

**N432 Culture Report: Western Africa**

Davis Coffey

Lakeview College of Nursing

N432: Maternal-Newborn Care

Prof. Jodi Bohlen

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Western Africa consists of sixteen culturally diverse countries (Udofia, 2021). Among cultures, language also varies between areas and countries. Some languages are Hausa in Nigeria, Akan in Ghana, Wolof in Senegal, Bambara in Mali, and Mandinka in The Gambia. Art and music are also very prevalent in Western African countries. Many types of drums are used to make music, and art consists of sculpture-making and basket weaving. The two primary religions in Western Africa are Christianity and Islam. Family and religion play a vital role in the life of a native of Western Africa.

Islam and Christianity are the two most common religions in Western Africa (Udofia, 2021). Natives of Nigeria and Ghana are typically Christian, while other countries such as Niger and Mali are typically Islamic. A recent study completed in Saudi Arabia with Islamic individuals showed that most Islamic male individuals are okay with having a male doctor take care of their immediate family members, such as their wife or sister (Alqufly et al., 2019). Western African Christians typically have no issue with using a male or female provider; however, this is based on the individual and their own preferences (Udofia, 2021).

Concerning religion, healing beliefs and practices can be herbal, medical, or spiritual (Mokgobi, 2018). Pain is commonly viewed as just a natural process of disease. In some communities, though, it can be considered a religious punishment. Healing techniques can be spiritual by an elder or religious leader using prayers, blessed water, and religious practices. Herbs and other traditional medicines can also be used. Home births are very common in Western Africa. A home birth attendant, who is usually an older woman, helps in this process. The majority of Western African individuals utilize a hospital setting when it comes to the birthing process.

Family is a very important part of a native Western African individual (Udofia, 2021). Typically, extended and intermediate families live close together, if not in the same household. Elders of villages and communities are respected and looked upon for advice and decision-making. They can live with families if they desire, but modernization has led to this happening less.

With there being many different languages, communication is an essential part of a Western African native's life (Udofia, 2021). Men and women can speak freely to each other. Depending on the individual's religion, women can usually speak for themselves and make their own decisions. Eye contact is arguably the most important nonverbal form of communication when it comes to conversation with other individuals.

A Western African diet is much different than that in the United States. The African Black Pepper is used frequently in Western Africa (specifically Nigeria) for its medicinal benefits and flavor (Okpiabhele & Aihokha, 2022). No food is necessarily eaten after the birth of a child; however, foods are restricted and eaten during pregnancy (Ramulondi et al., 2021). For instance, in Ghana, eggs are typically avoided by the pregnant mother for fear of having the fetus become too fat. Though there are no restrictions on the majority of Western African individuals, their diets can cause hospitalization due to malnutrition and bodily functions. An example of this is in Southern Africa; anemia was prevalent among 49% of infants.

The most important value when it comes to childbearing in Western Africa is family. Many women who give birth at home do it for economic reasons and to be closer to family (Ramulondi et al., 2021). Respect is another very important value in Western Africa. Respect for elders and obedience towards them and their spiritual leader is crucial in being a part of the community. Elders will give advice and counseling to those going through prenatal times

(Udofia, 2021). The last value used by Western African natives is based on their faith. Western Africa is known to be a widely religious region compared to the rest of the world (Udofia, 2021). Many times, mothers will name their newborns after something of meaning. An example of this would be naming a newborn Abasiediuwem, which means God is life.

The three main things to do when taking care of a patient from Western Africa are to assess their religion, their diet, and their preferences. Religious preferences can determine what the patient or the patient's family wants in regard to care. Some Islamic individuals may not be okay with a male provider taking care of their wife or sister. While the typical Western African diet has few restrictions, some do not. Western Africans of the Islamic faith may not be able to consume things such as pork or gelatin (Alqufly et al., 2019). That is why it is crucial to make sure the religion is documented and checked with the patient. Lastly, Western Africans, or any individual, may have preferences that are different than most. All individuals have preferences on ways to take medications, foods, lifestyles, etc. As nurses, the patient comes first, and with them, their culture.

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