is dangerous: numerous young people feel alienated by a Somalia about which they have received only family stories, and at the same time feel rejected in the West-so that when they visit home countries, they are even called outsiders, a conflict encapsulated in the Somali dhaqan celin (cultural rehabilitation). The acquisition of citizenship is frequently perceived as an instrumental and not an affective status, which highlights a difference between the legal and emotional identities (Abdela, 2015). The lack of belonging has real dangers. Family, school, and community alienation are associated with more tobacco and drug use among adolescents in the U.S. where adolescents are exposed to poor coping mechanisms due to weakened parental authority and support systems (Wilhelm *et al.*, 2022; Ellis, 2009). Intentional, multi-system interventions, on the other hand, such as Project SHIFA in Boston, which combines school-based support, trauma-informed mental health care, and parent outreach, show that ecological-level (family, school, community) promotion of belonging can have an important impact on reducing PTSD and depression and increasing school engagement and social inclusion (Ellis, 2009). Therefore, being is not an active inclusion but participatory, struggle and necessary survival tactic, the one that needs structural assistance, cultural acknowledgment as well as the chance of the youth to compose their identities across borders. Belonging as a survival among the youth assumes that to the Somali youth, migration is not a failure of resilience or even as a mere economic calculation but as the ultimate and rational act of belonging, a basic need in human beings that is turned into a survival mechanism when all other systems fail.

Trauma renders the youth to remain psychologically intolerable. Civil war, state breakdown and violence over the course of decades have resulted in a landscape of collective trauma. There are somatic expressions of grief, inner shame, which are inherited not only by stories, but by youth. Thus, the migration is presented as a healing, symbolic running away of the spaces overwhelmed with unrecognized inherited sufferings.

Abandonment makes staying morally indefensible. Building on Paul Farmer’s concept of structural violence, the framework defines “structural abandonment” as



**Figure 2:** Factors that lead to a lack of sense of belonging

the deliberate, institutionalized withdrawal of care, recognition, and opportunity. It is not mere poverty, but a profound betrayal the message that one’s existence is unworthy of protection. This manifests in the absence of legal documents, denied access to education and healthcare, climate-induced displacement without state intervention, and international aid that prioritizes donor visibility over sustainable development.

Agency makes migration an act of sovereignty. The framework explicitly rejects the notion of Somali youth as passive victims. Instead, it draws on theories of agency-as-resistance, where agency is the capacity to assert dignity within severe constraints. Paradoxically, the very forces of trauma and abandonment fuel this agency. They become the forge in which the youth’s will is tempered, transforming them into “agents forged in crisis.” Migration is thus an act of courage, defiance, and self-determination a way to reclaim a future and prove their inherent worth.

### Discussion

The paper aims to explore how the combined impacts of both intergenerational trauma and structural abandonment determine the agency of Somali youth and the desires to migrate, usually by dangerous, informal means. With a foundation of a more comprehensive theoretical approach that goes beyond economic reductionism, our results are overwhelmingly impressive in relation to the main hypothesis: migration among Somali youth is not an economic calculation but rather an existential reaction toward transmitted psychological wounds and institutional betrayal. In fact, this hypothesis is not only confirmed by the empirical results; but it also shows one power-trio: trauma renders it psychologically unbearable, abandonment renders it morally indefensible, and agency renders it an act of sovereignty that essentially redefines our conceptualization of youth mobility in situations of prolonged crisis.

Using empirical research in form of survey data and synthesized literature, the paper advanced three pillar theoretical frameworks, including Intergenerational Trauma Transmission, Structural Abandonment as Systemic Violence, and Agency as Existential Resistance,

which culminate in a single construct: Belonging-as-Survival.

Results confirm and build on important findings of the existing literature. As an example, Cavallera *et al.* (2016) suggested that the Somali youth do not simply receive war stories; they also acquire somatic and spiritual manifestations of grief, including murug (deep sorrow) and qalbi-jab (broken heart), that influence their worldview. This is confirmed by the study: 74 percent of the surveyed persons said they were directly exposed to armed conflict, and 52 percent lost immediate family members. Importantly, intergenerational trauma (IGT), had a very high correlation with migration aspirations ( $r = .721$ ), which indicated that migration was a kind of therapeutic breakage- a symbolic way out of the environment filled with unprocessed familial pain. This is more consistent with Halcon *et al.* (2004) who discovered that trauma in refugee youth is not only manifested in distress but also in a radical reorganization of future orientation.

In the same way, findings support the idea of structural abandonment as a type of structural violence (Farmer, 2004). Since 92 percent of the youth had undergone displacement and 70 percent of them could not stay in school despite their high levels of commitment, the statistics demonstrate the effect of state breakdown and international abandonment as manifestations of embodied treachery every day. It is worth pointing out, though, that the most significant correlation in the data, between structural abandonment (SA) and migration aspirations ( $r = .795$ ) supports the idea of Brunarska and Ivlevs (2024) about the so-called family migration capital, which in turn, however, strengthens this point: not only is migration possible because it is normative, but it is the ethically right thing to do since to stay is to become invisible. One of the participants numerically said: They state stay and survive. But to live here is to be invisible. This mood resonates strongly with the ideas of Mbembe (2001) and necropolitics, in which Somali youth are turned into a precarious subject, and whose life is expendable across the globe.

Most importantly, the results contest the discourse of victimhood that is widespread in humanitarian discourse. Against expectations that trauma and abandonment would result in passivity, our results showed that perceived agency (PA) is the most important predictor of migration aspiration ( $r = .812$ ). This validates the theory of flexible citizenship by Ong (2006) and a more recent article by Abdi *et al.* (2023) on the resilience of refugee youth. Somali young people are not escaping something-- they are moving to something called recognition, dignity, and personhood. In addition, their social media use to fantasize about life in a foreign country, chosen by 40% as a coping skill, is not escapism, but counter-narrative construction: a conscious effort to make belonging in a world where they cannot do it at home.

Such results imply the need to change the paradigm of migration studies. Unlike the conventional rational choice

models (Haug, 2012), which understand migration as a cost-benefit calculus, our data show that traditional approaches do not explain the existential urgency of the Somali youth. Migration, here, has nothing to do with maximizing utility--it has to do with having a claim to exist. To fill that gap, we suggest the Belonging-as-Survival framework that would combine intergenerational trauma theory, structural violence and agency-as-resistance into a unified model. This model holds that the institution is unable to offer safety, identity or hope, then belonging itself must become a survival strategy, and migration its most logical manifestation.

There is deep meaning behind this reframing. First, it is a critique of economic reductionism: migration does not concern wages but rather about the value: the value of the life and future. Second, it challenges the logics of securitization: young people who cross the Mediterranean are not dangers that can be controlled but witnesses: they are witnesses of the decades marked by the failure of the systems. Third, it repositions resilience: although 86% of the youth say that their coping methods are emotionally protective, coping is not the alternative to migration but its precursor- finding the strength, focus and bravery to make the final move.

The results reveal a severe loophole in the existing humanitarian actions. Even though culturally based coping mechanisms, including prayer, peer support, and online connectivity, are actively used by the youth, there is nearly no formal psychosocial support, and only one respondent mentioned having access to a counsellor or NGO worker. This is indicative of a greater systemic breakdown: humanitarian systems remain focused on logistics and not healing, and containment rather than dignity. Moreover, the fact that there is a virtually universal aspiration to legal routes to migration - 94 percent feel that Europe is their sole hope of dignity - indicates the ethical emptiness of deterrence measures. By shifting the border to Libya or Yemen, as Medecins Sans Frontieres (2015) has reiterated the point, migration is not prevented but only made more lethal.

Thus, the paper demands a radical change in policy and practice. One, there should be safe and legal avenues to education, employment, and asylum, particularly among young people, whose lives are being betted by the smugglers' boats. Second, the communities should be urgently invested in mental health programs that respect Somali views of healing such as cilaaj (Quranic recitation) and storytelling by peers instead of introducing Western clinical practice. Lastly- and most importantly- the Somali youth need to be placed in the centre of the solutions, not as passive objects of research. It is then only, by acknowledging their agency, hearing their testimony and reinstating their right to belong, that we can move to deal not with the so-called crisis of migration, but with the underlying crisis of abandonment which motivates it.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated the role of intergenerational

trauma and structural abandonment in migration aspirations in 50 Somali youth in Mogadishu and found that migration is not necessarily an economic factor, but a rational reaction to deep violence and erasure. Most important are the results that indicate that the majority of respondents had to endure the direct conflict and loss of family members, and they are additionally traumatized by the continued displacement, and structural abandonment deprives them of education, healthcare services, legal status, and fundamental dignity. The youth perceive migration as the only way to secure their future, and they would rather die attempting to than remain powerless, and perceived agency is greatest in those most committed to migration, who portray it as a way of resisting and reclaiming themselves instead of victimisation. The paper presents the Belonging-as-Survival framework and redefines the idea of migration as an existential journey of recognition and complete humanity. The policy implications require the replacement of deterrence with dignity restoration by means of safe migration pathways and trauma-informed mental health care based on respect towards Somali healing rituals such as *cilaa*, and an acknowledgment of youth migration aspirations as proper claims. Finally, it is a crisis of belonging that would necessitate a world in which Somali young people do not have to endanger their lives to be viewed as human beings.

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