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## Somali American Parents' Perception of Formal Education for Females

Abdirahman Abdullahi Abdirahman  
*St. Cloud State University*

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**Somali American Parents' Perception of Formal Education for Females**

by

Abdirahman Abdullahi Abdirahman

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

St. Cloud State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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Thesis Committee:  
James Robinson, Chairperson  
Michael Schwartz  
Judith Dorn

### **Abstract**

Minnesota, known as the land of ten thousand lakes, is home to a mixture of immigrants. Among the immigrants who call Minnesota home are Somalis. There have been many studies on various topics about the Somali community both nationally and at the state level; however, no study regarding this topic has been explored based on the researcher's knowledge. The purpose of this specific study was to find out the perceptions of Somali American parents toward formal education for females and to identify the reasons of their beliefs. The findings are based on data collected through two semi-constructed interviews with ten Somali American participants who have resided in the U.S for a minimum of twenty years, equally representing both genders. The analysis of the interviews led to discovering nine major themes related to Somali American parents' perception of formal education for females: Somali American parents view formal education for females and males equally, parents like that their female children receive a formal education and are proud that they are, they have positive beliefs about formal education for females, they believe there are no direct negative impacts associated with formal education for females unless used incorrectly or seen as a problem by others, concerns about boys/males freely intermingling with their female children, Somali American parents believe that females do better than males at receiving a formal education, family responsibilities can be an obstacle for females, parents value formal education for females, and support their female children receive a formal education.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

### Introduction to Study

Many Somalis reside in Minnesota. The American Community Survey data indicated that about 85,700 people of Somali origin are in America and a third of them reside in Minnesota (American Community Survey, 2015). Somalis in Minnesota vary regarding the amount of years they have lived in America. Some are second generation Somalis, those who were born in America, but parents are immigrants, and "generation 1.5" who came to America at a young age from abroad. Of course, there are those who migrated to America in the late 1800s; though, there are not a lot of them. Somali community leaders estimate the Somali population in Minnesota to be 25,000 with an expected increase to 50,000 by the year. The growth in Somali immigration to the Twin Cities has been described as "totally unforeseen" and prompts estimates by state demographers and Somali immigrants in the nation (Heitritter, 1999, p. 3).

Similar to other immigrants, living in America has granted Somalis many opportunities. From the many opportunities present in America, is the opportunity to attain an education. Somali parents—in general—appreciate this opportunity since education has many connections to various aspects of life. For this reason, parents recognize the value of receiving a formal education, especially at schools that have bilingual Somali educators. Minnesota has been described as a positive community for Somali families, in part, (a) because of its economy, (b) because the large Somali community provided resources for reinforcing child-rearing values of Muslim families, and (c) because the education system has a strong bilingual education program incorporating native Somali educators (Heitritter, 1999, p. 7).

Of course, it is important to clarify what type of education is being referred to since education entails many conventions such as formal, non-formal, informal, secular, religious,

institutionalized, and non-institutionalized education. This study examined formal education. That is, since modern society's education is a highly developed institution. It has a network of rules creating public classifications of persons and knowledge. It defines which individuals belong to these categories and possess the appropriate knowledge. And it defines which persons have access to valued positions in society. Formal education is a central element in the public biography of individuals, greatly affecting their life chances. It is also a central element in the table of organization of society, constructing competencies and helping create professions and professionals. Such an institution clearly has an impact on society over and above the immediate socializing experiences it offers the young (Meyer, 1977, p. 2).

Somali parents' perceptions of male and female formal education may vary. Therefore, exploring Somali American parents' perception of females' formal education reveals whether there is difference from their perception of males' formal education. It is also possible that their perception and beliefs about females' formal education may influence their daughters' achievement. With that said, this study may serve as an explanation to some of the questions held by educators concerning Somali American parents' perception of formal education for females in general and educators inquiring about the Somali community.

### **Significance of Study**

This study is significantly important as it investigates Somali Americans, a minority immigrant group in Minnesota, who are becoming more and more visible in the state. As well, this topic is very important for educators. It is hoped that this study better helps U.S society understand a party of its members by examining how Somali American parents perceive formal education for females. Studies like this one can be very useful for educators specifically and for all U.S citizens in general. This study will be a stepping-stone for those who work in the field of

education since it relates to their field and so will provide insight about the views of a minority group it serves.

Studies like this one can breed useful information that may call for the modification or enhancements of pedagogical curriculums. School boards can better work with their students by designing ways to convey the importance of formal education for females among the Somali communities and employ convincing methods that make formal education for females appealing to Somali American parents. The results of this study can contribute to better develop strategies to convey the need of formally educating females to Somali parents. As well, it can shed light on some of the obstacles that females in the Somali community encounter in attaining a formal education.

This study was examined through the perspective of Somali American parents on female education. Therefore, this study can possibly indicate not only some of the barriers for females' formal education within the Somali community, but also see if there are patterns among parents' viewpoints that affect their female children in their pursuit of their formal education. With that said, this study is significantly important as it provides useful data that is pertinent to education and educators.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study and why I chose it was to find out what the perceptions of Somali American parents are regarding formal education for females and to see if there are any shared reasons among parents. No doubt, children are influenced by the cultivation of their parents and their views on issues related to their children will manifest in them. Therefore, females whose parents perceive formal education to have a lot of value for them may perform differently than females whose parents do not; in other words, parents' perception of formal

education can possibly influence—negatively or positively—their performance at schools. With that said, this study sought to examine what Somali American parents’ perceptions were regarding formal education for females in hopes to provide resourceful information to educators.

### **Preceding Work Related of Study**

In doing this study, I did not come across any studies on Somali American parents’ perception on formal education for females in particular. It appears that this topic is underdeveloped and/or is still in its infancy. However, this does not detract the value of this study. Conversely, it is an incitement for all—Somalis and non-Somalis—to contribute in its coverage. However, I did manage to find some research on related topics about different ethnicities.

Leigh Fuke's study, “Girls’ Education and the International Community: The Case of Education for All (EFA) and India” (2007), contained points I benefitted from. He concluded that there is one major issue that must be considered regardless of programs, policies or other interventions and this is the close link between low educational attainment by women and the low social status of women in society in general. In many cases, women are denied access to getting an education and encouraged to end their education prematurely because of their societal and familial roles. The traditional role of the girl child in taking care of younger siblings and helping in the home from an early age is clearly problematic in terms of the achievement of education by girl children. Additionally, Fuke reported that marriage traditions that see a woman absorbed into her husband’s family are problematic in terms of allowing girls’ parents to envision some future benefit of educating girl children. Marriage of girls at an early age is another practice which is seriously limiting to girls in terms of educational opportunities (Fuke, 2007, p. 121).

As well, Patrick A. Edewor's work: "Changing Perceptions of the Value of Daughters and Girls' Education among the Isoko of Nigeria", was another related work I came across. His research indicated positive perceptions. The changing perception on the value of daughters among parents in Isoko society is altering their attitudes toward the benefits of girls' education. Given the fact that parents perceive adult daughters as more caring and more supportive than adult sons, girls' education is perceived as a way of investing for the future. Educated women are better equipped to provide support to their aged parents. This changing perception on the value of daughters creates a favorable disposition towards girls' education (Edewor, 2006, p. 69).

Lastly, I also found Pinar Mercan's study, "Perceptions of Parents Regarding Girl's Education". Based on the findings of her study, it was seen that parents had positive thoughts and beliefs concerning girl's education. Overall, parents' ideas regarding benefits of girls' education were positive regardless of their social and educational background. Thus, it can be inferred that awareness raising activities of girls' education campaigns executed by MONE and NGOs had positive impacts on parents' thoughts of female education (Mercan, 2010, p. 73).

In sum, we share a communal responsibility in contributing to this topic about all ethnicities and communities. As a Somali American who is a member of both the American community and the Somali community, I felt a larger responsibility to cover this topic about my community. I anticipate that readers find many stereotypes, stigmas, and asserted beliefs regarding Somali females receiving a formal education to be untrue. As well, that many have denigrated the Somali community unwarranted and that such denigrations, perhaps may have been because of ignorance about Somali Americans. Due to the large Somali population in Minnesota, it is hoped that this study contributes in providing an insight to some of the dynamics within the Somali community pertaining to how Somali American parents perceive formal

education for females. There are many presumptions of ethnic groups, cultures, and immigrants at large, leading to fallacious beliefs about them.

I say this since I have heard many stereotypes and unsubstantiated opinions from non-Somalis regarding how Somalis view females in general, and more specifically, how they view females receiving a formal education. If Somalis viewed female education negatively, then I would assume their performance would be also negative at schools. However, having attended school since kindergarten, I have seen many Somali female classmates who were very bright students and excelled in their studies. I have also interacted with many members of the Somali community and have heard much commendation for Somali females' dedication and performances at schools. Therefore, from the perspective of a Somali American male, I have had positive views regarding formal education for females. However, this research will examine the perceptions of formal education for females through a broader lens and exactly what this research was titled; that is, Somali American parents' perception of female formal education.

### **Research Questions**

This research sought to explore the following questions:

1. What are Somali American parents' ideas about the formal education of their female children?
2. What are some possible obstacles hindering Somali females from receiving a formal education from a parent's perspective?

## Chapter II: Literature Review

### Somali Culture and Tradition

Somalis are a nomadic people. Somali society is also heavily nomadic. Much of what goes on in day-to-day life surrounds herding camels, making a shelter for one's family, and animals, more specifically cattle, are important in Somalia. Camels are often a wide used source for transportation. Traditionally, people get by from place to place with their herds. Therefore, animals like camels and sheep are very valuable to them. For this reason, the amount of camels one possesses indicates the level of his wealth.

Somalis, traditionally, are also very close with their families and keep ties with their kin. They are a communal people and it is from their tradition to support one another. They visit one another periodically, check-up on one another, and it is very normal within Somalis to marry one's cousin. This aids to their collectiveness and unity. There is a Somali proverb rendered in English as, "Together the teeth cut", which implies that strength is in unity. This proverb underscores the notion of family unity as the foundation of family strength found in the study (Putnam & Noor, 1993). A large factor to this unity is that Somali people have a clan system that helps keep them united and know the members of their clan. They have a close bond with these members who are from their clan/tribe. Therefore, resources attained by one member is like resources attained by all member from his/her family and clan. Interdependence and support through the sharing of resources maintained strong families through the physical unity of family members. Families were accustomed to living difficult lives as nomads and farmers by relying on both the physical environment and on the physical proximity of extended family members for necessary resources. Interdependence and sharing of resources were expected between generations within families, and between families and the greater Somali community (Heitritter,

1999, p. 5). In other words, it is not from their tradition to be individualist. This interdependence is really a core part of the Somali culture. Therefore, extended and direct family members unity is a sense of support for one another. This is most seen during times of hardship, calamities, strife between married couples, and also general welfare.

At times of hardship and calamities, Somalis receive moral, financial, and spiritual support from each other. Their families, both direct members and distant, help alleviate some of their struggles. They help one another cope with their calamities by visiting one another at each other's home to give their condolences. If a person has been afflicted financially, they raise money within their clans for the afflicted. This is seen when someone dies within their clan. Members of the deceased's clan help with burial costs, mourn together, and if the deceased is a male who left a wife with kids, may have the brother of the deceased marry her. This is known in Somali as 'dumaaylee' and is still practiced among Somalis. This is also the case if the deceased was a female who left behind her children and husband. Her sister may often voluntarily get married to the deceased's husband. This is done so as to alleviate the hardship that has afflicted the deceased's family, to replace the loss of not having a spouse to help raise the children, and to have someone who would care for the children as would the deceased.

Traditionally, Somali parenting is a life role. Somali parents, for example, continue to have a say in their children's upbringing till their kids get married and even after they do, have much influence in their children's lives. They support their children financially, emotionally, and spiritually. Usually, what is common practice in America, when children reach 18 years of age, is that they move out from their parents' home either by choice or sometimes forced to rent their own place. However, Somalis, traditionally speaking, allow their children to live at home with them regardless of age. Somali traditional parenting, though having some similarities with



western practices, does differ in ways and this is normal seeing that they are two different cultures. Somali child socialization goals contrast sharply with U.S. mainstream child socialization goals. The western view of Somali parenting as hierarchical, and therefore authoritarian and controlling, may be misleading. Such perceptions are based on American concepts for child socialization and are not necessarily relevant to Somali child rearing practices. Parents describe their primary role as ‘guardians’ of their children according to religious tradition. Thus, child socialization practices of control and “guardianship” are viewed positively. Responsible parenting can be conceptualized as “educating” and “training” children by parents who are deeply concerned about their children’s well-being in a foreign country (Heitritter, 1999, p. 7). It is very important to understand this so as to not view Somali parental practices in a negative light due to its differences from western parental practices.

Though Somali parenting may appear costly, it really is not since their children contribute—when/if they are able—to the family’s expenses. Therefore, in most cases, this helps the family’s financial state. Both children and parents support one another. A major benefit of children to parents in the past and present is that of the provision of old-age security. So, in parental calculations, an educated child becomes equipped to provide his/her parents with support—especially financial support—at old age (Edewor, 2006, p. 66).

Children also benefit by staying close with their parents and clan members. Parents too, benefit by receiving financial aid from children. Even if their children don not have an income, parents still allow them to live at home for free. Children in return, have their parents live with them when their parents get older and take care of them. This again, is contrary to what is normally seen in western practices; that being, when parents become old and reach a senior age,

their kids send them off to live at a senior home. Somali traditions, however, afford great care to both parents and children.

Somali traditions are patriarchal. The society mixes nomadic ways while complying with Islamic laws. Traditionally, women maintain the home and men carry the responsibility of providing for the family. Women's roles in the family can be described as the 'cornerstone' of family life and central to preserving family strength across cultures. Women support family strength by endorsing hierarchy in outside the home (Heitritter, 1999, p. 6). This is similar to the family structure of how the United State of America was back in the 1950s. Such a family structure resembles the breadwinner model. The breadwinner model is where the member who earns a financial income supports the family while the other partner who does not earn an income take cares of the duties of the home. Therefore, the breadwinner is responsible for providing for the family and goes out to make a living and the non-earner takes care of the home. There has been much debate about this type of structure and patriarchy in general since the 1950s. In the context of the debate whether or not patriarchy was defeated at all and by extension, what exactly constitutes patriarchy, many theorists have dropped the concept 'patriarchy' altogether, in favor of formulations such as 'gender difference' or 'gender oppression (Pierik, 2018, p. 3). The term 'patriarchy' for some, may not have a pleasant connotation; however, referring it to as 'gender oppression' is problematic. Regardless, this still exists today in America, to some degree, among some families and also among the Somali community. It is important to note that much of our societies have been patriarchal within history and this has been a universal practice. Therefore, Somalis should not be viewed as abnormal or worse, as people who take their female spouses as servants and mere subordinates. Since patriarchy is so universal, it cannot be the product of some vicious circle that was kick started by a chance occurrence. It is particularly

noteworthy that even before 1492, most societies in both America and Afro-Asia were patriarchal, even though they had been out of contact for thousands of years (Harari, 2015, pp. 171-172).

Without a doubt, the parameters of any culture are vast; nonetheless, culture continues to change, modify, and alter. Females, culturally, marry at a younger age. Marriages in the Somali tradition are not just a new connection between the two spouses, but also a new connection between their families. For this reason, Somalis view marriages as a 'xidiq' (a vein) referring to the strong bond that has been established. According to UNICEF, 45% of girls were married by age 18 in 2017. However, here in America, that is not the case. Within every culture, there are traditional ways of how people should or ought to behave and function within cultural norms. Socio-cultural norms in which males and females ascribe themselves to have an impact on their lives. Specifically, the Somali culture is/has known to hold traditional values and traditions. However, as Somalis in the U.S have transitioned to a new land, one with its own customs and culture, traditional gender roles, have changed (Abdi, 1998).

Formal education being a catalyst to this change, has geared some Somalis away from traditional views. Therefore, living conditions and financial income both heavily rely on one's level of formal education. Meaning, the more formally educated one is, the greater chances of attaining what he/she needs to prosper in America. Due to this, there may arise an unequal representation between Somali males and females at schools. In Somalia, females' participation at schools is much lower than that of males in Somali. Fewer than 50% of females attend primary school, and the last countrywide survey from 2006 showed that only 25% of females aged 15 to 24 were literate (UNICEF, 2016). Somali parents' perception of females' education can possibly be a factor that serves as an explanation; however, there may be other factors and variables that

have played a role. Nevertheless, what is essential to take from this data is the low percentage of Somali girls and females being educated.

However, Somalis' strong sense of communal identity and cultural confidence and pride makes them feel strongly about their cultural values and habits as well as their religion, Islam (Kapteijns & Arman, 2004). Upon their arrival to America, formal education seemed to billow in the air for many Somalis, which spurred them to aspire to acquire this commodity. Like other immigrant cultures, many components have played a role in the reconfiguration of the Somali culture in the US. Whether it is freedom once not available, financial leisure given by formal education, or the mutual legal rules granted to all citizens. Being in a new land with different norms, customs, and dynamics, any and every aspiration being equally possible to all has definitely influenced the Somali culture, negatively and positively. It would be remiss of me to overlook the fact that the Somali culture entails tacit gender-based customs that are implicit.

Changes in the parameters set within conservative cultures, one like the Somali Culture, would be divisive. There are Somalis who vehemently opposed and resist the idea of change. This is regardless of whether the reason is cogent or not. Conversely, others have embraced a new phenomenon. Therefore, with Somali females attaining a formal education, some Somalis have espoused a strong contention while others have welcomed it in an absolute sense regardless of any negative ramifications placed on the Somali culture or Islam and such people have strayed. Condemning such beliefs further or deeming them as tenable or untenable is not the focus of this study. Rather, the aim of this study is reporting the perceptions of Somali American parents of formal education for females.

## **Education: A Human Right**

Education is a human right. The Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights confirmed this right. United Nations (UN) organizations aim to enforce basic human rights including education for all. Article 26 (1) of the Universal Nations Declaration of Human Rights stated,

Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. (UN, 1948)

Education is a right to all humans includes children. Sadly, there may be children whose parents cannot grant them this right. Or, perhaps do grant some of their children and not others. One of the important collective responsibilities we hold as a society is to make sure all rights are given to their recipients. This is even more so when the recipients are children who may be denied their right due to the perceptions and beliefs of their guardians.

However, The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) has strove hard to emphasis these educational concepts. The following was noted:

- The right to education is to be achieved on the basis of equality of opportunity.
- Measures must be taken to encourage regular school attendance and reduce dropout. It is not sufficient just to provide formal education. It is also necessary to remove such barriers as poverty and discrimination and to provide education of sufficient quality, in a manner that ensures children can benefit from it.

- The aims of education are defined in terms of the potential of each child and the scope of the curriculum, clearly establishing that education should be a preparatory process for promoting and respecting human rights.
- In its General Comment on early childhood, the Committee on the Rights of the Child interprets the right to education as beginning at birth and encourages governments to take measures and provide programs to enhance parental capacities to promote their children's development. (p. 7)

Not only is education a human right but it has ample benefits for children. Education is one of the most beneficial investments to support child survival, growth, development and well-being. Research indicates that much of the reduction in the mortality of children under 5 from 1970 to 2009 can be attributed to the increase in the average amount of years of schooling of women of reproductive age. Increased education equity also decreases the likelihood of conflict. Formal education contributes to higher income, individual empowerment and decreased poverty levels. Improving the quality of learning contributes to economic growth (UNICEF, 2004, p. 3).

Sadly, the right to education worldwide is denied to 58 million females, and a further 45 million males, even at the primary school level. One-third of these countries are in sub-Saharan Africa (UN, 2005). For such reasons, Article (28) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (date) has stated concerning child's education:

- (a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all;
- (b) Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education; make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need;

- (c) Make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means;
- (d) Make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children;
- (e) Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates. (p. 8)

### **Importance of Formal Education**

The importance of formal education is known. Formal education affects us socially, economically, interpersonally, and many other aspects in our life. The more educated are healthier; wealthier; and, in some ways, wiser-not to mention more participative in political and civic life, more cosmopolitan, more content, supportive of civil liberties (Kingston, Hubbard, Lapp, Schroeder, & Wilson, 2003, p.2). In other words, the above stem from receiving a formal education.

Some more explicit reasons include the following: the more educated are more supportive of civil liberties (Wright & Hyman, 1979). As well, social capital involves having interpersonal connections that help people get ahead in settings like the workplace and schools (Putnam, 2000). A place where people can gain these interpersonal connections is at schools. Schools may teach people useful skills and values. Whether they do or not in particular cases, they certainly allocate people to positions of higher social status, and this affects the anticipations and socialization of the students (and nonstudents) as well as the experience and later socialization of the graduates (and non-graduates) (Meyer, 1977, p. 74). Also, education provides civic knowledge since the more educated are more informed about current events and social developments (Kingston et al., 2003).

Quality primary schooling gives children a better chance for a full, healthy and secure future. Basic skills such as reading, writing and arithmetic facilitate access to good employment in adulthood, as well as to information essential to both adults and children for solving problems and making important decisions. Education also brings the rewards of confidence and self-esteem associated with achievement and encourages the development of analytical and reasoning powers (Boyden & Ryder, 1996, p. 9).

In sum, formal education is a fundamental component for gaining development skills needed to function well within society. Formal education, therefore, is a significant need and an essential tool that determines many factors in life such as a person's social and political identity. The role it has is large and in order to eradicate any discrimination from occurring, formal education should be attainable to all. In current times, we live in a world with a plethora of information. Some information is vital for our well-being; however, it may not be accessible except to an exclusive group within our society, the formally educated. In order to avert this injustice and promote open access to all the information present, attaining a formal education is essential. What is gained through formal education is valuable skills that enable a person to advance in his or her general state of welfare. Due to this, it is incumbent that we promulgate the need and importance of education in our communities and among all ethnicities.

### **Formal Education for Females**

It is also worth noting that it is important that females attain a formal education. There is a proverb in some of the African countries that goes by, if you educate a woman, you educate a family. This is very true and apparent in real life. Formal education for females has a long-term economic implication for the nation. It is important to understand that increasing the number of girls in school, and thereby increasing the number of literate adult females has a positive effect



on both economic growth and social well-being (UNGEI, 2013). Girl's education also influences our society greatly.

- Educated females are less likely to die in childbirth
- Educating females can save millions of lives
- Mothers' education improves child nutrition
- If all women had a secondary education, 12 million children would be saved from stunting from malnutrition. (UNGEI, 2013, p. 2)

As well, formal education for females, who are the mothers of today and will be tomorrows, is important for their children's upbringing and cultivation. If mothers are formally educated, then they have the ability to educate their children and can inculcate the value of education in them, especially their girls will have a higher level of educational enrolment and attainment (Roudi-Fahimi & Moghadam, 2006). In many countries, every additional year of formal education completed by a mother results in her children remaining in school for an additional one-third to one-half year (World Bank, 2009).

Though formal education for females impacts society substantially, some communities may still be averse to it or not as appealed as formal education for men. Formal education has been one major area in which females have been systematically more disadvantaged than males, simply because of gender discrimination, which often begins at the earliest stages of life (UN, 1994). In some countries, more likely in developing countries, females may be denied the opportunity to gain an education. Of course, there are cogent reasons at times, but for others, it may be due to the view of those under their tutelage viewing formal education for females as not having value. However, formal education can improve children's health, increase family income,

protect girls from diseases, and lower girls' risk of exploitation; which in return, is a benefit to the entire country (UN, 1994).

More than half of all children and adolescents in Somalia have never attended formal education or are currently out-of-school for a range of different reasons (MOECHE, 2017). As well, formal education among males and females in Somalia has both historically been imbalanced and still is the case till today. The Federal Government of Somalia Ministry of Education, Culture, and Higher Education said in its Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) for 2018-2020—that in primary schools—the national survival rates to Grade 5 across Somalia are 64%, suggesting high drop-out rates (MOECHE, 2017). The gender ratio in schools is also uneven with 44% of the enrolment being girls (MOECHE, 2017). Across the whole of Somalia some 195,804 young people are enrolled in secondary education of whom only 39% are female (MOECHE, 2017, p. 20). Over half of children in Somalia are out of school for one reason or another. Thus, the potential for accelerated basic education is vast. Most such services in Somalia are provided by non-government institutions. Higher education in Somali is also not very promising. University enrolment in Somalia reveal significant inequalities between male and female learners. Of the about 14,000 learners enrolled in institutes of Higher Education in Somalia, only 31% are female (MOECHE, 2017, p. 172).

Across all 44 universities reviewed in 2013, the estimated enrolment stood at 51,471 with 49% of learners coming from South-Central (25,147). Some of the challenges of higher education in Somalia that have been reported include absence of research capacity exacerbated by the lack of meaningful research links and relations with other institutions in the region and beyond. Poor infrastructure, no comprehensive national higher education laws and no national commission for higher education. There is a lack of curricula guidance or quality benchmarks or

other key forms of support and finally, weaknesses and deficiencies in university management system, including the absence of clear regulations (MOECHE, 2017, p. 24). Of course, this has not been transported to the United States of America.

In addition, most Somalis in Somalia are not literate. A population survey conducted by UNFPA indicated that only 40% of the Somali population is literate, with literacy rates being 8% higher among males compared to females. While this is generally recognized as a very poor national rate, inequities between specific groups and geographic types is profound. In urban areas, literacy rates are significantly higher compared to the national average, with some 64% of people in urban areas being literate. However, educational inequities between males and females is highest in urban areas compared to other locations and types of groups, with 12% more of the male population being literate compared to females (male 70.5%, female 58.1%). The next greatest rate of inequity between male and female literacy is found in Internally Displace Person, known as IDP, camps. Male literacy there is 11% higher compared to females. The lowest level of inequity between males and females regarding literacy rates is found among nomadic/pastoralist communities, where literacy among males is only 2% higher compared to females (MOECHE, 2017, p. 54). The chart below is an illustration of such inequalities.

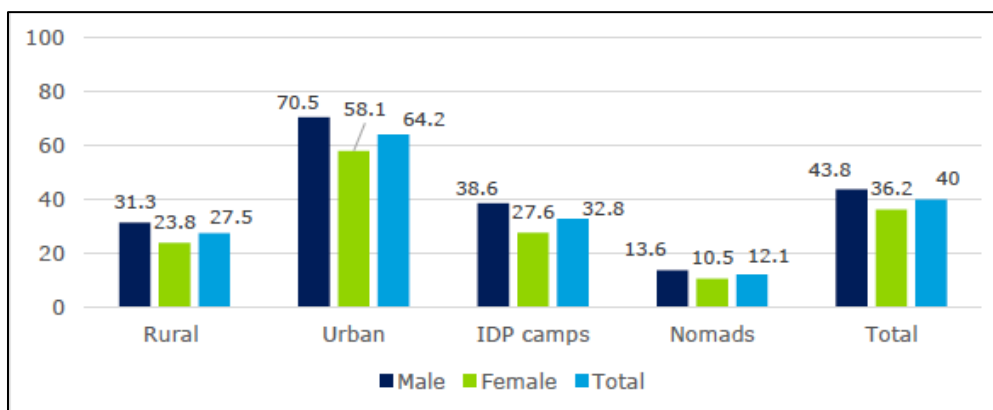


Figure 1. PESS, educational characteristics of Somalia people, 2015.

Female literacy is consistently lower than males across all types of groupings and locations, though literacy rates among urban females is much higher compared to their female counterparts in rural communities, in Internally Displace Person (IDP) camps, and among nomadic communities (MOECHE, 2017, p. 54).

Generally, along state and regional areas across Somalia, adult literacy rates are lowest in Central South Somalia where only 38.3% of the population is literate. This being lower than that of Somaliland where 45.3% of the adult population is literate, and Puntland where 42.9% of the population is literate. Only in the regions of Sool and Sanaag, which are contested by Puntland and Somaliland, are adult literacy rates lower than Central South Somalia at 27.9% (MOECHE, 2017, p. 55). This phenomenon has not been transported to the United States of America.

### **Obstacles in Formal Education for Females**

Even with the established benefits gained from formal education for females, there still are obstacles impeding females from attaining a formal education. This is more so in areas of the world that are not advanced or in underdeveloped countries. The MOECHE reported some reasons for not being receiving a formal education in Somalia. It stated,

“Those who have remained most excluded from formal education are from clearly defined groups including nomadic and pastoralist communities, those from rural areas, IDPs, and those from the poorest wealth quintiles across the country. Reasons for not attending school were affordability, working at home, perceived benefit of school and distance to school. A small number of respondents also cited poor health as a barrier to education, with ‘disability’ likely a being a major reason for a large proportion within this group.” (MOECHE, 2017, p. 124)

Studies done on the obstacles of female's education or barriers of female's education categorized these barriers in different ways. Some studies mention that the reasons for lower school attendance and educational achievement for females can be divided into two categories, economic factors and socio-cultural factors (Fuke, 2007, p. 58). While others, mention that there are economic, religious and social factors (Brock & Cammish, 1997). The United Kingdom government department responsible for administering overseas aid known as United Department for International Development stated:

There are five main challenges we identify that make it difficult for females to access education. These include:

- The cost of education—ensuring that communities, parents and children can afford schooling;
- Poor school environments—ensuring that girls have access to a safe school environment;
- The weak position of women in society—ensuring that society and parents value the education of girls;
- Conflict—ensuring that children who are excluded due to conflict have access to schooling; and
- Social exclusion—ensuring girls are not disadvantaged on the basis of caste, ethnicity, religion or disability. (p. 6)

In some countries, formal education has a monetary price. Due to enrollment fees, books, general supplies, uniforms, transportation, and more, parents may not have the financial means to educate all of their children and so have to select which ones to send to school and which ones not to. For this reason, these costs cause selecting which children attend school. In his research,

Fuke (2007) mentioned that this factor appears to have an unequal impact on male and female children. What has been discovered is that when private costs are high, and parents in poverty face the choice of sending a boy or a girl to school, it is the boy who is sent (Mehrotra, 1998).

There are many reasons why females are less apt than males in attaining formal schooling. In some African cultures, sons typically are responsible for supporting parents in their old age, having educated sons is attractive to parents. The costs of education, both direct (e.g., school fees, books, uniforms, etc.) and opportunity (i.e., loss of household help and, in some cases, wages), are therefore more readily absorbed for sons than daughters. When we consider that the economic contributions of daughters to the household is much greater than sons in poor economies and that future economic opportunities are much more limited for females than males, it is not surprising that parents are more averse to girls' than boys' schooling (Hadden & London, 1996, p. 32).

Therefore, females usually contribute in the maintenance of the home and as a result, some families may not be able to enable their daughters to gain an education. In some cultures, females are heavily responsible for maintaining the home. For that reason, females sometimes lose the opportunity to gain an education. This isn't always the case; however, it does occur. Sanumaiya Bhandary (2017) mentioned in her research, "Understanding Some Cultural Barriers to Women's Access to Education A Case Study in Rural Nepal", that the amount of housework females commit to is a cultural barrier for females aspiring to attain an education. One of her participants stated,

I was the eldest daughter in my family. My brothers and sisters were small. My parents asked me to look after the household chores and take care of my little brothers and sisters. They used to work in the fields and collect firewood from the jungle. I was always

busy with housework - cooking, cleaning house, taking care of my little brothers and sisters.... After getting married I was also busy doing housework. Being a daughter in-law, I have to perform all the housework. I didn't get an opportunity to study (p. 48).

This lost opportunity—from the perspective of families—is replaced with the amount of help girls give to their families by assisting their mothers, taking care of their younger siblings, etc. It has been discovered that caring for younger children is often an important role that older female children play, and this often means that they do not have the opportunity to attend school (Mehrotra, 1998; Rao, Cheng, & Narain, 2003). This factor may also be true in the Somali community, especially in Somalia where the need of children assisting their parents is more due to poverty. In Somalia, child labor is a significant barrier to education. According to the United States Bureau of International Labor Affairs, 39.8% of children (aged 5-14 years) in Somalia are engaged in child labor, including street work, while 20.2% of children aged 4-14 combine work and school (US Department of State, 2015).

As well, Leigh Fuke (2007) mentioned that this is something which is found both cross culturally and in India. This can relate to socially assigned gender roles and helps to explain not just lower access to school in general, but lower access for females specifically.

### **Gender Roles among Somalis**

Knowing the gender roles of Somalis is significantly important and helps explain that which is presently being discussed—Somali parents' perception of formal education for females. Research on gender and migration, along with the more general literature on gender and patriarchy, focuses on how structural and cultural forces inform gender practices in a given context. The dynamics of gendered power relations and the shifts in this relationship over time and space are crucial for understanding gender as a constructed and fluid concept (Abdi, 1998).

This appears partially true as there has been a shift from traditional Somali culture to the Somali American culture to some degree. Gender relations in Somalia are patriarchal, with an idealized image of men as household heads anchored in Islamic gender prescriptions (Kapteijns, 1995, p. 19). However, at certain occasions in the US, this style of relationship is challenged by exterior factors such as the inability of husbands to provide the needs/wants of their spouses (Abdi, 1998, p. 13).

Due to this, many Somali females feel compelled to share the role of their husbands and find work. Of course, roles change as necessities cause it to change. A female Somali interviewee stated, “Most women back home used to be housewives. They used to be at home and calm. Now, here, I see them running trying to get their bills paid. They are more active here than they were at home” (Crosby, 2006, p. 24). Somali females' interpretations of the new reality in the United States stress the need for their contributions in the household.

From the contributions, that some Somali women believe they must make in their relationships, is being educated so they can therefore contribute financially. Among Somali females, there is however, difference in beliefs concerning the gender roles of males and females. Elderly females seem to have more male-like opinions and traditional views. It seems older women's perceptions of Somali gender relations are close to those of men; this may possibly be because most women over age 55 are either divorced or widowed, and, thus, do not themselves confront issues of income redistribution with men (Abdi, 1998, p. 12).

“These women also support the tenet that men are in charge of women and view this as an Islamic precept that should not be contested” (Abdi, 1998, p. 13). However, young Somali females have their own beliefs of the gender roles in the Somali culture. Abdi (1998) said,



“By contrast, women in their late teens or early twenties are much more likely to celebrate potential subversion of traditional patterns. Commenting on migration and women’s access to new economic resources, one woman said: ‘I think migration diminished male authority. Men were breadwinners back home, and here they still are but not to the same extent.’ The woman is running beside him and working. Men had all the power at home: ‘we are moving, we are moving from this house, cause I say so.’ And now if he is intelligent enough, he will consult with his wife, saying ‘I have this point of view about this house, it is bad in this way, that way, so we have to move out.’ But back home, he had the power: ‘We will move from this house and this is final. . . . Like an authoritarian parent (Abdi, 1998 p. 12).”

### **Opportunities**

Opportunities have been, without a doubt, scarce for Somali females in their homeland. After the migration to a new land, the land of opportunities, Somali females have been provided ample opportunities. Some of these opportunities impacting them directly. One woman, after being asked if gender roles have changed in the United States, describes this new opportunity by saying,

“Definitely changed here. We were in [a] Third World country and you weren't necessarily able to make money if you weren't educated. But here you are able to make money whether you're educated or not. Women have more opportunity here than in Somalia. Here it's difficult to support the family on just the husbands' income. So, the women have to work also.” (Crosby, 2006, p. 10)

Therefore, such beliefs can possibly be factors in formal education for females. Similarly, another interviewee says, “Here anyone can be somebody. You have a lot of opportunities, but there [in Somalia] it was tough” (Crosby, 2006, p. 10).

Many factors play in shaping Somali parent's perception toward females' education. With such inequality in gender roles and differences, Somali females see education as a key to independence, freedom, and self-reliance. To some Somali females in the United States of America, this is appealing. As stated by in interviewee, “Here we get more freedom, which is good. We can do for ourselves. We can work; we work, and we have an income. We have independence” (Abdi, 1998, p. 12). In addition, Somali females may seek formal education as it is a means to acquiring financial security for themselves. One respondent said, “I educated myself. I'm safe” (Crosby, 2006, p. 9). This may possibly mean that this Somali woman perceives gaining a formal education provides security and safety for her. Hence, it will be interesting to examine if Somali parents in the U.S, which would include Somali females who are parents, hold this similar belief and if they perceive formal education providing their female children such opportunities.

## Chapter III. Methods

### Research Questions

As stated earlier, this study will seek to cover the following research questions:

1. What are Somali American parents' ideas about the formal education of their female children?
2. What are some decisive obstacles hindering females from receiving an education from a parent's perspective?

### Participants

The participants in this study were 10 first-generation Somali American parents living in America for a minimum of 20 years and resided in a Midwestern city. Participants had children attending school and have been attending in Minnesota for at least four years. The ages of the participants of this study were from 28-40. To protect their confidentiality, participants were assigned letters A-I to participants. Male participants were labeled with the letter M then adjacent to it will be their assigned letters (A-I). Similarly, female students will be labelled the letter F and then adjacent to it will be their assigned letters. Data was collected from parents: both females and males. Participants held different occupations, social rankings, relationship statuses, and educational levels. As well, they were provided ample time to convey themselves during interviews.

Table 1

*Code and Gender Identification Table*

Code	Gender: Female (F) Male (M)
1. Participant A	M
2. Participant B	F
3. Participant C	M
4. Participant D	M
5. Participant E	M
6. Participant F	F
7. Participant G	F
8. Participant H	M
9. Participant I	F
10. Participant J	F

The code and gender combination above are provided to help readers analyze the statements from the data. Each participant is represented in a code format and followed with gender specification letter; “F” for female and “M” for male participants. There is no specific strategy used in the sequencing of participants from A-J. The researcher labeled participants in the order they were interviewed during the interview session.

**Procedure**

In order to find candidates for this research, potential candidates already known to me through my involvement with the Somali-American communities in Midwestern cities were

contacted. Potential candidates were then reviewed and screened over the phone to ensure they meet the inclusion criteria for the study. If they did meet the criteria, individual 60 minute, mostly semi-structured, interviews were scheduled. Additionally, the researcher visited local Charter schools and Daycares that have Somali American students and spoke with the administration to ask to contact some of the children's parents. Once potential participants were found and screened over the phone to make sure they and their children fit the criteria of this study, a semi-interview was scheduled. Before the interview, participants were asked to sign a consent form after explaining to them what it is and what this research was. After doing so, participants were asked if they had any questions or concerns before conducting the interview.

As for the recording and transmitting of the information they share in the interview, that was done by audio recording through a voice recorder app on my smartphone. Afterwards, it was transferred to my private OneDrive online account. Upon doing so, the researcher transcribed the data on his personal secure laptop.

Interviews started by first asking questions about participants' demographic background such as their sex, age, highest education attained, number and age of children. As well, participants were asked how long they have been in the United States. After asking them these demographic questions, semi-structured open-ended questions were conducted (see Appendix). The researcher's interview questions focused to the research questions in this study. The questions asked were intended to elicit responses about the perceptions, beliefs, and views of parents on formal education for females.

Participants were met with at separate places and times depending on their convenience. Interviews with female participants were conducted in public areas, as Islam does not permit

seclusion with the opposite gender. Interviews with men were also in public for the most part; however, some were conducted in spaces that were secluded.

### **Data Analysis**

After conducting the interviews, data was collected. The objective in collecting the data was to answer my research questions. The theory used was the grounded theory approach so I could guide the analysis of the qualitative data from the interviews. Instead of forming a hypothesis before collecting data, the grounded theory approach encourages the development of theories based on the data that are collected; in other words, other words, the data paves the way for the analysis (Mackey & Gass, 2016, p. 231). Therefore, with that said, no hypothesis was formed before completing the interviews.

After the completion of interviews, interviews with participants were transcribed and if common themes among the parents were examined. Themes were arranged in accordance to research questions. So, common themes regarding one question were relegated and assigned accordingly. In sum, the data was organized to convey the results in a more systematic and fluid fashion.

## Chapter IV: Discussion/Findings

Nine themes related to the two research questions emerged in the data analysis process. The researcher has identified the nine major themes below. Those themes will be addressed in this section. Participants' answers, comments, and excerpts from the interviewees have been included to substantiate and indicate the presence of those themes. The themes found were:

- 1) Somali American parents view formal education for females and formal education for males equally,
- 2) Somali American parents like that their female children receive a formal education and are proud that they are,
- 3) Somali American parents have positive beliefs about formal education for females,
- 4) No direct negative impacts associated with formal education for females unless used incorrectly or seen as a problem by others,
- 5) concerns about boys/males,
- 6) females do better than males at receiving a formal education,
- 7) family responsibilities can be an obstacle for females,
- 8) formal education for females has value, and
- 9) Somali American parents support their female children receive a formal education.

**Theme one: Somali American parents view formal education for females and formal education for males equally.** Somali American parents see that formal education for females and males should equally receive it. Participants mentioned how they feel formal education for females is the same as it is for males. Each of the four participants responses revealed equality in formal education between the two genders. This equality was expressed explicitly by two male participants and two female participants. One of the female participants acknowledged that there is a bias in society which most people would agree; however, she herself as a Somali American parent views formal education equally for males and females. Therefore, the existence of biasness against formal education for females is true but regardless of acknowledging this bias, what is significant here in this study is how Somali American parents view formal education

themselves and that is that they see it equally for both genders. Equality in formal education between the two genders was something natural for the participant and that was evident in their reports. Participants' upbringing, communities, and generation were accustomed to both genders equally receiving a formal education. The first participant clearly stated that growing up in his environment, females were receiving a formal education just like males. The second participant said that males and females are both human; therefore, there is no difference. The third participant reported that equality for males and females in formal education is what she has known among her community and friends. The last participant mentioned expressed that she personally sees no difference in her generation. That was expressed in the following:

*Participant D-M.* When females receive a formal education me personally, I grew up in an environment which females were receiving the same education with their counterparts' male counterparts same as males. In Somalia during 1970s and late 1960s, there was a change that happened in Somalia and that change affected Somalia significantly during 1970s in the Somali Society, in a very positive way as a as a matter of fact. Some people may say that it was impacted in an in a negative way but personally from my own experience, I strongly believe that it impacted positively, the way societies acted similarly particularly because in the past, females do not have equal opportunities in terms of education, the role was different than that of males. Males in the past was the breadwinner of the house and the female did the household stuff which is not a bad thing at all but that has changed and females the girls started to go to school, girls started going to colleges, girls started getting jobs they supporting their families. They have their financial responsibilities they have gotten freedom and when I say freedom, I mean freedom of going getting jobs competing with men and believing that they can actually get an education exactly the same as male counterparts and the fact that they can get jobs, good jobs and help their



families financially. So formal education for females—the way I see it—is not any different than formal education for males they should be getting an opportunity and here in the United States, it's no different. People are equal here, same as where I came from. My family, my girls had the same opportunities when I went to school. I went to college. They have jobs they are taking care of themselves so it's not any different than any male's formal education. To me, you know, it is exactly the same. Some people may have different perspectives in terms of believing that females should be doing some household stuff and staying at home, but I don't think in that old-fashioned stuff. It is not any different, in my opinion, females receiving from education is exactly the same as male's formal education.

*Participant H-M.* Just like it is with males (laughs). If you can be dedicated and you could go and work hard and be patient through the boring stuff or what's perceived as boring, may God make it easy for you. Like definitely, go. I mean they are human just like males are and I cannot seem to feel a negative way, and you know every time I hear this type of questions it just seems more depressing than ever. So, what is the difference. I cannot see it. I do not even know anyone who feels that way about education for their own daughters. I think it is equal as males, males get an education, and so should females.

*Participant F-F.* Somali boys and girls that are now here in America that they equally gain an education, this is what I have heard and know from Somali members. from my friends from my family and from the larger community I have seen that they like that their girls educate themselves and get an education.

*Participant I-F.* Personally, I have seen in my generation, that is the only thing I can speak for, is that I have not heard anything that's against you know so many females in my generation again receiving a formal education again I can only speak for my generation annoying

that my mom and my dad were, may he rest in peace, were always for females formal education equally for their sons and for the daughters and I have a mom that is always encouraged receiving a formal education and sacrificing herself just so all her sons and daughters all got an education. She allotted me the same opportunities if not more that she allotted my brothers. I think that, you know I know that this is based on formal education for females, but I really wish that there would not be any differentiation between females formal education and males formal education to the extent that you know questions like this are engineered (Of course, almost everyone would acknowledge that there is a gender imbalance in education. However, she herself does not view formal education for males and females differently. She as a Somali American parent, just as she stated in the beginning of this response, does not see male and female education differently regardless of the fact that others do.) But I guess it is the reality and my beliefs and perception of females' formal education is that again it balances the world it enlightens the world. I think that you know, if one gender is more educated than the other, there is an imbalance and there is going to be a separation and you know, for females not having the same opportunity as her male counterparts. For me, it is not a competition between the genders which one competes against the other. For me, it is personally speaking, formal education. I feel like we owe it to ourselves as a parent. I feel like I owe it to my children in this case to my female child's growth, for her. You know knowledge in terms of just being well-rounded and formal education is really important especially nowadays with having so many disparities but the good thing is that nowadays there are plenty of opportunities that is out there for females as males and not only that there are empowerment groups that are out there and there are a lot of resources out there that any one person can first can go after formal education and particularly females that can do so and overall for me personally as a female, formal education is really

crucial, those who can and are healthy enough and well enough and capable enough to take it and as a parent and as a mom and as a female who has been lucky enough to having a mom who encouraged, facilitated for me to receive a formal education, I will continue to do the same for my female child. You know I plan to even send them to private school, to Blake school which is a very prestigious school and very expensive. But, however, there are some scholarships that I plan on applying for my children that I have found out and so I plan to take both my boys and my girl there and this is for families who are less resourceful then other paying parents. It cost \$28,000 a year to take your child to the school in this is of course for privilege children and on the flip side there is this opportunity for children who come from lower-income families to attend and receive scholarships and to receive this rich education, rich formal education and this is for families who can't pay tuition and I do plan on applying for the scholarship soon so they can get an equal chance to receive such a high formal education.

In sum, the view of equality in formal education for males and females among Somali American parents is apparent. Formal education holds great significance for both their male and female children. As described in the literature review, formal education is very important and Somali American parents want it for equally for their children. As can be seen above in the last participant's response, participant I-F reported that she plans on taking both her male and female children to Blake School which is a private school to enrich her children's education. She said,

“You know I plan to even send them to private school, to Blake school which is a very prestigious school and very expensive. But, however, there are some scholarships that I plan on applying for my children that I have found out and so I plan to take both my boys and my girl there.”

This illustrates, as does the reports of the other participants, that Somali American parents view formal education for their female children the same as they do for their male children. Participant H-M, a male participant, also convey his equal view for males and females. This is evident in his reply when asked about his beliefs of formal education for females said, “Just like it is with males (laughs). If you can be dedicated and you could go and work hard and be patient through the boring stuff or what's perceived as boring, may God make it easy for you. Like definitely, go. I mean they're human just like males are.”

**Theme two: Somali American parents like that their female children are receiving a formal education and are proud of them.** When asking participants if they like that their female children receive a formal education, their responses were positive. All participants said that they like their female children are receiving a formal education. It is clear from participants’ responses that Somali American parents do not dislike their female children receiving a formal education.

*Participant A-M.* Yes, I do. Me personally, I think that formal education is very important and that my daughter receives it so she can be an educated person is why I want my daughter to receive an education and you know she's going to be the one whose taking care of her children. She's going to be at her home, so if she's not educated how can she train her kids and educate them? So, you know that's the main reason.

According to the researcher, this statement reflects the participant’s value for family. His statement should not be understood that he believes women are the only ones who take care of children and fathers do not. Of course, fathers play a big role in the upbringing of children and do also take care of their children. However, this participant is alluding to that women, like men, if they are not properly educated, will not be fully able to.

**Participant B-F.** Yes, definitely. I would continue to have them receive it because it gives them structure. What I mean by structure is that we have schedules in the morning, they wake up they do x, y and z. In this time of the day they are here and that's a routine for them and that's what I like about that about the formal education.

This participant conveyed one of the reasons that she likes formal education is because it is structuralized and provides structure to her children. She expands on what she means. That is, that kids go to school in the morning, they do things at fixed times such as classes starting at a specific time, and lunch being at a specific time, then come home after school is over, etc.

**Participant C-M.** Yes, I like that they receive formal education because we are living in the country that everything is education and yes, I love that my girls get an education, a quality education and I am proud of them and I support them.

**Participant D-M.** Of course, any parent any father should be proud when he sees his daughters getting a formal education just you know as being proud of his boys getting his formal education. As a parent, your children are exactly equal so as a matter of fact of course yes, I'm really happy and glad that my girls, all of them, all of my three girls, completed high school and all of them have completed a college level education.

**Participant E-M.** Yes, very much. All praise belongs to Allah, I have both boys and girls. I always count and put a lot of emphasis that girls receive an education because even if boys work and whether he becomes a factory worker, wherever he works, he can go about finding something. However, girls they need to have knowledge and be filled with knowledge so that, God forbid, if she has kids and her husband passes away, that she is able to earn a living so she can cover the expenses, that she can help her children homework, so she could help herself and her future and have support: So, I always tell my daughters, don't rely on getting married and

having a husband pay your expenses and you just stay home. Rather, try that if you have children and you get married, may God forbid, and if your husband dies because we're in this world where anything can happen or he gets sick or somehow his job is not sufficient for you guys, that you can help the husband, that you can be a shoulder he can lean on and that can come if a person is educated. The person who is not educated cannot help anyone.

*Participant F-F.* Yes, I do like that my girls getting education. I have five daughters, the two oldest are twins, they are currently in college and one has graduated this year and I like that each one of them reach a high level and reach the highest level that they can.

*Participant G-F.* Yes, I like that my daughter goes to school and gets a formal education. She learns a lot from getting formal education, it's great and every girl... Me, as a mother I like that every Somali girl, every female, gets a formal education and that she reaches a high level in her education.

*Participant H-M.* I'm thrilled, honestly, I'm thrilled. The reason why is Islamically because of my religion like being educated and being among those who have knowledge, it's a good thing. It's something that that religiously we're supposed to, the benefits clearly without a doubt outweigh anything else, you know, any other worries that I have. I'm thrilled and I'm thrilled to see their faces. I actually notice the pride they have when they know something when they find out something new and I love it and it makes me, when I looking at one of my daughters and how happy she becomes when she learns something new and seeing how she deals with her day to day things and how she thinks and interacts with her siblings in the house, how she uses what she has learned and I cannot, I can't picture them not knowing not getting a formal education, and I can't imagine any parent saying, you know, I don't want you to get an education and acquire knowledge. I think that's ludicrous honest-to-god I don't know anybody who feels

that way for their own daughters. I hear silly statements about guys mentioning the success of their wives, but you know, again, that goes back to their insecurities so I've never met anybody that said my daughter shouldn't go to school and shouldn't get a formal education.

According to the researcher, this is contrary to what some may assume about Somali American parents' perception of formal education. This participant's comment is an explicit proof that Somali American parents are very happy about their female children receiving a formal education. As he said, "I'm thrilled, honestly, I'm thrilled. The reason why is Islamically because of my religion like being educated and being among those who have knowledge, it's a good thing."

*Participant I-F.* Yes. I have two sons and one daughter, and I equally want them to receive as much formal education and I want my daughter to receive as much as her brothers that is feasible. So, yes one hundred percent do like that my daughter is getting a formal education. This is a consistent feeling expressed by participants. None of them stated that they did not want or dislike that their female children receive a formal education.

*Participant J-F.* That my girls got a formal education and attend schools really makes me happy a lot just as boys are getting a formal education makes me happy and also makes me happy to see girls do so and it makes me happy because not knowing is darkness and so getting out of this darkness is something that really makes me happy that girls are getting an education and when they later have kids are able to get their kids out of darkness and help themselves and the man that marries her and that they can adapt to America is something that I'm really happy about. That my daughter's get a formal education is something that I'm very, very, happy about and that they have become people who their minds have expanded and they are learnt just as my sons have learned and they major in different fields and work in different professions and they

are helping themselves, helping their children, helping the community, is something I'm very proud of.

In sum, these statements represent Somali American parents' proud feeling regarding their female children receiving a formal education. All participants above expressed a deep sense of pride. They also mentioned how the effects of gaining a formal education for females made them happy such as being able to help themselves, their families, and communities. What a formal education will provide their female children with appears to cause Somali American parents' happiness and take pride in that. For instance, participant J-F said, "That my daughter's get a formal education is something that I'm very, very, happy about and that they have become people who their minds have expanded and they are learnt just as my sons have learned..." It is quite clear from this participant's statement that what makes her happy, as a Somali American parent, is that her female children are able to receive a formal education and that will be able to help themselves as well as their families.

**Theme three: Somali American parents have positive beliefs about formal education for females.** All 10 participants expressed positive beliefs throughout about formal education for females during their interviews. They shared how important it is for their female children, how it is a right to do so, and that it is a good thing. Somali American parents have experienced a great deal of positivity in their female children's pursuit of a formal education. All participants mentioned various ways it has influenced their female children positively and provided ample examples from their personal experiences. 90% of participants reported formal education enabling their female children to make great achievements. The positive beliefs participants hold stem from their particular focus on the positive effects formal education has on the female children's future. They report a good sentiment towards formal education for females due to the



overwhelming positive effects such as gaining life skills like participant A-M stated, “That way they learn maybe she'll get some skills from those projects that they do at schools and working as a team those can be beneficial, so gaining interpersonal skills.”

As well, formal education gives exposure to female children to meet female teachers who serve as a role model. This was expressed by participant B-F wherein she said, “I would say that based on experience with my daughter, I struggle with her right but she has strong teachers and when I say strong teachers I mean they are very smart and strong woman...” Participant D-M mentioned that formal education helps females reach their full aptitude stating, “It builds your brain it gives you the aptitude and you know that aptitude as you know is the ability that's inborn, but formal education increases that.” Participant E-M reported that formal education gives them confidence. He said, “It will give her confidence, if she has knowledge and is educated.” Participant F-F connected formal education providing employment opportunities which in return provide a good future. She said, “If girls learn, then I believe that they can have a good future because you can find employment.”

*Participant A-M.* I would say honestly speaking, in my experience, it's a good thing. Obviously, because women are the ones taking care of our children, I guess positive. Like I said, formal education in general is good and it's how you utilize that education and so for me, like I have sisters and one of them is a nurse and she received formal education you know this impacted her because now she is taking care of her family and at the same time she doesn't want to neglect her family. She wants to educate her kids...so in my story I feel like it helped my sister positively what she's teaching her kids and If she didn't have any formal education would be difficult, she would have to get tutors and things like that but now she has this formal education she can help them out. I think for me the fact that she's mixing with other woman too,

the way you think that can be something helpful to them, that way they learn maybe she'll get some skills from those projects that they do at schools and working as a team those can be beneficial, so gaining interpersonal skills. I can give another example where it was one of my cousins were I mean she's been here and she didn't even get to her bachelor's degree and but she did something with children and that helped her a lot because she ended up working with us and helping adults with filing applications with citizenship and she was working and she was helping them with applications forms, this was when we were new in the country and she has been here longer than us but she came to the United States at an older age and she wasn't as young as we were so her formal education helped her out a lot in this case because she could read and she can write, she could speak and all that assisted her. You know, when they gain the skills of reading and writing and math, all these skills, planning and formal learning, a lot you can do within your family or household. In my opinion, the biggest thing anybody should be thinking about is their household, their children. You can use that towards your children, to educate your children, to help your community without really neglecting your children in your household and even if you were to go to work, you could go to work and utilize it that way but you know you, you can work part-time and not neglect your family completely. So, yes. Actually, we can go back to within our culture. Woman would, if they go to a hospital, they rather be seen by a woman and not by a man, you know in terms of nurses and inspecting them and touching them even though it's okay and accepted for a doctor, but they would feel more comfortable if another woman was assisting them. So yes, this can also be beneficial but to answer that question, yes, it's beneficial.

*Participant B-F.* My beliefs about formal education for females is that females girls in general are very, very smart and they become responsible at a young age and I feel that sometimes some girls sometimes do not reach their full potential and I would want to see female

students be encouraged more and being told that you can do as much as your brother can do that way they don't settle for just a bachelor's perhaps they go for a masters instead of going for something like you know just social working or fashion if you are great with math then use that math brain and go for being a brain surgeon you know give that kind of confidence. I would say that based on experience with my daughter, I struggle with her right, but she has strong teachers and when I say strong teachers, I mean they are very smart and strong woman it's almost like the thing takes a village to raise a child. they guided her they talked to her so she almost has like a another set of I'm not going to say a mom but like another set of people that she looks up to and admires and listens to and takes them serious and I feel that formal education if practiced the right way girls can establish lifetime friendships with their teachers who they look up to and admire and say that teacher made a difference in my life where normally you wouldn't get it, you see what I'm saying. Formal education for females benefits them if it's practiced the right way I believe. I believe that formal education for females is really, really, I'll push for that a lot because if the mother has an education and is formally educated then she could educate her children, she could be strong minded. I'm not saying that if your homeschooled, I strongly believe formal education for females is a huge deal, I would say almost more important if not as important as educating boys because that's a mom who's caring for the future. I say this based on experience from my daughter. I struggled with her right, but she has strong teachers and when I say strong teachers, I mean they are very smart and strong woman, it's almost like it takes a village to raise a child. They guided her, they talked to her, so she almost has like another set of, I'm not going to say a mom, but like another set of people that she looks up to and admires and listens to and takes them serious and I feel that formal education if practiced the right way, girls can establish lifetime friendships with their teachers who they look up to and admire and say that

teacher made a difference in my life, where normally you wouldn't get it, you see what I'm saying.

*Participant C-M.* It's really important and I hope they get the resources to get a good education. They have schools that help them improve their education. Because if they learn and get an education, tomorrow they can help the community and their children that's the most important thing because their education will be able to help the community and their family, so it'll impact their families. I think every human being, if you get formal education, it helps them in the future. If the girls get an education, in the future they get a good future and so they'll help themselves and their families, so I think that formal education will be a benefit in every situation for them.

*Participant D-M.* Well, I actually believe that females should have the privilege and the right you know just as anybody else to gain a formal education, they should be allowed actually to achieve their potential to get an education to work in any environment and they should never be discriminated in regards to getting a formal education that's what I believe and I totally believe that if that opportunity is provided like anybody else that they can obtain their potential

Education for females impacts females, formal education increases your perspective, it increases your knowledge, it increases your ability to know what's going on in your environment what's going on around, it builds your brain it gives you the aptitude and you know that aptitude as you know is the ability that's inborn, but formal education increases that, it helps you to broaden one's perspective, one's knowledge, even if one doesn't get a job and they get a formal education, it helps them, it transforms them and you know after that, getting a good job, earning money that also helps them to be, you know, able to contribute to the society economically and it

also helps in their families financially. Of course, going back to Somalia in 1974 early 1970s people in Somalia were 70% or more than that, were illiterate and then there was a campaign that actually helped people everywhere to be taught, this how to write, that has transformed everything and that not only transform males, it also transformed female's education. Females were being able to read their own language, you can speak your language but reading your language is a different thing and that has helped females in actually many believe that okay, if I can read my own like language, if I can write my own language then I can be someone, I can actually go and get a job. I can start my own business. So it's really transformed the society by helping everyone particularly females and back then, way back, you know, more males were getting an education but that particular was in rural areas, females living rural areas, it actually transformed their lives, they can read books they can get and find out what's going on so it can transform their lives, being able to read and write your own language, it is an experience that cannot be compared. Imagine something someone just speaking their language but cannot read and write in their own language so it gives them the freedom to be able to go to the library, to be able to read signs on the streets, to be able to read their prescriptions and to be able to read everything and to be able to read to their own children and when their children go to school and come back, you know, females who got an education, it transformed the entire family members. Remember because remember, a female spends more time with their children than males in the Somali culture and for females to be able to sit with their children and be able to read to them, to be able to help them with their homework that is a power by itself. Benefits in lots of ways. It helps them personally, on a personal level. A person who is formally educated, as a person, you are totally different sort of personal level, that's the first thing. Second, for the families but people have an education as a mission earlier and also helps their families. They can teach their

children, they can be a positive role model for other females and so the other people can say okay, well if she did it, I can also do it and so encourages other females to look up to those females that have an education and follow in their footsteps. So, it helps them in lots of ways to help the community, educates a community that that's respected so it also helps the entire community, they can contribute to their communities economically, financially, their families. So, so does not only help the person that's educated but it goes beyond that. You know at a family level, at a community level, a country level even also internationally also and gives them power it gives them power education and powers gives power to everybody and females you know males were the dominant species in the workforce in the past, females are competing with males at the same level and that's because of education and that's because of education actually gives female a level of playing field with males, there's still lots of things need to be changed, that will probably take a little while but actually helps females compete with males when it comes to every level of life and that is a result of being educated.

*Participant E-M.* This is similar to what we started talking about, in that Islamically, education doesn't have any type of prejudice, that only some people should be educated and others should not be educated and educating children is a responsibility upon every parent that he equally educates his children as much as he is able to. Children vary in their understanding and their comprehension it may be that sometimes boys may be able to comprehend better or girls may be able to comprehend better; however, Islamically, it is incumbent upon us as parents that we educate our children regarding their Islamic education and their worldly education. In every aspect, it will give her confidence, if she has knowledge and is educated. Just as if she is religiously educated she will worship Allah correctly and will be able to respect her parents and her spouse, she'll be able to guard herself, she'll ward herself from any harm, and if she is

formally educated then she'll have a profession and a skill that she can work with, that she can go into mainstream and work with it and that she can talk with others and she can find a job with and she can benefit from and so if a female is educated, it is like a city that is settling very well. If girls are educated it has more benefits than an educated boy because if a girl is educated, she benefits her house she benefits for children and wherever she is, she brings benefits.

*Participant F-F.* If girls learn, then I believe that they can have a good future because you can find employment and if they have kids, she can help her children and the community and society. They can contribute to it and that's how I see it can positively impact their lives. If girls learn then I believe that they can have a good future because you can find employment and if they have kids they can help her children and the community and society they can contribute to it and that's how I see it can positively impact their lives. They'll benefit, to be able to get a job or even if she's at home she can work from home and you can see that everyone, everything is using technology, they can help their children, she can be able to benefit from it in so many ways but if she doesn't have a formal education, she won't be able to do any of that.

*Participant G-F.* As a mother, my opinion is that every girl, every female, should gain her education, she should go to school and get the highest level she can get because when she gets married this will help her and also help her children since that's something that is good for her. This is something good for her children and for her family. It gets to help them in their lives because she can help herself and tomorrow, when she becomes a mother tomorrow, she's going to have to help her children with their homework. She's going to have to help her family, her parents, her husband, and so when she has a good level of formal education, she can help others. They can benefit from it in many ways. In their everyday life, making decisions, in their home, their kids, their husband, and whole community.

*Participant H-M.* Just the same as males, they don't get any breaks. Honestly, nobody gets a free lunch. I'm assuming that people who may have marital situations comes to account and that really males are the providers in that perspective. I don't know, I don't think that's a 21<sup>st</sup> century ideology. Regardless anyone family can have their own way of doing things whether that the guy stays home and takes care of their kids and or the wife stays home and she takes care of the kids that's their ordeal but everybody is in need of a formal education because no one can get a free lunch. I don't know how I can possibly think something else, yeah. I definitely don't believe that it's only males who should get a formal education. Yes, I get it. Males are usually breadwinners but that's not even the case anymore. Honestly, there's more women in college and in higher institutes who are getting a higher education and regardless of your background, to be honest there are actually a lot better at it they have patience dedication and maturity and honestly very smart because they have a very easy time what appears even though everything is equal the books are not going to discriminate and the chapters are gonna be the same and the professors are gonna want the same requirements but they're just looking as if they're having an easier time so for me to like to think a certain way about getting or not getting a formal education I don't know. They're are going to be mothers, they're going to hopefully be a mother if all works out and may Allah forbid that she get someone who's insecure to be her spouse and that becomes a hardship on her but no, they are the true teachers especially when I'm looking at my own upbringing. My mother, my mother that's the person who I looked up to, the person that who I learned from, that's how I learned, not to take anything away from my father or anything. I think they're the nurturers, they are the natural nurturers so regardless of what your ethnicity is, a baby is born and instantly the mother is the go-to person from day one and even if I had to choose growing up, my mother she would be the one who I looked at, so I would want my girls to be the



best version of them because they're going to have babies and that's how it works the mother, she's going to nurture her children so she should be formally educated so I think it impacts them positively. I mean just look around our communities, look at the businesses, they own them all (laughs). They're balling, they're doing good for themselves, and that's all because of their formal education, higher learning. They figured it out, how to do things. That's the clearest evidence of the benefits and that's more obvious than anything else that they are breadwinners and all that is from having the patience to get a formal education and you know, the males may not have been patient and all that, the females did, it paid off. They have the patients at schools and it's paying off. Because they're human (laughs) and they're contributing to society and contributing to their families and their well-being and their families and that's what's supposed to happen, you know, you acquire knowledge and education and get the fruits of your hard work.

*Participant I-F.* It's really important for my daughter. I see her becoming a parent, a mom, and I feel that most of and I don't want to say, most of the raising and parenting is left to moms one hundred percent but I would say the most important portions of it, moms are responsible for grooming and raising their children and I believe that with her being a female and hopefully having her own family would include boys and girls, it is my responsibility to give her, you know, a formal education. Not only for her becoming a parent but for her future and for her place in the world and for her self-sustainment and enlightenment, because I feel like if minds are not expanded, you'll remain close minded. I think it's not just one area that impacts their lives positivity. I mean just being able to read for the children that is really important I reach for my children every single day morning at night and if they or I didn't receive a formal education I can only imagine how sad and it would be for me for having kids who have a love for books I mean this is just a small example they have a love for books and I can't I feel bad for them and not for

them when they asked me, my kids have more books than toys, just that as a parent that gives me a great fulfillment to know how to read to them because I have received a formal education, it positively impacted me and this is a simple example let alone going out there and you know working in a professional job that the goal is to hopefully provide for them or today taking you into the doctors I would require if I didn't have a formal education I would always be required to get an interpreter I doubt I mean I'm just going by the simplest things that I need as a mom it's more important to me being a mom than anything and this is more important to me so this is why I show you examples of how limiting my life would be if I didn't have a formal education and how I wouldn't be able to fulfill the simplest things that I need to that is requiring owes me as a mom, and one of the biggest responsibilities being a parent and so to meet the needs of my children is important and besides that makes you connected to higher levels, to you know, to the world. To expand yourself you know to engage people in a deeper level I mean simply having to engage in a conversation with someone where the other person had the advantage of having a formal education and you didn't you really can engage in intellectually so I guess it has positively impacted me and I see in my day-to-day life when I tracked with my kids what I have to do for them just being a mom and having to deliver my role as a mom and impact them positively, it just to me if I didn't have that formal education it wouldn't be possible I would be very limited.

*Me.* Can you tell me a story where a female has been positively impacted by her formal education?

*Her.* Yes, there's a person, there's one female that has really, I guess till this day, she's my role model in terms of how formal education has affected her life in how therefore, she's impacted my life her name is Margaret Warner and this is a woman that I met back 2006 through

advocating for the farm bill for the world food program and she was very humble, she never spoke of the fact that she went to Harvard School of Law, never ever, but she did go there and her formal education at many schools has put her in the highest level of the UN world food program in Washington DC and her education and her background has helped so many, so many people because she was effective, she delivered to people who needed the most basic need that a human being can have which is food, feeding children, feeding woman and it was her background and not alone her background but her humanitarian side, but definitely her formal education and this has affected and impacted other people positivity until today I keep in touch with her and she is my role model. I mean it's beneficial in many areas, for females to receive a formal education I believe there are more females in this world than men and again it provides balance to the world, gives them self-sustainment and I'm going to use that as an example because I really love being a mom and I really love being impactful on my kids and just the simplest thing, simple actions such as reading to them again and simple things like reading their prescriptions and understanding their doctors notes and protecting your future and sending them to the right schools, you really do have to have a formal education and an understanding of education generally, but in the bigger picture is that it brings stability to the world because I think it's unfair for again, one gender to have more formal education. Therefore, leading to more power, more prosperity, more progress for one gender and leaving behind already females, who are a minority, who are considered to be a minority, I guess we will just have a really well-rounded people who have an education, to have intellectual conversations and you know at least you agree to disagree, and that comes from some formal education.

*Participant J-F.* My belief is that formal education that girls are getting it, it's something that is really good for them and that they continue to do so and that they reach the best level that

they can and graduate. It impacts positively. When they learn and get a formal education because it's not the same when someone knows and when someone doesn't know. Girls are going to be mothers and so she can help her kids, she will can get work, she can find a job, she can save money for her family, she can buy what she needs, she can be independent, she can be able to be fully capable of doing many things. So, if she gets a formal education, she can help the community, she can help her parents, she can help people and just like boys are learning and helping others they can do the same. I know a lot of girls in our community, in the Somali community that they learned, got a formal education and accomplished a lot. Some they opened businesses that are helping the community. They did this in the majors that they did at school. Some opened homecare after majoring in nursing. Some in social work, some became case workers. They help people, they became teachers and so they've done a lot and working in different fields and so they help other people and they help themselves by getting an income. When I hear about females getting a formal education, going to school whether it in the beginning stages or middle stages or later stages, I see that she is going to get a lot of information that's going to benefit her that she will be someone who has knowledge about different things and can help herself and can help others. The benefits of formal education has for females, what it gives them is confidence. It also enables them to do more. They become girls who inspire to do a lot, to help their families, to help the community, to give back to their neighbors, anyone who is poor or those below them. The girls have gained a formal education, their minds have expanded, and they give back and even in the amount of money they give back to their families. Girls who get a formal education, they really are able to help the Somali community and they've done a lot and contributed to the Somali community. So, they are able to be self-sufficient, they

don't ask for money, they don't need things from others, they actually are able to help people and help their family, they're able to give in charity and give donations as well.

In sum, participants revealed their belief that formal education for females has many positive effects in various ways. Participant D-M's statement illustrates this as he said, "Formal education increases your perspective, it increases your knowledge, it increases your ability to know what's going on in your environment what's going on around, it builds your brain it gives you the aptitude and you know that aptitude as you know is the ability that's inborn, but formal education increases that, it helps you to broaden one's perspective, one's knowledge, even if one doesn't get a job and they get a formal education, it helps them, it transforms them and you know after that, getting a good job, earning money that also helps them to be, you know, able to contribute to the society economically and it also helps in their families financially."

**Theme four: No Direct negative impacts associated with formal education for females unless used incorrectly or seen as a problem by others.** Seventy percent of the participants interviewed reported that there are no direct negative impacts associated with formal education for females with the exception that it be used incorrectly or seen as an issue by others.

*Participant A-M.* When you see formal education as a way of just making money, that can negatively affect them especially if they are a woman who plans to get married and take care of kids and this can impact them as a female, not as a man, because if her goal is to take care of children and get married but in your mind you want to go make money and get more education, if he's like that what happens is the more times you spend outside of the house, your kids are getting neglected whether it's work or getting a masters or Ph.D. and this is what I believe personally. The kids get neglected so if you use it in that way, it's not good but if you use it in the perspective as I have a formal education and I can help my community I can help my family,

then that is something positive. I believe this because I see it's in the Somali community. A lot of divorces are occurring simply because of this. Women are working and not taking care of children because the husband, his main goal is to be the financial provider, to take care of the family. So, he's going to go out to work and takes care of everything that's needed of the house and though that's occurring some women since she's educated, she wants to do the same thing so now they bump heads and divorce occurs because she's not taking caring of her family and her kids and fulfilling these responsibilities within the culture and our religion. I have a friend that I went to High School with and when they got married after they graduated and got their degrees, they got married and that really changed the structure of the family because she wanted to work and he also believes that the main job of his is to provide for the family and so they ended up getting a divorce because she felt like she was not utilizing her skills and her formal education and just taking care of the kids wasn't enough. She felt like she needed to use this form of education and being at home, taking care of kids was stressing her out and she felt like she was going to lose her skills and she rather just go and go to work and use her skills even though financially being provided for and everything was being taken care of, she still didn't feel happy, for that reason their marriage got impacted.

*Me.* Do you feel that females who receive a formal education wish to work and utilize their formal education?

*Him.* Yes, one hundred percent; they want to utilize it, but I think some just don't understand the best way to utilize it. But yes, of course when you receive a formal education, you feel like you've went to school so many years why waste it? Some way you need to benefit from that education you've gained. So, they do.

This participant relates that, in his opinion, formal education for females can cause marital problems if primary focus is to use it as a way to earn an income. He says,

“I believe this because I see it's in the Somali community. A lot of divorces are occurring simply because of this. Women are working and not taking care of children because the husband, his main goal is to be the financial provider, to take care of the family. So he's going to go out to work and takes care of everything that's needed of the house and though that's occurring some women since she's educated, she wants to do the same thing so now they bump heads and divorce occurs because she's not taking caring of her family and her kids and fulfilling these responsibilities within the culture and our religion.”

According to the researcher, this statement should not be seen sexist or misogynist. Instead, his view should be understood within the context of the Somali community, their culture, and most of all, their religion as mentioned in the literature review. As a people, culture, and religious commitment, this view is very understandable and alludes to a possible reason for divorces among Somalis. Of course, that is a topic that needs further covering and is not the focus of this research.

**Participant C-M.** I think formal education is very important, I don't believe that if they learn, there is any bad, it'll impact them only good.

**Participant D-M.** Well, I don't believe that formal education for females can impact negatively at all; it really doesn't. There is no negativity associated with formal education at all, there's nothing really. It doesn't affect them at all. They do the things that they do, they do their household chores, they have babies, they take care of their children. So, I don't see, there's no negativity at all that is associated with getting a formal education at all. Education has a positive

impact in human lives in females and males, all of them. So, I don't really see the slightest negative impact on females when they have a formal education.

From the researcher's perspective, it appears this participant reports that females are still able to function in their lives as normal. In other words, that formal education does not hinder them or negatively stop them from other components of their lives.

*Participant E-M.* No, education doesn't bring about any type of negativity. If children are taught and educated, if girls are educated, that is always good. Sometimes I would joke and say it may not be in the best interest for females to be educated on a high level. But education does not bring any deficiency in males or females, it doesn't bring any harm to them or negativity.

*Participant F-F.* No, I don't think if females learn that there'll be any negative impact. They are only increased in good and it will be a positive for them because you'll be able to be equal with others and similar to the rest of society and the people who gain formal education and they'll be able to progress and today, the time we live in, formal education is really important for both, for girls and for boys, men and women and whoever does not have a formal education is as if he's blind.

This participant expresses, similar to most of the other participants, that there aren't negative effects on females and adds to emphasize its importance for both genders. She likens the one who isn't formally educated to a blind person which –metaphorically— signifies ignorance.

*Participant G-F.* No, I don't think it can be something bad for females getting a formal education because there are teachers there who are helping them and are instructing them and teaching in correct way and I always believe that formal education is a wonderful thing.



The presence of teachers instructing students the right way reassures Somali parents that no harm will occur to their children.

This participant response indicates formal education is not something bad for females because it is conducted under the supervision of adults, teachers, who help their female children.

*Participant H-M.* No, formal education for females and for males is something that I can't see being a negative thing and that would be a contradiction for what education stands for. Honestly, especially this day and age, I mean everybody is noticing how hard life is going to be if you don't have a formal education, you won't be able to earn the best you can; however, there's people who have ignorant ideologies and I think that's across-the-board, you know, like nothing that's more specific to some person. To be honest, I don't pay attention to it. I think it's more to do with their insecurities when I hear negative things about females getting a formal education. Honestly, because the reality in our lives is you have to learn and you have to earn a lot and from whatever house you come from, you need all that you can get so anybody that spoke negatively about formal education for females my first thought was insecurity that is coming out of them but more than anything, I think there's no one who can take that seriously honestly because the situation how life is these days regarding education, that's what's needed to get ahead, that's, that's the most secure path to take honestly, I'm going to do something, you have to know a craft, you have to master it, you have to know how to do something and that's just the reality and honestly, I don't really deal with a lot of people who express weird feelings about females getting a formal education.

This participant's response indicates that he believes formal education not only does not negatively affect females but is needed to progress in life. He says, "That's what's needed to get ahead, that's, that's the most secure path to take honestly."

*Participant I-F.* Well, I don't really think about formal education negatively impact or having a negative impact at all but as it happens often when females have you know the background that's equivalent to a man there can be a lot of lash back in terms of, of when a woman starts her has her own family being married and being a married couple who both have an excellent form of education background and equally hold successfully demanding jobs a lot of times that might negatively impact the family because in this case, well it's not in my opinion but I have personally seen it with all my friends were it becomes a problem for the marriage and I don't know because it's the woman's role naturally I guess to provide for the family at home and to take care of the home front while the man takes care of aspects of it but one of my friends was married to this lawyer and she was also a lawyer and they were in two different fields and she was out advocating for civil rights and that meant that she had to travel a lot even though two kids and she had one in the way in the way and so she was asked my husband to either stop working or the other ultimatum was to split you know, you would split and that can sometimes have some you know receiving a formal education for females can negatively impact them and unfortunately I have seen it with one of my friends and ultimately they did get divorced, and she did continue practicing law and continue to do a humanitarian advocacy in New York she moved to New York and he remains in Minnesota and the family did get split.

This is another participant who reports that formal education can negatively impact females by causing marital problems. She says, "I don't really think about formal education negatively impact or having a negative impact at all but as it happens often when females have you know the background that's equivalent to a man there can be a lot of lash back in terms of when a woman starts her has her own family..." It seems from her response that it may be difficult for women to have a rigorous work schedule and maintain their family engagements.

**Participant J-F.** That which I know is there is no negative things that I have seen or know of if girls get a formal education. I haven't seen anything negative that's happened to them or negative impact on them. What I know is that girls who learn are girls that are very advanced and they have the latest cars, live in better homes and work and are independent, that they purchase homes are homeowners and encourage other girls to learn and get educated and are successful and they've really succeeded.

This participant is basing her judgement from experience. She personally has not seen formal education to have a negative impact on female students. Contrary, she has witnessed female students advancing and succeeding due to the formal education they have received. She supports this by saying, "They have the latest cars, live in better homes and work and are independent, that they purchase homes are homeowners and encourage other girls to learn and get educated and are successful and they've really succeeded."

**Participant B-F.** Negatively? Bullying, that comes to my mind. Some girls would have low self-esteem, some even develop lower self-esteem in public schools while seeking a formal education. There is that pretty girl that is slim, popular and she might not even be very smart but she just is popular and has good looks and there's that other girl who is also beautiful but doesn't think she's as beautiful and she's smart but she doesn't appreciate that because she wants to be like the other girl who is being asked out to prom, you know all that stuff, so the whole high school she can come out with a very low self-esteem and those kind of students, I noticed when you go to college unless something there, getting groups of people that are uplifting them and find themselves, they carry that into their adulthood then men taking advantage of that because the first guy that pays attention that makes her feel like, oh my God ,you know, so that's one thing that comes to mind.

This participant's response describes a possible negative effect that formal education may have on females. Bullying does occur and so this is a valid concern. She says, "Some girls would have low self-esteem, some even develop lower self-esteem in public schools while seeking a formal education." Developing a low self-esteem, as the participant said, can also be carried with females into their adulthood which can be abused by their partners. Therefore, steps to prevent this low self-esteem from happening should be taken.

In sum, the negative impacts participants mentioned above appear to stem from external factors such as how others may physically influence females at schools like bullying or view it as a problem when there is marital disharmony between spouses. Such scenarios seem to portray formal education for females in a negative light. As participant I-F said, "I don't really think about formal education negatively impact or having a negative impact at all but as it happens often when females have you know the background that's equivalent to a man there can be a lot of lash back in terms of when a woman starts her has her own family being married.

**Theme five: Concerns about boys/males.** Three of the 10 participants expressed this concern. Intermingling with the opposite gender can lead to committing immoral acts, illicit relationships, and the general harmful ramifications are ample; thus, Somalis American parents have this valid concern.

*Participant A-M.* I believe that females, not all females, in general are softer than men and so their personality can be taken advantage of. So, when you are in an environment where you're dealing with so many different personalities, that can really impact girls, especially nowadays in schools where boys and girls mix. Boys can take advantage of girls. Education itself is not the issue, but it's more so the environment that they're in. So, for me, the only worry that I have about girl's formal education is them being taken advantage of because they can be naive

and honest and sincere to the opposite gender. So, that's my main worry. That my daughter be taken advantage of because of her innocent thinking, her kindness.

The worry of this participant for his daughter is a shared worry among all parents who have female children. Somali American parents, like other parents, do not want their daughters to be taken advantage of by males. Formal education being provided at facilities that have both genders attending, female students can be victim to mental and physical harm by male students. The mixed environment between males & females is what worries Somali American parents, not formal education in itself. This is clear in the participant's statement, "Education itself is not the issue, but it's more so the environment that they're in."

*Participant B-F.* Well, my daughters are right now 14 and 13, based on what they're experiencing, I so, what I notice is girls need more pushing when it comes to areas like science and math. I feel like it's already predetermined to what they should be focusing on so I noticed that girls who are good with science might be not going into science because they feel that science is for boys so I am seeing that in the formal education system, so I feel that girls should be motivated to do science, math and engineering as much as boys because some girls are good at building things with their hands and creating things as far as that goes and other things that I see with female students is sometimes boys are loud and they instantly overtake them where girls are not as expressive as boys even though I know girls put in a lot of effort studying and are just as smart as boys but I think it's just sometimes because the presence of the boys, they may feel that all I'm supposed to do is be nice and pretty, it's I'm seeing now, it's changing but that's happening a lot. Personally, now that my daughters are going to, to high school, I'm cautious about boys and so I'm also kind of concerned about what might take place since the classes are both boys and girls and are mixed and what's even more concerning currently is that some

schools have transgender bathrooms which, it's kind of scary because that could be like totally like a privacy issue for my daughter, so that's some concern that I have as to formal education.

According to the researcher, this participant conveys her concern for her female children due to them intermingling with male students when receiving a formal education. Somalis are Muslims and in Islam, it is not allowed to freely intermingle with the opposite gender due to the consequential harm that can ensue from it. In Islam, all sexual relations outside the fold of marriage are strictly forbidden such as forming illicit contact, pre-marital sex, pregnancy before marriage, etc. which harmful impacts are both on an individual and societal level. Therefore, Somali American parents are cautious of the interactions male students may have with their female children and that is what this participant is conveying. She says, "Personally, now that my daughters are going to, to high school, I'm cautious about boys and so I'm also kind of concerned about what might take place since the classes are both boys and girls and are mixed." All caring and responsible parents, Somali or Non-Somali, would have some concerns for their female children freely mixing with males. Therefore, this concern is very conceivable and warranted.

*Participant H-M.* Some of the things that make me worry is getting sidetracked and the same as everybody and anyone who has a daughter is forever thinking about what other things that can hinder them from the successful path like little things that can come up and as far as mingling with the opposite gender and making poor decisions is something that I worry about but it never stopped me from letting it, I would never do it. I think it's just something that's going to be a part of our lives, that you know to subtract all the negativity and all the things that can harm them but no, I never stopped them.

This participant reports the same concerns mentioned; that is, he is worried about what might occur when his female children intermingle with male students. As well, he professes that

this concern is shared among all parents who worry about the impediments that can hinder their female children from attaining success. He says, “Some of the things that make me worry is getting sidetracked and the same as everybody and anyone who has a daughter is forever thinking about what other things that can hinder them from the successful path like little things that can come up and as far as mingling with the opposite gender and making poor decisions is something that I worry about.” He connects getting sidetracked, making poor decisions, and intermingling with males to be possible obstacles that can hinder his female children from being on a successful path. Noteworthy to mention, freely intermingling with male students in itself can sidetrack and cause female students to make poor decisions. As a result, can obstruct them from attaining the success Somali American parents wish for their female children to have.

In sum, Somali American parents concern about boys/males mixing with their female children at schools is very warranted. Islam does not permit opposite genders to freely intermingle; rather, there are guidelines in which must be adhered to avoid immoral and indecent actions. Therefore, Somali American parents are not apprehensive about female’s formal education; however, they are apprehensive about the effects of boys/males intermingling with their female children at schools. As stated by participant A-M, “Education itself is not the issue, but it's more so the environment that they're in.”

**Theme six: Females do better than males.** This was something that some of the participants, both male and female, said. Of course, this belief, is merely their belief; however, it is what they have also seen from experience.

*Participant B-F.* Well, I must say things are changing. If we are talking about here in America, girls are succeeding quite a bit. Actually, if you look at the universities, you see more girls than boys. Our culture, usually the boys are the ones that are educated and if a family were

to take their son to school or their daughter back home they would choose to put their son to schooling whereas the daughter would be cleaning and cooking and that would be the focus. Over here, I'm seeing girls are succeeding a lot and so it's kind of a difficult thing because fathers are used to their sons being more educated, so things are changing a little bit. So, I am noticing that within our community. Somali female students seeking a formal education are doing, as I said, better than boys even though I think it might have to do with something with girls being taught responsibility at home. They are more responsible at home, they cook and clean so a fifteen-year-old daughter, if she has four siblings younger than her, she might be a good helper to her mom and while she's helping her mom she's also multitasking and she's doing her homework, taking her schooling seriously where her brother is playing Xbox all day so that's what's making them more successful in the school setting. I don't know, that's something to look into. Like why is there more Somali female students in universities than boys? What's the cause of that? Like a boy and a girl that came from the same household, the girls are going to universities and the boys are finishing high school and then doing other stuff. If you look at our numbers, even the graduates, even if they go to universities, the girls are coming out with degrees. Whereas the boys are dropping out and I don't know why that is.

According to the researcher, the participant's response illustrates that she has noticed a significant difference between male and female Somali students. She says that not only does he see more female students than male students, but also appear to be striving more and doing better. Of course, this merely her claim and would need to substantiate it with proof. However, she narrates her experiences and what she has noticed. She then provides possible causes of why female students may perform better than males students when receiving a formal education. She says, "Somali female students seeking a formal education are doing, as I said, better than boys



even though I think it might have to do with something with girls being taught responsibility at home. They are more responsible at home, they cook and clean so a 15-year-old daughter, if she has four siblings younger than her, she might be a good helper to her mom and while she's helping her mom she's also multitasking and she's doing her homework, taking her schooling seriously where her brother is playing Xbox all day so that's what's making them more successful in the school setting.” If this is the case, it can explain why Somali female students are doing better than male students.

*Participant D-M.* As a matter of fact, here in the United States and I'm speaking from experience, I teach classes at a local college and I speak from experience, you see more Somali females or females than males getting a college-level education and that is something that is, you know, that is unbelievable. You know, I don't know if the population of females is larger than the population of males, I haven't seen any statistics that can be explained, not only do you see more females going and getting a college level education, their commitment. I teach both. I see both. I see males and female Somalis in my classes and the commitment from the females it seems to be higher than that of the males so it's really something, something that someone can look into. Why there's more females going and getting a college education than males. I don't know what goes on, everybody you speak with in the community, members will say the same thing and they will tell you, hey, girls are doing extremely well, completing high school and at the same time, going into higher education, getting a college education.

According to the researcher, Somali American parents see more females receiving a formal education than males. As well, female students appear to be performing better than males too based on their experiences. This participant is a professor at a midwestern community college and shares his experience with male and female students. He states that there is definitely

a difference between male and female students. He says, "I teach classes at a local college and I speak from experience, you see more Somali females or females than males getting a college-level education and that is something that is, you know, that is unbelievable." Similarly, to the past participant, he too sees that Somali female students receiving a formal education are more than Somali male students. In addition, he also notices that the performance of Somali females is significantly different than that of males. He says, "Not only do you see more females going and getting a college level education, their commitment. I teach both. I see both. I see males and female Somalis in my classes and the commitment from the females it seems to be higher than that of the males so it's really something, something that someone can look into." The commitment that he notices from Somali female students isn't the same as that of male students. This difference is recognized by Somali American parents in their female children's general performance.

***Participants F-F.*** Females receiving a formal education strive to learn and educate themselves and reach the same level that boys reach and even higher level because I have noticed that girls are better at learning than boys. What I see from Somali females is that they are very diligent in their schooling, in gaining a formal education and when I compare them with boys they excel much better, that is what I have seen.

Another participant who concurs based on her experience that Somali females are very committed and diligent in gaining a formal education compared to boys. It is quite clear that Somali American parents are very much aware of the performance and commitment difference between both female and male students.

***Participant H-M.*** Honestly, there's more women in college and in higher institutes who are getting a higher education and regardless of your background, to be honest they are actually a

lot better at it. They have patience, dedication, and maturity and honestly, are very smart because they have a very easy time, from what appears even though everything is equal, the books are not going to discriminate and the chapters are gonna be the same and the professors are gonna want the same requirements but they're just, just looks as if they're having an easier time.

Many conclusions can be made from these responses. Somali American parents acknowledge that there are a lot of females receiving a formal education: even more female students than males. As well, they feel that females make more effort in their formal education studies as a result, appear to be performing better than males. They believe that responsibilities females have had help them in their studies. Participant H-M said, “They have patience, dedication, and maturity and honestly, are very smart because they have a very easy time, from what appears even though everything is equal.” Such comments reveal that Somali American parents believe that female students have very good characteristics that enable them to perform at the level they do.

**Theme seven: Family responsibilities or starting a new family can be an obstacle.**

The concept of family is important among Somalis and all members shoulder some amount of responsibility. For females, similar to males, they have a share in carrying out their family responsibilities. Therefore, potential obstacles that may obstruct females from receiving a formal education—as expressed by participants—is their family responsibilities or starting a new family.

*Participant B-F.* Well, most kids that I know do go to schools whether they are from two parent households or one parent households but there are times that are unfortunately where the mother is not doing good herself whether it's chemical abuse or mental health or other than that those kind of things can hinder females students from going to school on a daily basis. If a

student is missing for instance she may be taking care of the mother if she's the oldest child and she's taking care of the child she's going to be missing school more than the rest of the kids because she might be acting like a mom putting the kids on the bus and caring for mom, whatever the reason is. you see what I'm saying and that sometimes hinders them it's not very often but that is sometimes very much that do happen.

This response conveys that overwhelming responsibilities can hinder females from attaining a formal education. In cases where girls come from families whose parent(s) are medically ill, the female child(ren) may assume the role of the parent which as a result, can cause female students to be distracted from their formal education.

*Participant E-M.* There are some, not related to the people of the past, but to the people of today and there are some families today that convince themselves that if a girl is not married off early then this can bring some shame to the family so a girl who's in high school may be told by her, from her family, that she's going to get married and this is not good. Allah has not created people the same. If she feels that she would like to get married and expresses this wish then what you should do is help her do so and find someone suitable for her but that the family and parents be a hindrance on their female children from getting a formal education, this isn't good. Saying to them, don't learn and stay home, establish a family this is going to harm her but if their daughters say and express their interest in marriage at an earlier age then then this should be something that the their families should support and welcome while at the same time, encouraging her to continue receiving her education because there are some girls who while married, and even pregnant, continue their education.

According to the researcher, this participant's response indicates that some Somali families encourage their female children to marry early and do so believing that if they don't,

shame may come due to their female children not being married. However, he appears to not support this way of thinking. He says, “Allah has not created people the same. If she feels that she would like to get married and expresses this wish then what you should do is help her do so and find someone suitable for her but that the family and parents be a hindrance on their female children from getting a formal education, this isn't good.” This illustrates that Somali American parents don't believe pressuring their female children into marriage should be done. Instead, families should counsel with their female children to see if they are interested. If they are interested in getting married, families should help them as this participant said, “If she feels that she would like to get married and expresses this wish then what you should do is help her do so and find someone suitable for her but that the family.” Still, he does note that parents should not hinder their female children from attaining a formal education by making remarks such as the participant stated, “Saying to them, don't learn and stay home, establish a family.”

**Participant F-F.** There is nothing that prevents them, even if she gets married. Females get married, some females get Married earlier than others, this still shouldn't prevent them. But sometimes, yes. Many of them still seek to get a formal education, so there's nothing that contradicts getting married and getting it from education this is what I believe, I believe that she can do both.

This participant reports that though marriage can hinder females from attaining a formal education, they can and still do gain it.

**Participant H-M.** We're talking about today kind of thing and formal education starting from kindergarten? I can't see anything that's standing in the way of them graduating and gaining a formal education until High School. After High School, things get tricky. The human body evolves, and people take different routes and only thing I can possibly think of that can hinder

them from getting their education would be them starting a family or some sort that would be harder. Commonsense, especially with their bodies going through so much. I can see how they wouldn't be able to attend college, but they can still do it and they do (laughs). So, my hat's off to them and they do it so magnificently. Honestly, this is all seen and proven. Like as far as their strengths are very strong and dedicated in formal education something that they are very good at and, and how the system is built where we are here in the United States of America is your kid can't miss school and they don't care who you are, your kid has to show to school before you may get in trouble and everyone starts looking at you and so I don't see that stopping them. It is evident that participants acknowledge that marriage and starting a new family can hinder females from attaining a formal education. They do believe it is very possible to do so; however, can also believe it can be difficult.

In sum, the responsibilities females may have within their homes or when starting a new family can no doubt be an obstacle that can prevent them from receiving a formal education or at least, slow their progress. Participant H-M says,

“The human body evolves, and people take different routes and only thing I can possibly think of that can hinder them from getting their education would be them starting a family or some sort that would be harder. Commonsense, especially with their bodies going through so much. I can see how they wouldn't be able to attend college, but they can still do it and they do (laughs).”

So, of course, with the physical change that occurs to females during their pregnancy and recovering, it can occupy them away from their studies temporarily. It is important to note that it appears from participant responses that Somali American parents do not favor that females be forced to start families. Participant E-M said, Allah has not created people the same. If she feels

that she would like to get married and expresses this wish then what you should do is help her do so and find someone suitable for her but that the family and parents be a hindrance on their female children from getting a formal education, this isn't good. Saying to them, don't learn and stay home, establish a family this is going to harm her but if their daughters say and express their interest in marriage at an earlier age then then this should be something that their families should support and welcome while at the same time, encouraging her to continue receiving her education because there are some girls who while married, and even pregnant, continue their education.

**Theme eight: Formal education for females has value.** All 10 participants said that formal education has value. The following excerpts of their interviews indicate this.

*Participant A-M.* Yes, the fact that she can be in a structured organized schooling system has a big value for me because without that, I don't know how else, I can try, but I'm not a teacher, and my wife's not a teacher. So, it's not going to be as easy to educate her but going to school, you know, and learning from teachers that are trained, is very important to me and if we need or want to expand on what she's learning we can expand on that and that's not going to be difficult for us. But at least we have something to start with so that's the value formal education has for my daughter and the fact that she gets to mix with different personalities and see how different people act and maybe also take some lessons from that as well.

Attaining a structured education instructed by professionals is of great value to Somali American parents. This participant appreciates that his female child can receive an education that is formal. One that he cannot provide himself for her as he says, "A structured organized schooling system has a big value for me because without that, I don't know how else, I can try, but I'm not a teacher, and my wife's not a teacher." He perceives this type of instruction to have

great significance for his female child. He also says, “Learning from teachers that are trained, is very important to me and if we need or want to expand on what she's learning we can expand on that and that's not going to be difficult for us.’ This comment reveals that Somali American parents view the professional instruction delivered to their female children receiving a formal education is not something they can provide. Therefore, perceive this to have a lot of value.

*Participant B-F.* Okay, so my daughters talk about their future, they, you know believe so much, I've talked about education, that, that only if they have a formal education such as a bachelor's that they can actually provide for themselves and make for their families, so they see those two go basically hand-in-hand. Like if they have a formal education and have my degree then I can live like a good stable life so then they value it quite a bit cuz they do want to have a good life and I value it too. I believe that it'll make them a well-rounded person. Like, I feel that if they have a formal education, of course they're going to get that everyday education from mom, uncle, aunties, grandma, but if they have that formal education in addition to that, I feel that it makes them like a well-rounded person that can think outside the box, does that make sense?

Somali American parents believe formal education has great value for their female children due to it enabling them to provide for themselves. As well, they believe formal education will make their children a well-rounded person as this participant says, “I feel that if they have a formal education, of course they're going to get that everyday education from mom, uncle, aunties, grandma, but if they have that formal education in addition to that, I feel that it makes them like a well-rounded person that can think outside the box.”

*Participant C-M.* Yes, it's very important for me that my girls get formal education. They started kindergarten now they're in the fifth grade and one fourth grade and one third grade and



some kindergarten and my son will be in the 4th grade and the system in America the educational system, the formal education system has helped my kids. They go to school for eight hours, they bring homework. It is good and has a lot of value. It's helping them how to read, how to write, even how to speak English.

This participant also values the structured instruction that formal education provides. He says, "They go to school for eight hours, they bring homework. It is good and has a lot of value."

*Participant D-M.* It has a lot of value. Formal education, as I mentioned earlier, it gives them, it shapes the person it really shapes the person you know. It broadens, it increases their mental capacity when it comes to seeing things, how they visualize things. A person with a formal education has much more mental capability to see things at a different angle, how they visualize things. A person with formal education, you know has much more capability to things, to see things at a different angle, to be able to be more than a person who doesn't have a formal education. It gives a person, it is a chance, it gives a person a chance to be who they want to be as a matter of fact. So, it helps them to be themselves and to be able to speak and interact with others at the same level because a person who is formally educated is able to interact with others at the same level. A person who doesn't have it would not be able to interact with others at the same level so it makes them and give them that confidence, it builds their confidence that, hey I went to school, I finished high school, I went to college, I finished college. To be able to compete and to get good jobs. It's another thing to be able to have their earnings, to be able to earn, to be able to serve for the future, it really helps a lot and on a lot of levels.

Formal education, to Somali American parents, expand the mental aptitude of females whereby enabling them to view things differently and interact with other at the same level. This participant says, "A person with a formal education has much more mental capability to see

things at a different angle, how they visualize things.” As well, Somali American parents believe that formal education will provide their female children confidence and the opportunity to earn an income. He says, “It makes them and give them that confidence, it builds their confidence that, hey I went to school, I finished high school, I went to college, I finished college. To be able to compete and to get good jobs.”

*Participant E-M.* The value that it has for girls, for females, is huge. It allows them to become self-sufficient. When someone is self-sufficient, it is then, when they can help others and the society and to give back, to bring some type of benefit. But if a person is not self-sufficient but you can't do anything, she herself needs assistance and so formal education allows a person to be self-sufficient and to be able to progress, then she can help her parents, her family, her religion and also, she can give back.

Self-sufficiency has been an echoed sentiment expressed by participants. Formal education is valued by Somali American parents due to it helping their female children gain self-sufficiency. This is illustrated by the participant's response. He says, “The value that it has for girls, for females, is huge. It allows them to become self-sufficient. When someone is self-sufficient, it is then, when they can help others and the society and to give back, to bring some type of benefit.”

*Participant F-F.* It has a great value. Formal education has a great value. As a mother, that my daughters have a formal education, and I support them and those who have finished I support them, and those of my daughters who are currently still in school I support, those that I know among the Somali community, I encourage that they gain a formal education and I advise Somali parents to encourage their daughters to get a formal education and that they take their

daughters to the best schools and that they know their progress and that they help them with their homework, and that their progress be monitored, that what I believe.

**Participant G-F.** As a mother, that my daughter is gaining a formal education has a lot of value and for every girl and for all girls, I feel I am a mother to, I have a great joy to see a girl doing her homework, reading, going to college, going to college, going to high school and as a mother, it has a lot of joy and it brings happiness to me and because we are in a country, in America, they have a formal education, they have degrees, they can advance and I would say continue, and keep going and I'm very happy about that.

**Participant H-M.** What value does it not have? It has everything that matters. Like honest to God. I mean to survive, formal education would provide you those skills that you acquire, and it is common sense, yeah.

Somali American parents believe formal education has essential skills needed to survive. This participant says, "It has everything that matters. Like honest to God. I mean to survive; formal education would provide you those skills."

**Participant I-F.** Well, the value it holds for me, I guess going back to coming from a family who values education, watching my dad reach all the way to receiving a doctoral degree, to my mom coming here striving to educate herself as much as she could her own self as a preschool teacher. I see the difference it makes. I see the difference it makes on my little girl; you know, in comparing her to children her age, she is much more vocal, and she loves books. She's just a different child than the children who didn't have the same opportunities as she has and had at an early age and I think about the impact that receiving a formal education makes and I think how much more will she grow and education will make a difference for her because I can see the difference it makes on her compared to other kids. I think about it in terms of those

milestones, so I don't know really, formal education is necessary, and I just feel it's essential. It's not just for making more money or what not. It's, I mean, I have friends who have their PhDs in Washington DC and literally they were busting tables. I mean they had their PhDs. Can you imagine how much money it took but it wasn't about the money for them; they loved doing, being in the service industry, busting tables. But they also had their education so it wasn't about the money for them and I think it's for me, what I feel, receiving a formal education is not, cannot put money on it. It's more valuable than that. It's just, it's a growth of an individual. It's the expansion of the world and that's my feeling.

Somali American parents hold formal education for females to be essential. It is not just a complementary achievement in life as the following participant says, "Formal education is necessary, and I just feel it's essential." This participant also values formal education greatly due to the difference it has had on her female child compared to others. She continues to say, "I see the difference it makes. I see the difference it makes on my little girl; you know, in comparing her to children her age, she is much more vocal, and she loves books. She's just a different child than the children who didn't have the same opportunities as she has and had at an early age and I think about the impact that receiving a formal education makes and I think how much more will she grow and education will make a difference for her because I can see the difference it makes on her compared to other kids." Formal education without a doubt does make a difference, especially on children.

*Participant J-F.* My daughters and every girl that lives in America needs to get an education. If she doesn't learn and get an education, if she doesn't learn her needs will be a lot, their lives will be very basic, I mean, if she would just be at a home, would this be good? Would this be something that is easy? That's something else. It would definitely be different.

In sum, living in America has prompted Somali parents to want their female children to gain a formal education. It appears that their experiences in the U.S has shown them that their female children may have a difficult time attaining their needs without a formal education. This is understood from the participant's responses wherein she says, "If she doesn't learn and get an education, if she doesn't learn her needs will be a lot."

**Theme nine: Parents support their female children in receiving a formal education.**

This theme became apparent throughout the interviews. When I asked participants what role you think you play in your female child(ren)'s formal education, many of their responses were that they are a source of support, reinforcement, motivator, etc.

*Participant A-M.* I help her with homework that she receives from her teachers, I go to the school events that they have so I can support her. That's mainly what I do. I also communicate with the teachers to see if there are things that my daughter is not understanding. I communicate with them to spend more time with her or to, you know, inform us of any shortcomings that she has in terms of learning. I attend any of the parent-teacher meetings, this is how I participate in my daughter's formal education.

Data from this research indicates that Somali American parents take an active role in the formal education of their female children. They help their female children with their homework, attend conferences, and seek to improve their daughters learning experience.

*Participant B-F.* A lot of enforcements (laughs). Yes, just for example, today I was at work. I get an email from a program call AVID. The kids had to start that program on Thursday, yesterday. I marked it as next Wednesday. The bus came today, and they didn't come. Then today, I got an email saying that your kids missed the program for the second day, what happened? So, I said, oh, my God! I have it recorded as next Wednesday. So, I told him that

they're going to come tomorrow, and they had me sign some permission slips that they're going to go visit some colleges and I texted my daughter tomorrow that she's going to go to school. You're going to go to AVID, the bus is going to be here, make sure you be there at 7:50 am in the morning outside and she text me back saying, "No!" Because she wants a summer break, she wants to relax. So, I'm like yeah, you're on summer break but you are still going to seek those enrichment courses that way by the time school comes, like you will, if not up to date, you will be advanced. So, I'm constantly trying to implement enrichment courses so they can get to where they need to go either at grade level or at advanced level so as a mom, that's just my job. So, a lot of like, just always looking for resources, classes, tutoring. I have a tutor, matter of fact, that comes here Fridays, things like that.

*Me.* You said you have to reinforce them, what did you mean by that?

*Her.* I mean kids like sometimes just want to be on their phone especially when they're on summer break, so you got to give them guided structure. You have to like, almost have your own formal education going on at home where you're giving them a structure and things to be doing and that's what I do.

The positive reinforcement this participant provides to their female children specifically, illustrates that Somali American parents play a big role in their education and believe that this is their job. This participant's comment is replete with explicit ways she seeks to enrich her female children's formal education. During summers, where many students are on break, she seeks educational opportunities for her female children and encourages them to participate in them. She mentions when informing her daughter about a summer educational program, her daughter's response was that she didn't want to attend. She says, "Because she wants a summer break, she wants to relax. So, I'm like yeah, you're on summer break but you are still going to seek those

enrichment courses that way by the time school comes, like you will, if not up to date, you will be advanced. So, I'm constantly trying to implement enrichment courses so they can get to where they need to go either at grade level or at advanced level so as a mom, that's just my job." This participant sees encouraging her daughter and reinforcing the importance of a formal education to be 'her job'.

*Participant C-M.* As a father, anyway they can get an education and get a good quality education, especially I pay for my kid's extra tutors because I need that they improve at school, anyway I can help them, I'm ready for that. Even I pay the tutor, or I help them any way they can get a quality education.

This statement reflects this participant's great desire that his female children receive a formal education and his readiness to do whatever he can to improve. He says, "I pay for my kids extra tutors because I need that they improve at school, anyway I can help them, I'm ready for that."

*Participant D-M.* Parents are, you know, help their children. When it comes to opportunities, they make sure they have all the opportunities. When it comes to education, so if the parents do not fulfil that fundamental role for the children, you have to instill to your children that hey, you can do what everybody else can do. You have to send them to school. You have to be able to provide them this. Parents are the basis upon which children get their formal education. If it wasn't for the parents, if the parents do not fulfill that primary responsibility, for their own children, then it's going to be hard for children to go to schools. So, if you don't do that, if you don't send your children to school, then how will they be able to go to school? You have to have them; you have to make sure they have supplies for school. So, parents play integral role when it comes to educating their children. Without parents doing that, then hey children are

children so they will not be able to go to school, so parents play integral role. I play an integral role, their mom wakes up every morning, makes sure that the kids have their breakfast on the table, they are ready, they have the supplies. It's a collaborative effort from both parents working together and making sure that they have their children get that education other children are getting so that is something that is a primary responsibility upon every parent here in United States where people have that opportunity and making sure that your children are getting every single opportunity when it comes to education, so you have to make sure that you do that, so when they grow up, they know their parents have done their job when it comes to helping them get an education and being able to succeed in life.

This participant's response reveals that Somali American parents feel they play an integral role in the education of their female children. They provide them school supplies, emotional support, instill confidence in them, and believe are the basis upon which their children receive their formal education as the participant said, "You have to instill to your children that hey, you can do what everybody else can do. You have to send them to school. You have to be able to provide them this. Parents are the basis upon which children get their formal education." The comments from participants in this study indicate that Somali American parents do play an active positive role in the education of their female children. They also believe this is from the responsibilities of both parents as said by the participant, "It's a collaborative effort from both parents working together and making sure that they have their children get that education other children are getting so that is something that is a primary responsibility upon every parent here in United States where people have that opportunity."

***Participant E-M.*** I really encourage my daughters and I always say to them, if you are in school learning, then the car that you're using, the home that you are living in, your school fees,



all of that, it is an on me. I don't want you to have any debt when you graduate, and I want you to graduate with no debt and to have your school write my name on your degree (laughs). So, now one of my daughters has finished her bachelors while having no debt. I used to make sure that every day she had what she needed of expenses and now she is doing her masters and I said to her if you bring me a good grade, I will make sure that you have no debt and will cover all of your expenses free. I rather I have debt so I can pay yours. I want you to continue your schooling and get your degree debt free. Similarly, to those younger than her, I encourage them to do the same and I say to them that you guys have a future and if you guys are still living, I want you guys to be educated in your worldly affairs and also in your religion. All praise belongs to Allah, this is the direction that I direct my children to and encourage them and for every parent, they should play this type of role and when I see men in my age and we just converse, they say even if you educate your daughter she will go with a man and get married and she's going to support her husband and so I reply to them and say that this itself is sufficient for me. That she is able to keep her family, support her family, to support her husband and if she wasn't educated, she would not be able to help her husband and they would be struggling but if she is educated, her husband also will be having respect for her, she will see that she helps him and every man who is successful, there is a woman who is has supported him.

Encouraging female children has been a repeating theme among participants. Parents view their role in the education of their female children to be encouragers, both emotionally and financially. This participant says, "I really encourage my daughters and I always say to them, if you are in school learning, then the car that you're using, the home that you are living in, your school fees, all of that, it is an on me." It is evident from this comment that Somali American parents genuinely support their daughters and are a source of encouragement for them.

**Participant F-F.** As a parent, anything and everything that I can do for my daughters and need, I'm going to do it. Whatever it be. When they were young, anything that they needed, I gave it to them. When they get older, whatever that they needed of advice, suggestions, and help, I give to them, to help them, to be a shoulder for them. I help them with anything that they need. I tell them where to study, how to study, help them by giving them gas money and telling him that I will assist them in all that I can do.

**Participant G-F.** All my siblings, they take their kids to tutoring places and, but I have someone come over my home to tutor my daughter and help her with her homework and similarly, I help my daughter I read books to her and that really is important. That, that I'm able to help her and I always encourage her and so taking her to the library and reading books and that this is something that every mother should be doing since it is their responsibility.

Again, the sense of responsibility towards the education of female children is a sentiment expressed here by this participant. Taking her daughter to the library, reading to her, etc., is something Somali American parents believe all parents are responsible for.

**Participant H-M.** I'm the motivator. I like to see myself as the motivator. I like to see myself as, I mean, they're human in the end of the day. So, clearly things are going to come at them and they're going to want to do, you know, other things that you know, like don't get their assignments done or focus on their work and so I'm the reminder. I'm the transportation guy. I'm the guy that gives them high fives. I'm the guy who says, hey you need to earn money, you want to get all these nice things, so you need to go get your formal education and so learn and yeah. I'm the positive pillar behind them. I'm forever the congratulator when they achieve their goals. You know, I'm their support system more than anything, support. I'm the guy that says, hey do it better than me, yeah. So, mostly I'm the motivator, honestly. I just want to motivate them. I

mean, I can't do much for them because they're humans just like I am and they're going to have their off days and steer away and all that stuff and they're dealing with life too and so I'm the reminder. I'm just a person who is constantly motivating, reminding them and I can't see anybody who wouldn't do that for their daughters.

This participant expressed the feeling of being a motivator, supporter, reminder, and congratulator in his role of the education of his female children. He says, I'm the motivator. I like to see myself as the motivator. So, clearly things are going to come at them and they're going to want to do, you know, other things that you know, like don't get their assignments done or focus on their work and so I'm the reminder. I'm the transportation guy. I'm the positive pillar behind them. I'm forever the congratulator when they achieve their goals. You know, I'm their support system more than anything, support.”

*Participant I-F.* So, luckily, I had a mom who till today is very driven in education and was very driven equally for all of her children—both males and females—and my role as a mom now and I love being a mom. Again, it's important to me that I am making, I'm making their whole lives, not necessarily an outcome for them, but how I do and what I do really sets a tone for their future, granted that Allah has a role in it too. But as their mom, you know, I have a stake in the outcome of their future and that stake is that I lead them rightly, whether it's formal education or you know, in terms of being a good human being. But now, considering formal education is that I did what I could and believing in good early child development, I did what I could, providing them a chance to get their formal education and I plan to, as I said, send them to Blake School which is very good school and I hope to, you know, help them gain their lower, middle, upper formal education. Making sure that they have a stable stepping stone to get their formal education. That's the best I can do as a mom. To see them till their 12th grade. That I

ensure that they have the best tools and to invest in that and hopefully the rest will lead them on to where they need to be or where they want to be.

This participant sees her role in the education of her female child to be significantly important because she believes what she does will impact her daughter's life and future. She says, "It's important to me that I am making, I'm making their whole lives, not necessarily an outcome for them, but how I do and what I do really sets a tone for their future, granted that Allah has a role in it too. But as their mom, you know, I have a stake in the outcome of their future and that stake is that I lead them rightly." This response displays that Somali American parents are not only aware of their role in their female children's education, but also strive to lead them rightly. They do this by providing their female children opportunities which will enable them to be successful in the journey they embark to receive a formal education as clear in the following statement by this participant where she says after mentioning that she plans to take her children to Blake School, a private school known for its prestige in education, "Making sure that they have a stable stepping stone to get their formal education. That's the best I can do as a mom. To see them till their 12th grade. That I ensure that they have the best tools and to invest in that and hopefully the rest will lead them on to where they need to be or where they want to be."

*Participant J-F.* My position as a parent, my role in my daughters getting a formal education is that I have taken them to preschool, to schools, to make sure that they do their homework, to get them help if they need help and helped them and encouraged them to do good and that they stay in schools, that I put alarms on that alerted them when it's time for school, to build a connection to with their teachers, to push them to do their best, to provide them supplies, pencils and notebooks, to give them what they need, lunch money, and when they become adults to continue helping them if they need a car, to help them get a car, if they have young children

and my girls have young children, to babysit for them, to do everything and anything that I can do, to be an open door that is open for them to enter and ask whatever that they need.

As previously expressed by other participants, Somali American parents view their role in the formal education of their female children as providing them all that they need as this participant says, “My role in my daughters getting a formal education is that I have taken them to preschool, to schools, to make sure that they do their homework, to get them help if they need help and helped them and encouraged them to do good and that they stay in schools, that I put alarms on that alerted them when it's time for school, to build a connection to with their teachers, to push them to do their best, to provide them supplies, pencils and notebooks, to give them what they need, lunch money, and when they become adults to continue helping them.”

### **Summary of Themes/Patterns**

A total of nine major themes related to the perception of Somali American Parents on formal education for females were identified by the researcher during the analysis of this qualitative study. The first theme focused on equality for both genders in formal education. This theme revealed that Somali American parents view formal education for females and formal education for males equally; in other words, they see them both the same and want both genders to receive a formal education. Regardless of the fact that there is a bias in society on formal education against formal education for females, they as individuals and parents perceive formal education equally for both genders. A male participant, participant A-M, said, “So formal education for females—the way I see it—is not any different than formal education for males; they should be getting an opportunity and here in the United States, it's no different. People are equal here, same as where I came from.” Another male participant said, participant H-M, said, “Just like it is with males (laughs). If you can be dedicated and you could go and work hard and

be patient through the boring stuff or what's perceived as boring, may God make it easy for you. like definitely, go. I mean they're human just like males.” The responses of these participants illustrate that Somali American male parents don't have any prejudice against females receiving a formal education nor are they misogynist as some people unrightfully believe. In contrary, their responses display that they genuinely desire the same for their children, both male and female. Similarly, Somali American female parents also are not prejudice against their female children. A female participant, participant F-F, said, “Somali boys and girls that are now here in America that they equally gain an education, this is what I have heard and know from Somali members. from my friends for my family and from the larger community I have seen that they like that their girls educate themselves and get an education.” Another female participant, participant I-F, said, “Personally, I have seen in my generation, that's the only thing I can speak for, is that I haven't heard anything that's against you know females in my generation.”

The second theme highlights that Somali American parents like their female children receive a formal education and are proud they are. They are happy their daughters are learning, gaining skills, and gaining a formal education. All ten participants said they liked that their female children receive a formal education. Some even said they were thrilled, and many said they were proud. This sense of pride participants expressed could be due to them possibly knowing how important getting a formal education is in the United States of America as many participants said that during their interviews. Of course, there may be other reasons; however, this finding does demonstrate that Somali American parents like and are proud that their female children receive a formal education.

The third theme concerns the beliefs of Somali American parents towards formal education for females. The interviews of the participants revealed positive beliefs about formal

education for females. All ten participants expressed positive opinions and views. Both female participants and male participants shared in this. It appears, from this data, that Somali American parents view formal education for females positively, not negatively.

The fourth theme also was about the impacts of formal education on females but how Somali American believe that there are no direct negative impacts associate with formal education for females so long it is not used negatively or seen as a problem by others. The majority of the participants, nine out of the ten interviewed, perceived this.

Theme five was about the concern of females intermingling with males. Some of the Somali American parents expressed their concern and fear of boys/males during the process of their female children receiving a formal education. The participants, being of Muslim faith, worry for their daughters may be interacted with by boys/males at schools and rightfully should, as most schools providing a formal education do not segregate students by gender; instead, students share the facility and freely intermix. This intermixing is alarming for Somali American parents since it opposes their religion and due to the harmful effects of intermixing between genders such as forming illicit relationships, unwelcomed body contact, inappropriate language, and more. Due to this, this is a concern they have since male students may interact with their female children in a way that is not permissible in their religion.

Theme six shows that Somali American parents believe females do better at receiving a formal education than males. Participants did not support this belief with any statistics; however, they seem to be speaking from what they notice having children and from experience. One of the participants is a college professor and explained that this belief of his is due to what he sees while teaching his courses; that is, his belief that Somali females are excelling more than Somali males. A female participant also tried to give reasons as to why this may be the case. She said

that Somali females multitask and learn a lot of skills at home. Due to their responsibilities at home, are more committed and responsible in their studies.

Theme seven revealed that family responsibilities can be a possible obstacle for females receiving a formal education. Four out of the ten participants mentioned this. Females among the Somali community, as like males, have responsibilities within the family. Some of the participants mentioned that the responsibilities females have within the home and having children, can hinder them from receiving a formal education as participant H-M, for example, said, “The human body evolves, and people take different routes and only thing I can possibly think of that can hinder them from getting their education would be them starting a family or some sort that would be harder. Commonsense, especially with their bodies going through so much. I can see how they wouldn't be able to attend college, but they can still do it and they do (laughs).”

Theme eight indicated that Somali American parents perceive formal education to have value for their female children. All ten participants expressed this belief during interviews. Some may have assumed the opposite about Somali American parents. However, contrary to such an assumption, participants in this research perceived formal education to have great value for their female children.

Theme nine discussed what role Somali American parents see themselves having in regard to their female children receiving a formal education. All 10 participants said they play the role of a supporter, or motivator, or encourager, and similar to that in meaning. They all expressed that they are sources of support for their female children in receiving a formal education. In addition to this, they mentioned that they greatly support them receive their formal



education any way they could whether it be monetary, emotional, or educational support. This seems to reinforce their positive beliefs and perceptions of formal education for females.

## **Chapter V: Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate how Somali American parents perceive formal education for females. The study used a qualitative theory approach employing interviews with participants from the target community which thereby sought to seek answers to the following research questions:

1. What are Somali American parents' ideas about the formal education of their female children?
2. What are some decisive obstacles hindering females from receiving an education from a parent's perspective?

The data of the study show nine identifiable themes produced by the qualitative investigation regarding Somali American perceptions of formal education for females:

1) Somali American parents view formal education for females and formal education for males equally, 2) Somali American parents like that their female children receive a formal education and are proud that they are, 3) Somali American parents have positive beliefs about formal education for females, 4) No direct negative impacts associated with formal education for females unless used incorrectly or seen as a problem by others, 5) concerns about boys/males, 6) females do better than males at receiving a formal education, 7) family responsibilities can be an obstacle for females, 8) formal education for females has value, and 9) Somali American parents support their female children receive a formal education.

The findings of this study should add great insight into the perceptions of Somali Americans regarding formal education for females. Of course, the particular findings of this study do not represent all Somali Americans. However, it does shed light on their perceptions through the lens of Somali American parents. It displays that Somali American parents, who

have been in the U.S for a minimum of twenty years, have adopted mainstream American educational values. The study's finding illustrates that Somali American parents share similar perceptions of formal education for females as mainstream Americans. The findings also reveal that Somali American are not anti-formal education for females or have misogynistic beliefs regarding formal education for females. Therefore, it is hoped that similar studies on various topics about the Somali community in the U.S will be afoot so to educate people who have negative preconceived opinions about Somali Americans.

### **Somali American Parents' Perception of Formal Education for Females**

Somali American parents in this study perceived formal education for females very positively, having positive impacts on their female children, and being of benefit for them. As well as perceiving formal education for females in this light, none of the ten participants interviewed dislike or were averse to the formal education that their female children are receiving. Conversely, all participants expressed that they like that their female children are receiving a formal education as well as being a source of support for them. Somali American parents see that formal education for their female children will enable them to help themselves, their family, and those around them. Therefore, Somalis being a communal people, formal education for their female children will transitively benefit their communities. Additionally, Somali American parents also viewed that formal education for females essential as they will be better able to cultivate their children. Many of the female parents emphasized its importance by expressing that if they did not have a formal education, many areas in the upbringing of children would be very difficult for females. Male parents too, emphasized the importance of formal education for females in raising children.

**Decisive obstacles hindering females from receiving an education from a parent's perspective.** In this study, Somali American parents viewed family responsibilities mainly being a possible obstacle for females receiving a formal education. Participants mentioned various components with the family such as females raising their own children or helping take care of their siblings, household chores, etc. The communal culture of Somalis does call for helping one another. Due to this, family members –both immediate and extended—assist one another and females, similar to males, help their females. Some of the participants expressed that females can still and do attain a formal education even with the responsibilities they have in their families. This is evident as many females among the Somali community who shoulder family responsibilities, as like males, are graduating and receiving a formal education.

### **Limitations**

This study was conducted by a male Somali American researcher who grew up in a home wherein formal education was of significant importance. His father, in particular, received a Ph.D. from Colorado State University and inculcated the value of education in his family. The researcher's mother is a retired head-start teacher and nearly all of his siblings have a postsecondary education. Though he represents the Somali American community, it would be interesting to see the depiction of the findings of this study from a female Somali American researcher's perspective.

Also, the participants of this study were all residents of the U.S for a minimum of 20 years. The researcher sought to interview such participants to ensure that they had a higher level of familiarity with the American culture in general and American educational values more specifically. It is possible that the findings of this study could have been different if the

participants interviewed were Somalis who came recently to America or resided in the U.S for a shorter period of time.

In sum, the study relied on data collected from the interviews of ten participants among Midwestern Cities. Therefore, both the size of the collected data and region must be considered. Thus, the findings of this study should not be a general representation of all Somali American parents. As well, the method of data elicitation for this study was interviews. With that in mind, participants may have refrained from sharing some of their more personal beliefs and perceptions about the study's topic due to not being comfortable or being gender sensitive.

### **Future Research**

Future studies can elaborate more on this topic by expanding the sample size, exploring different regions in the United States of America, and collecting data differently than done in this study. Noteworthy to mention is that this study revealed other connected compartments of the Somali community such as their religious views, family dynamics, etc., which also need independent coverage.

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## Appendix

### Demographic Information

1. Sex
2. Age
3. Birth Place
4. Citizen, Immigrant, or Refugee
5. What is your highest level of education?
6. How long have you and your children been in the United States of America?
7. If foreign born, how old were you when you came to the US? \_
8. If born in a Somali speaking country, how old were you when you left that country?
9. What is your first language?
10. Did/do you go to school here in America?
11. What is the religion you practice?

**Interview Questions**

1. Tell me what comes to mind when you hear females receiving a formal education.
2. What have you heard from members of the Somali community concerning females receiving a formal education?
3. Do you like that your female children should receive a formal education?
4. Describe your beliefs and perceptions about formal education for females.
5. What ways do you believe formal education for females positively impact their lives?  
Tell me stories that you know of where females have been positively impacted by education.
6. What ways do you believe formal education for females negatively impact their lives?  
Tell me stories of that you know of where females have been negatively impacted by education.
7. Describe how formal education for females could be of benefit
8. Is there a situation where you believe formal education would not be useful for females?
9. Tell me some obstacles that hinder Somali females from receiving formal education
10. What variables do you believe cause such obstacles?
11. Describe what your daughters would be doing if they weren't receiving formal education
12. As a mother, what kind of value(s) does formal education have for your female children?

13. As a father, tell me what values you believe formal education has for your daughter(s).
14. What role do you think you play as a parent in your female child(ren)'s formal education?