



**Linnæus University**

Sweden

Thesis

# Soccer for immigrant girls - a means for integration?



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.2. RESEARCH PROBLEM AND RELEVANCE	1
1.3. OBJECTIVE	2
1.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS	2
1.5. STRUCTURE OF THESIS	2
<b>2. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK</b>	<b>3</b>
2.1. ACCULTURATION	3
2.2. INTEGRATION	5
2.3. SPORTS AND INTEGRATION	9
2.3.1 <i>Sports and immigrants</i>	9
2.3.2 <i>Initiatives related to girls and soccer</i>	9
2.3.4 <i>Soccer and women in an Islamic context</i>	10
2.3.5 <i>The perception of well-being</i>	12
2.4. APPLICABILITY TO MY THESIS	13
<b>3. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK CONSIDERATIONS</b>	<b>14</b>
3.1. BACKGROUND	14
3.1.1 <i>Araby</i>	14
3.1.2 <i>Soccer at Araby – my research</i>	16
3.2. ABDUCTIVE REASONING	17
3.3. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	18
3.4. LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS	18
<b>4. RESULTS</b>	<b>18</b>
4.1 RESPONSES OF THE PARTICIPATING GIRLS	18
4.2 RESPONSES OF THE MOTHERS	21
4.3 RESPONSES FROM THE FATHERS	22
4.4 RESPONSES FROM THE BROTHERS	24
<b>5. DISCUSSION</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>6. CONCLUSION</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>7 REFERENCES</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>APPENDIX</b>	<b>34</b>

INTERVIEWS OF GIRLS.	34
INTERVIEWS OF MOTHERS	42
INTERVIEWS OF FATHERS	44
INTERVIEWS OF BROTHERS	47

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Introduction

Sports as a means for integration is a subject that has been discussed and researched for more than two decades. Sports are generally practised all over the world, and as an immigrant, you may participate in a sport in a new country without much difficulty. Soccer is particularly well suited, as one may join easily and even if an amateur enters the game, he will find a suitable team to join. Even if rules are not known to the new participant, these will be learnt quickly. Hence, soccer invites a broad group of people. Soccer has long been a sport for men, and much of the research done are directed towards integration efforts where men are playing soccer in their new country.

Some few initiatives directed towards soccer for girls or young women have surfaced during the cause of my research. These are all driven by sports clubs, which means the goal is to recruit new players for the club's teams. The soccer project for girls at Araby in Växjö, which is the subject of my research, stands alone without any ties to an organization. This means there is less pressure on the participants to deliver results and you participate much on your own terms. Thus, it seems, the Araby project would reach out to a wider audience than the club-oriented efforts.

## 1.2. Research problem and relevance

Previous research has largely been directed towards the impact of soccer on men's integration. The few reports dealing with soccer for girls are lacking a wider view vis á vis influences on family members.

The research problem is thus summarized in the over-all question if soccer has played a role for the integration process as such for the girls into the Swedish society. Likewise, if the soccer has had an impact on a girl's personal development and self-esteem and the opinions of family members regarding her participation in the soccer project.

My research adds to the ongoing discussion regarding sports facilitating integration. The part covering the views and attitudes of the family members supplement previous research.

Anyone who plans to reach out to immigrant girls hopefully finds some useful information in my thesis. Areas where it may be relevant would be other sport activities and cultural events, which would require parents' consent to join. An organizer may not fully understand the strong influence by the family members.

### 1.3. Objective

The objective of this study is to investigate if the participation of girls in soccer has played a role for them and their families for their integration into Swedish society. The group of girls to be subject to my research were playing soccer in a loosely organized form at Araby, Växjö which began in 2010 and is still ongoing. My research also aims at finding out if this has affected attitudes among family members of the girls, in particular how their new roles as soccer players have been perceived by their close family and if any other changes in their family life can be observed.

### 1.4. Research questions

The main research question is if soccer has had an impact on the integration for the girls themselves as well as on their families. Specifically, the study asks:

In how far has soccer influenced the integration for the girls themselves and their families?

How has soccer affected the girls' self-esteem and self-confidence?

What changes may the participation have triggered e. g. in plans for education?

What were the reactions, if any, by the girls' family members?

### 1.5. Structure of thesis

My thesis starts with objectives and research questions. Then there is a chapter on the analytical framework, including, the concepts of acculturation, integration and a discussion related to sports and integration. The next chapter relates to the methodological framework. Some background information regarding Araby is inserted there, followed by a section regarding abductive reasoning, ethical considerations and limitations/delimitations. Results are presented per category of interviewees. The last part of the thesis is an analysis to sum up the results. The answers of the interviewees are found in the appendix.

## 2. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1. Acculturation

With immigration comes an adaption of some sort which influences an immigrant's life. Berry (Berry, 1997) describes the gradual adaption of an immigrant to a new country using the concepts of *acculturation* and *adaption*. The former was introduced already in 1936 by Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (Redfield, 1936). The definition reads "acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups".

It is commonly understood that changes are more pronounced in one of the groups, which then is referred to as the acculturating group. Graves (Graves, 1967) added psychological acculturation as a result of changes in the culture of the group; there is a change in the psychology of the individual.

Berry sees four strategies for the immigrating group:

*Assimilation* – no wish to maintain its own culture

*Integration* – some degree of cultural integrity, while participating in the larger social network

*Separation* – keeping your own culture and minimizing contacts with other groups

*Marginalisation* – little interest in cultural maintenance and little interest in relations with others

In an effort to illustrate the complexity of acculturation Berry presented the scheme in fig 1.

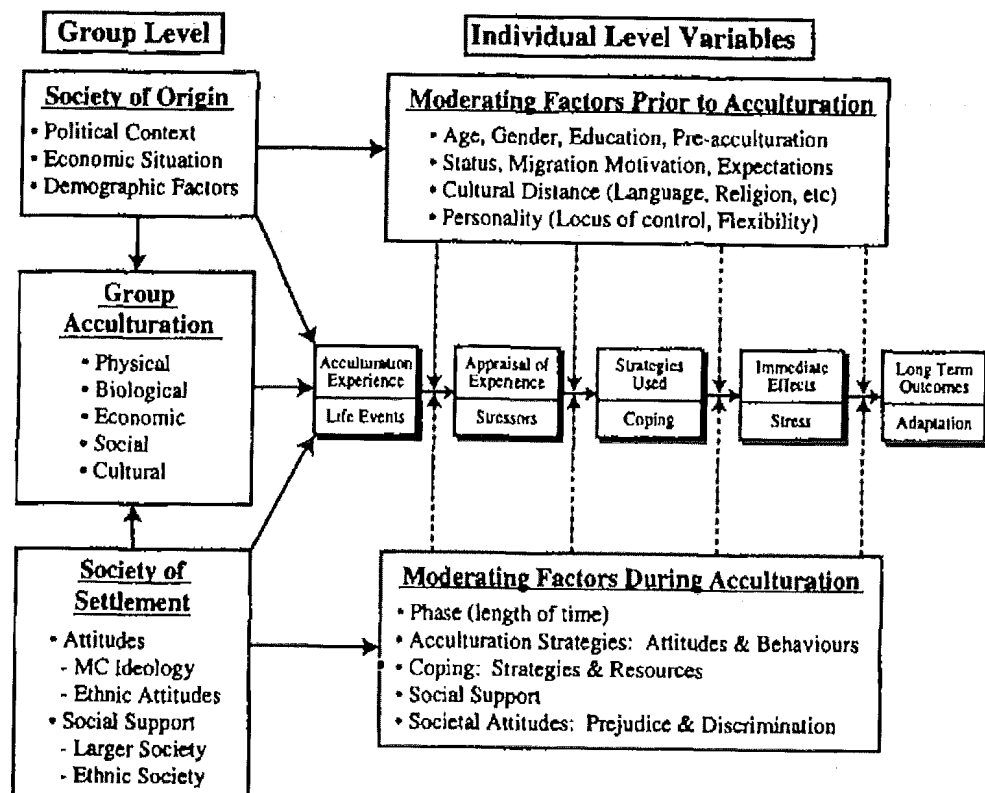


Fig 1. A framework for acculturation research (Berry, 1997).

To the left one finds variables on the group level, while individual level variables are found to the right. Here it suffices to say that the process of acculturation is depending on a multitude of factors on group and individual levels. In a later work Berry has somewhat modified his reasoning. He underlines that in addition to variations at group and individual levels, “there are variations within families: among family members, acculturation often proceeds at different rates, and with different goals, sometimes leading to an increase in conflict and stress and to more difficult adaptations.” (Berry J. W., 2005 p 700).

It is further noted that acculturation can be reactive, in as much as the cultural influence from the dominant group may be rejected and “changing back” to a more traditional way of life. Identification of the cultural changes including psychological changes requires the study of individuals, who are involved in the process. Likewise, “it is imperative that work on acculturation be based in examining its cultural contexts” (Berry J. W., 2005 p 702).



## 2.2. Integration

In Swedish everyday debate, the term integration is not necessarily used in a particularly defined way. Depending on the context, the term “integration” is used, or more seldomly “assimilation” without really making a distinction as to what is meant. For relatively early immigrants to Sweden from countries within Europe (Hungary, Poland, Italy, Yugoslavia), assimilation into the Swedish society was of course much easier than for recent immigrants originating from countries in Asia and Africa – the reason being differences in e. g. culture, religion, traditions, average level of education etc. A man in the street would probably tend to say the former group has been well integrated, while the latter is not. It is likely he would understand integration as being well assimilated; the mere thought that you somehow could be integrated without being assimilated is probably far reached for him.

The European Union has issued some common basic principles for immigration policy (Council of the European Union, 2004). Some of these formal paragraphs read:

*Integration is a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States.*

*Integration implies respect for the basic values of the European Union.*

*Employment is a key part of the integration process and is central to the participation of immigrants, to the contributions immigrants make to the host society, and to making such contributions visible. 19.XI.2004 14615/04 (Presse 321) 18 EN*

*Basic knowledge of the host society's language, history, and institutions is indispensable to integration; enabling immigrants to acquire this basic knowledge is essential to successful integration.*

*Efforts in education are critical to preparing immigrants, and particularly their descendants, to be more successful and more active participants in society.*

*Access for immigrants to institutions, as well as to public and private goods and services, on a basis equal to national citizens and in a non-discriminatory way is a critical foundation for better integration.*

*Frequent interaction between immigrants and Member State citizens is a fundamental mechanism for integration. Shared forums, inter-cultural dialogue, education about immigrants and immigrant cultures, and stimulating living conditions in urban environments enhance the interactions between immigrants and Member State citizens.*

*The practice of diverse cultures and religions is guaranteed under the Charter of Fundamental Rights and must be safeguarded, unless practices conflict with other inviolable European rights or with national law.*

*The participation of immigrants in the democratic process and in the formulation of integration policies and measures, especially at the local level, supports their integration.*

The Swedish multi-cultural approach is coinciding with that of the European Union (Bijl & Verweij, 2012, p 35),

*The overall goal of the Swedish integration policy is 'equal rights, obligations and opportunities for all, regardless of ethnic or cultural background'. The integration policy is based on a vision of a society where individuals with different cultural and ethnic backgrounds can co-exist. However, it is also important that an individual's freedom does not encroach on the fundamental values of society. Swedish integration policy seeks to ensure that 'respect for fundamental values such as human rights, democratic governance and equality between women and men are maintained and strengthened'*

Note that the wording of the EU document regarding practice of religions and cultures – EU and national laws are prevailing. In any event, the support for the present soccer project, may be categorized under the points 14 -15. The Swedish policy underlines human rights, democratic governance and equality between women and men. These norms are not necessarily uncontroversial in the eyes of an immigrant, even though they constitute pillars of the Swedish immigration policy.

“Until well into the 20th century it was believed that eventually all immigrants would assimilate to their new environment.” (Entzinger & Biezeveld, 2003, p 7). The authors note that there is a shift in the acceptance of the term assimilation around 1960, as it was clear that cultural differences between immigrants and next generations on the one hand and the host society on the other, did not disappear completely. The notion of ethnicity was introduced as a label for this. Even if immigrants participated in major institutions of the host countries,

cultural differences remain. Two dimensions were thus defined, a *structural* and a *cultural*. (Entzinger & Biezeveld, 2003, p 8). One may further conclude that the meaning of integration is a function of time and place. Integration into the US society in early 1900's was "uncontroversial" for a European emigrant, whereas integration into a West European country for people coming from Middle East, Asian or African countries today deal with other issues, in particular such related to culture. Had the European Union decided upon the guiding principles today, rather than 2004, those may well have been formulated differently. The political landscapes in Europe have indeed changed. The actual situation influences at least the macro perspective of immigration and integration – the basic everyday struggles as experienced by the immigrant probably remain.

For determining how well an immigrant is integrated some suggestions are reported by Ager and Strang (Ager & Strang, 2004). They list ten domains that under four headings that form a framework for measuring progress of integration, see fig 2. The headlines are rather self-explaining; some of the included comments may be helpful:

*Means and markers:* Employment, Housing, Education and Health. Grouped together, these domains represent major areas of attainment that are widely recognised as critical factors in the integration process.

*Social connections:* Taken together they stress the importance of relationships to the understanding of the integration process.

These include

1. Social bonds (for example, ethnic, national or religious identity);
2. Social bridges (with members of other communities); and
3. Social links (with institutions, including local and central government services).

*Facilitators:* Knowledge of language and culture

*Foundation:* The basis upon which expectations and obligations for the process of integration are established.

Note that the integration process includes a multi-cultural perspective – full assimilation into the host country is not assumed. The report thus lists rather tangible areas, that together make up a measure of how far an integration process has proceeded, fig 2.

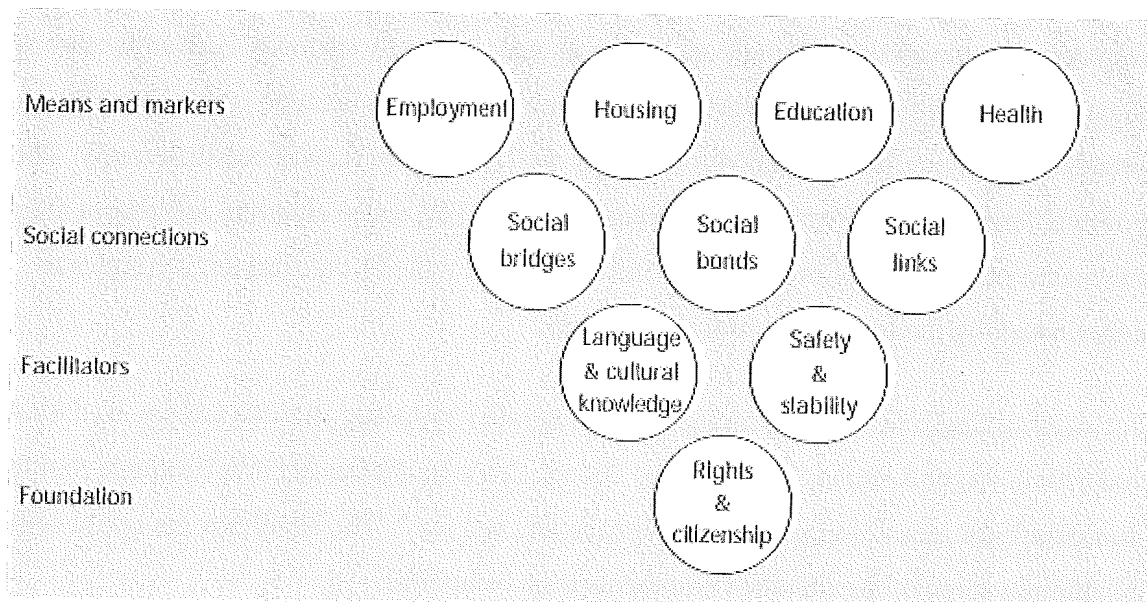


Figure 2 The indicators of integration framework (Ager & Strang, 2004)

Gender is one of the factors on the individual level. Gender is not a factor dealt with in detail by Berry (Berry J. W., 2005). He concludes however that “There is substantial evidence that females may be more at risk for problems than males” and that “attempts by females to take on new roles available in the society of settlement may bring them into conflict with their heritage culture” (Berry J. W., 1997, p 22). It is likewise noted by Stritikus (Stritikus, 2007) that immigration is a gendered process. Men and women are received differently in the new country, which leads to different patterns of social interaction. It is concluded that parents, keen to preserve their culture for coming generations, are seeing this as a task primarily for the daughters, as “a way to counter” – in this case the Americanization of Philippines. It is further emphasized that earlier work tends to categorize genders as static and fixed categories with already established meanings and norms. They found, however, a different pattern among immigrant Vietnamese youth. They were found to “interpret gender and cultural identity in relation to each other, schooling, and future opportunities”. One would expect similar attitudes to be represented among Islamic immigrants, although the picture in the countries of origin is not quite homogenous. And some women have apparently started to reinterpret their traditional roles vis á vis sports.

## 2.3. Sports and integration

### 2.3.1 Sports and immigrants

The role of sports for integration of immigrants into the Swedish society has been subject to discussion and some research. Soccer is a sport that is spread all of the world and thus should fit very well for finding a common ground for immigrants and Swedes. Professional soccer excluded, just about anyone can participate, which is important in the present context. The discussion and research has largely been limited to boys, however. This topic has recently been researched by Solling (Solling 2015) General aspects were discussed by Fundberg already in 2004 (Fundberg J. , 2004). Now and then articles appear in the newspapers (DN 2017) Soccer for girls is a relatively new sport for girls in Sweden, so the focus on boys and soccer is not surprising. However, this has changed in recent years and the game is now very common among girls. Note, though, that Real Madrid manager Carlo Ancelotti only some few years ago unleashed “Football is a sport for men, it is not a game for girls.” (Yoder, 2014)

The integration of young women with a sport as enabler has previously been subject to several studies. Soccer is one of the sports, covered, although to a limited extent. A relevant investigation is the cited work by Solling (2015), although it relates to boys only. Other researchers have been interested in results generated from sports participation are Cuadros (2011) and Elling and Knoppers (2004).

### 2.3.2 Initiatives related to girls and soccer

Soccer as a mediator for integration is the aim of programs offered by IFK Trollhättan. One of these, “Futebol Aberto” is for girls 10 – 16 years old (Kittelmann Flenser, Korp, & Lindgren, 2017). How the sports trainers coped with their tasks in relation to the ambitious goals “to actively strengthen democratic values and equality” was researched by Kittelmann et al (Kittelmann Flensner, Korp, & Lindgren, 2017, p 2). “Futebol dá força” is yet another organization in this field with the goal to “enable leaders to empower girls and change social norms in their local communities”. (Futebol da Força, u.d.) (Öppen fotboll för tjejer , u.d.).

In Germany there is programme a “Kicking Girls” which started in Oldenburg 2009, but now (2020) reaches out all over the country to 4800 weekly participants, with 1100 trained young coaches. Seventy percent of the participating girls come from homes of immigrants (Integration durch Sport und Bildung e V, u.d.). The aim is to promote social integration of the participants. Training is first taking place at schools and later transferred to clubs. “Girls only training sessions help the youngsters to earn the trust of their parents, whose support is crucial, and slowly introduce the girls to the beautiful game” (FIFA, 2019). Muslim women are included in my study, so the works of Maxwell and Taylor (Maxwell & Taylor, 2010) and Ahmad (2011) are relevant. The legal differences between Islamic and Swedish family laws are summarized by Sayed. (Sayed, 2010).

### 2.3.4 Soccer and women in an Islamic context

Of interest for this work is the attitudes within Islam to sports for women in general and to soccer in particular. Hjärpe (Hjärpe, 1983 as referenced by Walseth & Fasting, 2003, p 46) has divided Islam into four ideological tendencies depending on what role Islam should have in society, fig 3.

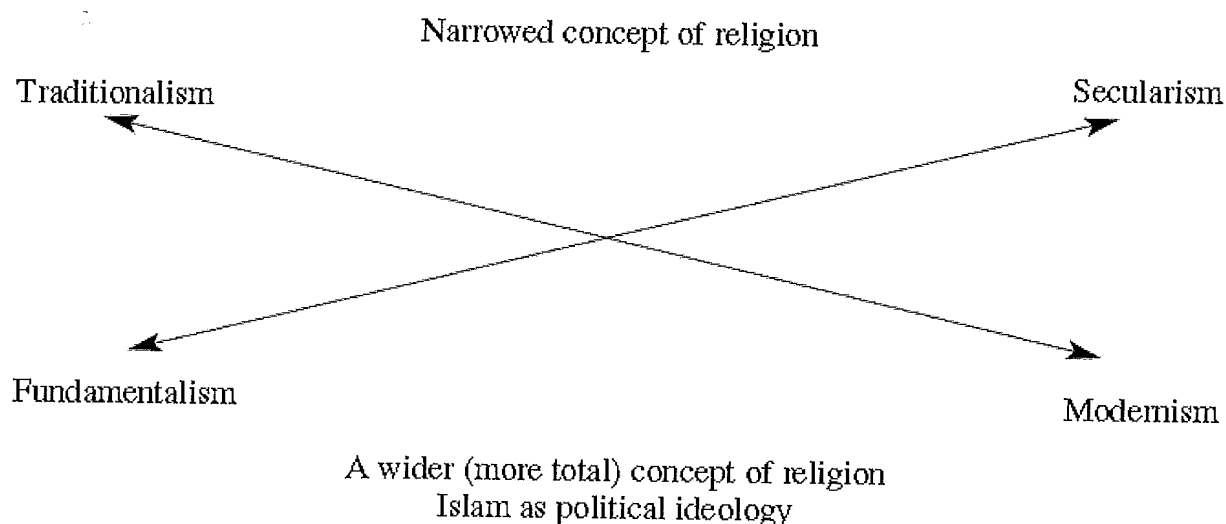


Figure 3. Different interpretations of Islam. (Hjärpe, 1983 as referenced by Walseth & Fasting).

As the name implies, *traditionalism* emphasize tradition and how Islam has been interpreted during past centuries. *Modernism* means that society’s laws should be inspired by Islamic

values and principles, not traditional rules – which may mean “reinterpretation” of certain aspects of the religion. *Secularism* sees religion as a private matter in opposition to *fundamentalism*, which argue that Islam is a way of governing society. These several branches of Islam make it difficult to á priori with some certainty assume how a particular Islamic person views matters related to religion.

Interestingly enough, national women’s soccer teams exist in some Islamic countries. FIFA allowed Hijab to be worn by female players in 2014. Many are still of the opinion (Klein, 2007) that “football and sports are haram – forbidden.” “If my fiancée wanted to play football, I would forbid her. I only respect men playing. It could also distract her from her home.” An even more hostile view was reportedly expressed by an Indian Muslim cleric who claimed women watching soccer violates the tenets of Islam: “Women shouldn't watch football and shouldn't be looking at men's bare knees. Women shouldn't be looking at men,” (Khalife, 2018). A leading female player in Egypt reported she was “being heavily criticised by religious clerics who deem football as immoral and regard women taking part in the sport as incongruous with the teachings of Allah.” One would expect similar attitudes to be represented among Islamic immigrants, although the picture in the countries of origin is not quite homogenous. And some women have apparently started to reinterpret their traditional roles vis á vis sports.

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socialisation to reinforce expected behaviour and teaching of gender roles”. Bichi lists the barriers he sees for Muslim women to participate in sports, but also provides hands-on suggestions how to design sports programs for Muslim women, since Islam requires “certain practices and procedures” to be followed. A selection thereof is found below:

- Arrange special women-only coaching sessions.
- Have experienced women available to help beginners
- Highlight the fact that certain sessions are intended to provide supportive environments for women users
- Allow a wide range of clothing choices, for example in swimming women may wish to wear more than what conventional swimming costumes may allow.
- Try to identify role models within the community who can break down barriers with parents.
- Provide opportunities for social interaction as many women enjoy doing sport as it provides social opportunities.
- Ensure action is taken in the face of discrimination or stereotyping.
- Ensure male participants or coaches can’t attend or accidentally walk in.

As a contrast a few lines from the development of women’s sports in Sweden. Below the headline “Research related to sports and femininity” (Fundberg & Lagergren, 2015, p 68 f) it is stressed that throughout history, women often have been warned to sport to ensure that the organs of reproduction are not hurt. The sports activities that were accepted at the beginning of the 1900’s were esthetical forms of gymnastics, figure skating, tennis, golf and swimming. Other sports were not allowed to women, with the argument her body was considered too fragile.

### 2.3.5 The perception of well-being

The well-being and self-esteem are important factors in the research questions. A model of psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989, p 70 - 71) is thus referenced. Six factors are considered key for the meaning of well-being

#### *Self-acceptance*



*Positive Relations with Others*

*Autonomy*

*Environmental Mastery*

*Purpose in Life*

*Personal Growth*

Without looking further into the scientific fight if Ryff's model is right or wrong, it has been criticized: "we found very high factor correlations among the dimensions of well-being, especially personal growth, purpose in life, self-acceptance, and environmental mastery". (Springer, Hauser, & Freese, 2006). As one might suspect, one factor may impact on others, so one positive experience may well spill over into other areas. It seems likely this effect would be stronger, if you live under somewhat strained conditions. This reasoning seems likely for the circumstances given for the girls at Araby.

## **2.4. Applicability to my thesis**

The works regarding acculturation sets the stage for multitude of factors that are applicable for analysing my results. The same goes for the indicators of integration. These theories appear applicable; however, they may in fact be too general to serve a really meaningful purpose?

The sections regarding sports and integration is a lead in to the next chapter, where necessary background information about Araby and the soccer project. The subject of women's sports and Islamic tradition/religion is key. The short note on the perception of well-being is put in as a reflection of the forthcoming results.

## 3. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK CONSIDERATIONS

### 3.1. Background

#### 3.1.1 Araby

The immigration to Sweden 2013 – 2018 according to statistics published by Statistics Sweden (SCB) is shown in diagram 1. The frequency of immigrants from Asia has been 2 – 5 times higher than those from Africa. Statistics for the community of Växjö indicate

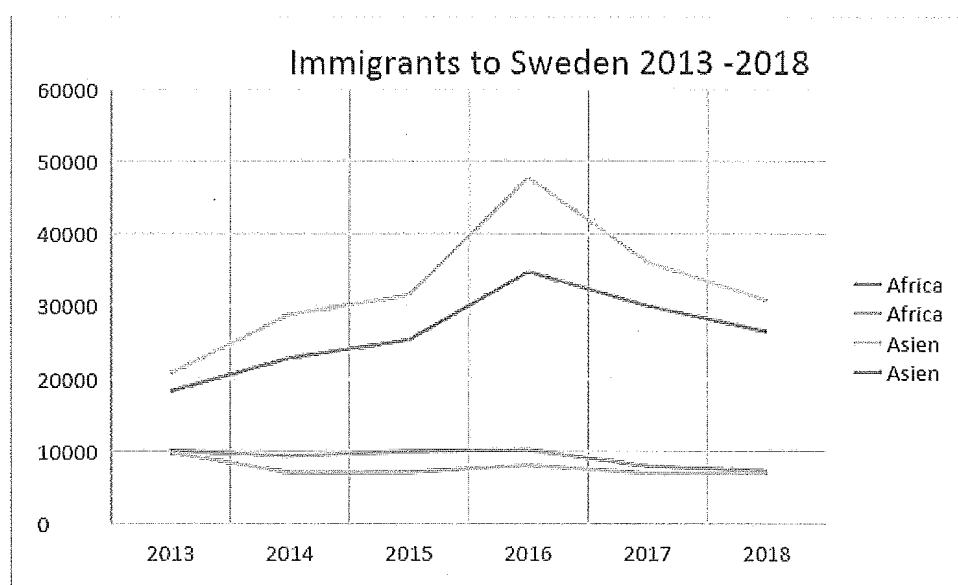


Diagram 1. Immigration to Sweden 2013 – 2018. Inflow from Africa and Asia.

Derived from SCB table "Invandringar efter födelseland, kön och år" -

[http://www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se/pxweb/sv/ssd/START\\_BE\\_BE0101\\_BE0101J/ImmiEmiFod/table/tableViewLayout1/](http://www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se/pxweb/sv/ssd/START_BE_BE0101_BE0101J/ImmiEmiFod/table/tableViewLayout1/)

Since my research refers to conditions in Växjö (Araby), the following background numbers (2018) are given as reference: Out of 95,257 inhabitants, 18,7 % were born outside Sweden. Data for some selected countries are presented in diagram 2.

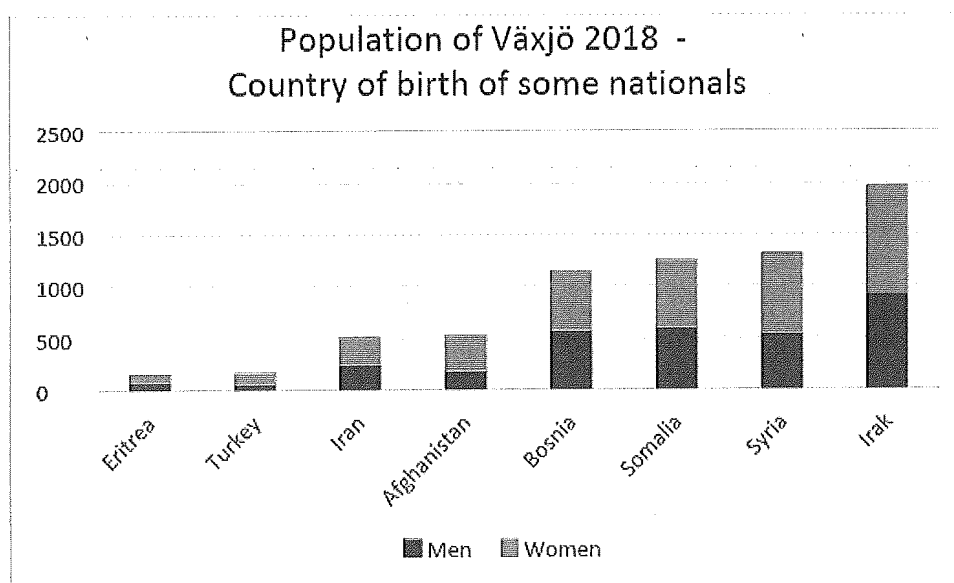


Diagram 2. Selection of minority populations in Växjö

Statistiska Centralbyrån (2018), derived from SCB-file BE0101-Utrikes-fodda-kom-fland-2018.xlsx

In rough terms this means that one out of five was born outside Sweden, one out of 13 would come from Asia and one out of 42 from Africa. The quoted numbers are totals for Växjö. In the highly segregated Araby (i. e. Araby, Nydala, Dalbo) 54 % of the inhabitants are born outside Sweden (Statistiska Centralbyrån, 2015, Tabell 1.3 p 29). So, in contrast, here more than one out of two persons are foreign born. The integration of women into society is much slower than for men. This is clearly seen in the job statistics. Notably, women with education get a job faster than those without. Still, though, the integration of women is generally a much slower process than for men. (SCB, 2019, p 29).

Araby is one of 15 areas included in the term URBAN 15, selected after negative socio-economic indicators, unemployment rate, need of financial support, low education level. (Näringsdepartementet, 2012 - 2015). It is also an area defined by the Swedish Police Authority as especially exposed to crime (Polisen, Nationella operativa avdelningen, 2015). There are numerous initiatives taken by authorities on national, regional and local levels to improve the situation for immigrants., particularly for those in the especially exposed areas. Listings of publications by the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society which provides funding to a variety of organizations and projects are impressive. The number of approved projects for 2019 is long (mufc, 2019, pp. 38 - 41) . It is striking, though, out of 53 project titles, only four suggest they are directed to girls only. The agency also provides statistics for monies directed to Växjö. Only one of the 39 projects 2011 – 2019 are clearly directed

towards women (mucf, u.d.). One supported initiative in Trollhättan, appears to be close to my research. There IFK Trollhättan has an open training for girls, once a week. (mucf, Unga möter unga - IFK Trollhättan får tjejer att mötas genom fotboll). This effort is researched by Kittelmann Flensner (Kittelmann Flenser, Korp, & Lindgren, Idrott som integrationsarena? Agens, inkludering och interkulturella möten i barn- och ungdomsidrott, 2017). Other examples of local initiatives for youth in Växjö are “home-work help” as organized by the Swedish Red Cross and the local Somalian Association. The Red Cross also offers courses in “how to bike” and may find a mentor for an immigrant.

### 3.1.2 Soccer at Araby – my research

While playing soccer is uncontroversial for men, this is often not the case for girls of immigrants. Soccer may well not be considered a sport for girls. Engaging in soccer for a girl means much more than for a boy. It is a change for her, but, perhaps, even more of a change for families and friends. The present study of how the girls themselves and their families perceive girls' participation in the game would thus bring new knowledge and add to the discussion if this break with a traditional pattern would induce attitudes of family members related to the girls' participation in sports. An interesting, perhaps parallel, development is described in an article where children's activities at a playground allegedly have changed mindsets existing for centuries (Shachar, 2010).

My research relates strongly to personal experience from starting up soccer for immigrant girls at Araby, Växjö. This project was initiated in 2010. Girls in my neighbourhood were asked if they would like to play soccer. We were lucky enough to get two time slots at the local sports arena on Fridays and Saturdays. Somewhat later, activities were expanded to school holidays. The initiative goes back to 2008. Swedish youths played soccer, so why would not immigrants' girls follow suit? In my home country Somalia, girls do traditionally not sport. This required the permission of the girls' parents before joining. The consent of my own mother was crucial – it opened up for other parents not to block participation in soccer for their daughters. The socializing around and while playing is important – you talk a lot and you make new friends. And there is perhaps even a thrilling moment of emancipation – you enter into a hitherto unexperienced field. The soccer project has since been more formalized. There are still two gatherings per week. It is not bound to any political party or other

organization. All leaders are women from Araby or surrounding areas, the aim being to cooperate to form a platform where girls can participate in soccer under forms comfortable to them. There are some simple rules – you must speak in Swedish. Photographing and filming is not allowed and likewise no audience. No special clothing is required. Sneakers if you have, otherwise bare feet. If you cause trouble, you are locked out for three weeks. If you cause trouble again, you are not allowed in again. This has only happened once, in spite of the project being active for 10 years and having in total 200 participating girls.

### 3.2. Abductive reasoning

My research aims at a qualitative study founded in abductive research theory. According to (Kok, 2010) “Abductive Research Strategy (ARS) is one distinctive type of qualitative research developed by Blaikie (Blakie, 2004), which refers to the process of constructing theories or typologies that are grounded in everyday activities and in the language and meanings of social actors.”

The theoretical account of the researcher has to be grounded in the world view of those being researched. A researcher needs to thoroughly study their language, meanings, and perspectives. “Therefore, social scientists under this approach need to discover and describe this 'insider' view. They should not impose an 'outsider' view on it. It is this stock of knowledge and how it is produced and reproduced by social actors that abductive researchers need to grasp and articulate to provide an understanding of these actions.” A similar definition is given by Bryman (Bryman, 2016): “the theoretical account is grounded in the worldview of those one researches”.

The field work consists of structured interviews with participating girls as well as of family members. This method was selected as it ensures critical issues are covered, while still permitting the interviewees to add information. This has proved very helpful, as some answers were “not expected” and thus helps to get a better understanding of the over-all situation. The semi structured interview requires however that the interviewer keeps subject matter on track. Since the scheme is somewhat open, it allows the interviewee to elaborate on the answer, which anyhow may be necessary when the interviewee and interviewer do not communicate well using a common language. (Barriball & Wille, 1994, p 339) In this respect, my knowledge of the Somalian language has proved valuable.

### 3.3. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Interviews have been conducted individually – one person at a time carried out with each individual alone. Interviewees have been promised anonymity, which hopefully result in sincere and unbiased answers. The interviews are enclosed in the appendix. They are referenced in the following way:.

Interviews of girls: G1 – G12

Interviews of mothers: M1 – M4

Interviews of fathers: F1 – F4

Interviews of brothers: B1 – B4

### 3.4. LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS

The number of girls who have participated in soccer at Araby is around 200. Ideally the selection of interviewees should have been made to cover the widest possible ranges of ethnicity, religion, age, participation length. However, this ambition collided with time constraints, so the interviewees were randomly selected among all four categories.

## 4. RESULTS

All interviews are translated and are found in summary form further below. The reader is encouraged to review them, as they present more direct links to the subject matter.

### 4.1 Responses of the participating girls

The positive responses are massive.

*Everyone* claims that participation has facilitated their learning of the Swedish language; one girl (G10) even says “Thanks to the soccer, I learned much more Swedish there than at school.”

*Everyone* tells they all have acquired new friends from a variety of countries.

These items underline the social aspects and the activities seen as a meeting point for the girls. Friendships develop over time – and may well contribute to coping with the language, since Swedish may be the common link. It is easy to understand the importance of friends when you show up in a foreign environment and you don’t know anyone at all and even don’t know how to get friends to socialize with. I can refer to my own experience, which is behind the start of the soccer project (Kardell, 2017).

The girls often relate to how well they felt after joining and that the soccer has helped them to overcome a difficult period of time in their lives. It is clear that the soccer has contributed to positive experiences and friendships. The well-being is exemplified by these quotes:

“I socialize much more and I dare to speak” (G1),

“I dare to be myself much more and I now ask more questions, something I did not do before” (G3),

“I feel fine both mentally and physically” (G3)

“I feel like a different person after starting with soccer. I feel better physically and mentally.”(G6),

“I long for my family, but not as much since I started with soccer. I feel fine.” (G11).

This is in full agreement with findings in a study of soccer as a mediator for integration related to programs offered by IFK Trollhättan. One of these, “*Futebol Aberto*” is for girls 10 – 16 years old (Kittelmann Flenser, Korp, & Lindgren, 2017). The aim was primarily to study how the sports leaders coped with their tasks in relation to the ambitious goals “to actively strengthen democratic values and equality”. (Kittelmann Flensner, Korp, & Lindgren, 2017, p 2). They conclude concerning language use and the cultural integration: ” The rule is that only Swedish should be used, but some participants hardly speak any Swedish, which often makes

this rule difficult to fully apply. Integration to “Swedishness” seems generally to be the norm, but this norm creates contradictory and sometimes confusing results.”

The girls felt they had to be back home on time after the soccer. If you were not, one girl was afraid scoldings like a “third world war” was awaiting her.” (G2). Some of the interviewees at Araby stress that they were selected to work as leaders for the group. This, it seems, was regarded as a great favour, since it resulted in a job (often the first one) and gave them the opportunity to go courses in coaching. It appears this trust in them as individuals was valued very highly: “I even got my very first job in Sweden as trainer for the girls playing soccer. My mom was very happy, when I got this assignment” (G1). “I have also got the opportunity to attend different coaching courses. I have got an extra job to train small children. I am very pleased for this” (G10). For some girls the soccer resulted in their first experience of organizations that stretch out to people new in Sweden. Notably the reference to the “Läxhjälp” provided by the Swedish Red Cross in Växjö.

Kittelmann et al. (Kittelmann Flenser, Korp, & Lindgren, 2017, p 24) concludes “If you are a child or a teenager it means a lot to be seen and to be confirmed and connected, and some of them described it as life changing”. Somewhat the same was expressed also in the interviews from Araby. In this respect the set-up at Araby avoids this particular issue, since there is no formal sports organization behind the initiative. A girl born in Sweden, who plays soccer at Araby, but does not live there, explains how she felt pressed by the training hours matches to play every weekend that she experienced in the regular sports club she used to play for.

As Elling points out (Elling & Knoppers, 2005, p 266), “participation in (a particular) sport is a personal choice” and “gendered and racial/ethnic normative images still structure sport involvement. Inter actions of gendered and ethnic norms and values structure sport participation and can both positively and negatively influence personal choices and the sporting habitus of teenagers.”

Fundberg expresses even more relevant thoughts, as he says that the picture of the sport should be supplemented by all those who have chosen not to participate, and likewise by those who have been excluded by the sport (Fundberg J. , 2004, p 2). Taken at face value, this girl refers to too much of training hours in the regular sports club, but there may be other reasons behind as well. Exclusion mechanisms can take different shapes and, in an



environment, where only athletic achievements count, governed by the overall goal, i. e. to win matches, you need to be in consort with these attitudes.

This girl does not live in Araby and before joining the soccer, she was even afraid of passing through the area. However, she soon discovered that people were friendly. And additional Swedish born girls from her school followed suit. Like the other interviewed girls, she has now acquired friends from other countries. She mentions she had tasted food from many countries, which indicates she was invited to visit other girls' homes.

## 4.2 Responses of the mothers

It is striking that the girls needed permission by their mothers before joining. It seems that the word of a girl's mother is determining if she is allowed to participate in the soccer.

This has probably to do with the role of a mother in Muslim tradition/religion. The emphasis which Islam places upon the feminine/masculine polarity (and therefore complementarity) results in a separation of social functions. In general, a woman's sphere of operation is the home in which she is the dominant figure – and a man's corresponding sphere is the outside world. (Eaton, 2000). Another direct quote says “A woman is a guardian for her husband's home and is responsible for it” (New Muslim Guide, u.d.)

One of the mothers (M2) expressed it like this: “According to our tradition it is shameful for girls to play soccer. I grew up in a village where girls remain at home and help the family. And then she marries, give birth to children and takes care of the household.”

The majority of the girls were concerned what their mothers would say about them starting to play soccer. The mothers hesitated for a number of reasons. Soccer was new and the environment unknown and they had never had this experience themselves. It would be a break with traditions and one mother argued she did not know yet how the society works. There is further a concern that the Islamic dress code would not be followed and that there would be boys or young men watching the girls playing. “I want to know what they are up to after school” (M4).

One mother (M3) points out “Sports are for boys, not for girls”. Like the reasoning about sports in Sweden in the early 1900’s ” (Fundberg & Lagergren, 2015, p 68 f), she argues that soccer would not be good for her daughter’s body.

There is also a rather strong element of concern for what relatives and neighbours will say – and think - about the girls’ sports activity. Relatives to one mother were asking “Who will marry your daughters, when they play soccer like boys?” (M2), “Maybe no one wants to marry her.” (M3). So the “usual” negative view, “soccer is for men” shows up and that the Islamic dress code could not be followed is an issue. A comment by Pfister may suffice “How families deal with and observe religious rules, for instance regarding the wearing of the *hijab*, or headscarf, varies considerably according to the country or region of birth, social class, level of education, the religious customs of the older generation and location (for example town or country)” (Pfister, 2010, p 42)

Successful strategies for persuading parents were either a visit by the leader to the girl’s parents or inviting the mother to watch for herself what was going on. The process could drag out over a considerable period of time.” It took months before mom allowed me to play. I wanted to give her time so I could explain.” (G3). It also helped when a mother discovered that girls who were doing well at school were participating. Personal ties to the trainer were likewise effective, either through relationship or from earlier encounters during the first time after arrival in Sweden.

However, it seems all interviewed mothers are happy that their girls have got this opportunity. “This is one of the best decisions I have ever made as a mother” (M4).

### 4.3 Responses from the fathers

Four of the girl’s fathers were interviewed.

One of them questions his wife’s decision to allow the girls to play soccer. Girls do not sport in his tradition – soccer is a sport for men, and my boys do play. If a girl does not behave like a girl, she will face problems in as much as nobody will want to marry her.

However, he accepts his wife's decision, which she based on the argument that the girls need additional training in the Swedish language. He admits, though, that his girls have improved their knowledge of the language and that they have got friends through the soccer. He adds that he wants the eldest daughter to stop playing, "she is now an adult".

The acceptance of the wife's decision is notable and in accordance with the previous observation that the inroad to the soccer is through the mothers. According to tradition/religion women deal with home and household, while men take care of external affairs.

The remaining three fathers are less bound to traditions:

"I left behind all old traditions and the culture I was raised with" (F3).

"My parents did not think it was a good idea to allow my girls to join other activities after school. But I don't listen to them" (F3).

"My daughters have always been girls and boys to me, since I don't have any sons." (F1).

"Traditionally women have been discriminated" (F1).

"I have been recommended to remarry, so I can have a son, but I will never do that" (F1).

"My wife and I have good educations and we have no favourites; we are just grateful over the fact that our girls are so good at school" (F4).

The comment regarding remarrying to get a son may seem unusual. However, it may be seen in light of Islamic traditions. In some Islamic countries, a man can divorce his wife quite easily. For example, at a website for "The Islamic Sharia Council" a man can get an Islamic divorce certificate by E-mail for the sum of £200. It is stressed, though, that the Council "does not conduct cases as part of the UK legal or judicial system". (Islamic Sharia Council -Talaq, u.d.). This is but one of the inequalities between men and women as present in some Islamic tradition. A man can still, in some areas, it appears, "divorce a wife anytime simply by uttering a divorce formula." (Mayer, 1984). This easy rule is sometimes abused, and divorced women were then left in poverty, since Islamic law prescribed the man to support the children from the marriage permanently, but only required him to do so for the wife until the expiration of three menstruation cycles after the divorce was pronounced.

Furthermore, women inherit half of the man. This is justified the larger economic burden the man has for supporting the family. The rule appears explained in a somewhat strained

language when presented on webpages directed to a western audience. (Bogis, u.d.) “Under many of the regimes of customary law that have prevailed to this day in the Middle East, women inherit nothing”. (Mayer, 1984)

Another interpretation of “remarrying” would be that the relatives expected the interviewed father to take a second wife. Polygyny, i.e. when a man is married to more than one wife at a time, is permitted. Up to four wives are permitted. “All Muslims ... know that a man is allowed to marry several (men)” says Swedish islamologist Suad Muhammed, “irrespective if it is legal or not, people will still marry outside of Sweden”. (svt Nyheter, 2017). According to Swedish law, polygyny is not permitted, if one of the parties has a connection to Sweden at the time of marrying (Sayed, 2010, p 207f).

In any event, three out of four fathers were happy their daughters participated in the football project. Two of them stress the need to learn the language to get access to society and to higher education. They likewise observed that their daughters had acquired friends at the soccer.

#### 4.4 Responses from the brothers

The interviews include three brothers.

One of them explained he had no problems whatsoever with his sister playing soccer. His mother had visited the venue before admitting her daughter to join. Her brother says he was glad she did. He refers to earlier experience from a refugee camp, where boys and girls played together – his sister did not want to participate if the crews were mixed.

He adds that some friends of his, whose sisters are not allowed to play, put the question to him “How can you allow your sister to play? Aren’t you the man in the family?” He assures “I don’t listen to them” (B3)

Another of the interviewed brothers is negative to his sister participating in the soccer. “She is a girl and should not do this.” (B2). He continues to explain that the reason is that their parents allow her. He also makes certain that his sister does not stay at the arena after activities have finished.

And he adds “I will never allow a daughter of mine to play. In spite of being raised in Sweden, I still want to keep my traditions and culture”.

A third brother is of the opinion that it is ok for girls to play soccer as long as doors are closed. Girls do not do sports at all in my home country, but here the girls can be for themselves. He admits he plays soccer himself and that Swedish is the common language for him as well when playing. Both he and his sister have developed their language skills further because of this. He quotes his father who encourage them both to get an education.” Language is key.”

There are boys or young men watching what their sisters are doing. The background is probably the role of honour plays in many cultures. It is the honour of the family that needs to be protected. “Honour related violence and oppression” is a conceptual definition of violence and oppression aiming at preserving the reputation of family or relatives”. The control of girls women’s sexuality is central and tied to the commune (kollektivet) and that virginity and chastity are in the focal point. The real or alleged behaviour of girls or women influences reputation and prestige of the family, building on strong patriarchal and heteronormative ideals. (Socialstyrelsen, 2019, p 12 - 13)

## 5. Discussion

The findings fit well with the frameworks outlined of Berry for *acculturation*. An attempt is also made to use the indicators integration as defined by Ager and Strang, see fig 1 – 2 above.

The moderating factors *prior* to acculturation we clearly see influences of gender, cultural differences (language, religion). The more pronounced moderating factors *during* acculturation would be phase, attitudes and behaviours and social support. The latter is exemplified by the soccer project itself. The factor of phase (time) is seen in interviews of the somewhat older girls. It appears the introduction to soccer may have an effect over a long period of time. Culture and/or religion play an immense role in the acculturation process. Mothers care for their daughter’s good reputation, which – at least initially – collides with the

idea of soccer for girls. Girls are supposed to behave in a certain way, if not, there is a risk for conflict. In addition, some girls are controlled by their brothers.

A study of the frequency of such control has been made in Gothenburg, Malmö and Stockholm, where pupils in grade 9 were asked relevant questions. The results showed that 7 – 20 % of the adolescents live with honour related norms and oppressions. In Uppsala 20 % of the girls stated that virginity was a requirement and that 26 % of the girls' marriages are decided by their parents. (Socialstyrelsen, 2019, p 68). Associate Professor Astrid Schlyter estimates that every third child with both parents born outside Sweden live under such conditions, facing restrictions in school, are forbidden to have a boyfriend and must be a virgin when they marry and they are not allowed to choose whom they marry. (Kerpner & Röstlund, 2017) . The total number of youths living under such conditions in Sweden could be as high as 240,000.

The integration framework given by Ager and Strang, underlines the importance of the facilitating factors language and cultural knowledge. The social connections of social bridges and social bonds are illustrated by the interviews of the girls' family members. *All girls* claimed satisfaction over their improved knowledge of the Swedish language and *all of them* claimed they had acquired new friends from a variety of countries. The critique of Riff's model of psychological well-being suggests that the net effect of these factors will positively influence the over-all situation. You are likely to feel better also in other areas, which is important for your personal development.

The acculturation process for the four categories, girls, mothers, fathers, brothers are linked together, although they seem to proceed at a different pace. The interviewees come from a variety of countries and have been in Sweden for varying periods of time. It is not a homogeneous group in these respects. The social, economical and cultural backgrounds from the home countries may be vastly different. Among the parents, there are persons both with "good education" and those who are illiterate. All have the challenge of learning a new language. The former group may be stressed by additional difficulties to finding a job at a comparable level to that in the home country, while the latter would have to cope with language and learning how to read and write. Both are life events on the acculturation road map. Parents faces other difficulties than children. For sons and daughters attending school is mandatory. Thus, they in school get in touch with Swedish customs and culture. If men find

work, the same goes for them, while mothers do not necessarily get the same experience of the new society – at least not if adhering strongly to traditions from the home country.

Moderating factors influencing the acculturation process such as age, gender, education can be identified in the interviews. There are few people interviewed, but from this material it seems that the fathers to a large extent accept that their daughters play soccer, while the younger sons are opposing the idea. Education is a differentiator, in as much as those parents with an education seem to care less about traditions and focus on their children acquiring a good education and even assimilation into the Swedish society.

The cultural distance is formidable. Few Swedish parents would question, or care much, if their children were to participate in a game of soccer. However, the clash with tradition and/or religion shows up as the barrier for the girl's participation. The reasons are threefold – a sport for men – who would marry a girl playing soccer -, maintaining the Islamic dress code and the risk for being observed by men/boys, while playing. These are obvious obstacles for persons “within the system”, but probably difficult to fully comprehend for an “outsider”.

With respect to gender, it is observed by the parents that Swedish women and girls have a much greater freedom in their choices of what they are allowed or expected to do. Some mothers seem to accept this: “But here everything is different. Boys and girls do whatever sport they want.” (M3), while others are hesitant and need to see the girls playing, before allowing them to participate. This seems to be associated with the cultural distance (you do not really know what to expect) and the expectations of the mothers. The mothers do care about their daughters and they are the decisionmakers.

The soccer has played an important role for some of the girls. The appraisal of the experience has, it seems, led to a wish to try new avenues for education; be it as an assistant nurse or as a chemical engineer. This is not to say, that soccer is the only reason for selecting a particular education, but at least it helps in opening up the “bubble” that some girls appear to live in. The experience has likewise influenced the parents/mothers – if an elder sister played, it was not questioned that the younger would be allowed to join. (G11).

Although the indicators of integration according to the framework of Ager and String (Ager & Strang, 2004) appeared useful, my questionnaire does not fit very well. Based on official statistics one probably draws the conclusion that the *Means and markers*: Employment, Housing, Education and Health would indicate a low degree of integration, the worst hurdle being the low employment rate. As to the *Social connections* I would expect the social bonds

related to the own group to be there, while social bridges to other communities are weak, while social links to institutions exist to an extent formed by necessity. The *Facilitators* knowledge of language and culture probably show wide variations. The one group, it seems, at disadvantage would be the women taking care of family and home.

A reflection regarding the *Foundation*, or *basis* upon which expectations and obligations for the process of integration are to be established. I note the wording of the Swedish integration policy, '*equal rights, obligations and opportunities for all, regardless of ethnic or cultural backgrounds can co-exist*' and that "*Swedish integration policy seeks to ensure that 'respect for fundamental values such as human rights, democratic governance and equality between women and men are maintained and strengthened'*". The latter part of the policy adds restrictions to the assured rights – an important factor, since it articulates what constitutes the *Foundation*.

## 6. Conclusion

The participation in the soccer at Araby appears definitely to have improved self-confidence and self-esteem of the girls participating. Not through the sport as such, but by providing an arena for meeting people, having fun and tie new bands of friendship. The integration process has probably been influenced most by the use of the Swedish language while meeting and indirectly by the boost in self-esteem and self-confidence.

This is difficult to assess from the interviews. The appetite for education has at very least not diminished – if you feel confirmed, you have the courage to do more. Once convinced that the venue was acceptable (closed doors, women only), mothers were positive, or even very positive. A concern was that girls playing soccer may never be married. To convince the mothers was immensely important – without the consent of a mother; no soccer. All but one of the interviewed fathers were positive. Interviews of brothers revealed honour related scepticism to soccer for girls among the young men at Araby.

The research problem defined a lack of information regarding soccer for immigrant girls. My research suggests that soccer has played a significant role for them. In particular the interviews of their family members have brought additional knowledge to the current research. The influences of tradition and family remain strong, which may be difficult to



comprehend for someone not familiar with the customs. Any additional research should even more emphasize the role of the family, and if this role changes over time.

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# APPENDIX

The interview answers are found below in a somewhat redacted form. Even though everyone of the girls who were asked about their soccer experience was positive, all answers are presented per person.

Answers of the girls are referenced by a “(G)” followed by a number 1 - 12

Answers of the mothers are referenced by a “(M)” followed by a number 1 - 4

Answers of the fathers are referenced by a “(F)” followed by a number 1 - 4

Answers of the brothers are referenced by a “(B)” followed by a number 1 - 4

## Interviews of girls.

***G1. Girl 22 years old from Somalia. Came with siblings to Sweden in 2013. Mother here since earlier. Participant since 2014.***

I started playing in 2014. I got the information from a friend who told me how fun it was with “soccer and music”. (We play music from CDs while we are in the hall at the sports centre). At first, I was a little hesitant, since I had never played soccer. My friend told me how her language had developed, after starting to play. The idea appealed to me, but the question was how tell my mother. I came once just to see what was all about and I loved it from the very first moment. I was welcomed with warmth. I have always been reserved and shy, but the leader knew what she was doing. I said I was invited, and that I just wanted to sit in. The answer was “Absolutely ok” with a big smile and offered me to select a tune to play. I just sat there for 20 minutes and then the leader came up to me and told me about the project and how it was with the family issue. She offered to talk to my mother, if I wanted that. Next week she met with my mother and invited her to sit in before she decides for her daughter. My mother hesitated to allow me to participate, but she finally allowed me to join. I am living very close to the sports arena, so there was no problem for me to get there.

Thanks to the soccer I have developed my language skills and I feel like a different person today. I now socialize much more and I have dare to speak. We had a group work today, and I had the courage to participate in the discussion. I never used to do that before.

The change in our tradition was difficult for my mom in the beginning, And it was very helpful that the leader and many of the girls came from the same country. Quite a few of the girls were doing fine at school, so mom thought it was ok to hang out with them and play soccer. Integration? I did not have a clue regarding organizations and associations, but thanks to the soccer I have come in touch with many of them I now understand how they work and what they do. Thanks to the soccer, I have for example participated in leadership- and first aid courses. I even got my very first job in Sweden as trainer for the girls playing soccer. My mom was very happy, when I got this assignment.

Studies? It was difficult with the language and it was of course difficult to study as well. I met girls from different countries who had had the same experience. They encouraged me to go to the tutorials managed by the Red Cross.

I dare to do more with just about anything. My personality has changed – I am more open and I socialize more. I always used to long for Fridays and Saturdays, since I started to play soccer. I felt much better. Today I am living in another town and I am following a program to become an Assistant Nurse. Hadn't it been for the Soccer, I would not have come as far as I have come today. I have met good examples of girls, who in spite of a short time in the new country, are studying at university level. Still today I am in contact with girls that I met from other countries via Facebook.

### ***G2 Girl 19 years old from Iraq.***

I have always heard two messages, “there is no difference between you and your brother” and that “he is a boy, and you are a girl” – he can do whatever he wants, but I cannot.

When my friend told me there are activities for girls at the Arena Hall, where you could play soccer, I thought it sounded like a fun – and something I had never done. The question of how to persuade my mother immediately came up. She always thinks about what the neighbours and other families would say about something unusual.

I finally got permission to join, but if I were to come back home a little later than expected, a “third world war” is starting.

### ***G3. Girl 21 years old from Somalia. Came to Sweden in 2012***

I started to play in 2013. I got the information of a neighbour's daughter. She told me there were soccer activities for girls going on in the Arena Hall. I was new in the area and did not know what was going on there.

My mom got angry when I told her I wanted to participate. I was not allowed by mom – I was supposed to just forget about it. It became more difficult for me when school started and I had to stay at home while others were allowed to play. The main issue for my mom was what other people would think about me and about us as a family. Another reason was that she had never done it, neither had her mother.

Unfortunately, it seems our parents have been manipulated – they don't even know themselves why certain things are forbidden. "It's ignorance"

It took months before mom allowed me to play. I wanted to give her time so I could explain.

At last my mom allowed me to join, when she saw how interested I got. She had nothing for not being on my side, to trust me even though she had to face the consequences of what others might say about my choice.

Language is key and this project has really helped to improve my Swedish. I have met girls of different nationalities, but our common language is Swedish.

Thanks to the soccer, I dare to be myself much more and I now ask more questions, something I did not do before.

We travelled to different places. I have had the leader as a model for myself, I am so grateful. I got the opportunity to join a course in coaching, which led to my first job, doing just that.

We travelled to different towns, I have really learnt a lot, I am so grateful. Today I am studying at the university. In the beginning I was lacking the will to study because of the language. But after meeting with other ambitious girls, my will to study is coming back.

I feel fine both mentally and physically.

#### ***G4. Girl 19 years old from Syria. Came to Sweden in 2013***

I came with my family to Sweden in 2013 I began playing soccer the same year. My family at first was against it. There were two main reasons. First, the Arena area is a place dominated



by young men and boys. Second, I am a girl and is not allowed to play. But when I told them that only girls were allowed in and the doors were closed, they agreed to me playing.

However, my brothers did not agree. They thought only bad girls attended the arena. Luckily enough, though, my brothers were friends with a brother of a friend who told me about the soccer. So they talked to my brother and they changed their minds.

Through the soccer I have learnt more Swedish and I have got many friends from different countries. I also attended a course in coaching. In this way I got my first job as leader during the summer.

I organize activities for small children and teenagers. I do what I love to do, and at the same time I earn some money.

I have met girls who study the same program, but at a different school. We help each other.

Today my parents are happy that I work extra with the soccer. And my younger sisters have just started to play without any groans from those at home.

***G5. Girl 16 years old from Somalia. Came to Sweden in 2014 with her family.***

My father brought me, my sisters and my mom to Sweden in 2014. I started to play in 2015. Participating in the soccer has influenced my personality and I have become more social. I have been able to move around and here you need to accept the views of others. To start paying was not an issue in my family, because they knew the leader and trusted her.

In my family we have never discussed the soccer as a negative thing, probably due to the personal ties to the leader's family

I have got in touch with some different organizations and I now know better how they work. Some of my friends have got jobs during the summer. I have now attended coach training.

***G6. Girl 18 years old from Somalia. Came to Sweden in 2013 with her family.***

I started with soccer as soon as I got here. I got the information about it through friends who played themselves. My family was against it. Girls do not sport and you are not allowed to do it. "it is not good for you, plus that where you play, there are boys hanging around, This is not good for you – you should not be in that building at all".

I argued to my mom how important it would be for me to get in contact with Swedish speaking persons outside of school. And that it is important for me to move around.

With the help of one of the leaders, mom finally agreed. Today I have extra work with the soccer and I have attended coaching education. Through the soccer I have learnt to know different organizations and I have got many friends.

I feel like a different person after starting with the soccer. I feel better physically and mentally, "I long for Fridays and Saturdays" when we meet to play.

#### ***G7. Girl 19 years old from Iraq. Came to Sweden in 2009***

My father took me, my siblings and my mother to Sweden from Iraq since we were family members. At first I played soccer in a Swedish girls' team and my family had no problem with this. However, as I turned 15, I was not allowed to continue, in spite of the fact that I loved it. "You are a grown up girl now and not a child, so it is not good for you".

I began to study at the high school (gymnasium) in Växjö when I was 16. I then got information about the soccer at Araby. I visited them at one occasion and loved it instantly. My parents would not allow me to join, but I told them it was not the same as the previous experience – there are only girls participating and the doors are locked. To begin with they did not listen to me, but then I asked mom to come and have a look before she said no. She came and liked it just as much as myself, and in this way I got permission to start playing.

I have attended several courses and this I am grateful for. I have learnt a lot, and attended a course in coaching and has work as coach as well. I have likewise attended a course by the Red Cross, where you learnt about giving first aid. I would never have come in contact with all of these organizations, had I not started to play soccer with the girls at Araby.

I have got many friends from different countries and I met my very best friend here as well. I now live at Åseda, but I don't want to miss a single Saturday unless I have to. On Fridays I am in Växjö anyway, since I go to school here.

***G8. Girl 17 years old from Kenya. Came to Sweden in 2012.***

I came to Sweden with my father and my brothers. I could start playing without any problem at all, since the coaches' mother and my mother knew each other. But my mom did not want me to there alone, especially when it was dark and winter.

My father and my brother were all against me playing soccer, because I am a girl and girls do not play soccer. My mom has lived here since 2009. She has learned the language by going to "language cafés" (språkcafé), so she realised how important it is to get contacts with Swedish speaking people outside of school. She did not see soccer as soccer as such, but as a means to quickly improve my Swedish and get new friends.

I developed my language skills quickly after that I began playing soccer, since you meet a lot of girls from different countries. Some have arrived late, like myself and others were born or raised here. And I met my first Swedish friend through the soccer. I know the difference between how it was not to know the language and today. I have many friends and I am "present" during lessons – I mean, I now understand what is said. Earlier there were lessons where I did not understand a single word.

My father reiterates I am now a grown up and should stop playing soccer, in spite of the fact that I have learnt the language, and that I have got many friends and attended courses, e. g. for coaching and even got extra work as coach for small children. My father is of the opinion that I should stop, "he is living in his old world". But my mother is pleased and so am I.

***G9. Girl 18 years old from Sweden.***

I started to play soccer at Araby in 2017. I used to play soccer when I was younger, but stopped when I was 15. I did not cope with all the training and playing matches every weekend. I still wanted to play, though, and if you got a choice in school, I always choose to play soccer. A class mate of mine played soccer at Araby and she told me how fun you have with

music played all the time as you are there. And no special training lessons. So I decided to join her one Friday evening to see what it was like. "I loved it from the first visit".

When I first came in I was a little nervous, but within the next second, I felt at home. There were quite a few girls from different countries in the hall and there was music played at a high volume. I played the same day. I did not bring any sports clothing, but this was not required.

Since 2017 I am active and many other girls from my school have joined as well. We live west of Araby. "We could not even pass on bike", because we thought it was dangerous to be here. But everyone is nice to you here. I now have now many girls as friends, who come from different countries. I have tasted food from many countries. I like it here and I wish that as many as possible can share this experience. . Many of the girls here are not permitted to sport at all, but I don't have a problem with that.

I don't want to be all that well organized as in a Swedish sports club, but I still want to play for fun, so this is an ideal place for me and other Swedish girls who are like me. "Play soccer, laugh, listen to music all at once and take a pause when you like and re-join as you wish. I like there is no press

***G10. Girl 19 years old from Syria. Came with her family to Sweden in 2014.***

I got the information from the leader who was working at my first school "Landningsbanan" ("The landing strip"). I had just arrived in Sweden, when the leader told us about the project – girls only and behind closed doors. The leader volunteered to talk to my parents, we live quite close to the hall, and they then allowed me to join.

Thanks to the soccer I developed my language, made many friends I finally got more and more interested and joined Växjö DFF, which is a women's team. Then I got too much to do at school, so I stopped playing. I have met many girls from different countries and some of them are now close friends. I have also got the opportunity to attend different coachingcourses. I have got an extra job to train small children. I am very pleased for this.

***G11. Girl 22 years old from Somalia. Came to Sweden 2013.***

I came to Sweden with my family in 2013.

I have now begun to study a master programme in bio-medicine in Uppsala. I did my bachelor at the university in Umeå.

When I came to Sweden everything was new. I had no friends and did not know one single word of Swedish. I participated in a language introduction program and a girl there had heard there was soccer for girls and that girls from a variety of countries were participating. I came one Friday evening to say hello. I like the idea right away and wanted to join. It was easy for me to take this decision, but not that easy for my parents. After a long discussion with them I was allowed to join.

Thanks to the soccer, I learned much more Swedish there than at school. I got many friends from different countries. I became active in some organizations and got my first summer job through this.

Today my sister is playing soccer at Araby, and she did not need to take a long discussion with my parents, who live with old traditions and culture. They have understood how important it is to get in touch with Swedish speaking persons also outside of school.

***G12. Girl 15 years old from Afghanistan. Came to Sweden 2017.***

When I came to Sweden everything was difficult. I live with a family and have a trustee (god man).

The daughter in the family I am staying with, told me about the soccer at Araby. She told me there were girls from many countries and Afghan girls as well. I found this interesting in as much as my Swedish is not all that good.

I joined in 2018. It was wonderful. Life was not easy here without my family, but I have now many friends among the participating girls. And many of them has welcomed me to their families. I long for my family, but not as much since I started with soccer. I feel fine.

***G12. Girl 22 years old from Somalia. Came to Sweden 2012.***

I came to Sweden in 2012. My older brother came in 2010 my mother and my brothers and sisters allowed in to reunite as a family

I study in Stockholm to get an exam as chemical engineer. I began playing directly after I came to Sweden. I got the information through a friend. With the exception of my brother we were new to Sweden and we did not know the language.

I have always been an ambitious person, and I have always wanted to be an engineer since childhood. When arriving in Sweden, everything got much more difficult, since I lacked the language. With the soccer came many friends. I have developed my language and I have got hope back.

During my studies at high school in Växjö, I got extra work and some educational courses thanks to the soccer.

Every time I come back to visit in Växjö, I participate in the soccer – I do not want to miss one single time.

## Interviews of mothers

***M1. Mother 54 years old from Somalia. Came to Sweden in 2014. Her children arrived in 2015.***

In the beginning I did not like the idea that my daughter would play soccer. It is not in accordance with our traditions – girls should remain at home. “Soccer is for boys only”. Then, after talking to the leader, I visited the sports arena and found out for myself how things were arranged. The doors were closed and there were just girls, so I allowed my daughter to participate.

It is not easy when you come from a country at war. I especially care for my daughters. In this country I don't know yet how the society works and I don't know the language, so therefore I am afraid for what might happen to my sons and daughters. My daughter is feeling better today – before she was alone and now she has a lot of friends. She has developed her Swedish language and she has also got a job in an organization.

***M2. Mother 35 years old from Somalia. Came to Sweden in 2014 and fetched her children in 2015.***

I am the mother of three girls who are playing soccer. According to our tradition it is shameful for girls to play soccer. I grew up in a village where girls remain at home and help the family. And then she marries, give birth to children and takes care of the household.

Here it is different. girls and boys are together when sporting in school. As time has gone by, I have got used to this – now my girls play soccer and today it's ok for me. But when I talk to family members in my home country, they think it is weird that girls play soccer. And my mother keeps telling me “Who will marry your daughters, when they play soccer like boys”.

I understand my mother and her way of thinking. But today we live in Sweden and everything develops – there is no difference between girls and boys.

***M3. Mother 56 years old from Bosnia. Came to Sweden 1985***

When I was young, my parents did not allow me to play soccer. “Sports are for boys, bot for girls”. And I did not want my daughter to play since her body turns more manly and this is not good for a woman. Maybe no one wants to marry her.

But here everything is different. Boys and girls do whatever sport they want. My daughter is 18 now, and she plays soccer with you at Araby. I don't want her to join a women's team, because then she would have trained and played matches all the time – this would not have been good for her body.

Your kind of soccer is different – you have fun together and you don't have to train all the time. So it's ok for me that she plays. She has participated since she was 13. Still today she don't want us to plan anything for the family Friday and Saturday evenings, because these are reserved for soccer. Today she is 18 and she decides all by herself what to do with her life and her children.

***M4. Mother 42 years old from Eritrea. Came to Sweden 2015.***

I came to Sweden with four children, two boys and two girls. I am most worried for my girls, I want to know what they are up to after school. So I want to know when to expect them to be home.

My boys had more freedom. I am from a tradition where boys and girls not do the same things and I think society is more of a risk for the girls. I was chocked when my eldest daughter told me she would start playing soccer. She argued she would integrate faster into the Swedish society and that she would get more friends. As a mother, I want my daughter to get an education, a chance I never had. In my opinion she would have had to give up the soccer and focus on the education. I allowed her though, since I met the coach at the introduction programme “Landningsbanan” when we first came here. I trusted the coach, but my husband is still of the opinion it is a bad way to follow.

I myself want her to be successful with her studies, that she will have a car of her own and get a proper job. The hall lies close by, but when she is late from the soccer, I am very worried.

My daughter has learnt the language – me and my husband cannot read or write. We grew up in a small village in Eritrea. So she is our eye.

When I talk to my family back in Eritrea, and in particular, my parents, I tell them that there is no difference between girls and boys here.

Now I study SFI and is learning to read and write. I go with my children to language cafés (språkkafé). These are opportunities we have to take.

My second daughter is 12 and she will start playing when she turns 13- she is longing for it to happen. My eldest daughter is 17 now – she began to play in 2016 when she was 13.

This is one of the best decisions I have ever made as a mother, to allow my daughter to play soccer. She is feeling very well – physically as well as mentally.

## Interviews of fathers

### *F1. Father 46 years old from Afghanistan . Came to Sweden 2015.*

I came with wife and five daughters. The eldest four of them play soccer at Araby since 2016 and the youngest will start next year when she is 13. I have no problem with them participating. My daughters have always been girls and boys to me, since I don't have any sons.



In my home country they used to call me the father with girls only. Traditionally women have been discriminated. I have been recommended to remarry, so I can have a son, but I will never do that.

When we were seeking asylum, the daughters did not play, because waiting for the residence permit. They started to play in 2016 and even today, I collect them at Araby during the dark time of the year.

They have developed their language and they have got many friends from different countries. I think it is very good they speak Swedish to each other when they play.

***F2 Father from Somalia. Came with his children to Sweden in 2017.***

In our tradition, girls do not sport, especially not the girls – they should not deal with soccer which is a sport for men. If a girl does not behave like a girl in our tradition, she will have problems in the future – no one will want to marry her.

My wife came to Sweden in 2015 and the rest of us arrived in 2015. I have nine children, three girls and six boys. My boys play soccer and do other sports. If had had to decide, my daughters would not have got permission to participate. However, my wife made the argument that it is not enough with school for learning the language. You have to get in touch with others who speak Swedish when not in school. Now they play, they have learnt Swedish and have got many friends.

But now I would want them to stop playing, especially with respect to the eldest daughter. She is now an adult and is ready for the future.

***F3. Father 49 years old from Iraq. Came to Sweden 2008.***

Myself, I came to Sweden in 2008. The rest of the family came in 2010. I have eight children plus my wife. She is a cousin of mine, and we married when we were 14 – 15 years old.

Life was not simple, but it worked. When I came to Sweden it was like entering into a different world, everything was different and difficult. And I was sent to school, where I would learn Swedish. In my home country I attended high school. But here I fought to come into society before my family arrived.

For eight children and my wife it would have been difficult, had I not learnt the language. When they arrived, I had done SFI and “sas- grund”. I said to my wife that you and the children will go to school, as had my children done in my home-country. She argued that she was old and illiterate. But I encouraged her to start from the very beginning. Today she has done SFI and “sas- grund”, even though she could not even write her own name.

I left behind all old traditions and the culture I was raised with. I pushed all my children, boys and girls, to do whatever they wanted after school to improve their knowledge of the language. It is not enough with just school, you need to get in touch with Swedish speaking persons after the school.

My girls play soccer and are now fluent in Swedish and all my children have high ambitions with their studies. It warms my hart every time I hear them talk about this – I just hope they reach their goals.

My parents did not think it was a good idea that especially my girls were allowed to join other activities after school. But I don't listen to them. Today we live here in Sweden who has welcomed us and given us back our hope for the future. We are very grateful.

#### ***F4. Father 50 years old from Syria . Came to Sweden 2015.***

I came to Sweden in 2015 with my wife and my two daughters, I am an engineer and my wife is a midwife. WE had a good life in our home country.

I have two daughters, and I have never asked myself why I just have girls., like my relatives are asking all the time. My wife and I have good educations and we have no favourites, we are just thankful over the fact that our girls are so good at school.

I have always been pushing my girls to get an education. And in order to get this, you need to get access to the language. I use to attend a "language café - språkcafé" for adults every other week, so my wife can go the weeks in between.

My daughters started to play soccer with you, and since then the language has developed rather quickly. And they have got many friends from different countries. I think you do a very good job for girls that have not been here very long. They need all the help they can get to integrate into the new country. It is easier for boys and I think it depends on old traditions that do not give the same degree of freedom to girls.

## Interviews of brothers

***B1. Brother 22 years old from Somalia. Came to Sweden in 2015 with his mother and his siblings. His father arrived in 2012.***

I think it was ok for my sister to start playing soccer, as long as only girls are participating and the doors are closed. Girls do not sport at all in my home country, but today we are here and there are halls indoors where the girls can be alone for themselves.

I myself play soccer with other chaps from different countries. We speak Swedish and I have also developed my language skills since I started to play.

My father has not had any problem with the fact that girls play soccer. "Language is key", he says. And he wants us all to educate ourselves further.

***B2. Brother 24 years old from Iraq. Came to Sweden in 2006.***

For me, it is still not ok that my sister plays soccer. She is a girl and should not do this. Today she is playing only because our parents allowed her to do so. But I see to that she does not stay at the sports arena afterwards. I will never allow a daughter of my own to play. In spite of being raised in Sweden, I still want to keep my traditions and culture.

***B3. Brother 19 years old from Afghanistan . Came to Sweden 2016.***

I came to Sweden in 2016 with my mother and my elder sister. At first we ended up in Kalmar, but we were then moved to a refugee camp in Växjö. We lived there until we received a residence permit. Since we were “under aged” while waiting for the asylum process to proceed, we joined the introduction program “Landningsbanan” for four weeks. After that we were to join the regular school. During those four weeks we made different tests in order to map our level of knowledge from back home. We also got information about the Swedish society, since we were new in the country. My mother also got this information during four weeks.

One of the days the leader of the soccer project came there and told about activities for girls where you play soccer and train the language. She even brought one girl who had been playing and in spite of a short time spent in Sweden, she had learnt the language quickly thanks to the soccer.

There were parents from different countries in the room who had questions, so they were invited to watch what was going on. My mother was one of those wanting to see for herself. Since we lived close she came and saw that the doors were closed and that only girls were participating. So after a while my mother allowed my sister to join.

This is my only sister, I have no brothers, and we had always been together. I had no problem with her playing, on the contrary, I was glad she did. In refugee camps we had lived, there were activities for youths, but only for boys or for boys and girls mixed. My sister did not want to play with the boys.

Right now, my sister is playing. I have some friends, whose sisters are not allowed to join. They ask me if I am not the man in the family – why do you allow your sister to play, etc. etc. But I don't listen to them

***B4. Brother 20 years old from Syria. Came to Sweden 2017.***

I came to Sweden with my parents and my siblings. I have three sisters and one brother. We moved away from the war. Before we came to Sweden we stayed at a refugee camp in Turkey. Life was harsh, but we managed to take us to Sweden.

In the beginning everything was difficult. In Syria we attended school, but the language was the most difficult part. My parents were always active in our home country and in our family, there was never any difference between me and my sisters. They have always done what they wanted. Our parents were pushing us to learn the language and to integrate ourselves into the Swedish society.

That my sisters started to play soccer was never a problem for me or my parents. The only concern was how to get to the arena. Most of the times my father follows them, and if he can't I do. My sisters have learnt the language quite well and they have got many friends from different countries.

