

Equality & Diversity Fact Sheet 2

Considering Cultural Awareness / Religion and Belief of Ethnic Groups in the Provision of Services.

This section provides information about the main ethnic groups and their cultural needs within the community. This information is generalised and is not intended to be prescriptive to each individual, it serves as a guide only. It is important that staff discuss an individual's needs with the person or someone who knows them well so that services may respond accordingly. Needs must not be based on assumption.

Saudi Arabia

The majority of Arabs have emigrated from Saudi Arabia.

Religion

The religion followed by the community is Islam

Language

Arabic is the spoken language.

Dress Code

Traditionally Saudi men wear a long white robe over western clothes which covers the entire body from neck to feet, with sleeves coming down to the wrists. They also cover the head with a head-dress, which is usually made of white or red and white chequered material. The head-dress is held in place by a double black cord called the egal.

Most Saudi women wear black in contrast to the men. Older women are generally dressed from head to toe in black. Younger women may wear modern western clothes at home, but cover themselves with a black cloak called the Abbaya and a scarf to cover their head when they go out in public.

Diet

Arabs follow their Islamic religion on the subject of diet. They only eat Halal meat where animals are slaughtered according to their religious methods. They do not eat pork or pork products.

Traditionally Arabic meals are meat or fish cooked with herbs and spices and served on a bed of rice. Plenty of fresh salad and special flat, circular bread are also very common and eaten with nearly all meals. Dates are popular and form part of the staple diet.

Coffee is made and served with great ritual and ceremony. The drink is strongly flavoured and served in small cups.

Fasting

Arabs fast during the Ramadan period, although the sick can be excused.

Ideas of modesty

Arab women are very modest and do not expose any part of their body in public and they prefer to be examined by female doctors. Women also prefer to wear long examination gowns and nightdresses and will usually want to keep their head covered by wearing a scarf in hospital.

Death

Arabs bury their dead and express grief openly and publicly and relatives will usually make all the arrangements for preparing the body for burial and all other rituals.

Bangladesh

People who originate from Bangladesh, formerly East Pakistan

Religion

The religion followed by the majority of the population is Islam but a small proportion may be Hindus.

Language

Bengali is the spoken language.

Dress Code

Most men wear western clothes outside but some will wear a long shirt over trousers or pyjamas. They also often wear a white cloth cap.

Bangladesh women wear a saree, one end of which can be used as a veil to cover their head.

Diet

Islamic Bangladesh people do not eat pork or pork products and are only allowed to eat Halal meat where animals are slaughtered according to their religious methods. Bangladeshis follow the Hindu faith will be vegetarians and most people from Bangladesh will accept a vegetarian meal to play safe. They find western substitutes for a vegetarian meal unacceptable, for example cheese salad or beans on toast.

Some may not be used to eating with a knife and fork. Most eastern populations use their fingers and spoons for eating.

Fasting

Most patients in hospital are excused from fasting during the month of Ramadan.

Ablution

People from Bangladesh attach great importance to washing in free flowing water and therefore prefer to shower. They find sitting in a bath unacceptable. Washing hands in free-flowing water is essential before eating meals, saying prayers and after visiting the toilet.

Ideas of modesty

Bangladesh women are usually very modest. As their religion encourages them to keep their bodies covered at all times, they may find it embarrassing to wear a short, open gown for examinations so a blanket or a long gown would be helpful to cover their bodies. Due to cultural upbringing, Muslim women prefer to see female doctors, especially when intimate procedures are about to be carried out. Single sex wards or a single room are greatly appreciated.

Prayer

Prayer is an essential part of the Bangladesh way of life and Muslims are required to pray according to a set of rituals five times a day. This requires privacy; therefore either a single room for a patient's use or a room specially set aside for prayers is required.

Death

Islamic Bangladesh people prefer to bury the body as soon as possible. Permission for a post-mortem is only given if legally required. Grief is openly expressed and the family will accept responsibility for making all necessary arrangements. In Muslim countries the mourning period varies from seven days to 40 days and can even be up to three months. During that period no joyful events such as weddings, take place.

Chinese

Chinese people have a rich and varied religious tradition and a complex system of magical beliefs. The younger generations have adapted to western influences but there remains a group of older Chinese who have held on to their cultural beliefs.

Religions

Taoism and Buddhism are the main religions although some Chinese are Christians.

Language

There are several different dialects spoken by Chinese people. They are Cantonese, Chiu-Chow, Hakki, Mandarin and See-Yip. Cantonese is the most commonly spoken.

Dress code

Most Chinese wear western clothes, but older females sometimes wear trousers and tunics.

Diet

The Chinese believe that in order to be healthy, equilibrium between hot and cold needs to be maintained, be it in the form of food, herbs or medicines. Foods are classified as hot or cold. Therefore, in order to restore balance, the Chinese may adhere to a special diet. Rice is the staple food of the Chinese people which is eaten with a variety of meat, fish and vegetable dishes. Chinese meals have greatly influenced western eating habits.

Ideas of Modesty

In general Chinese women are very shy and modest and prefer to be examined by a female doctor although medical care takes priority should female doctors not be available.

Death

Funeral and mourning customs vary widely amongst the Chinese, depending upon their beliefs. Some are buried, while others are cremated. Individual family wishes are respected. Relatives grieve, dressed in white or beige clothes if they follow the traditional religions, but black if they are Christians.

India – Gujarat

The two main centres of emigration from India are the states of Gujarat and Punjab. The religion, culture and way of life of both groups are markedly different. The Gujarati community comes from the state of Gujarat which is on the North West coast of India.

Religion

The religion followed by the community is mainly Hinduism, but a small proportion is Muslims.

Language

Hindi is the administrative language of India, but Gujarati is the first spoken language.

Dress code

Most men wear western clothes. At home or in hospital they may wear a long white shirt or pyjamas. Women wear a saree over a short blouse and underskirt and the midriff is usually left bare.

Bindi

A coloured spot on the forehead indicates whether a woman is married or not. A red spot means the woman is married. Different colours to match an outfit are used by young, single girls. A black spot is worn by widows.

Diet

The diet varies considerably, depending upon the person's religion. Hindus place great significance on spiritual diet. They believe that it is wrong to take life – therefore they are strict vegetarians. They will not accept food which has come into contact with prohibited food. Rice is the staple food which is eaten in combination of vegetables, salads and pickles. People from India may prefer to eat their traditional meals with their fingers or a spoon.

Fasting

Fasting is considered a spiritual and physical benefit and is a personal decision. Most patients in hospital do not fast.

Ablution

People from Gujarat attach great importance to cleanliness and prefer a daily shower. A bath is considered unhygienic.

Ideas of Modesty

Women prefer to wear long gowns and nightdresses as they find exposing their legs embarrassing. Out of choice, women would prefer to be examined by a female doctor.

Death

Hindus believe in reincarnation and cremate their dead as they believe that the soul leaves the body at death. Muslims believe in burial. They prefer to bury the body as soon as possible. Permission for a post-mortem is only given if legally required. Grief is openly expressed and the family will accept responsibility for making all necessary arrangements.

India – Hindus

The Indian name for the sub-continent is 'Hindustan' meaning land of Hindus.

Religion

Hinduism is the main religion of India.

Language

Hindi is the administrative language of the country, but Urdu is also understood by most.

Dress Code

The male costume of the sub-continent is a long jacket with a high collar which buttons down the front and worn over western style trousers. However, most men wear western style clothes in hospital. Men will usually wear long shirts over pyjamas. The female national costume of the country is a saree, which is worn over a short blouse and an underskirt and the midriff is usually left bare.

Bindi

This coloured spot on the forehead may be worn by married women.

Diet

Hindus place great significance on a spiritual diet. They have a great love of animals because of their belief in reincarnation, and for this reason they do not believe in killing animals. Hindus believe the cow is the most sacred animal – the killing of a cow is one of the greatest religious crimes. Hindus are normally very strict vegetarians. They will not accept food which has come into contact with prohibited food. Rice and chapattis are both eaten with various vegetables, pulses and yoghurts. Pickles and salads are commonly used as side dishes.

Fasting

Fasting is considered to give both spiritual and physical benefits and is a personal choice. Sick and elderly people are not expected to fast.

Ablutions

Like most Asians, Hindus attach great importance to personal cleanliness. They prefer showers to baths and washing hands in free-flowing water before meals and prayers is essential.

Toilet paper on its own is not considered hygienic; therefore water must be available in the toilet. Washing hands after using a bedpan is also considered essential.

Ideas of modesty

Hindu women prefer to wear long gowns and nightdresses as they find exposing their legs embarrassing. The older female population prefers to be examined by a female doctor. However, medical care takes priority over the availability of a female doctor in an emergency. Older women will not wear short, open-back gowns.

Death

Hindus believe in cremation, preferably before the next sunset after death or as soon as possible. If the body has to be left overnight a light must be left in the room throughout the dark hours. After the cremation ceremony the ashes are collected and scattered over running water like a river. The wish of most Hindus will be to have their ashes scattered over the River Ganges, 'The Holy River'.

Relatives will fully participate in making all arrangements.

A child under five years of age is usually buried rather than cremated.

Pakistan

People who originate from Pakistan.

Religion

The religion followed by the population is usually Islam.

Language

Urdu is the administrative language of Pakistan; Pakistanis can usually speak Punjabi, Urdu or Hindi.

Dress code

Men usually wear western clothes outside the home and pyjamas with a long shirt at home or in hospital. Women from Pakistan dress very modestly, covering their body completely with the exception of their face. They usually wear a long tunic over loose trousers and a long scarf. When in the presence of mixed company, they may cover their head with a scarf.

Diet

People from Pakistan do not eat pork or pork products. They prefer Halal meat where animals are slaughtered according to their religious methods. Most will accept a vegetarian meal to play safe. Chapatti, which is made out of wheat, is the staple food and rice is not uncommon. These staples are eaten with highly spiced meat, fish and vegetable dishes. Salads are eaten with a meal as a side dish. People from Pakistan find western substitutes for a vegetarian meal unacceptable, for example cheese salad or beans on toast. Some may not be used to eating with a knife and fork. Most eastern populations use their fingers and spoons for eating.

Fasting

Most patients in hospital are temporarily excused from fasting during Ramadan.

Ablution

People from Pakistan attach great importance to washing in free-flowing water and therefore prefer a shower. They find sitting in a bath unacceptable. Washing hands in free-flowing water before eating meals, saying prayers and after visiting the toilet is considered essential.

Ideas of modesty

Women from Pakistan are generally very modest. As their religion encourages them to keep their bodies covered at all times, they may find it embarrassing to wear a short, open gown for special medical investigations. A blanket or a long gown could be helpful to cover their bodies. Most women also prefer to keep their head covered with a scarf. Due to their cultural upbringing, Muslim women prefer to see female doctors, especially when intimate procedures are to be carried out. Single sex wards or a single room are greatly appreciated.

Prayer

Prayer is an essential part of the Pakistani life and Muslims are required to pray according to a set of rituals, five times a day. This requires privacy; therefore either a single room for a patient's use or a room specially set aside for prayers is required.

Death

Muslims prefer to bury the body as soon as possible. Permission for a post-mortem is only given if legally required. Grief is openly expressed. The family will accept responsibility for making all necessary arrangements. In Muslim countries, the mourning period varies from seven days to 40 days and can even be up to three months. During that period, no joyful events such as weddings, take place.

Rastafarians

The Rastafarian movement was started in Jamaica in the 1930s by Marcus Garvey, a black leader who said that an African King would save and help black people.

The original name of Ethiopia's Emperor Haile Selassie was Ras Tafari. The Rastafarian faith is named after him. Rastafarians believe in one true God, Haile Selassie, that they will all return to African, their true home, and that they will be free.

Rastafarian way of life

Rastafari is a way of life, not a religion. They have many links with the Christian and Jewish faiths. Rastafarians are taught never to cut their hair, as it is a symbol of strength. The long braids are called dreadlocks which represent the lion's mane and the hair of an African warrior.

Language

The language used by the Rastafarian is based on a Jamaican patois. Sentences are constructed with little use of verbs and other non-Rastafarians may not understand the speech.

Dress Code

Rastafarians usually wear ordinary western clothes. On holy days, white clothes are often worn which are made in an African style. Certain colours such as green, red, gold and black have a special significance. A traditional Rastafarian hat, called a tam, is worn by some men and women to keep their hair covered.

Diet

Most Rastafarians do not eat meat or salt. Many do not eat fish, eggs or dairy products. Some do not consume milk or coffee and prefer fresh vegetables and fruit. They believe that a healthy diet is an important part of a healthy lifestyle.

Family planning

The majority of Rastafarians do not believe in family planning.

Community Hall

Rastafarians do not always have special buildings, so they conduct their religious meetings weekly in a local Community Hall. There is always music which accompanies the hymns and songs. Rastafarian music is called reggae. Through reggae they sing about their beliefs and their lives.

Chaplain

Meetings are led by the Chaplain who has a special duty to visit the sick and infirm.

Death

Rastafarians believe in the resurrection of the soul after death but not of the flesh. Generally speaking, burial is the preferred choice but some may choose to be cremated. The funeral service is very simple and is usually attended by family and friends only.

Romani and Traveller

There are between 250,000 and 300,000 British Romani and Travellers in the UK. Eastern European Romani in the UK are mainly from Romania, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. They began to come to the UK in large numbers after 1990.

Religion

The traditional Romani belief system is pantheistic (believing in many gods), and based on magic forces and taboos which are believed to preserve the true Romany way of life. For the most part, Romani people have also adapted to the religion of their country of residence. They may be Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox,

Protestant or Muslim. Many carry out religious rituals in their home rather than in churches or mosques. As well as practising formal religion, many Romani people have faith in the supernatural. The best known Romani festival is the pilgrimage to Saintes Maries de le Mar in France held between the 24 -26 May.

Language

The Romani language is derived from old Punjabi or Hindi. There are different dialects in different countries, but a core of common words. There is no universal written Romani language. Literacy and numeracy are rare; there is a strong oral tradition of transmitting information from one generation to the next. The majority of Romani people also speak the language of the country where they have settled or spend most of their time. Other Travellers speak English, but not all are literate.

Customs

There are many customs among Romani people concerning cleanliness (mochadi). For example, food, dishes and cutlery are never placed anywhere where people may sit, stand or work. Washing one's hands is very important; the hands are washed prior to handling food or dishes. Things that can occasionally be put on the floor, such as handbags and toys, are never put on the table. Washing in standing water, such as a bath, is taboo and a shower is preferred.

It is normal to take off shoes when entering a house. It is traditionally a very serious offence to refuse hospitality when it is offered but these days is less of a problem if the guest is not Romani.

Dress Code

There is a strict code for married Romani women, who must cover all parts of the body except the face and hands. Traditionally women wear two or three long skirts, one on top of the other, to prevent accidentally showing their feet or bare skin. Men generally wear western style clothing.

Diet

Romani people eat most foods as long as they are prepared in the traditional way: washed in running water, prepared by women who were suitably dressed and not touched by a woman whilst being served.

Family structure

Togetherness of the family is important. In a balanced family the man and the woman do not compete against one another. The man is the head of the family and the woman is the heart of it: both are important for its well-being. Men make decisions on behalf of the family. It is typical for all the members of the community to take part in the upbringing of children. Children tend to have a lot of knowledge of people and human nature from quite an early age and learn to deal with the difficulties they may face. European Romani men may have problems accepting advice or instructions from female professionals. Traditionally marriage takes place when the girl is between 12 and 15 and the boy 14 – 20.

Naming

Romani children are normally given names from the country where they are born. Women change their name on marriage, and children have their father's surname.

Strangers should ask for the person's full name: if they give two names, they should be addressed as Mr or Mrs with the second name as the surname. If they only give one name, that should be used without the title Mr or Mrs.

Health Care

Many British Romani and Travellers in the past have used the Accident and Emergency Department as a way to access health care. This may be through lack of knowledge of the area, or because GP practices have refused to register them. For European Romani health problems are considered to be punishment for infringing the traditional way of life. People may try their own traditional medicine involving magic rituals and herbal remedies before going to a doctor.

Due to modesty, some female Travellers prefer to be treated by a woman. European Romani women will not remove any clothing in front of a male professional and will not discuss medical problems in front of any male family members. Open discussion with the patient is important. If you notice that the patient is concerned by something, try to encourage them to discuss their needs and fears. In general, male Travellers do not mind whether it is a male or female professional they see. They do not feel comfortable on their own and usually they can be accompanied by one or more escorts during treatments and journeys. All treatments and procedures should be explained by healthcare staff thoroughly. Travellers have difficulty in keeping appointments for differing reasons such as not keeping a diary, cultural differences, literacy problems or sudden evictions.

Death

Death is a strong and deep experience for Travellers. Sometimes a family will move to another place so as not to be reminded of the deceased. Close relatives of the deceased will make the arrangements for the funeral. Bigger numbers however, may arrive to visit the dying or deceased. The extended family and friends will meet as a group prior to and during the funeral. Personal items may be placed with them. Family and community meals are organised as offerings to the spirits of the dead.

Somalia

People from Somalia - the horn of Africa.

Religion

The religion practiced by the people of Somalia is usually Islam and they are expected to pray five times a day.

Language

The language spoken by the people is Somali which had no written form until 1972. For this reason, older Somali people are unable to read or write. The English alphabet is used for the written form.

Dress Code

Men usually wear western traditional clothes and will sometimes wear a white cloth cap as well.

Somali women wear long gowns called the Juba, which cover them from neck to ankle. They also wear a scarf to keep their head covered.

Diet

People from Somalia do not generally eat pork or pork products. They prefer Halal meat where the animal has been slaughtered according to Islamic religion. Alcohol is strictly prohibited.

Men tend to chew gat which is part of a plant grown in Africa. Its effects on the individual may be similar to alcohol, such as hangovers and headaches. It is addictive and the desire to chew can lead to restlessness.

Fasting

During the religious month of Ramadan, Somalis will fast from sunset. However, young, elderly and sick people can be excused if necessary.

Ablutions

Somalis attach great importance to cleanliness. They prefer showers to baths because of their belief in washing in free-flowing water. They require water after visiting the toilet as paper on its own is not considered adequate. They wash their hands before they say their prayers.

Prayer

Prayer is a very important part of the way of life. Somalis are required to pray five times a day. If possible a single room should be provided to meet their religious needs, especially if the wards cater for both sexes.

Ideas of Modesty

Islamic religion teaches high moral values which include:

- The separation of men and women in public places;
- Women to keep their bodies covered, apart from their face, at all times.

Somali women will not wear short, open gowns. Therefore long gowns should be made available. They may also refuse to be examined by male doctors.

Death

Somalis prefer to bury their dead as soon as possible. Permission for a post-mortem is only given if legally required. Grief is openly expressed. The family will accept responsibility for making all necessary arrangements. The mourning period varies from seven days to 40 days and can even be up to three months. During that period, no joyful events such as weddings, take place.

Vietnam

Half the population of Vietnam is of Chinese origin. Therefore their customs and beliefs are very similar to those of the Chinese.

Religion

Vietnam has no official religion and the population are followers of Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism or a combination of these.

Language

Vietnamese is the official language, but there are two different dialects which may be spoken, depending on whether the individual comes from North or South Vietnam.

Dress Code

Most Vietnamese wear western cloths.

Diet

Like the Chinese, the Vietnamese hold the belief that in order to be healthy equilibrium between hot and cold needs to be maintained. Their meals are rice-based with plenty of vegetables and fish dishes. Meals can vary according to different religious beliefs. Older Vietnamese people may not be used to eating with knives and forks and, therefore, alternatives need to be considered.

Ideas of Modesty

In general, Vietnamese women are very shy and modest. They prefer to be examined by a female doctor if possible, but medical care takes priority over the availability of female doctors. Women may find wearing short, open backed gowns unacceptable.

Death

Funeral and mourning customs vary widely according to religion and belief. Individual family wishes must be respected.