

Exploring the Afghan Culture

Background



Afghanistan is located in Central-South Asia and is bordered by Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and China. The country is primarily mountainous, with plains in the north and southwest. Kabul is the capital and largest city. It is one of the world's least developed countries, and the effects of wars in recent decades have contributed to poverty, child malnutrition, and high levels of terrorism. In recent decades, Afghans have experienced changes in occupation, with the Taliban government returning to power. In addition, Afghanistan has been a large opioid producer.

Traditions and Customs

Afghans share common cultural traditions but can differ from region to region. Family is central in Afghan society, and families are often patriarchal, with multiple generations living together. Families often live in mud-brick houses, and villages typically have a headman, a master for managing water resources for the community, and a religious teacher. Many follow Pashtun culture, which includes the key tenets of providing hospitality, sanctuary to those seeking refuge, and revenge for the shedding of blood. Carpet weaving is an ancient Afghan practice with intricate designs that express feelings.



Holidays and Celebrations

Afghanistan's official New Year occurs yearly at the vernal equinox and is celebrated with music and dance. Like polo, Buzkashi tournaments are a national sport with fierce competition, where horse-mounted players try to put a goat carcass in a goal. Yalda is celebrated on the eve of the winter solstice, in late December, when families gather to recite poetry and eat fruit. Because Afghanistan is predominantly Muslim, Islamic events and festivals, such as *Ramadan*, *Ashura*, and *Eid al-Fitr*, are widely celebrated with traditional foods. Afghanistan's National Independence Day is celebrated on August 19 each year.



Education and Literacy

Dari and Pashto are the official languages of Afghanistan. Due to limited education opportunities, the literacy rate is about 55% for males and 30% for females.



Health Disparities

The average life expectancy is around 60 years, with a high infant and maternal mortality rate. The disability rate is also high as a result of war injuries.

Traditional Food Practices

Afghans are generally quite hospitable and welcome guests with lots of food. Afghan cuisine is largely based on major crops, such as wheat, corn, barley, and rice. Meals also include staples such as natural fruits, vegetables, and dairy products. Afghanistan is known for its high-quality pomegranates, grapes, and sweet melons. Tea is also a favorite drink among Afghans. A common diet consists of naan (flatbread), yogurt, rice, and meat. *Kabuli palaw* is the national dish of Afghanistan, which consists of steamed rice mixed with caramelized carrots and dry raisins, marinated lamb meat, and garnished with almonds and pistachios. Saffron may also be added to the rice or as a garnish. Onions, tomatoes, and garlic are also widely used in Afghan cuisine, but eating habits may have changed as they acculturate in the US.



Kabuli palaw

Considerations for WIC Educators and Counselors

- Afghan families are generally large and multigenerational, as it is customary for wives to move in with the husband's family.
- Most families have an average of four children, and neighbors and family are involved in child-rearing.
- Close friends and family may hug or kiss on the cheeks, while others may greet with a handshake. A standard greeting is "Salam," which may be appreciated.
- Afghans eat three family-style meals daily from a communal platter while sitting on cushions spread on the floor.
- Alcohol and pork are always avoided, and older children and adults fast during *Ramadan*. Pregnant and lactating persons are not expected to fast.
- Afghan postpartum practices combine traditional beliefs and customs. The first 40 days after childbirth are a time of bonding with the baby and resting while the family provides support.
- Babies are often wrapped tightly to feel secure, and nursing is encouraged from the first six months up to two years.
- Solids are introduced at about six months of age with mashed vegetables, fruits, lentils, eggs, and meat. Thicker textures are gradually introduced, and babies eat with the family.



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