

Karen Culture in MN - At a Glance

Common cultural norms of the Karen population residing in Minnesota.



Traditional Beliefs on Health and Medicine

- Karen people do not have surnames. They normally address each other by terms that denote kinship.
- While many Karen hold traditional beliefs about health and illness, they tend to believe that Western medicine can cure anything.
- There is a feeling that if a person isn't sick now, they don't need insurance.
- Older generations are more accepting of doctors, medicine, and treatment because it is socially expected that they become weaker and ill with age.

Gender

- Men and women are considered equal in this community.
- It is more likely that men work while women care for the home.

Personal Space & Social Gestures

- Public displays of anger and other negative emotions are considered shameful.
- Although Karen people don't engage in public displays of affection, women are often physically affectionate with each other. They will often hold hands with or hug a female visitor.
- Unmarried women and men do not touch. However, handshaking is common when greeting Westerners, regardless of sex.
- People take off their shoes when entering a home. Walking on the floor with shoes on is considered disrespectful.
- Karen people quickly become very close and comfortable with each other.



Familial Structure

- Family, community, and elders are highly valued and respected.
- Caring for the poor and disadvantaged is very important.
- The youngest child, either son or daughter, is responsible for staying home and caring for parents until their death, they then receive the home.
- A Karen family would ideally have a balance between the sexes and have an equal number of boys and girls; however, this is not expected.
- For marriage, the groom's parents and elders must visit the bride's family and convey the marriage request. The marriage is held at church.
- Families eat together, but the eldest gets served first.
- Turning 18 is not considered a sign of adulthood, marriage is.

Communication Styles

- Communication is often indirect. Rather than coming straight to the point, they may discuss other subjects first and may say "no" as a demonstration of modesty.
- Karen people avoid confrontation and usually do not like talking about themselves.
- There is difficulty making and keeping appointments because in their home country it was never expected and people could just make impromptu visits either to friends, doctors, family, etc.
- Items are given to elders using the right hand as a sign of respect.

Religion

- Most Karen in the U.S. are Evangelical Christians.
- A small percent are Buddhists and Animists.
- Many avoid discussing religion because it is something that they could disagree on.

The above information was provided by the following organizations and individuals: ECHO Spokesperson Moo Zar and <http://www.dictatorwatch.org/articles/karenintro.html> and Stratis Health.

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

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