

FILIPINO ETHNICITY AND BACKGROUND

Communication

- The word 'Filipina' refers to women from the Philippines; 'Filipino' refers to people from the Philippines in general, or men in particular.
- Many Filipinos may be familiar with American English. They may not be as familiar with the Australian accent or Australian idioms.
- Tagalog (Filipino) is the national language. Filipinos also speak a number of other languages; the most common are Ilocano and Visayan. A Visayan dialect, Cebuano, is widely spoken among the Filipino communities in Australia.
- Doctors and nurses are generally highly respected for their knowledge, education and expertise and few Filipinos will question them.
- Filipino people, especially from rural areas, may not like to voice their concerns to health professionals.

Filipinos generally consider it impolite to stare or look directly at people with whom they are talking. This should not be mistaken for mistrust or lack of confidence.

- An important cultural value of Filipinos is hiya, which can be translated roughly as 'embarrassment', 'shame' or 'face'. It has been described as a kind of anxiety, a fear of being left exposed,

unprotected and unaccepted. Having hiya means that people may feel very sensitive to social slight, and as a result they may be very careful of the feelings of others.

Health related beliefs and practices

- In the Philippines, biomedical services may be supplemented by herbalists and other healers who specialise in herbal remedies, massage or healing by spiritual means, through power derived from devotion to Christian saints.
- People may use the concepts of 'hot' and 'cold' to classify and explain illnesses. Foods, medicines and temperature/weather conditions are classified according to their hot or cold qualities and their effects on the body. Sudden changes in body temperature may be perceived as harmful.
- Beliefs about the relationship of water and bathing to health can differ substantially. Bathing can be associated with a draining of strength from the body, particularly if a person is already ill.

Pregnancy

- Women often have children within a year of getting married in Australia.
- According to some Filipino beliefs, cravings for food during pregnancy should be satisfied.
- Some pregnant women may avoid eating black foods to avoid the birth of an infant with a dark skin tone.
- Some pregnant women may place great emphasis on being tidy and beautiful, believing that these practices will influence the beauty of their child.
- Unpleasant emotions experienced by pregnant women may be blamed for causing birthmarks.

Population in Australia:
120,539 people

Population in
Queensland: 18,705
people

Population in Brisbane:
9,870 people

Gender ratio: 54.8
males per 100 females

Median age: 40.3 years

Age	%
0-14	7.1
15-24	13.4
25-44	40.9
45-64	33.6
≥ 65	4.9

The main languages
are Tagalog, Filipino
and English

Most Philippines-born
people who speak a
language other than
English at home are
proficient in English

Most Philippines-born
people in Australia are
Christian, primarily
Catholic and
Pentecostal

A high proportion of migrants have come to Australia to marry Australians or to join Australian husbands. Others migrated to join family members, or to escape political oppression under the Marcos regime. Many of those in this latter group have been sponsored to come to Australia by relatives.

The Filipino community is well established. There are many ethno-cultural and religious community organisations operating in the state. The Filipino Community Council of Queensland is the peak body for Filipino community organisations.

Birth

- The most common birthing position is to lie down. Some women may prefer a squatting position.
- In some regions of the Philippines, it is believed that putting squash leaves on the abdomen of a labouring woman can facilitate labour.
- Some women believe that drinking coconut water can facilitate a fast labour.
- Some fathers may prefer to be close to their labouring wife, so they can bury the placenta.

After birth

- In some regions a father is responsible for the burial of the placenta. He usually buries the placenta very quickly, because the burial of the placenta indicates the end of the labour, and therefore the end of pain and blood loss experienced by the labouring woman. The placenta should be offered to the postpartum woman or the father.
- Traditional custom in the Philippines dictates that women should not bathe for about ten days after giving birth and during menstruation. Bathing during these times is seen as a cause of ill health and rheumatism in old age. Sponge baths and steam baths could be used as alternatives. Women may object to having a shower immediately after giving birth.
- Traditionally, after labour, women wear heavy clothes or wrap themselves in blankets to prevent exposure to 'cold' and 'wind'.
- Some Filipinas bind their abdomen tightly, believing that this practice helps to prevent bleeding and helps the uterus to retract.
- New and lactating mothers are often given rice porridge (rice boiled soft to a consistency halfway between soup and puree). This may be served with sweet, salty or spicy accompaniments. Soup made of meat and vegetables is also believed to help promote lactation.
- Women fear what is referred to as a 'relapse' if they become active too soon. This involves extreme tiredness, weakness and chronic headache.
- In the Philippines when a woman has a baby, she usually rests while her relatives do all the housework and cooking. Many women can have difficulty coping with the daily routine of looking after a baby in a country where they may not have the support of an extended family.
- Postpartum women may be massaged with coconut oil, with the aim of restoring their lost health, expelling blood clots from the uterus, returning the uterus into a normal position, and promoting lactation.
- Some women perform various practices for the purpose of 'drying out' the womb. For example, 'mother roasting' can involve lying beside a stove for up to 30 days, squatting over a burning clay stove, sitting on a chair over a heated stone or a pot with steaming water, or bathing in smoke from smouldering leaves. In Australia, these practices may be replaced by hot water bottles and placing a postpartum woman close to a heater.

Infant care

- Infants and small children are thought to be susceptible to fright, which causes crying and trembling. A traditional belief is that an infant may be hexed by an admiring glance, but many Filipinos in Australia are likely to be ambivalent or doubtful about such beliefs.
- Colds and rashes may be accepted as natural in young children, although some may be regarded as serious. In rural Philippines, women will often take a child with a cough to a traditional healer. Filipino women should be educated to contact health services if they notice any unusual symptoms.
- Traditionally, parents sleep with their children or have their children sleep with another relative, and do not separate them when they are ill.

Infant feeding

- Colostrum is usually considered 'dirty milk' and discarded. Some women may be reluctant to feed colostrum to their newborn, despite encouragement by health professionals.
- Breast feeding on demand is normal practice for rural Filipinas. Women may adopt mixed feeding because of the demands of work outside the home.
- Some mothers believe that a mother's mood can be transmitted through breast milk and therefore do not feed if they feel sorrow or anger. Breast feeding may also cease if the child contracts diarrhoea, in case the illness becomes worse.
- Of the 459 Philippines-born women who delivered in Queensland Health facilities in 2006, at the time of discharge, 78% (358) exclusively breastfed, 12% (55) breastfed and formula fed and 10% (45) exclusively formula fed.

References

Cabigon, J.V.

1996. Use of health services by Filipino women during childbearing episodes. In P.L. Rice & L. Manderson (Eds.), *Maternity and reproductive health in Asian societies* (pp. 83-102). Chur, Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers/Gordon and Breach.

Dixon, G.

1992. Colostrum avoidance and early infant feeding in Asian societies. *Asia Pacific Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 1, 225-229.

The University of Queensland.

1998. *Cultural diversity: a guide for health professionals*. Brisbane: The University of Queensland.