

Chin State Cultural Profile

PLEASE NOTE: This profile provides an overview of some of the cultural information relating to the groups of Chin people who live in the Eastern Region of Melbourne. This description may not apply to all people as individual experiences may vary. However, this profile can be used as a guide to some of the issues that may concern your clients.

Introduction:

The Chin people are a relatively new group arriving in Melbourne from Myanmar (Burma). The Chin State is located in Western Burma, and the capital of the state is Hakha. The Chin State borders Bangladesh and India.

Due to the intense persecution experienced by many Chin people from the government, many have fled their homes in hope of refuge. Tensions with the Burmese military government began deteriorating in the late 1980's and early 1990's, during which many Chin refugees fled their homes in seek of safety (Burma Link, 2014). In the present day, the Chin people still experience much abuse and persecution from the Burmese Army (Scarlis, 2010).

The Chin state comprises many different ethnic minority groups, but for the purpose of this profile, five groups will be the main focus, as these groups have settled in the Eastern Metropolitan Region (EMR) of Melbourne. These include:

- Chin, Hakha
- Chin, Falam
- Chin, Tedim
- Chin, Zomi, Zo, Tedim Chin
- Mizo

Migration:

- Due to Burmese military suppression, many Chin people are leaving their country and arriving in Australia. Since 2000, many Chin people have entered Australia as refugees (Australia Chin Media Network, 2013).
- It is common for Chin people who have fled Burma to arrive in either India or Malaysia and live as asylum seekers within those countries. They then find a UNHCR office and register with UNHCR and go on a waiting list to be relocated to another country, such as Australia.

Language:

- There are many different Chin languages, consisting of different dialects (Scarlis, 2010).
- The Chin people are ethnically and linguistically diverse (Human Rights Watch, 2009).

Table 1: Zomi and Chin Hakha-speaking people in the Eastern Region

Local Government Area	Total number of people speaking Zomi at home	Total number of people speaking Hakha Chin at home
City of Boroondara	3	3
City of Knox	57	13
City of Manningham	0	0
City of Maroondah	433	1158
City of Monash	0	9
City of Whitehorse	0	0
Shire of Yarra Ranges	60	649
Eastern Region	553	1832

(ABS Census 2016) *Please note Chin Haka classification as per Census Data (2016).

*ABS Census Data does not include Chin, Falam, Chin, Tedim and Mizo as available options to select.

Table 2: Chin dialect-speaking people arrived between July 2016 - June 2018

Local Government Area	Hakha Chin	Falam Chin	Tedim Chin	Zomi	Mizo
City of Boroondara	0	0	0	0	0
City of Knox	7*	0	8*	5*	0
City of Manningham	0	0	0	0	0
City of Maroondah	72	32	33	10	0
City of Monash	0	0	0	0	0
City of Whitehorse	1	1	0	0	0
Shire of Yarra ranges	47	4	0	5	0
Eastern Region	127*	37	41*	20*	0

(Australian Government Department of Social Services 2018: Settlement Database).

Please Note: This data is concerning settlers who have been granted a permanent or provisional Visa.

*Approximation due to data constraints and the Department of Social Services Privacy Policy.

Religion:

- The majority of Chin people resettling in Australia identify as Christian.
- Back in their home country, Chin people may also hold an Animist belief, which is the belief in spirits (Scarlis, 2010). However, within an Australian context, this is not as common (Falam Chin Consultation, 2018).
- Christian Pastors are held in high respect from the rest of the community (Falam Chin Consultation, 2018).

Pregnancy:

- Chin women are familiar with the roles of midwives, as midwives are present at births in both rural and urban areas (Scarlis, 2010).
- Since arriving in Australia, Falam pregnant women are generally more aware of things to avoid when pregnant, e.g., smoking or drinking (Falam Chin Consultation, 2018).
- Falam Chin women may believe there are certain foods to be avoided because of the effect it may have on their baby. For example, some may avoid cow tail as it is believed it makes your child more active (Falam Chin Consultation, 2018).

- Some Falam Chin husbands may believe that their taste for certain foods may change because of their wife's pregnancy. For example, they all of a sudden stop liking potatoes (Falam Chin Consultation, 2018).

Childbirth and Child Rearing:

- After birth, the mothers traditionally drink oxtail soup or chicken soup to increase milk production (Scarlis, 2010). Most babies are breastfed for around 2 years.
- In Chin culture, young children share a bed with their parents, and don't sleep by themselves until they are ready. This may be up until they are 10 years old. Young babies sleep in the same room or same bed as their parents (Falam Chin Consultation, 2018).
- Some families may find it difficult to adjust to western child rearing practices. For example, there is a lot more freedom for children in Australia, and Chin children learn this quickly. This can create tension between parents and children. Parents may not be able to discipline their children the way they normally would (South Eastern Region Migrant Resource Centre, 2011).
- In Chin families, it is common for older children to help care for their younger siblings.
- Chin families may place value on having the first born as a male. This is because the oldest boy is seen as representing the family and is important in carrying the family name on. It is also shown as bringing honour to the father (Falam Chin Consultation, 2018).
- In Falam Chin families, parenting usually comes from the mother, and she is more involved in everyday parenting. However, the father will be sought after for the final decision and has the final say in decisions (Falam Chin Consultation, 2018).
- In Falam Chin culture, parents encourage children to go to church, and church activities are highly valued. The church plays a big role in providing direction to children. Sunday school is very important, and children will attend this along with the normal service and a youth service (Falam Chin Consultation, 2018).

Attitudes and Issues with Ageing:

- Elders are highly valued and respected (South Eastern Region Migrant Resource Centre, 2011). The term 'elder' refers to reaching a certain age, generally once the person reaches 50 and above. The person then may be contacted by the community for advice when a situation arises (Falam Chin Consultation, 2018).
- Grandparents usually live with their children and help take care of their grandchildren. If they are quite elderly, they may be cared for by their children (South Eastern Region Migrant Resource Centre, 2011).
- Within Falam Chin community in Australia, aged care facilities do not tend to be used due to language and cultural barriers. It is generally thought to be the child's responsibility to look after their ageing parents, as they have looked after them earlier in life (Falam Chin Consultation, 2018).

Attitudes to Disability and Mental Illness:

- Counselling can be unfamiliar to Chin people. Talking and reliving traumatic experiences may be regarded as unhelpful, as the person is usually a stranger (South Eastern Region Migrant Resource Centre, 2011). Although with experience of western culture this view is beginning to shift.

- Pastors and Leaders play a big role in providing mediation to those who may be experiencing difficulties. Emotional support is thought to be provided by the family (Falam Chin Consultation, 2018).
- Within Falam Chin culture, mental health can still be considered a taboo topic, therefore the issue may be kept private and the community will not know if someone is experiencing hardship (Falam Chin Consultation, 2018).
- The Chin people do not use mental health terminology as such, but they tend to describe it as 'madness'. There are many words in English related to mental health that do not exist in Chin languages (for example, there is no word for stress in Falam Chin language). Therefore, many Chin people may not be familiar with terms such as depression or anxiety (Falam Chin Consultation, 2018).
- Within Falam Chin community, disability is viewed as shameful. Parents may feel guilty because of what has happened to their child and attribute this to their past mistakes. With the Australian/western influence, Chin families are beginning to seek help and support should their child be diagnosed with a disability (Falam Chin Consultation, 2018).

Attitudes to Death and Palliative Care:

- Chin of Christian faith hold a funeral and burial for the body (Scarlis, 2010). Christian pastors play a vital role when there is a death within the community and may lead a funeral or service.
- When there is a death in the community, there is a strong emphasis on family and community support (Scarlis, 2010). Families gather together to show support and to pay their respects.
- Possessions can be displayed at funerals to display the wealth and status that has been achieved.
- Within Falam Chin culture, funeral services are viewed as very important to attend, and this is given a priority over other events. This is an opportunity to show you care and to pay your respects, and missing a service can therefore show the opposite (Falam Chin Consultation, 2018).
- If there is a death within the Falam Chin community, there is a communal gathering at the church or family's house to comfort the grieving family. This will happen in the days leading up to the formal funeral service (Falam Chin Consultation, 2018).
- It is important to be sensitive when talking about death with Falam Chin people, as they are not as familiar with direct information about death (for example, if an illness is terminal). Death is usually discussed with the family, and not with the individual person. It can be very confronting to talk about death to the individual directly (Falam Chin Consultation, 2018).
- Chin people do not use cremation, only burials. If the funeral expense is very high for the family, costs may be collected from the community or family to support this (Falam Chin Consultation, 2018).

Customs / Values:

- Chin people tend to prefer to use their ethnic identity, rather than being called Burmese. It is important to be mindful that ethnically, they are a very different group, largely persecuted by the Burmese government.
- Chin culture values music, dance and folk tales (Australian Chin Media Network, 2013).
- In Chin families, the husband is the head of the household and children are equally valued.

- Family relationships are highly valued and are seen as central to culture (South Eastern Region Migrant Resource Centre, 2011).
- First cousins are thought of as brothers and sisters (South Eastern Region Migrant Resource Centre, 2011).
- Traditionally, children generally live at home before marriage. It is considered shameful for a male and female to live together before marriage (South Eastern Region Migrant Resource Centre, 2011).
- Attending church provides a connection to community.
- As grandparents are responsible for naming their grandchildren, they are to be highly respected by their children or children in law. It is seen as very rude to disrespect grandparents (Falam Chin Consultation, 2018).

Communication Styles:

- Eye contact can be minimal when communicating, but this must not be seen as rude or avoiding behaviour (World Relief Fort Worth, n.d).
- For Falam Chin, direct eye contact is seen as rude, especially if there is an age difference (Falam Chin Consultation, 2018).
- Some Chin may cross their arms when in conversation. This is out of respect and demonstrates giving the person your full attention (Falam Chin Consultation, 2018). This should not be mistaken as hostile behaviour (World Relief Fort Worth, n.d).

Naming Conventions:

- Women or men are usually called aunty or uncle out of respect, even if there is no direct relation.
- Within Falam Chin families, a child's name replaces the father's name. For example, the father will not be called his name, but rather "Nicholas' Pa", meaning Nicholas' father. This changes as soon as they are born and are named (Falam Chin Consultation, 2018).
- Within Falam Chin culture, the child's name is usually given by the Grandparents. The first child's name is given by the grandmother on the mother's side. The second child name comes from the grandmother on the father's side. If the family have another child, the parents select this themselves (Falam Chin Consultation, 2018).
- Traditionally, Chin people don't have first and last names, but a series of 2 to 4 words as their name (Neiman, Soh & Sutan, 2008). When applying for a visa, the UNHCR forms require a first and last name, and sometimes a person's name is written by a UNHCR official on a form all as a first name, all as a last name, or the name can be split up at random, with some words of the name used as a first name and other words as the last name. Whatever the UNHCR officials put on the official forms as the person's first and last name is what will be on their travel document, even if one part is left blank. This then becomes the person's official name in Australia, as it is often the only form of identification the person has.
- Because of this, filling out forms in Australia can be challenging as Australian culture and most forms and documents require a separate first and last name and both individuals and staff from a variety of agencies and organisations (such as Centrelink, medical practices, schools, utility companies etc.) become confused when working with the Chin community. Recognising these challenges and wanting to acculturate to life in Australia, some Chin people choose to officially change their name (Falam Chin Consultation, 2018).

Health Beliefs and Practices:

- Use of traditional medicine within the Chin community still remains important. This can include 'coining' and 'cupping' (Scarlis, 2010).
- Exposure to western medicine is common, however this can depend on whether the individual lives in a rural or urban area. Chin refugees may be familiar with western medicine due to health care professionals who assist in the refugee camps.

Greetings:

English	Falam Chin	Hakha
Hello (how are you?)	Hello	Na dam maw
Goodbye	Damten	dam tein
Yes	Asi, Awle	a si ko
No	Asilo, Ai	asilo
Thank you	Lungawi	Kaa lawm

Key Chin Festivals / Significant Dates:

20th February: Chin National Day

28th November: Tho, Chin Harvest Festival

25th December: Christmas Day

Local services useful for Chin residents in the Eastern Region

Settlement Services

Provide information, referral and casework for refugees and family migrants who arrived in the last five years.

Name	Address	Contact
AMES Australia	30-32 Prospect St, Box Hill, 3128	Ph: 13 26 37
Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne)	Suite 2, Town Hall Hub, 27 Bank Street, Box Hill, Vic 3128 <u>and</u> 18 Bond Street, Ringwood Vic 3134	Ph: 9285 4888 (Box Hill) 9870 1351 (Ringwood)

Aged Care & Disability Support Services

Migrant Information Centre Aged Care & Disability Services

Address: Suite 2, Town Hall Hub, 27 Bank Street, Box Hill, 3128

Ph: 9275 6901

Email: wzhang@miceastmelb.com.au

Website: <http://miceastmelb.com.au/our-services/elderly-people-younger-people-disabilities-carers/>

The Access & Support Program provides short term support to help people access aged care and other services so they can stay living at home independently. The Program provides information, referral, support and monitoring. The aged and disability team generally aims to increase access to

aged care and disability services for CALD communities in the EMR through working with CALD communities to promote those services, provide information and referral and supporting organisations to provide culturally appropriate care. The team also receives funding for specific projects in this area.

Chin Community Victoria

Address: 49A Mt Dandenong Road, Ringwood East, VIC, 3134.

The Chin Community Victoria (CCV) help Chin Migrants to successfully resettle in Australia by providing guidance and support. They assist community members to participate in Australian society, while still remaining connected to their Chin cultural heritage.

References

Australian Chin Media Network, 2013, *Chin People*, viewed 2018, <<http://www.acmn.net.au/chinculture.html>>

Burma Link, 2014, *Background: Chin*, viewed 2018, <<https://www.burmalink.org/background/burma/ethnic-groups/chin/>>

Falam Chin Consultation, 2018, (consultation was held with a Falam Chin leader from the Chin Community Victoria (CCV) to discuss the topics covered in this profile and to order to receive valuable insight about the Falam Chin culture. We warmly thank him for his contributions).

Human Rights Watch, 2009, viewed 2018, <<https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/01/27/we-are-forgotten-people/chin-people-burma-unsafe-burma-unprotected-india>>

Scarlis, C. A, 2010, *Chin Cultural Profile*, EthnoMED. viewed 2018, <<http://ethnomed.org/culture/chin/chin-cultural-profile>>

South Eastern Region Migrant Resource Centre, 2011, *People of Burma in Melbourne: A community profile*, viewed 2018, <<https://smrc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/people-of-burma-in-melbourne.pdf>>

World Relief Fort Worth (n.d). *Burma (Myanmar) Chin Cultural Profile*, viewed 2018, <<http://worldrelieffortworth.org/burma-myanmar-chin-cultural-profile>>