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TECHNICAL REPORT

# A Survey of Recent Qatari Secondary School Graduates

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## Methods and Results

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*With  
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Prepared for the Supreme Education Council



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## Summary

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The state of Qatar is a nation in transition. It is immensely wealthy because of its reserves of oil and natural gas, yet its leaders believe the country needs to develop a diversified, competitive economy (Nafi, 1983; Rathmell and Schulze, 2000). Through large investments in educational opportunities for its citizens, Qatar's leadership has made it clear that it sees a well-educated populace as key to achieving that goal. Despite this recognition, the nation faces a number of challenges as it moves into the 21st century. The system of widespread public-sector employment has resulted in a workforce that is overwhelmingly employed by the government and an economy highly dependent on foreign workers. And, although a wide array of educational offerings is available in Qatar, many employers and policymakers are concerned about the skills of students produced by the Qatari educational system.

Recognizing these problems, the Qatari leadership asked RAND to assess the current situation and help develop priorities for providing post-secondary educational offerings. One of the primary impediments policymakers face in devising effective ways to improve educational quality is lack of data. Census and labor force surveys contain useful information, but they have important limitations. First, they are conducted infrequently and irregularly. Qatar's first and second censuses were conducted in 1986 and 1997, and the latest census was conducted in 2004 (the most recent population-wide labor force survey was conducted in 2001). Perhaps more important, such surveys contain little or no information about the aspirations, experiences, and educational needs of young Qataris. This is precisely the information needed to shape effective educational reforms that serve individuals who are transitioning between school and their post-schooling lives. For example, policymakers deciding whether to expand educational offerings would benefit from knowing what the interests of young Qataris are as well as the areas where they might benefit from additional schooling.

To shed light on these issues, the RAND team conducted two surveys: one of current high school seniors and a second of young Qataris who graduated in 1998.<sup>1</sup> The main purpose of this report is to describe the survey of the 1998 high school graduates and to report summary tabulations, expanding on the data presented in the main report (Stasz, Eide, and Martorell, 2007).

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to the surveys, we conducted interviews with employers and policymakers and reviewed 2004 census data and Planning Council data (See Planning Council, 2005).

## Survey Design and Sampling Strategy

The target population for this survey was of Qataris who graduated from high school in 1998. We designed the survey to collect information on the transitions that members of this cohort made in the years between the end of high school and spring 2006. Specifically, the survey contained questions on family structure (e.g., marital status and number of children), post-secondary schooling, work and employment experiences, and attitudes about careers, school, and work.

Our goal was to obtain a final sample size of 100 respondents, with an equal share of men and women. Ultimately, we were able to survey 50 men and 49 women, for a total sample size of 99 respondents. To identify potential respondents, we used the Qatar Ministry of Education's (MoE's) administrative files, which contain information on which students graduated in each year. We randomly sampled individuals from that registry to generate the sample of graduates to be interviewed. The primary challenge we faced was contacting potential respondents. Our strategy was to use the phone number of the family home listed on the MoE data file. A serious limitation of this approach is that individuals who could be reached might differ systematically from those who could not. To assess the severity of this limitation, we compared the sample respondents to individuals in the underlying population from which they were drawn. We found that, in terms of high school field of study and eventual educational attainment, sample members did not differ substantially from individuals in the cohort as a whole. This finding suggests that our sample is reasonably representative of the underlying population.

## What Are the Educational Experiences of Young Qataris?

More than 80 percent of the respondents continued studying after graduation from high school and more than 66 percent reported their current level of education was higher than a secondary degree. We found sharp differences between the educational attainment of men and women. Female respondents outperformed males in both pursuit of, and achievement in, post-secondary education. Only half of the men reported that their current level of schooling was beyond secondary school, compared with 80 percent of female respondents. Among respondents who had attended a post-secondary program, women were considerably more likely to have completed their degree program than men (85 percent compared with 58 percent). Overall, 71 percent of female respondents reported completing a university degree, compared with just 36 percent of male respondents.

We found other gender differences in post-secondary education as well. Some major fields of study (such as "Law" and "Engineering") were chosen only by men, while others ("Education" and "Humanities, arts, and literature") were pursued exclusively by women. Almost one-third of male survey participants went abroad for post-secondary education; all the females received post-secondary education in Qatar.

## What Are the Main Employment Experiences of Young Qataris?

About two-thirds of the sample respondents were employed at the time of the survey. Not surprisingly, the employment rate exhibited a large gender gap, with nearly all men (88 percent)

indicating they were employed, compared with only 54 percent of women. In fact, a sizable share of female respondents (43 percent) reported never having held a job since leaving high school, which shows that even among relatively young Qataris, many women either decide not to work or do not have the opportunity to do so.

The survey also asked a series of questions about the characteristics of the respondents' job. Virtually all employed sample members worked in a government ministry or for an establishment owned by the government (e.g., Qatar Petroleum), which is consistent with other research showing that Qataris overwhelmingly choose not to work in private-sector jobs (Planning Council, 2005). Respondents indicated that interpersonal skills (such as working in a group and giving/taking orders) and communication skills were important in their jobs. Notably, fluency in a foreign language was a widely cited skill, especially among men.

We also found that participation in formal job training (defined as training that does not occur at school or at a structured program at one's employment) to acquire these skills is common.<sup>2</sup> Nearly 60 percent of respondents indicated they received formal training to learn skills needed for their job. Training was even more widespread among respondents employed at a government corporation (75 percent).

## Attitudes Toward Work and School

The responses to the attitudinal questions on work and school yielded some surprising results. Both male and female respondents felt that being made to feel respected and appreciated was the most important feature of a job.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, factors associated with financial compensation (salary and other monetary benefits) were ranked in the middle of the job characteristics that we considered. Another interesting finding was the relatively progressive attitudes about gender roles. A large majority (88 percent) of respondents agreed with the statement that there should be more jobs open to women. Even among men, this sentiment appears to be widely held (75 percent of male respondents agreed with the statement).

## Implications

Methodologically, this report demonstrates the feasibility of conducting this type of survey in a similar setting.<sup>4</sup> The approach we used to identify sample respondents and to contact them worked reasonably well, even though the contact information that was available to us was about eight years out of date. This method was successful at least in part because Qatar is a relatively small, developed country where familial ties are strong. In settings where individuals are not easily reachable by mobile phone or where family ties are weaker, contact information that is very out of date may not be enough to locate potential respondents.

<sup>2</sup> An example would be foreign language training that occurs at a center devoted exclusively for this skill.

<sup>3</sup> The survey questions did not distinguish between respect from employers or co-workers and respect from family members or the rest of society.

<sup>4</sup> Stasz, Eide, and Martorell (2007) discuss at length the policy implications of many of the survey tabulations presented here. Because this report instead focuses on describing the survey methodology and presenting tabulations from the survey, it only briefly describes their policy implications.

The inherent drawbacks of this strategy underscore the need for obtaining information that can be used to assess whether the sample of respondents accurately reflects the sampled population. Although the results discussed in this report suggest that our sample is fairly representative of the underlying population, a limitation of our data is that we have relatively few characteristics that can be used to judge sample representativeness. Thus, we recommend that studies that conduct surveys using a similar strategy make acquiring such information a data collection priority.

The report also shows how this type of survey can be used to obtain information that is not available from other sources and that is useful for policymakers. For instance, we found that most respondents saw English language proficiency as a skill important to their job. This finding indicates that providing high-quality language instruction in schools and in job training centers is warranted. Another interesting result is that when indicating which job characteristics respondents saw as important, the respect conferred by a job outranked monetary compensation. This knowledge is helpful for policymakers interested in developing policies that foster greater willingness on the part of young Qataris to work in the private sector (Stasz, Eide, and Martorell, 2007).