

Somali Culture in MN - At a Glance

Common cultural norms of the Somali population residing in Minnesota.



Traditional Beliefs on Health and Medicine

- Depression and anxiety is considered taboo and not discussed openly.
- Mental illness is also considered taboo to discuss; many think that by praying certain prayers from the Koran a person can be healed.
- Circumcision may be found in both men and women.
- Birth control practices are not widely used.
- Most agree to surgery and blood drawing, but health care decisions may involve the entire family.
- Some people are afraid that their organs will be stolen during surgery.



Gender

- Men and women generally do not touch members of the opposite sex in public.
- Traditionally men work outside the home and women stay home to raise children, although in MN more women are going to college.
- Women generally choose to cover their bodies and their hair to show modesty as part of Islamic tradition.
- At age 15 young men are considered adults.
- Girls are considered adults when they menstruate.

Religion

- Most Somalis are Muslim, majority are Sunni Muslims.
- Some commonly practiced Islamic beliefs include: prayer 5 times a day, eating pork and drinking alcohol is prohibited.

Communication Styles

- Only men are expected to shake hands with other men.
- Women shake hands with other women.

Personal Space & Social Gestures

- According to Islamic tradition the right hand is considered the correct and appropriate hand to use for daily tasks.
- Traditionally, eye or physical contact between men and women is avoided in public.

Familial Structure

- Family is source of personal security and identity.
- Traditionally live in multi-generational households. High respect for elders.
- Commonly have large families.
- Father or oldest male is head of household and decision maker.

The above information was provided by the following organizations and individuals: ECHO Spokesperson Ahmed (Jahweyn) Farah, The Confederation of Somali Community in Minnesota, and Stratis Health www.stratishealth.org.

This information sheet is not intended to be an exhaustive approach or complete representation of the Somali culture, but rather a basic introduction and foundation.

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