**Cultural Differences Separates**

**Somali Family: Six Children Taken by Social Services**

**Buffalo News**

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NEWS STAFF REPORTER

**Key Vocabulary Words:**

**Whole Class** (bold):

* **Abuse**
* **Lawyer / Attorney**
* **Breastfeeding**
* **Foster care/home**
* **Suffering**
* **Headscarf**

**Individual Level** (italics underlined):

* *Unfairly*
* *Tie*
* *Misbehave*
* *Acceptable*
* *Culture*
* *Punishment*

**Glossary/Class Explanation** (italics only):

* *Immigrant*
* *Electricity*
* *Erie County Department of Social Services / Child Protective Services*
* *Imam*
* *Valuable*
* *Rash*
* *Islam/Islamic*

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| Malaika Sabtow, 28, holds photos of her six children, taken from her by Social Services. |

Somali *immigrant*Malaika Sabtow raised five children in African refugee camps. She lived 14 years with no *electricity*, no rain, and a lot of sickness.

But nothing before was bad like what happened to her in Buffalo.

Sabtow, 28, now has six children, including **breast-feeding** a baby who is 2 months old. Five months ago, the *Erie County Department of Social Services* took all of her 6 children and put them in a **foster home**, and Sabtow doesn’t understand. Sabtow, 28, wants to go back to Africa.

“At least I had my children in Africa,” she said. “Here everything is good, but if they are taking the kids from you, Africa is better.”

Some people think *Social Services* was wrong to take her children. They think that she and her husband, Madhey A. Khamis, are being treated *unfairly* because they are new to the country and don’t speak English.

*Social Services* Commissioner Carol Dankert said they could not say why they took the children. Also, she did not say if they would come back to their families.

“We do want kids to be with their families when it is possible,” she said.

Sabtow asked Buffalo **attorney** Oscar Smukler for help.

“I think the kids have **suffered** too much,” said Smukler. “We’re trying hard to get the children back to their parents.”

Khamis got a letter in September from *Social Services* saying that someone in his house had **abused** one of his children.

*Child Protective Services* said that on July 30 at Khamis and Sabtow’s home on Chenango Street, Khamis **abused** his 8-year-old son, Abdi Abdi, with a belt and *tied* the boy’s hands and legs with rope after he *misbehaved* at school, said friends of the family.

The friends said that type of *punishment* is *acceptable* in Somalia. They said Khamis didn’t want to hurt his son.

“They already understand that what Khamis did is not *acceptable* here,” said Osman Dualeh Abdullah, a Somali who has lived in Buffalo for many years.

Abdullah and Omar, imam of the Islamic Cultural Association of Western New York, have tried to help the family.

“Child Protective Services, they don’t know the *culture.* People need to teach them,” said Omar. “There is a lot of **abuse** in America, but not with these people. Their children are so important and *valuable* to them.”

Dawoud S. Adeyola, another imam, wrote a letter to *Social Services* saying the family has been treated badly. He says it’s important to return the children to their mother, or a family that understands their language and *culture*.

Muslim community leaders can help to return the children to the mother, but not the father. The father would not be with the family.

Friend of the family said that the children should be placed in homes more understanding of their *cultural* needs.

The parents have told friends and others that the children seemed sick and sad when they visited the parents.

The baby girl, Shamia, who is now 6 months old, has *rashes* on her body and doesn’t stop crying during the visits, according to Sabtow. Shamia was being **breastfed** at the time she was taken from Sabtow.

Shamia and her brother, Hassan, 5, were recently in the hospital at Women & Children’s Hospital — and *Social Services* told their parents not to visit.

“We’re afraid that this will make them too sad. Every time they go see them, their kids are crying, sick or **suffering**,” said Abdullah.

The children live in 3 different **foster homes**. None of them are Muslim families, said Omar, the imam.

One of the boys, Mustaffa, 12, had to leave his *Islamic* private school and go to School 19, even though his parents paid $3,600 for the boy to attend.

According to Omar, Mustaffa told his mother that the people in his new house would not allow him to practice *Islam*.

A daughter, Fatuma, 11, also has not been allowed to wear the traditional Muslim **headscarf**, called a hijab, Omar said.

And none of the children could celebrate Ramadan, a Muslim holiday.

*Child Protective Services* says they try to understand *cultura*l differences as much as they can.

**Glossary**

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| **Word** | **Definition** |
| * ***Immigrant*** | Someone who is from another country living in a different country |
| * ***Electricity*** | Power that gives you light that comes through a wire |
| * ***Erie County Department of Social Services*** | Government agency that helps people in need |
| * ***Child Protective Services*** | Government agency that helps children who are being abused |
| * ***Imam*** | A leader of the Muslim religion |
| * ***Valuable*** | Important and rare |
| * ***Rash*** | A problem of the skin |
| * ***Islam*** | Describes the Muslim religion |