

## PARTICIPATION DETERMINANTS IN AHBĀSH SECT ACTIVITIES IN THE HARARI COMMUNITY, MELBOURNE

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### ABSTRACT

*This study explores the determinants of participation in Ahbāsh Sect activities by the Harari Community of Melbourne with the objectives of describing the socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents, highlighting the various activities/programs of the Ahbāsh Sect, examining the factors determining willingness to participate as well as the frequency of participation in the Ahbāsh Sect activities/programs in the study area. As the Harari community in Melbourne are in roughly four groups, stratified random sampling was used. A representative sample size of 65, 80, 80 and 170 was taken from the Krejcie and Morgan's sample size determination table for the population size of each group. Thus, a total of 395 individuals were randomly chosen from the community but only 287 of the returned questionnaires were useful for the analysis: resulting in a 72.7% response rate approximately. Descriptive and double hurdle inferential statistics were used as the analytical tools. The results show that: Most (27.53%) of the respondents are in the 51-60 age group and 60.28% of them are a member of one of the three Harari community organizations. About 65.85% are married and 30.31% are single, 3.38% divorced and only 0.35% are widowed. The results of the double hurdle analysis indicated that the age of the respondents, household size and years of occupation significantly determined the willingness of the respondents to participate in sect activities while gender, age, education level, understanding of Arabic and Harari languages influenced the likelihood of intense participation in sect members various activities with different levels of significance. The study recommends that the Harari community of Melbourne should equip themselves with good religious education from trustworthy sources to guide them against the deviance of this sect.*

**KEYWORDS:** Ahbāsh Sect, Harari Community, Stratified Random Sampling, Double Hurdle

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Ahbāsh are a deviant Islāmic group that appeared during the last century in Lebanon. They are a Semitic speaking people (Asante, 2005) and some historians suggest that the Harari are the descendants of the first Muslim immigrants at the time of the Prophet ﷺ, who left Tigray after the death of Negus As-Hama (Ahmed al-Najashi), headed south, and settled at a place now called Harar. Others suggest that the Harari are originally settlers from Hadramawt (Southern Arabia) (Abubaker, 2016).

However, the position most historians agree on that is best backed by archaeological evidence is that the Harari are the descendants of the Harlas who were living in the Harar plateau, a region that extends from the Churcher Mountains (Southeast of the Awash plane) to the area of Hargeisa in present day Somalia. The Harlas who were a wealthy and powerful nation were hit by natural disaster and hunger and one of their legendary leaders was able to save some of them and settle in Harar in the seventh century (Dilebo, 1990).

As a religious centre, Harar and the Harari people were a factor in teaching and propagating Islām throughout the Horn of Africa, particularly in southern Ethiopia. They were generally inclined towards Sufism as demonstrated by their history and the many shrines found throughout the city of Harar (Ahmed, 2015).

It is important to note that wherever the Hararis are, their community is built around three primary social institutions. These are ‘*afocha*’ (community organizations) whose primary functions are to take care of weddings, funerals and provide support during some social needs, ‘*ahli*’ (blood relation) and ‘*marīgnnat*’ (friendship). These three social institutions tie all Hararis together and maintain their sense of common identity. The Harari in diaspora is not an exception to this; they also establish and participate in these institutions wherever they settle (Carmichael, 2004).

The theology of the Ahbāsh is a mixture of the Jahmiyyah, Mu’tazilah, Sūfis and the Shi’ah. Some of the beliefs of the Ahbāsh are clearly described in their writings (al-Munajjid, 2000) and those against ‘*Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā’ah*’ (the main Muslim body) are:

- Sin does not matter so long as one is a believer
- It is obligatory to interpret the texts of the Qur’ān and Sunnah, to understand them differently from the apparent meaning
- The Qur’ān is not the Word of Allāh ﷻ.
- Speaking ill of some of the Companions of the Prophet ﷺ among others.

One of the worst things done by the Ahbāsh is to turn people away from true knowledge and to stop those who are against their teachings by slander, belittling, undermining and even denouncing scholars who have deep knowledge as unbelievers. Among the scholars they denigrate are Ibn Taymiyah, Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab, Sayyid Sābiq, Sayyid Qutb and many others (Dimishqiyyah, 1996). This alone shows that the Ahbāsh are against everyone who calls people to worship Allāh ﷻ, alone and adhere to ‘*Tawheed*’ (unity of Allāh ﷻ), which was the belief and way of the people of the best generations (al-Munajjid, 2000).

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As for the *'fatāwā'* (pl. religious verdicts of scholars) of the Ahbāsh, many are clearly against the *'Sharī'ah'* (Islāmic law) and are downright deviant such as:

- They allow gambling with the unbelievers in order to take away their money
- They allow stealing the wealth of unbelievers -- specifically crops and animals -- as long as it does not cause *'fitnah'* (tribulation)
- They allow dealing in *'ribā'* (interest) with the unbelievers
- They allow buying lottery tickets, which is *'harām'*, if someone is in need.
- They allow free mixing of men and women and many others (Dimishqiyyah, 1996).

Some of their other *'fatāwā'* are meant to hinder a Muslim in performing his duty and blemish the character of a Muslim, such as:

- Changing the direction of *'Qiblah'* (direction of prayer) from northeast to southeast in America and Canada as the Ahbāsh do not believe that the earth is round.
- They say *'Zakāh'* (obligatory charity) is not obligatory in bank notes such as dollars and riyals except in gold and silver (al-Shahrani, 2002) and there are many other *'fatāwā'* which are similar and wrong.

In Malaysia and Indonesia, the Ahbāsh present themselves as part of *'Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah'* (the main Muslim body) and “anti-Wahhābi” movement. They create confusion among the masses by spreading their ideology, which many scholars there have declared as deviant, thus stirring up unrest and division among Muslims.

On the other hand, the Ahbāsh claim that they are the only ‘true Muslims’ and all the rest are unbelievers (*kāfirs*), and they support anyone who is against their opponent, be it a Muslim or not (Nasir, Talib and Ibrahim, 2013).

Most of al-Harari’s books are summaries of other authors and there is nothing new in them but copying what is favourable to them and changing the meaning of some without any consideration of the rules of scholarship (al-Shahrani, 2002).

Among the effects of the teachings of Ahbāsh sect is presenting faith in a philosophical way to children and their parents, to make them doubt the belief of all others except those who are with them. The worst thing that happens to parents and students themselves is that they do not accept what they are taught in mainstream Muslim schools. Therefore, to counter what they learn in these schools they either have extra religious classes on the weekends, or completely abandon the Muslim school in preference to public schools where religion is not taught. Thus, young people become blinded to the truth and will not accept any other opinion except that of the Ahbāsh sect (al-Shahrani, 2002).

Dividing the unity of the Muslims is also one of the effects of the Ahbāsh sect in various places and situations. For instance, the Ahbāsh are the cause of the problem in *'Dar al-Fatāwa'* (the Fatwa board) and the organization of *'Imāms'* (prayer leaders) in Lebanon to the extent that it escalated to physical fighting and bloodshed in mosques known as *'sirā' al-Masājīd'* (the conflict of mosques).

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This division is also seen between family members, causing conflict amongst brothers and causing husbands to divorce their wives (al-Shahrani, 2002). Such problems are not restricted to Lebanon only, but have also occurred in the U.S., Canada, Switzerland, Australia, and more recently in Ethiopia.

The Harari community of Melbourne are a product of the Ethiopian military coup of 1974 against the monarchy which brought about a socialist government that was accompanied by state terror forcing young Hararis to disperse throughout the world (Carmichael, 2004). The Hararis who settled in Melbourne, Australia, are refugees who left Ethiopia in the late 70s and early 80s to escape the 'red terror' of the Ethiopian military government. The first settlers were 16 Harari refugees from Egypt in 1984. Since then, several groups arrived from Egypt, Djibouti and a few other places and continued to arrive till the mid-90s.

After that the settlement continued although not in the same large numbers as before. Even though there are those who settled in other parts of Australia the vast majority are in Melbourne. The Harari community of Melbourne may be divided roughly into four somewhat distinct groups: Two groups which are organized based on the social needs of the community, the Ahbāsh sect and those who are not involved in any of these groups.

Although the members of the circle did not increase significantly, their influence within the community became more visible. In Melbourne, the main followers of the Ahbāsh are within the Harari community and are better known among the community as '*Ashîr Jamāa*' (the group for religious education) which they named themselves from the traditional '*Ashîr Gār*' (the house for religious education) where mature students attend advanced Islāmic learning in Harar (Ahmed, 2015).

The '*fatwa*' committee of Saudi Arabia (PCKBRRV 2015) after studying the teachings of the Ahbāsh sect determined the following:

1. The Ahbāsh are a misguided sect and are outside the fold of '*Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*' (the main body of Muslims).
2. It is impermissible to rely on their '*fatwās*' (rulings) as they permit the worship of Allāh ﷻ based on their wrong opinions which are against the Qur'ān and Sunnah.
3. One should not depend on their Prophetic Narrations, the chain of transmission or interpretation.
4. It is the duty of Muslims wherever they are to warn and caution others from the misguidance of this sect.

The Harari community of Melbourne had never known or heard of the existence of the Ahbāsh sect before they arrived in Melbourne. Even the Ahbāsh themselves who started the first cell never mentioned the name; instead, they named themselves as '*Ashîr Jamāa*' which at that time appeared to be related to a noble '*Ashîr Gār*' where advanced religious education is provided back home in Harar. The group is still known by this name in Melbourne since the mid-nineties and nowhere else is this name used until recently.

The timing of their public appearance, in hindsight, is at least dubious as they appeared at a time when there was a big problem within the Harari Community Association which was the only

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organization for all the Hararis at the time that ended up splitting into two. The Ahbāsh sect, '*Ashîr Jamāa*', instead of trying to help reconcile the two groups as they are students of religion, as they claim, they appeared as the third group (Abdella, 2002).

As soon as they appeared, they started to give some extraordinary '*fatāwā*' (verdicts) such as:

- eating white sugar and chicken are '*harām*' (forbidden)
- studying the Qur'ān is not important compared to what they teach, i.e., religious education,
- women are allowed to disobey their husbands if it is in search of religious education.

What is astonishing is when some members of the public openly criticised them about these, all of the '*fatāwā*' suddenly disappeared. However, these '*fatāwā*' had already done their damage, for instance, some people had thrown out a lot of chicken meat from their fridge and there was a case of a divorce because of it. The biggest problem of this group is that when they are found to be mistaken, they do not make their error public, which would have helped others to know that the rulings were a mistake and need not be applied anymore (Abdella, 2002).

In recruiting their study groups, their initial focus was mainly on women. This seems to have worked to their advantage in two ways; firstly, some of these women dragged their husbands to the study group and secondly, these women began taking their children to their weekend school. As a result, there are many young children who are well trained in chanting songs and poems in '*mawlid*' (birth of the Prophet ﷺ) during their social activities. Moreover, these young children, now youth, seem to be diehard followers and defenders of the group. This is visible by the way they pronounce some Arabic words, i.e., struggling to get some sounds as Dimishqiyyah (1996) calls it as a 'twitter of birds', changing Harari words from its usual way and considering some Harari words as a taboo.

The main objective of the study, therefore, is to determine the effect of the Ahbāsh sect on the Harari community of Melbourne while the specific objectives are to describe the socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents, identify various activities/programs of Ahbāsh Sect in the study area, highlight the factors determining willingness to participate in Ahbāsh Sect activities/programs in the study area and examine the factors affecting intensity of participation in the Ahbāsh Sect activities/ programs in the study area.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The study area is Melbourne, Australia, specifically the western and south-eastern suburbs where the concentration of Hararis is high, as over ninety percent of Hararis live in these regions. These two areas are also where the two Harari community weekend schools are found. The western region is also where the Saay Harari community centre and centre of '*ashîr jamāa*' (Ahbāsh) are located.

The methodology applied in this research is a cross-sectional study of the Harari groups which helps to determine the relationship between exposure to the Ahbāsh sect and tolerance of their ideology by the other three major groups of the Harari community in Melbourne. The cross-sectional study provides a descriptive study which examines the relationship of variables and

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belief-related characteristics in certain situations at a particular time within a representative group over the population. Inferential statistics are applied to determine the cause-and-effect relationship between the different variables. It gives a clear view of the population at a point in time and measurement of the exposure that exists in relation to the acceptance of the prevalent Ahbāsh sect ideology. Therefore, the result obtained from this study can predict the effect of the Ahbāsh on the population who are exposed to them.

The sampling method used in this study is probability sampling. As the community is in four groups, stratified random sampling was used where the population in each stratum have an equal chance of being selected. Based on the population size of each group, the sample size was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan's sample size calculation formula (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970):

$$s = \frac{X^2 NP (1-P)}{d^2 (N-1) + X^2 P (1-P)}$$

where,

$s$  = sample size.

$X^2$  = the table value of chi-square for 1 degree of freedom at the desired confidence level ( $1.96 \times 1.96 = 3.8416$ ).

$N$  = the population size.

$P$  = the population proportion (assumed to be 0.50 since this would provide the maximum sample size).

$d$  = the degree of accuracy taken as (.05).

A representative sample size of 65, 80, 80 and 170 was taken from the Krejcie and Morgan's sample size determination table for the population size of each group. Thus, a total of 395 individuals are randomly chosen throughout the community but only 287 of the returned questionnaires were useful for the analysis corresponding to a 72.7% response rate.

This study deals with the effect of an ideology of a group on another group within a community. To quantify this the questionnaire focuses on the participation of the individual in a specific group activity and his relationship with the other groups. The belief system of the Ahbāsh group is clearly known to everyone within the community and the observation on the ground also shows that individuals from the other groups who have close contact with them are more sympathetic to their ideology. Therefore, the questions are developed to investigate this relationship of the individual to conclude the effect of the Ahbāsh sect.

The questionnaire was mainly divided into three parts:

1. The first part was to identify the respondents' socioeconomic characteristics in terms of gender, marital status, education level and employment among other key demographics.
2. The second part deals with the types or dimensions of social capital in terms of membership in one of the three main associations, preferred activities to participate in and support of one of the other groups.

3. The final part tries to find where the respondents and their children, if they have any, obtain their religious education.

The data was gathered using stratified sampling based on the four groups of the community. The questionnaire was distributed personally by five people, one for each of the first three groups and two for the remaining group. A time limit of three weeks was given to collect all of the results. However, receiving a reply from the participants was not as simple and straightforward as initially thought. By the end of the three weeks only a little above 150 responses were collected. The deadline was extended by another week and at the end only a further 137 replies were obtained. Thus 287 was taken as the sample size for the study which was 72.7% of what was intended.

To examine the relationship and the effect of the Ahbāsh on Melbourne's Harari community, a double hurdle (DH) estimation procedure was applied. Under this estimation technique, a participant must cross two hurdles to demonstrate the effect of the Ahbāsh sect (EA). First, an individual becomes a 'potentially effectable' after crossing the first hurdle. Given positive relationships, being a member or supporting the Ahbāsh sect would then lead to being affected which is the second hurdle (Cragg, 1971).

The DH model of EA is, therefore, a two-equation framework:

$$d_i^* d_i^* = Z_i' Z_i' \alpha + \epsilon_i \epsilon_i \quad \text{first hurdle}$$

$$EAP_i^* EAP_i^* = X_i' X_i' \beta + \mu_i \mu_i \quad \text{second hurdle}$$

where,

$d_i^*$  is the binary variable depicting whether a participant is affected or not;  $EAP_i^* EAP_i^*$  is the latent variable which reflects perceived intensity; the observed way of EA. It is determined as  $EAP_i^* EAP_i^* = d_i^* d_i^* \cdot EAP_i^* EAP_i^*$ ; Z and X are vectors of factors explaining the probability of being affected EA and the intensity of the effect, respectively;  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  are vectors of coefficients to be estimated; and  $\epsilon_i \epsilon_i$  and  $\mu_i \mu_i$  are the two error terms assumed to be independently distributed such that (Cragg, 1971)

$$\begin{pmatrix} \epsilon_i \\ \mu_i \end{pmatrix} \sim N \left[ \begin{pmatrix} 0 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix}, \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 0 & \sigma^2 \end{pmatrix} \right] \left[ \begin{pmatrix} 0 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix}, \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 0 & \sigma^2 \end{pmatrix} \right]$$

The log-likelihood function for the DH model is:

$$\text{LogL} = \sum \ln \sum \ln [1 - \Phi(Z_i' \alpha) \Phi\left(\frac{X_i' \beta}{\sigma}\right)] [1 - \Phi(Z_i' \alpha) \Phi\left(\frac{X_i' \beta}{\sigma}\right)] + \sum + \ln [\Phi(Z_i' \alpha) \frac{1}{\sigma} \Phi\left(\frac{EAP_i - X_i' \beta}{\sigma}\right)] \left(\frac{EAP_i - X_i' \beta}{\sigma}\right)]$$

Where,

$\Phi(\cdot)$  and  $\phi(\cdot)$  are the standard normal cumulative and probability density functions, respectively.

The analysis of marginal effects helps to assess the impact of the exogenous variables on the dependent variable. To do so, the unconditional mean is decomposed into the effect on the probability of perceiving and the effect on the conditional level of perception and differentiating

these components with respect to each explanatory variable (Hetayezu et al, 2017). The unconditional mean can be written as:

$$E[EP_i|X_i][EP_i|X_i] = (EP_i > 0) \cdot (EP_i > 0) \cdot E(EP_i|EP_i > 0)(EP_i|EP_i > 0)$$

The probability of perceiving and the perceived magnitude of the effect of Ahbāsh conditional on perception are:

$$P(EP_i|EP_i > 0) = \Phi(Z_i' \alpha) \Phi\left(\frac{X_i' \beta}{\sigma}\right) \left(\frac{X_i' \beta}{\sigma}\right)$$

and

$$E(EP_i|EP_i > 0)(EP_i|EP_i > 0) = \Phi\left(\frac{X_i' \beta}{\sigma}\right)^{-1} \left(\frac{X_i' \beta}{\sigma}\right)^{-1} \int_0^{\infty} \left( \frac{EP_i}{\sigma_i \sqrt{1 + \theta^2 EP_i^2}} \Phi\left(\frac{T(\theta Y_i) - X_i' \beta}{\sigma_i}\right) \right) dEP_i \int_0^{\infty} \left( \frac{EP_i}{\sigma_i \sqrt{1 + \theta^2 EP_i^2}} \Phi\left(\frac{T(\theta Y_i) - X_i' \beta}{\sigma_i}\right) \right) dEP_i$$

For the discrete or categorical variables, the marginal effects are used to calculate percentage changes in the dependent variable when the variable shifts from zero to one while other conditions remain the same. In the Double-Hurdle model, the regression analysis of the probability to the effect is estimated using Probit regression and the second stage is calibrated using a truncated regression procedure (Hetayezu et al, 2017).

The difference of Poisson regression from other regression is that the dependent (Y) variable is an observed count that follows the Poisson distribution. It is similar to logistic regression, which also has a discrete response variable, but the response is not limited to specific values as it is in logistic regression (NCSS, n.d).

The formula for probability of y events in Poisson distribution model is:

$$\Pr\{Y = y \mid \mu, y \mid \mu\} = \frac{e^{-\mu} \mu^y e^{-\mu} \mu^y}{y! y!} \quad (y = 0, 1, 2, \dots)$$

The Poisson distribution is specified with a single parameter  $\mu$  which signifies the mean incidence rate of a rare event per unit of exposure. As exposure is often a period of time, the symbol t is used to represent the exposure. When no exposure value is given, it is assumed to be one. The probability of y events is given by (NCSS, n.d)

$$\Pr\{Y = y \mid \mu, y \mid \mu, t\} = \frac{e^{-\mu} (\mu t)^y e^{-\mu} (\mu t)^y}{y! y!} \quad (y = 0, 1, 2, \dots)$$

The Poisson distribution has the property that its mean and variance are equal.

Poisson regression supposes that the Poisson incidence rate  $\mu$  is determined by a set of k regressor variables (the X's). This expressed as (NCSS, n.d)

$$\mu = t \exp(\beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_k X_k)$$



Note that often,  $X_1X_1 \equiv 1$  and  $\beta_1\beta_1$  is called the intercept. The regression coefficients  $\beta_1, \beta_2, \dots, \beta_k$  are unknown parameters that are estimated from a set of data. Their estimates are labelled as  $b_1, b_2, \dots, b_k$ . Using this notation, the fundamental Poisson regression model for an observation  $i$  is given by (NCSS, n.d)

$$\Pr\{Y_i = y_i \mid \mu_i, t_i\} = \frac{e^{-\mu_i t_i} (\mu_i t_i)^{y_i}}{y_i!}$$

where:

$$\mu_i = t_i \mu(X_i \beta)$$

$$= t_i \exp(\beta_1 X_{1i} + \beta_2 X_{2i} + \dots + \beta_k X_{ki}) = t_i \exp(\beta_1 X_{1i} + \beta_2 X_{2i} + \dots + \beta_k X_{ki})$$

That is, for a given set of values of the regressor variables, the outcome follows the Poisson distribution.

The regression coefficients are estimated using the method of maximum likelihood. The logarithm of the likelihood function is (NCSS, n.d)

$$\ln[L(y, \beta)] = \sum_{i=1}^n \ln[t_i \mu(X_i \beta)] - \sum_{i=1}^n t_i \mu(X_i \beta) - \sum_{i=1}^n \ln(y_i!)$$

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the distribution of the respondents based on their socioeconomic characteristics. It reveals that 51.57% of the respondents were male while 48.43% were female. In terms of age, both the 21-30 and 41-50 age groups are 26.48% each. Most of the respondents are in the 51-60 age group at 27.53%. In general, nearly 70% of the respondents are less than 50 years. About 65.85% are married and 30.31% are single. There are 3.38% who are divorcees and only 0.35% are widowers.

The table also revealed that:

- 36.59% of the respondents have two or less than two members in their households
- 40.07% have 3-4 members
- 20.21% have between 5-6 members
- 3.14% have 7-8 members in their households.

It was observed that the average number of members in a household amongst survey respondents is 4.

Likewise, in terms of education levels:

- 0.70% have no formal education
- 7.34% of the respondents have primary school level of education

- 8.04% have vocational training experience.
- The majority (42.66%) have secondary school education
- 40.21% have tertiary level education, ranging from bachelor up to doctorate degrees.

As for the occupation of the respondents:

- Majority (41.11%) are private sector employees
- Followed by 20.56% self-employed
- 6.62% public servants
- There are 7.67% unemployed among the respondents
- 24.04%, although employed, have not specified the type of their employment.

The Table also presents the distribution of respondents in terms of membership in one of the main associations and it reveals that 60.63% of the respondents are members of one of the main associations while the remaining 39.37% are not members of an association. This indicates that the majority of the respondents do participate in the activity of one of the main associations.

Furthermore, the participation of the respondents in the three associations indicated that the majority of the respondents (39.72%) are not members of any association even though some of them may support one of the three. About 21.95% and 20.21% are members in one of the two socially organised associations. The remaining 18.12% of respondents are members of the Ahbāsh sect.

### 3.1 Various Activities of the Ahbash Sect in the Study Area

The Ahbāsh sect of Melbourne are active in running weekly ‘religious’ classes for parents and weekend school for children. They also have occasional gatherings where they chant songs in praise of the Prophet ﷺ and other saints (*awliyā'*) together and train the youth to perform these songs at weddings and other events. They also sometimes hold exorcism sessions and exhibitions of what they claim to be the hair of the Prophet ﷺ. They celebrate a number of holidays such as *mawlid* (the birth of the Prophet ﷺ), '*isrā'* and *mi'rāj'* (the night journey of the Prophet ﷺ from Mecca to Jerusalem and then to the heavens) and astonishingly Christmas Eve which began by the argument that the youth would spend their time in desirable places if they were not provided an alternative event during the festive season, currently this celebration is primarily used as a day for fundraising.

The religious education provided by the Ahbāsh sect shown in Table 2, is attended by 42.16% of the overall respondents. The majority of the attendees 47.93% are from the Ahbāsh group while 37.19% are among those who are non-members of any group. The rest which are much lesser in numbers, 9.09% and 5.79% are members of the other two associations.

Weekend schools are attended by all groups of the respondents as Table 3 shows. The two groups that run weekend schools, ASHA and HO (Ahbāsh sect), have more attendees at 38.55% and

26.51% respectively than the other groups. The other attendees are 20.48% from the HCAA and 14.46% from non-members.

### **3.2 The Factors Determining Willingness to Participate in the Ahbāsh Sect Activities in the Study Area**

Table 4 tier 1 (first hurdle) presents the logit result showing the factors determining willingness to participate in Ahbāsh sect activities in the study area. Three of the variables significantly determined the willingness to participate in Ahbāsh sect activities and they are: the age of the respondent, their household size and the years of being engaged in their chosen occupation.

Age and the number of years spent in school have a positive relationship with the willingness to participate in the Ahbāsh sect activities at a 5 percent level of significance. This implies that the older the respondents and the more educated they are, the higher the probability of participating in the Ahbāsh sect activities in the study area.

Conversely, the respondents' gender and household size have a negative association with their willingness to participate in Ahbāsh sect activities at 5 and 10 percent significance levels respectively. The larger the household size and the gender being male, the less the likelihood to be willing to participate in Ahbāsh sect activities.

### **3.3 Factors Affecting the Frequency of Participation in Ahbāsh Sect Activities in the Study Area**

Table 5 tier 2 (second hurdle) presents the tobit result showing factors affecting the frequency of participation (for those that have already been participating) in the Ahbāsh sect activities in the study area. Five of the variables significantly affect the frequency of participation in Ahbāsh sect activities.

The gender of the respondents affects the frequency of participation. There is a greater likelihood that females will participate with greater frequency compared to males in the Ahbāsh sect activities, this result is significant at 10 percent level. Similarly understanding of the Harari language is significant at 1 percent level. However, age, number of years spent in school, and the understanding of Arabic language negatively determined the frequency of participation in sect activities.

This indicated that at 1 percent level of significance, as the members get older the lower the probability of participating more in sect activities. Likewise, at the 5 percent level of significance, the higher the level of education and knowledge of the members in Arabic language, the greater is the likelihood that their participation in the sect activities will drop. This may be due to the fact that they are much more likely to be exposed to the truth behind the deviation of the sect compared to mainstream Islām.

## **4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

### **4.1 Conclusion**

This study has demonstrated the significant impact of the Ahbāsh sect on the Harari community in Melbourne as evidenced by their levels of membership and support amongst the community. It has also sought to identify some of the major factors driving the support of a clearly deviant sect.

The most notable factors have been gender, with increased support amongst females; age, with increased support amongst youth; and education levels with higher levels of education amongst sect supporters (particularly amongst the youth). A particular issue within the Harari community is the fact that the founder of the sect al-Harari is, as the name suggests, from Harar which automatically entails a certain amount of solidarity and support from his racial and familial brethren. This study has played an important role in highlighting a significant problem facing the Harari community today. Further action is needed to counteract the destructive force that is the Ahbāsh Sect amongst the Harari community. Innovative methods need to be applied as the Ahbāsh sect seems to have been calculated in targeting key elements in the community whereby they can increase their influence.

If some counterbalancing force is not found their influence will continue to grow until the Harari community is lost to the true belief of *'Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah'* (the main body of Muslims).

#### 4.2 Recommendations

Participation and support for this sect only exists if there is ignorance and misunderstanding of Islām by young and old in the community. Therefore, providing a normative understanding of the true religion through well-trained Muslim religious teachers should be the main measure required to stop it. This puts the responsibility of teaching Islām as the central focus for any prevention strategy to tackle sectarian ideology; because once the sources that promote it are inhibited, it seems that Muslims' understanding will then be shaped into something proactive and constructive for the community.

As seen in the results of the study, ignorance of the Arabic language makes the community vulnerable to following the misrepresentation of Islām by the Ahbāsh sect. Positive programs of balanced Islāmic education and Arabic language education are key recommendations of this study. The result also showed educated community members participate and support this sect; that is because their education is usually unbalanced towards the secular, leaving a gap in their religious knowledge that has been filled by this deviant group. The primary venues for better religious education for our community should be Muslim schools, mosques, and of course the family and not the Ahbāsh sects' religious classes.

The Muslims need to know that these sects are trying to divide and undermine the unity of *'Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah'* (the main body of Muslims) on a permanent basis. In reality sects such as the Ahbāsh are ignorant, not only that but they are ignorant of their own ignorance as well. It is as Allāh said in Sūrah al-Baqarah verse 3: ***'And when it is said to them (hypocrites): "Believe as the people have believed, they say: Shall we believe as the fools believed?" Verily, they are the fools, but they know not.'***

Therefore, to prevent the influence of this sect on our community, two opposites but mutually necessary steps are required. These are: exposing and excluding the Ahbāsh sect on the one hand and educating and helping those vulnerable community members who may fall into their trap by giving them an alternative religious education.

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APPENDIX

**Table 1: Distribution of the Respondents According to their Socioeconomic Characteristics**

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Sex</b>		
Female	139	48.43
Male	148	51.57
<b>Age</b>		
<11	1	0.35
11-20	9	3.14
21-30	76	26.48
31-40	32	11.15
41-50	76	26.48
51-60	79	27.53
>60	14	4.88
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	87	30.31
Married	189	65.85
Widowed	1	0.35
Divorced	10	3.38
<b>Household Size</b>		
< 2	105	36.59
3-4	115	40.07
5-6	58	20.21
>7	9	3.14
<b>Educational Qualification</b>		
No –formal education	2	0.70
Vocational training	23	8.04
Primary school	21	7.34
Secondary school	122	42.66
Tertiary institution	115	40.21
Others	3	1.05

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**Occupation**

Unemployed	22	7.67
Self-employed	59	20.56
Public servant	19	6.62
Private Sector employee	118	41.11
Others	69	24.04

**Membership of Social Association**

Yes	174	60.63
No	113	39.37

**Association**

HCAA	58	20.21
HO (ashir jamaa)	52	18.12
ASHA	63	21.95
Non-members	114	39.72

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**Table 2: Distribution of the Respondents According to Religious class attendance with the Ahbāsh**

Association	Frequency	percentage
hcaa	11	9.09
harari org.	58	47.93
asha	7	5.79
non-member	45	37.19
Total	121	100.00

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**Table 3: Distribution of the Respondents According to overall Weekend School attendance**

Association	Frequency	percentage
hcaa	17	20.48
harari org.	22	26.51
asha	32	38.55
non-member	12	14.46
Total	83	100.00

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**Table 4: Factors determining willingness to participate in Ahbāsh sect activities (First Hurdle)**

**Estimating Cragg's tobit alternative**

**Assumes conditional independence**

Number of obs = 287

Wald chi2 (7) = 8.95

Log likelihood = 256.18014

Prob > chi2 = 0.2560

	Coef	Std. Err.	z	P> z	[95% Coef. Interval]	
Tier1						
sex	-.3514457	.3197005	-1.10	0.272	-.9780472	.2751558
age	.0306151**	.0139463	2.20	0.028	.0032809	.0579493
schyr	.0472893	.0429089	1.10	0.270	-.0368106	.1313892
hhsz	-.1763226*	.1014292	-1.74	0.082	-.3751201	.0224749
occupation	.1135695*	.064053	1.77	0.076	-.011972	.2391111
arabic	.1531735	.6118229	0.25	0.802	-1.045977	1.352324
haralag	.0977954	.6193372	0.16	0.875	-1.116083	1.311674
_cons	.1427944	.8827237	0.16	0.871	-1.587312	1.872901

**Table 5: Factors Affecting the Intensity of Participation in Ahbāsh Sect Activities (Second Hurdle)**

	Coef	Std. Err.	z	P> z	[95% Coef. Interval]	
<b>Tier2</b>						
sex	.0202936*	.011023	1.84	0.066	-.0013111	.0418983
age	-.0020652***	.0004836	-4.27	0.000	-.003013	-.0011173
schyr	-.003199**	.001578	-2.03	0.043	-.0062919	.0001062
hhsz	.0032844	.003334	0.99	0.325	-.00325	.0098189
occupation	.0016108	.0017445	0.92	0.356	-.0018083	.0050299
arabic	-.0559345**	.0248899	-2.25	0.025	-.1047178	-.0071513
haralag	.0924194***	.0251602	3.67	0.000	.0431063	.1417326
_cons	.4032505	.0320591	12.58	0.000	.3404158	.4660852
<b>Sigma</b>						
_cons	.0837749	.0035954	23.30	0.000	.076728	.0908218