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TECHNICAL REPORT

A Survey of Qatari Secondary School Seniors

Methods and Results

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With

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Prepared for the Supreme Education Council



The research described in this report was prepared for the Supreme Education Council and conducted within the RAND-Qatar Policy Institute and RAND Education, programs of the RAND Corporation.

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Summary

Qatar has embarked on economic expansion and diversification initiatives that have created demand for skills and expertise in a wide range of fields. To date, however, this need has been filled largely by imported labor from abroad, which has resulted in a workforce that is predominately made up of foreign nationals. To reduce the nation's reliance on foreign labor in the growing oil and gas, technology, and services sectors, the leadership of Qatar has made substantial investments in post-secondary education and training in an effort to better prepare Qataris for the labor market.

In 2005, RAND was asked to study the post-secondary landscape and develop priorities for improving the opportunities available to Qataris to develop the skills that the nation needs. RAND developed a set of research questions designed to assess the extent to which current post-secondary opportunities intersect with employer demand for skills and the supply of skills among Qataris. An important component of this study was to examine the plans and aspirations of soon-to-be secondary school graduates of Qatar's education system. Up to that point, little in the way of systematically collected data existed to help understand the motivations behind decisions about pursuing post-secondary education and training, as well as long-term plans for employment. Therefore, RAND conducted a survey of students in their final year of secondary school.¹ These data, in addition to survey data collected on a random sample of young Qataris who graduated from secondary school in 1998, plus data on the secondary labor market and data from interviews with employers were analyzed to identify gaps in post-secondary opportunities and to recommend investment options (Stasz, Eide, and Martorell, 2007).

In this report, we examine data collected from the students in their final year of secondary school. Our main objective is to describe the survey and report its findings in more detail than provided in the study's main report.

Survey Design and Administration

The survey was primarily designed to ascertain the plans and aspirations of Qatari students in their final year of secondary school as they consider their options to enter the workforce or to continue on into post-secondary study. We employed a technique of random sampling of

¹ Students who participated in this survey anticipated graduating in spring 2006.

secondary schools stratified by gender and type (Independent, Ministry, private).² We then identified students in their final year who had reached age 18 at the time of the survey administration. The final sample consisted of 260 18-year-old third-year secondary school students (seniors) from Ministry schools, government-funded but autonomously operated Independent schools, and private Arabic schools. An important limitation of the sampling strategy was that it was designed to capture the diversity of schools in Qatar, and not necessarily the true numerical distribution of schools by type. Thus, students from Independent and private Arabic schools were overrepresented relative to students from Ministry schools. To take this issue into account, we calculated sampling weights using the 18-year-old student population distribution by gender across the different types of schools and then utilized those weights in the analysis.

Post-Secondary Plans of Qatari Secondary School Seniors

Significantly more females than males (60 percent versus 37 percent) plan to continue on into higher education after completing secondary school. Concomitantly, close to 50 percent of males plan to work after secondary school, compared with only 15 percent of females who plan to do the same. Males and females planned to make starkly different choices after graduating from secondary school, which suggests that they face very different post-secondary incentives—despite the fact that close to 60 percent of the males reported that they needed some post-secondary education or training to prepare them for their preferred job. The fact that Qataris can take advantage of further education and training opportunities after they have joined a government or government-owned organization may be part of the reason why the majority of males reported wanting to seek work first.

When asked about the type of organization they would prefer to work for, 75 percent of males said they preferred to work for a government ministry, compared with 33 percent for females. About 20 percent of males reported preferring a government-owned company, versus 27 percent of females who reported the same. Fewer than 2 percent of males reported preferring any kind of private organization, while close to 25 percent of females indicated they would work for a private organization, although mostly for a private charity or a religious organization, rather than for a private company.

We found similar differences between males and females when students were asked about their occupational preferences. Of those who specified an occupation (34 percent of the respondents), males overwhelmingly chose the military/police (65 percent), while females chose professional (33 percent), managerial (23 percent), and teaching (21 percent) occupations. The same pattern appeared when we examined occupational choice by post-secondary plan, particularly for males, where we found that the majority of students who indicated they do not plan to continue to post-secondary education plan to join the military or police. Students who do not plan to pursue post-secondary education also tended to prefer to work for a government ministry (65 percent) over other types of organizations such as government-owned organizations (16 percent) or those in the private sector (11 percent).

² Independent schools are government-funded but privately operated. Ministry schools are both funded and operated by Qatar's Ministry of Education. Private schools are managed privately and typically do not receive operational funds from the government. However, some private schools implement Qatar's Ministry of Education curriculum, and students in their final year take the General Secondary School Certificate Examination (GSCE) to receive a high school degree.

Factors Affecting Post-Secondary Plans and Aspirations

Despite the differences between males and females in their plans, they report similar sources of influence in making their decisions. Both males and females cite parental advice and religious values as important drivers, and they see their parents mostly as facilitators in helping them get the job or career that they desire. Most females (56 percent) report societal views as being helpful in their job and career aspirations, suggesting that traditional views about the role of women in Qatar may be changing.

An important difference between males and females is in their perceptions of the extent to which their performance in school and mastery of skills would affect their ability to get the job they want. Females are significantly more likely than males to report that poor grades (21 percent versus 9 percent) and limited ability to converse in English (40 percent versus 15 percent) would hinder their ability to obtain the job or career they desire. Although a greater share of females than males (26 percent versus 12 percent) reported that low exit exam scores would hinder their ability to get the job they want, the difference was not significant at the 10-percent level ($p = 0.13$).

We found that, for the most part, males and females share the same feelings about the most important characteristics of a job or career. Both rate the prestige associated with a job or career, feelings of being respected on the job, and job security relatively high compared with other characteristics. There were some differences, however. Males tended to rate job benefits higher than females did, and females gave working hours greater importance than did males. One characteristic deemed important by both males and females was whether or not the job fostered a mixed-gender work environment. This suggests that both males and females look closely at the provisions organizations make in terms of mixed- or non-mixed-gender environments when seeking employment.

Student Awareness and Attitudes Toward Education and Work

Both males and females reported being aware of government scholarships and other types of resources that might support their post-secondary education and training pursuits. In general, they also consistently cited the same main sources of information on career and job opportunities—their parents, family, and the newspapers or television, less so their school or their teachers. Their attitudes toward education and career are also similar: They agree that doing well in school and getting a good education are important. Again, the main differences between males and females lie in their self-perceptions concerning job prospects. Whereas 59 percent of females are very certain they will get the job they want, more than 75 percent of males feel the same. Similarly, of the males who do not plan to pursue post-secondary education, 46 percent are very certain they will get the job they want, whereas of the females who do not plan to pursue post-secondary education only 10 percent are very certain they will get the job they want. These results suggest that males have considerably less incentive to pursue post-secondary education than do females.

Implications

For individuals interested in studying views and attitudes of Qatari students toward school and work, this report exemplifies how a survey can be conducted to collect this type of information. It describes the survey development process, population sampling procedure, and the logistics of administering the survey. It also provides a detailed description of sample representativeness and data properties. The study presented a unique opportunity to systematically collect primary data to analyze the attitudes and perceptions of young Qataris and the factors that influence their education and work decisions. This type of survey study is an important means of informing labor and education policy; if regularly carried out, it supplements existing labor force survey studies that are intended to gather general information about labor force participation and unemployment.

The report also reviews the most important findings from an analysis of these data. We examine the decisions Qatari students plan to make in their final year of secondary school about their post-secondary plans and the reasons behind these decisions. The results of this study are relevant to policymakers in Qatar who are evaluating strategies to meet human resource challenges through investments in post-secondary education and training initiatives. Analysis of responses given by Qatari students, especially the differences between males and females, suggests that those differences lie not in the value students place on education or training but in the incentives they face when deciding between multiple post-secondary options. If males are able to choose a high-paying and secure job that either provides them with education opportunities or eliminates the incentive to seek further education, they are likely to choose that option instead of continuing on to university. To further the goal of meeting the nation's long-term human resource needs, there should be a clear link between pursuing education and training opportunities and attaining competitive career and employment outcomes.