

# Culture Guide

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Somali Bantu  
Sudanese  
Ukrainian  
Vietnamese



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Sources:

<http://www.everyculture.com/> <[http://www3.baylor.edu/~Charles\\_Kemp/refugees.htm](http://www3.baylor.edu/~Charles_Kemp/refugees.htm)>

<<http://www.ethnomed.org/>>

Maps: CIA World Factbook website. <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>>

# Afghan

## *Language*

Pashto, Dari (Persian)

## *Religion*

Islam

## *Cultural Norms*

- tribal affiliation is still the most significant organizing principle in parts of rural Afghan society
- for the most part, people live in extended family units
- adults work very hard but also do extensive visiting or entertaining during weekends and sometimes on weekday nights as well
- boys have much more freedom than girls
- in Afghanistan, families arrange marriages
- polygamy is allowed as long as the man can support all wives
- an Afghan's family is sacrosanct and a matter of great privacy; people are generally reluctant to share personal and family issues with nonfamily members, including health care professionals, though women may discuss their problems with friends, including non-Afghans
- Afghan women have adapted to the United States better than have men, who have had difficulty finding a middle road between a traditional and an American lifestyle
- husbands whose wives earn salaries and have economic freedom suffer a loss of paternal leadership as the family's sole breadwinner
- the traditional husband's power and role as head of the family is further damaged when children learn English more quickly than the parents do and become their parents' translators and spokespersons.
- hospitality, one of the most important Afghan values, requires elaborate food preparation and a very clean house

## *Health Beliefs and Practices*

- the majority of Afghans do not trust the U.S. health care system, believing it to rely on technology rather than health professionals' skill in hands-on examination and diagnosis
- Afghans believe that health is maintained through regular exercise, fresh food, and a balanced diet and by staying warm and getting enough rest
- "natural" illnesses can be prevented by following the precepts of Islam, which strongly emphasizes cleanliness and personal hygiene
- causes of "unnatural" illnesses include the evil eye or ghosts/spirits; unnatural illness must be treated with a curing ritua, because Western medicine is seen as useless in such cases
- illness may be interpreted as the will of God and the result of not adhering to the principles of Islam or not maintaining proper balance of hot and cold in food or drink
- home remedies include a variety of herbs and roots made into teas or poultices.
- women often being uncomfortable with a male health care provider or interpreter
- Afghans are responsive to and enthusiastic about health education
- although mental health is seen as a problem in the community, families seek psychiatric care only as a last resort, as the need for mental health care is often considered shameful



# Bosnian

## *Language*

Serbo-Croatian/Bosnian

## *Religion*

Islam, Christianity, Greek Orthodox

- religion generally has less impact on health beliefs and practices than in other Muslim areas

## *Cultural Norms*

- extremely high rate of smokers
- families are very close-knit and there is great emphasis on the extended family
- common for both men and women to work but it is generally the woman who takes care of the household
- it is expected that the family will care for the elderly at home as there is no tradition of placing them in nursing homes
- parents, relatives and friends all put a lot of time and energy into caring for the young

## *Health Beliefs and Practices*

- basic health care is similar in many respects to that in the United States
- health is often narrowly defined as only physical well-being
- illness is taken very seriously and sick people receive a great deal of physical and emotional support from family, relatives and friends
- treatment is often not considered complete without a prescription for medication
- counseling, psychotherapy or group therapy may be rejected
- clients may have a great deal of fear of serious disease and some may even develop phobias about becoming ill
- the health provider is expected to be attentive especially about discussions of symptoms and complaints; the client is likely to want detailed explanations of tests and procedures
- herbal medicine is very popular particularly in Bosnia and Serbia. Many people believe in medicinal mud baths, mineral springs and healing spas to treat various ailments such as rheumatism, chronic inflammation, arthritis and respiratory problems
- in family planning, the most widely used method of birth control is withdrawal. The condom also tends to be a popular form of contraception; the Pill is less popular because of its perceived side effects and a fear that it may cause weight-gain or cancer
- clients may be troubled when healthcare providers ask too many personal questions, take notes of conversation and fill out forms
- for men, talking about suffering may be a sign of weakness and they may be reluctant to talk about psychological dimensions of pain



# Burmese

*Language*  
Burmese

*Religion*  
Buddhism

## *Cultural Norms*

- Burma is primarily an agricultural country with little industry and almost no technology
- traditionally family and religion-oriented
- parents are held to be sacred, hence disobedience to a parent is considered a sin
- marriage is often arranged and arrangement may involve consultation with the family astrologer to determine whether the two young people will be compatible
- a distinctly Burmese cultural practice is the use of a pale yellow paste (from the thanaka plant) applied to the cheeks, forehead, and sometimes arms of both genders, but more frequently of girls and women
- interactions between social equals tend to be characterized by politeness and concern for the other person
- the head of an adult or child is figuratively the highest part of the body and should not be touched by another person, although exception is made for medical examination
- impolite to sit in a seat higher or at the same level as an older or more respected person
- shoes are not worn in the home or pagoda. When sitting on the floor, such as in a pagoda or a formal situations, men and women sit with their legs flexed sideways so that their feet are pointed to the rear rather than at a Buddha image or other people. However, in informal situations, men may sit cross-legged. Pointing one's finger, hand, or foot at another person is considered rude; and calling another person with upraised index finger is insulting
- astrological computations are commonly used to predict the future and to guide many life decisions

## *Health Beliefs and Practices*

- health is considered to be related to harmony in and between the body, mind, and soul and the universe
- illnesses are seen as “hot” or “cold” and treatment should be with opposite medicines or foods
- changes in diet are commonly used to treat illness
- culture bound illnesses among Burmese include spirit possession and *Koro* (the intense fear that the genitalia will recede into the body, and that if the genitalia recede completely, death will occur)
- among women, menstrual flow is thought to be critical to health and, depending on the flow, an indication of good or poor health - including mental health
- the use of betel quid by women and men is ubiquitous in Burma as it provides a mild “high” and helps with dental pain; however, it is associated with oral pathology

## *Pregnancy and Childbirth*

- traditionally prenatal and neonatal care is often provided by a midwife; in cities, however, clinics and hospitals are commonly used and the value of prenatal and neonatal care is well-recognized
- there are traditional dietary restrictions during pregnancy that could lead to a lack of nutrition
- the postpartum period is viewed as a time of susceptibility to illness as the mother's body is “cold” from blood loss
- sour and bitter foods are also taken postpartum as these are thought to reduce blood flow
- oral contraceptives are thought by many to cause menstrual irregularity, while Depo-Provera injections are thought to provide regularity



# Burundian

## *Language*

Kirundi

Swahili (from refugee camps)

## *Religion*

Roman Catholic

Indigenous

## *Cultural Norms*

- women's primary duties are childbearing and child care as well as responsibility for household chores; in rural regions, women also work in agriculture and do most of the work of planting, as their fertility is believed to be transferred to the seeds
- women are almost entirely unrepresented in business and at all levels of government.
- Women are respected, particularly for their power as life bearers
- the role of the mother is highly honored, but in practice, women have little decision-making authority in the family or in society as a whole
- fatherhood is considered an important responsibility, and it is the man who is in charge of the family
- women and children are expected to defer to the wishes of any adult male
- common for parents to arrange marriages and typically the groom's family gives a dowry to the bride's family
- each family generally has its own house, and these houses are grouped together in compounds that include the homes of extended family members
- family ties are very powerful, and extended families live in close proximity as a clan
- children are highly valued, viewed partly as insurance for the future
- exchanges often include literal or figurative references to cattle; a typical greeting involves both parties wishing each other large herds
- handshakes are important, and the type varies by location
- people stand close together in conversation and often continue holding hands for several minutes after shaking
- it is considered rude to turn down food or drink when it is offered
- Burundian people are generally thought to be quiet and reserved; in their traditional philosophy anyone talking too much is not considered to be intelligent

## *Pregnancy and Childbirth*

- birth usually occurs at home, assisted by midwives and other women
- six days after a baby is born, a ceremony is observed in which he or she is presented to the family
- the mother receives a crown of flowers and gifts of beer and money. Children are named in the kuvamukiriri ceremony. The paternal grandfather bestows on the child a proper name, a clan name, and one or two
- if the family is Christian, baptism usually occurs when the child reaches the age of about one year, as infant mortality is high
- children are breast-fed for as long as possible, at age two or three, they begin to be fed the typical national diet
- mothers generally tie their babies to their backs (or when they are older, perch them on their hips) and carry them everywhere



# Cambodian

## *Language*

Cambodian (aka Khmer)

## *Religion*

Buddhism

## *Cultural Norms*

- amulets or pieces of string are commonly worn around the neck by children or around the waist by adults
- Buddha images may be seen as statues or pictures in homes; they are found on altars placed high on a wall
- incense, flowers, food, cigarettes, or other things such as hair may also be placed on the altar
- tattoos are an older means of protection against harm or illness
- extended families living together or in close proximity are the cultural ideal, but nuclear families are common
- men are the heads of the household but in reality the power in some families is with the wife rather than the husband
- communication is often indirect and requests or questions may be very vague
- unusual for older people to answer with a direct “no” in response to a question or request; responses that may mean “no” include no response, a change in subject, or statements such as “its okay” or “no problem,” or even an unconvincing “yes”
- they do not gush over babies or children; in fact, complementing and praising babies and children may bring bad luck to the child
- effusive, loud, or over-familiar behavior toward others is seldom in good form; nor is showing anger or involvement in confrontation

## *Health Beliefs and Practices*

- illness may be attributed to imbalance in natural forces, however, many Cambodians will not directly express this concept
- common for people to note the influence of “wind” on blood circulation which leads to illness
- coining (rubbing of a coin on the skin) is a common treatment for ailments such as fever, upper respiratory infection, nausea, weak heart, and malaise
- pinching (first and second fingers are used to pinch and thus bruise the bridge of the nose, neck, or chest) is common for treating headache or malaise
- cupping (placing a small candle on the forehead, lighting the candle, and placing a small jar over the candle) is another common practice which can leave a contusion (from the suction of the cup) on the skin
- traditional or natural medicines are widely used, being brought by friends or imported from Asia
- often traditional measures will be tried in the home before seeking health care outside the home and/or be used simultaneously with western medicine
- many Cambodian see no conflict in practicing or using traditional or magic means of treating illness simultaneously with western medicine; many would further see no conflict in adding Christian prayer to the mix
- assessment is complicated first by a reluctance to complain or express negative feelings; common for patients to not report or even to deny symptoms or problems
- common for people to discontinue treatment after symptoms disappear
- great difficulty negotiating the business aspects of the health care system (upon receiving a large bill, some will react by simply not returning to the health facility)
- oriented more to illness than prevention of illness; most do not value early detection or disease screening
- childhood immunizations are accepted, but adult immunizations (influenza, pneumonia) are of little interest until illness strikes
- families sometimes wish to protect patients from poor prognoses



# Chinese

## *Language*

Mandarin, Cantonese, Hakka, Xiang, Min, Gan, Wu

- written characters are the same throughout all

## *Religion*

Buddhism

## *Cultural Norms*

- yes/no questions will almost always be answered with a polite “yes”
- important not to bring shame to the family
- individuals should strive to succeed and not accept praise for achievement
- as a means of maintaining emotional self-control, it is important to be reserved and formal in public
- a focus on family and community over self
- family structure is traditionally hierarchical and patriarchal, with the oldest male being the primary decision-maker; older children have precedence over younger children and male over female
- families tend to be very private and are unwilling to discuss issues or conflicts with non-family members
- the family, ideally the multi-generational family, is the most important unit in Chinese communities; all members contribute to the betterment of the family and its status within the community
- the elderly are highly respected and honored
- a nurturing approach to parenting is common among the Chinese: it is the parent’s responsibility to provide the proper physical and mental nourishment for their children and in return parents expect complete obedience and respect from their children, and that their children will care for them in their old age
- children are highly valued in Chinese families
- education is also very important, and a child’s performance can bring shame or honor to the family
- because they do not express open emotion during a conversation, many people who are not familiar with the communication style may get the impression that Chinese people are rude or unfeeling



## *Health Beliefs and Practices*

- a lack of harmony or balance (yin-yang) leads to trouble and illness (“hot” vs. “cold”)
- acupuncture is commonly used to create balance in the energies of the body that have lead to illness
- common for patients to use Western and traditional medicines as treatment
- reluctance to discuss prognosis and in some instances, diagnosis, of an illness
- a norm for families to withhold information or even lie to patient
- Chinese may be reluctant to question healthcare professions, but rather treat them with great respect and deference; this can hinder clear communication and compliance to treatments

## *Pregnancy and Childbirth*

- prenatal care is highly valued among Chinese women
- postpartum, many women practice “zuo yuezi” for thirty days: stay in the house; avoid cold foods, drinks, wind, water or any other cold substance or contact; diet based on balance; abstinence from physical work; abstinence from excessive pleasurable activities (sex, parties, etc.); limited bathing

# Cuban

*Language*  
Spanish

*Religion*  
Roman Catholic  
Santería

## *Cultural Norms*

- extended family is idealized and relatively common among Cubans of all social classes
- men usually have the dominant role, but many Cuban women are outspoken and assertive in public and private
- age, social status, and education are respected
- both within and without families, deference may be given to the elderly, persons of higher social status (especially male), and those with higher education
- conversation tends to be animated, fast, and may seem loud
- communications within families and among friends often seem warm and affectionate; men greet one another with handshakes and women are often physically affectionate with one another
- direct eye contact is the norm in almost all interactions
- both women and men tend to be passionate and express themselves in a way that may seem demanding to more reserved people



## *Health Beliefs and Practices*

- traditional Cuban culture holds that mind, body, and spirit are inextricably intertwined; health is viewed as a sense of well-being, freedom from discomfort, and a robust appearance
- traditionally, many Cubans believe that moderate obesity indicates good health and thinness indicates poor health
- traditional diet (fried foods, beans, sweets) contributes to obesity and the wide availability of colas, sweets, and fast foods in the U.S. promotes obesity and attendant health problems
- stress is thought to cause a variety of physical and mental health problems
- supernatural forces (e.g., mal de ojo or evil eye) or a lack of balance are thought by some to cause or contribute to physical and mental health problems
- regardless of a person's faith, spiritual care/belief is often incorporated in treatment or explanation of illness
- the physician is highly respected and expected to be in a more directive than partnership role
- decision-making usually includes older or more respected family members
- there is a general desire for family to be informed about a terminal illness or poor prognosis before the patient

## *Pregnancy, childbirth, and child-rearing*

- infants and children are often comforted with food and plump infants are viewed as healthy
- children, pregnant women, and postnatal women are thought to be especially vulnerable to supernaturally influenced health problems
- pregnant women are expected to stay inside if possible and avoid over-exertion
- contact with persons who have deformities or health problems, as well as discussion of these, should be avoided during pregnancy
- in general, it is best to avoid any potentially stressful or negative discussion with a pregnant woman
- men may be surprised at the prospect of participating or being present at delivery and the pregnant woman's mother may be surprised at not being allowed to direct the proceedings
- the traditional postnatal practice is for the new mother and infant to remain inside the home for 41 days after delivery; women from the family or neighbor women are responsible for caring for both
- breastfeeding is common
- many Cubans prefer circumcision

# Ethiopian & Eritrean

*Ethiopia and Eritrea are now separate countries, but culturally are similar, and considered the same by some sources*

## *Language*

Amharic, Tigrinya

## *Religion*

Coptic Christians (Ethiopian Orthodox)

## *Cultural Norms*

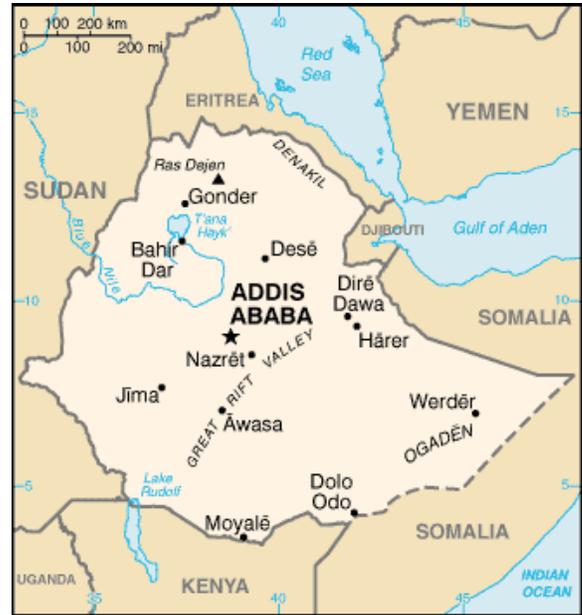
- most Ethiopians/Eritreans prefer translations and other assistance be provided by persons from their own ethnic or linguistic group
- communication tends to be direct, with most people usually speaking softly
- little emotion or affect is shown to strangers, but physical affection is common between friends
- a thin spongy bread is served and is used in place of utensils
- tendency to be very conscious of the need for hand washing before meals (and perhaps at other times as well)
- the ideal family structure and living arrangement is the extended family
- men make most of the decisions, especially those in relation to the outside world (this is changing as families move to the West and can change interfamilial dynamics)

## *Health Beliefs and Practices*

- traditional Ethiopian/Eritrean belief is that health results from equilibrium between the body and the outside world; and illness from disequilibrium
- the relationship between the person and the supernatural world is very important in maintaining health and happiness
- traditional herbal medicine is highly developed and widely used in Ethiopia/Eritrea
- Ethiopians/Eritreans put great stock in medications, with injections more valued than oral medications
- many patients are dissatisfied if medications are not given while diagnostic tests are pending or the illness does not necessarily call for medication
- female circumcision is common
- magico-religious practices are common in Ethiopia/Eritrea; amulets are worn by some, usually under clothing
- a person's mental condition is thought to play an important role in her or his physical health, hence shocking or potentially traumatic news should be given with care and with family or friend support at hand
- many will prefer that a poor prognosis or other such news be given first to a (male) family member
- physicians are expected to know and convey to the patient what is best for the patient
- most Ethiopians/Eritreans are stoic with respect to physical (and emotional) pain

## *Pregnancy and Childbirth*

- pregnancy is thought to be a time of increased vulnerability for the mother; the fetus is also at risk for harm from evil spirits and sorcery
- women generally prefer female physicians to deliver
- some feel that Western physicians are too quick to perform Cesarean sections and attempt to prevent such intervention by waiting as long as possible to go to the hospital for delivery
- some women practice a brief symbolic rejection of the infant for the discomfort and pain caused by pregnancy and delivery
- after delivery, the mother may stay in the home for two-six weeks
- breast-feeding (up to three years) is the norm in Ethiopia and also is practiced in the U.S., but for a shorter time
- family planning was not widely available in Ethiopia/Eritrea, but is well-accepted by many Ethiopians/Eritreans in the West



# Hmong

*Language*  
Hmong

*Religion*  
Animism, Christianity

## *Cultural Norms*

- traditional Hmong belief holds that a person has several souls, usually four
- traditional beliefs are that a spiritual world coexists with the physical world
- believe in reincarnation
- the shaman is one of the most important people in a Hmong village; he or she gives people hope in a crisis
- people may wear red necklaces made from silver and brass, white cloths around their wrists, or red or white strings on their wrists, necks; these are believed to keep away spirits who might bring misfortune
- clans are the social and political way or organizing
- may not marry within own clan
- Hmong people tend to be humble and may not express true emotions with others; may say OK or yes but mean no when they feel pressured
- most traditional elders, especially men, do not want strangers to touch their heads
- verbal greeting more common than handshake with traditional Hmong, especially women
- traditionally, it is considered inappropriate for the opposite genders to sit too close to one another when conversing

## *Health Beliefs and Practices*

- causes of illness: natural or nonspiritual (environment and aging); spiritual or religious (evil spirits, ancestor and nature spirits may cause illness when offended; curses (people who have been wronged can curse wrongdoer and cause illness)
- loss of souls may cause illness; good health requires all 12 souls to be intact
- aches, pains, depression, and other serious mental illnesses are caused by having lost souls
- the shaman, a spiritual and health leader, is the main health provider
- the shaman's job is to heal sick people and prevent illness by communicating with the spirit world
- used many herbs and plants which grow wild in the mountains to heal themselves
- as the Hmong adapt to western medicine, many continue to use their traditional medicines
- possible Western medical practices may conflict with traditional beliefs: surgery may interfere with reincarnation or open access for evil spirits to enter; blood maintains balance in the body so drawing blood will weaken the body; autopsy may hinder reincarnation, disrespectful to allow body to be dissected
- sick people and prevent illness by communicating with the spirit world
- used many herbs and plants which grow wild in the mountains to heal themselves
- as the Hmong adapt to western medicine, many continue to use their traditional medicines
- treatment for common ailments may result in unusual physical marks from cupping, spooning, or coining on the neck, shoulder, back, chest, forearms

## *Pregnancy, Childbirth*

- third day after birth, soul-calling/naming ceremony provides full complement of souls so child becomes a person
- new mother stays home 30 days to rest with child
- mother follows a special post-partum diet of "hot" foods including rice and chicken boiled with fresh green herbs
- mother and child not encouraged to visit others



# Iranian

*Language*  
Farsi

*Religion*  
Islam

## *Cultural Norms*

- having children is regarded as a blessing and very important life task to be accomplished by married couples
- boys are far more indulged than girls
- Iran is very safe and people will be prepared to help you in any difficulty – it would be a matter of national pride
- very kind, patient people
- men do not talk with women in public
- hospitality is a genuine delight here and the people are happy to be of service
- people are immensely proud of their country even if they are less than enthusiastic about its politics
- women have always had a strong role in Iranian life, but it's rarely a public one
- Iranians are a family-culture and the whole clan sits down on the carpets twice a day for banquets prepared by the women of the house
- it's polite to refuse food at least once; Iranians will usually only accept on the third offering
- requires that both women and men adopt modest dress that does not inflame carnal desire
- it is considered manly for men to be emotionally sensitive, artistically engaged, and aesthetically acute; women, by contrast, can be emotionally distant and detached without seeming unfeminine
- open weeping is not shameful for either sex
- kissing and hand-holding between members of the same sex is common
- by contrast, physical contact between members of the opposite sex is assiduously avoided except between relatives
- women control marriages for their children, and much intrigue in domestic life revolves around marital matters
- the patriarch is the oldest male of the family; he demands respect from other family members and often has a strong role in the future of young relatives
- the father is the disciplinarian and it is his responsibility to protect the honor of the family
- very strong emphasis on education
- one must be very careful about praising any possession of another; the owner will likely offer it immediately as a present
- guests are treated with very high regard; when invited as a guest a small present is appreciated, but often received with a show of embarrassment and will usually not be unwrapped in front of the giver
- a downward gaze in Iran is a sign of respect; on the other hand, staring directly into the eyes of a friend is a sign of affection and intimacy
- a folk belief prevalent in Iran tries to maintain balance between the four humors of the body— blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile—through judicious combinations of foods; however, many Iranians follow a two-category system: hot and cold

## *Pregnancy, childbirth, childrearing*

- mother's role is extremely important
- mothers are expected to breast-feed their babies for fear the babies will become "remorseless"
- small children are indulged by all of society
- common for older children to help raise younger siblings



# Iraqi

## *Language*

Arabic

- literacy in Arabic is rather low

## *Religion*

Islam (mostly Shiite with a small elite who are generally Sunni)

## *Cultural Norms*

- in general, Shiites are more orthodox and strict in religious practices, food prohibitions, and especially, treatment of women. Shiite Muslim women, especially older women and widows, dress typically in black, in full “hijab,” covering their bodies and faces
- at all public events, and even within the household, women are segregated from men.
- it is never acceptable for a man to shake a Shiite woman’s hand
- Sunni woman are less restricted and touching, and even full embracing, is quite common within (but not between) the sexes, especially when greeting
- when greeting, deference is always given first to males
- following Islam, pork and alcohol are prohibited
- loyalty to the family and tribe forms the basis of much of culture
- women in general are subservient to male authority, although it should be noted that Iraqi women generally enjoy more rights than other women from the region; there are many educated and professional women
- the husband controls the household finances, but women exert considerable influence over the children, including grown sons



## *Health Beliefs and Practices*

- both women and men are modest and either may resist or refuse examination or treatment by a person of the opposite gender
- during Ramadan, Muslims (aside from pregnant women, the ill or possibly children) fast between sunrise and sunset; more conservative Muslims may also refuse medications or medically-indicated foods during daylight
- among the most conservative Iraqi Muslims, typically the elderly, Western preventive health concepts may conflict with the belief that God has determined one's lifespan from birth which cannot (and should not) be altered by human intervention
- expression of pain is usually a private matter, except during labor and delivery

## *Pregnancy and Childbirth*

- other female household members relieve the pregnant woman from household tasks
- some Iraqis believe that sonograms to determine the sex of a developing fetus is against God's will and should not be performed
- in Iraq, midwives provide minimal prenatal care and most deliveries are at home
- circumcision of boys usually occurs within the first few days, accompanied by a ceremony and feast; commonly, a barber performs the circumcision; females get their ears pierced at one week
- breastfeeding is the norm for at least one year, for both sexes
- birth control is virtually non-existent in Iraq, as limiting births or interfering with conception in any way is thought by many to be against the laws of Islam as life is considered a gift from God
- likewise, abortion in any form is out of the question
- on hospitalization in the West, the family will stay with the patient and often will bring food, not trusting the hospital diet to adhere to Muslim food restrictions (halal)

# Korean

*Language*  
Korean

*Religion*  
Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity

## *Cultural Norms*

- communication is based upon social rank and familiarity with the people speaking
- meaningful conversation is highly regarded while small talk is seen as pointless
- look for a large area of personal space and over-familiar touching is poorly tolerated; in a health care setting it is acceptable providing it is a requirement for improving one's care
- high value placed on education
- strong belief in filial duty - treating parents with respect and obeying them, caring for them when they are old, giving them a proper burial, and even worshipping them with ceremonies after death
- father and sons are the heads of the household and decision makers
- men are the financial providers, often working outside the home; females in traditional families typically have the role of protecting the family and being a suitable wife
- common to offer food and drink to visitors but important for visitors to not accept upon first asking; respect is shown by allowing several offers before accepting



## *Health Beliefs and Practices*

- illness is often seen one's fate and hospitalization may be seen as sign of impending death
- illness is sometimes attributed to disharmony in the natural forces, e.g., yin and yang, hot and cold
- treatment of hot/cold illnesses is through the use of the opposite force to achieve balance
- another health concern is the kior chi force, which is the life-force of the body; withdrawing blood, sweating and sex are seen as reducing this force
- common health related practices include the use of herbs, acupuncture, cupping and moxibustion which is the burning of a soft material at specified spots (corresponding to internal energy channels) on the skin
- the physician is seen as powerful and very trustworthy; nurses are expected to carry out the orders explicitly
- organ donation and transplantation is seen as a disturbance in the integrity of the body
- much of a patient's care is provided by the family while hospitalized
- great stigma attached to mental illness
- typically focused on curative rather than preventative measures
- herbal medicines may be used in conjunction with prescription drugs

## *Pregnancy and Childbearing Practices*

- the South Korean government formerly required that households limit their number of pregnancies to two children; however, recently, the falling birth rate has resulted in the government now encouraging more pregnancies
- children receive minimal teaching about sexual practices; only formal instruction received concerns the menstrual cycle, which is taught to the females only
- during pregnancy women are taught to avoid certain foods and smoking
- introversion is common during pregnancy
- the woman begins pregnancy with the Tae Mong, a dream about the conception of the child; the woman focuses on Tae Kyo during pregnancy and avoids unpleasant thoughts which is believed to be the education of the fetus

# Kurdish

## *Language*

Kurdish

Arabic, Turkish, Farsi (depending on the country they live in)

## *Religion*

Islam (Sunni)

## *Cultural Norms*

- in general, the status of Kurdish women is higher than in other Islamic countries: women are not veiled, are more free to associate with men, and may even occupy political offices
- handshakes are usually appropriate between and within the sexes (exception: inappropriate for a man to shake the hand of an elderly woman); a two-handed handshake is considered especially warm and polite
- men may greet each other with a kiss on both cheeks
- tend to be strongly clannish in their social organization
- much reverence paid to ancestors
- women retain their names at marriage, but children are named after the male line
- strong emphasis on large families, with a preference toward males
- birthdays are not widely observed (except perhaps for U.S.-born children)

## *Health Beliefs and Practices*

- children from certain areas may rarely receive immunizations as there are chronic shortages of medicines and supplies
- not a huge weight given to herbal remedies or traditional healers; however, the ranking Islamic figure, the Imam, is seen to have curative power through his spirituality

## *Pregnancy, childbirth, and child-rearing*

- birth control is considered amoral according to Islamic law, although the view is changing amongst some younger women
- pregnancy outside of wedlock is strictly taboo and abortion is considered an extreme violation of Islamic law and Kurdish culture
- generalized Islamic taboo against knowing the sex of the child (“only God should know”), but some old women say that a more rounded abdomen in pregnancy means a female baby
- in the U.S., husbands commonly accompany their wives in the delivery room
- in the 40 days after birth there is a special bath poured over the woman to relieve her from bad spirits
- postpartum sex is taboo until those 40 days are over
- newborn boys are typically circumcised within the first month or two
- virtually all newborns are breastfed for at least a year and sometimes longer; here bottles can be used and is common amongst women who work
- much of the responsibility for childrearing lies with older sisters and grandmothers; older boys are typically not involved in childcare
- in general, female children are much more supervised than males



# Laotian

*Language*  
Laotian

*Religion*  
Buddhism

## *Cultural Norms*

- Laotians have tended to live in tightly knit communities to a greater extent than most other refugees from Southeast Asia
- home and family are headed by the husband or oldest man, with elders of both sexes given great respect
- beliefs and symbolism of the traditions and religious faiths are combined and adapted to one another with no conflict whatsoever
- respect for individuals, families, and the culture is critical
- it is the norm to remove shoes before entering the home
- it is well to sit on or below the level of the oldest person there; if an older person is sitting on the floor it is impolite for the visitor to sit in a chair
- the head is the highest (literally and figuratively) and thus one should not touch another's head, and preferably not his or her shoulder either (it is generally understood that it is necessary to touch other people's head during the course of some physical examinations)
- it is also impolite to point one's foot at another or sit with one leg crossed over the other so that the bottom of the foot or toe is pointed toward another
- the traditional means of salutation involves placing one's hands together as if praying and inclining the head; the height at which the hands are held depends on the social or spiritual status of the person being greeted
- Western greetings are well accepted, except that many women are not comfortable shaking hands with men
- Laotians tend to be reserved in most interactions (including health care)
- effusiveness and expression of strong feelings - including strong positive feelings - is not valued
- fussing over and complementing children and infants is not good form
- children are expected to remain quiet and respectful in interactions with elders, including visitors



## *Health Beliefs and Practices*

- physicians hold great status
- "winds" play a role in health and illness and bringing the winds into balance restores health or well-being
- illness may be attributed to the loss of a spirit or soul thought to inhabit the body and maintain health
- Laotians (and other SE Asians) view of physical and mental wellness are also tied to a person's ability to sleep and eat without difficulty
- some traditional or popular commercial medicines are intended to increase both appetite and sleep
- culture of privacy, reluctance to volunteer information especially related to family, sex and illness
- relationships are based on trust so initial visits can suffer from a lack of trust
- traditional treatments may be tried first and traditional practices are often continued while utilizing western medicine
- most Laotians focus on acute illness and do not place high value on disease prevention and health promotion
- mental illness will in many cases be ascribed to spirit loss
- help for mental illness will be sought in only the most extreme of cases under great distress
- coining, pinching, cupping and massage are all common forms of treatment (see Cambodian)
- the involvement of monks and healers, as well as family, in spirit-based practices is seen throughout illness and health-related aspects of life such as birth and death
- there is an acceptance of fate with the perspective that what happens now is all related to the past (including past life) and whatever one is born to is what one is born to
- many women may feel very uncomfortable with a male provider, especially for any sort of bodily exam

# Liberian

*Language*  
English

*Religion*  
Christianity, Islam

## *Cultural Norms*

- because of a high occurrence of war-related sexual violence against women, care should be taken when asking about sex
- Liberians may have different body-imagery than the "ideal" lean Western type; a "healthy" body is perceived as a stout one and is also associated with wealth and prosperity
- the palm oil that Liberians prefer to cook their food with is high in saturated fats, but also high in vitamins

## *Health Beliefs and Practices*

- the use of indigenous medicines in Liberia is extremely common, and most individuals have some knowledge of certain plants that may be self-applied in times of sickness
- Liberians also have an assortment of indigenous healers, or "native doctors," including herbalists, Muslim holy men, bone specialists, and increasingly, faith healers
- treatments are often complex rituals
- most Liberians see no discrepancy in attributing the etiology of disease to both naturalistic (biological) and supernatural causes
- the question of immediate "cause" may be commonsensical or biological, but the "why did this occur to me" may be attributable to sorcery, taboo violation, or some form of contagion (especially from breeze, cold, water, or dreaming)
- they may commonly combine indigenous and biomedical forms of treatment simultaneously
- condoms are not widely used among Liberians, for reasons of in-country accessibility and/or widely held popular beliefs, such as that the condom may "slip off" during use and cause internal complications
- although the movement to avoid female circumcision is growing, it is quite common in Liberia





# Russian

*Language*  
Russian

*Religion*  
Russian Orthodox

## *Cultural Norms*

- Russians are more likely to be cautious and conservative defenders of the status quo; their cruel climate, harsh history, and skeptical outlook on life has caused Russians to value stability, security, social order, and predictability, avoiding  
expectance that things will always go poorly and they have learned to live with misfortune
- notoriously not on time, but do not necessarily consider themselves late
- Russians rely on a close network of family, friends, and co-workers as protection against the risks and unpredictability of daily life; this extends into the business world as a way of getting things done
- in public and at work, Russians can be brusque and discourteous and they watch what they say; at home, within the intimate circle of family and friends, they feel secure and relaxed, warm and hospitable, sharing and caring, and they speak their minds
- handshaking is a common practice, both on arrival and taking leave; however, shaking hands over a threshold is an omen of bad luck and should never be done
- if you bring flowers, bring only odd numbers
- very long meals and lots of alcohol are common
- drinks are always served with something to eat, even if only a cookie
- hospitality is a strong virtue and an invitation to one's home should be highly valued
- a very generous people who will give you the last piece of bread if they feel you need; and expect the same in return
- Russians can fudge the facts, a national characteristic that in its most common form is an inability to face the facts, particularly when the facts do not reflect favorably on their country
- examples of unmannered, "bad" behavior: wearing coats in public buildings that have a cloakroom, standing with your hands in your pockets, sprawling in chairs, placing feet on tables, crossing legs while seated so as to show the sole of a shoe, sitting with legs spread wide, crossing arms behind the head, draping an arm over the back of a chair, eating lunch on park lawns, whistling at home or on the street, whistling during applause, public displays of affection, telling a Russian that you have to go to the restroom (you should just excuse yourself), and merely lounging or sitting on the steps of a public building

## *Health Beliefs and Practices*

- a common remedy for colds and flu is the use of glass cups that are pressed on a sick person's back and shoulders to ease fever and flu symptoms, often leaving behind bruises and welts
- primary method Russians use to prevent illness is to stay warm; if Russians get the flu, they are more likely to blame it on exposure to a draft than to exposure to a virus
- because Russians so fear cold, they are likely to resist a doctor's suggestion to ice a sore part of their body
- very anxious about x-rays as they are worried about the possible negative effects of the radiation
- common remedies include: herbal teas, boiled milk with honey and heating pads to alleviate symptoms
- some Russians will take a half tablespoon of vodka with sugar to cure a cough, or will put their feet in hot water to ease a sore throat
- physicians are likely to prescribe more than just medication to remedy illness; chiropractics, aromatherapy or massage might be used



# Somali

## *Language*

Somali, Arabic

Italian, English, Russian, Swahili

## *Religion*

Islam (Sunni sect in particular)

## *Cultural Norms*

- strict separation of the sexes
- women are expected to cover their bodies, including hair, when in public
- women in Somali culture have considerable status, and many resettled refugee women are highly educated and held professional positions inside Somalia
- handshakes are appropriate only between men or between women
- the right hand is considered clean, and is used for eating, handshaking, and the like; children are taught early to use only their left hand for hygiene during toilet training
- ritual cleaning of the body, especially before prayers, is dictated by Islam.
- during Ramadan adherents fast from sunrise to sunset (pregnant women, the ill and children are typically exempt)
- consumption of alcohol and pork is prohibited
- not uncommon for people to not know the exact date of their birth (January 1 is a typical date assigned during resettlement process); anniversary of deaths are observed and celebrated
- female circumcision is very common

## *Traditional healing practices*

- herbal medicines are widely used in Somalia, especially for chest and abdominal symptoms
- concepts involving spirits can be viewed as causing illness (example: “evil eye” = excessive praise or attention can attract evil spirits to a infant or child)
- ritualized dancing is used mostly for psychosomatic disorders

## *Prenatal, Childbearing and the Postpartum Period*

- families are typically large
- contraception and abortion are generally not allowed given the strong Muslim belief that pregnancy is a blessing from God and should not be interfered with
- discovering the sex of the fetus is not encouraged as it is God's will and cannot be changed
- prenatal care is sought by refugee Somali women here, although there is a marked preference for female examiners
- most women fear Caesarean section delivery, the perceived method of choice for American women, as it is thought that the surgery may impede subsequent pregnancies and leave the postpartum mother ill
- many women are concerned that episiotomies or even natural childbirth could damage the infibulation (closing of the vulva after female circumcision) and must be repaired
- culturally-sanctioned 40-day abstinence period (“afatanbah”) in the postpartum, when the mother remains in her household and is assisted by female relatives and neighbors
- amulets made from garlic can be worn by the mother and newborn to ward off evil spirits during this period, and incense is burned for the same purpose
- breast-feeding is the norm, sometimes for two years or longer
- infant care includes massages and warm water baths



# Somali Bantu

## *Language*

Mai Mai  
Somali

## *Religion*

Animism  
Islam, Christianity

## *Cultural Norms*

- very resourceful and hard-working
- Bantu have also been described as humble and very hospitable
- known for their capacity to easily adjust to any situation
- average Bantu family consists of between four and eight children
- very strong sense of family and community
- maintain the tribal identities of their ancestral country of origin, identifying themselves strongly with their place of residence (rather than clan or tribal relationships)
- Muslim Bantu tend to be less strict, such as women working in the fields and not wearing the hijab
- generally Bantu society is a patriarchal one in which the father is the main provider and the mother is the general manager of the family's domestic affairs
- in traditional Bantu marriages, the father of the groom pays a dowry to the family of the bride
- traditional ceremonies and ritual dancing is an important aspect of life
- electricity, flush toilets, telephones, and kitchen and laundry appliances are all foreign to most Bantu refugees
- some Bantu are not accustomed to being interviewed and answering questions in a linear, sequential way
- many are not able to give the exact age of their children, and use weather markers or particular events rather than specific dates to answer questions about dates of birth and other family history

## *Health Practices and Beliefs*

- some Bantu apply a heated nail or metal object to an infant's head in the belief that the burns will reduce the swelling of the head in cases where it is unusually large
- they burn small holes in the skin to cure ailments like stomach aches and migraine headaches
- the use of herbs in traditional medical practices is common
- religious healing, such as prayer, is also frequently used
- the Bantu circumcise both males and females

## *Prenatal, Childbearing and the Postpartum Period*

- traditionally, a child is given a name on the third day after birth
- women with babies under 40 days old traditionally stay inside
- in rural areas if a new mother needs to go outside, she will often take a metallic object with her to ward off evil



# Sudanese

## *Language*

Arabic

Dinka, Nuer

many tribal languages and dialects

- literacy is very low, especially as schooling has been disrupted by chronic warfare and strife
- except with the educated, it is not beneficial to use written materials

## *Religion*

Islam (Sunni sect in particular) in the North

Indigenous beliefs and Christian in the South

## *Cultural Norms*

- for Muslim Sudanese men shake hands only with men
- respect should always be afforded to the man as the household head
- however, mothers will typically know more about a child's health and can be addressed directly (especially with Southern families where the rules of interaction are less rigid)
- separation of sexes is common in the Muslim north
- Muslim women from northern Sudan may be reluctant to be examined by a male physician, although many southern Sudanese women will view this as a medical necessity
- Sudanese women will frequently use euphemisms when referring to genitalia or when English is poor in order to avoid the topic completely
- Sorghum is the most common starch, prepared in many different ways. Vegetables and greens, both wild and cultivated, make up a large proportion of the traditional diet, with meats including beef, goat, sheep, freshwater fish, and chicken (although chickens are generally more valued for egg production)
- not uncommon for people to not know the exact date of their birth (January 1 is a typical date assigned during resettlement process)
- in southern Sudan, both male and female circumcision is common among some groups, but typically for hygienic rather than religious or cultural reasons; however, there is much variation even within groups
- in northern Sudan, circumcision for both sexes is widely practiced
- birth control is typically looked down upon and there is great emphasis placed on a woman's ability to bear and raise children

## *Traditional healing practices and Western Medicine*

- herbal remedies are widely used
- parasitism is very common and cures range from boiling leaves and roots which when swallowed expels the worms or, with thread worm infection under the skin, by slowly rolling the emerging worm on a stick until out
- lack of medical care and checkups in Sudan; lack of previous medical documentation if they have had
- routinely share medication for cases with similar symptoms
- generally discontinue taking medicine as soon as symptoms resolve

## *Prenatal, Childbearing and the Postpartum Period*

- first-born boys are afforded special attention
- soft porridge made from sorghum and soups of boiled meat are believed to stimulate breastmilk production
- almost all women breastfeed for about two years; weaning typically occurs when the child is walking
- Childrearing is traditionally the responsibility of all the women in the village; while the father takes considerable pleasure in his children, discipline is the responsibility of the mother



# Ukrainian

## *Language*

Ukrainian  
Russian

## *Religion*

Eastern Orthodox

## *Cultural Norms*

- the traditional domestic unit is the single family
- food plays an important role
- Ukrainians prefer to eat at home, leaving restaurants for special occasions and main meal of the day is dinner
- there still is a traditional labor division by gender: teachers and nurses are mostly women; school administrators and physicians are mostly men
- women in typically female jobs are paid less and promoted more slowly than men
- in traditional society public opinion pressured young people to marry early
- common to have personal space of less than an arm's length in business conversations
- there is a habit of drinking alcohol at business meetings
- Ukrainians observe ancient funeral traditions very faithfully; acollective repast follows funeral services and is repeated on the ninth and fortieth days and then again at six and twelve months
- Ukrainians generally carry themselves in a very polite, civilized manner
- according to convention, when standing at a threshold (doorsill), do not shake hands or offer anything to be taken by the person on the other side
- a young unmarried man or woman should not be seated at a table's corner
- always buy an odd number of flowers as a gift, unless it is a funeral where in that case, it is appropriate to buy an even number
- when passing through the aisles in a theater or elsewhere, it is polite to face the people sitting down
- they are a gregarious people who will often gather in cafes or street markets to socialize; a common practice is for friends to visit each other at home to spend time chatting over tea

## *Health Beliefs and Practices*

- there is a popularity of folk healing that is based on a distrust of standard medicine
- a folk healer's knowledge of natural resources and lore is an ancient cultural heritage
- rituals, prayers, and charms are used by folk healers only as additional elements of healing
- these healers prefer to work individually and let the patient determine the fee
- another type of healer has become popular since the last days of the Soviet Union; these healers hold collective sessions eliciting mass hysteria from their audiences for an admission fee

## *Pregnancy, childbirth, childrearing*

- ancient beliefs regarding child rearing still exist in contemporary Ukraine: a baby's hair is not cut until the first birthday, baptism is seen as a safeguard, and safety pins inside a child's clothing ward off evil spells



# Vietnamese

## *Language*

Vietnamese

## *Religion*

Buddhism

some Christianity

## *Cultural Norms*

- profound respect for elders and those in authority
- rarely confrontational
- belief in a circle of life and fate; preventive care not emphasized
- family unit is more important than an individual
- health decisions and treatment are frequently a family matter

## *Health Care Beliefs and Practices*

- three different ideas for cause of illness: spiritual (curse, sorcery, nonobservance of a religious ethic), humoral imbalance (“hot” vs “cold”), and “western” concepts of causation (germ theory)
- traditional medical practitioners are common
- use of amulets and other forms of spiritual protection is also commonly employed
- traditionally there is no concept of mental illness and Vietnamese are very unlikely to utilize Western-based psychological and psychiatric services; instead most mental health issues may fall into the spiritual health realm and be treated accordingly
- in general, a Vietnamese patient expects a medicine to cure the illness immediately; when medication is not prescribed initially, the patient is likely to seek care elsewhere
- frequently discontinue medication after symptoms disappear
- if symptoms are not perceived, there is no illness
- quite common for Vietnamese patients to amass large quantities of half-used prescription drugs to share with family and friends
- Vietnamese commonly believe that Western pharmaceuticals are developed for Americans and Europeans, and hence dosages are too strong for more slightly built Vietnamese, resulting in self-adjustment of dosages
- the doctor is considered the expert on health; therefore, the expectation is that diagnosis and treatment should happen very quickly
- laboratory procedures involving the drawing of blood may be feared and even resisted by Vietnamese, who believe the blood loss will make them sicker and that the body cannot replace what was lost; surgery is particularly feared for this reason

## *Pregnancy, childbirth, and child-rearing*

- the maternal grandmother generally provides all care for the mother and infant; care is focused on the mother more than the infant
- the mother will go on bedrest for at least one month, if not longer, as it is believed essential for recovery
- showers are forbidden for one month; instead, sponge baths are given
- heavy emphasis on warm drinks and cold drinks are generally avoided
- males are not circumcised
- infants are generally breastfed but bottle feeding is common as well
- it is believed that bad spirits will take the infant away or illness will befall him/her if praises are given to the newborn

