



Introduction to Refugees from Burma & their Cultures

The Background of Refugees, Refugee
Services, and Cultural Experiences

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Refugee: Definition

A person who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of ***race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion***, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country"



Where is Burma? Myanmar?

- Bordering Thailand and Laos(East), China (North), India and Bangladesh (West)
- 50 million population
- South East Asia



Why are there Refugees from Burma?

- **Political Conflicts**
 - Arm Struggle for self-determination
 - Pro-Democracy Struggle
- **Human Rights Violations**
(Military Gov. troops' attacks on civilians)
 - Mass Murder, Rape, Torture, Forced Labor, etc.
 - Ethnic Cleansing, Internally Displaced Person
 - Arbitrary Imprisonment (Political Prisoners)
- **Life In Constant Danger and Fear**
 - Land mine, Shoot on Sight, D

Violent Crack Down on pro-democracy protesters

- **CRUSHED**



Human Rights Violations - Dismantled Life in Burma

- **DISPLACED**



Leaving Home Behind

Refugee Background



Refugee Camp in Thailand

Latest Record (TBBC registered in camps)

- Population in 10 Refugee Camps: 145,713
- Internally Displaced (8 camps): 19,518

UNHCR Statistical Snapshot

- 406,669 Refugees
- 67,290 Internally Displaced Persons
- 22,583 Political Asylum Seekers



Burmese Refugee Camp in Thailand



Burmese Refugee Camp in Malaysia



Refugee Resettlement

- UNHCR unsuccessful in negotiation with the Burmese government for refugees repatriation (over a decade of attempts)
 - No safety for refugees to return due to ongoing arm conflicts
- Thailand not signatory to UN Refugee Convention and regards refugees as “temporarily displaced person” without official recognition as a refugee
- Long Term Resolution
 - Resettle to 3rd countries (European countries, Australia, US)
 - *1% of refugees world wide resettled to 3rd countries
 - * 12,986 out of 16,849 Resettled in 2009 arrived in US(UNHCR-Thailand)
- Refugees resettled to US are; “admitted indefinitely as a refugee pursuant to Sec. 207 of the INS Act” and “Employment Authorized”

Exodus Refugee Immigration, Inc. (Exodus)

- Non-profit, independent, non-sectarian 501(c)(3) refugee resettlement agency
- Founded in 1981
- Help refugees establish self-sufficient lives in freedom and sanctuary for themselves and their families in Indiana.
- Serve refugees from 15 countries
- 500-700 individuals arrive in Indianapolis each year under the services of Exodus

Exodus Refugee Immigration, Inc. (Exodus)

- Services include
 - Reception and Placement
 - (Basic Needs: welcome, housing, health screening, school)
 - Language and Cultural Orientation
 - Employment and Matching Grant assistance
 - Health Services (management)
 - Working with refugees and medical service providers
 - Volunteers & Mentors

Cultural Experiences (Medical)

- Diverse Cultures within Burma
 - language, Geography-urban rural differences, practices (med),
- Most refugees are afraid to ask doctor **questions** /afraid to discuss
 - Doctor knows & decides what is best
 - Doctor asks patient questions in diagnosing illness
- Understanding what to do (show steps, perceptual differences)
 - Saying yes even if they don't know/understand
- Responsive/Not understanding concept of preventative health
 - Dangerous trust (forgot what the **surgery** was for after the procedure)
 - Parents love and care about their children but still responsive
- **Attitudes** toward medical treatment can be shocking
 - Death from lack of medical treatment may be so common that it becomes normal part of life
 - Underestimating symptoms (only when it gets worse will I tell the doctor)
 - Laugh away serious disease (hypertention-medication)
 - Expensive: I would rather die than pay because I have no money
 - Pay first in Burma

Cultural Experiences (Medical)

- Pointing things with foot considered rude
- Making eye contact may be considered disrespectful, especially younger person towards older individual.
- Qualify for Medicaid
 - Medication over the counter/ER vs.
- Some elderly clients cannot read or write and never knew their date of birth – ID verification for medical service can be unsuccessful
 - if you provide service only after he/she states their date of birth for ID confirmation
- Medications over the counter without doctor's prescription (wait for Doctor's appointment vs. ER)

A Clinic



Sources

- Thai Burma Border Consortium
- UNHCR (Thailand)
- Exodus Refugee Immigration
- Burma Campaign (UK, US)
- Karen Human Rights Group
- Free Burma Ranger