

1. Description

1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family:

Walmajarri, (also known as the Walmatjari, Walmadjari, Pililuna, Wolmeri)(5)

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com):

Wmt(5)

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

28 S, 139E (site of Lake Gregory). The Walmajarri live in the deserts south of the Fitzroy Crossing area and around the Lake Gregory area. It covers roughly 85000 square km of the Great Sandy Desert. (2)

1.4 Brief history:

The Walmajarri are a native hunter-gatherer desert people who traveled from water hole to water hole. They remained in the desert until the 1950's and 1960's when the final groups left the desert in favor of working for white settlers at cattle stations along the rivers to the north. Some had already chosen this lifestyle, but it has been suggested that a series of severe droughts drove the Walmajarri out of their homeland to search for new food sources. They have slowly accepted the white lifestyle, but still pass down stories of their youth in the desert and traditional tales. (1,2,3,4)

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:

See above. The Walmajarri are reluctant but nevertheless have begun to accept the influence of the white communities from which they live in. They have begun to eat nontraditional foods and wearing "white man" clothes. (1,2)

1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

Original environment was strictly desert, including water rich regions such as Lake Gregory. (1,2)

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density:

The Walmajarri divide into small groups that generally contain immediate family members such as your mother, father, siblings, grandparents, offspring, etc., but can include extended family members such as aunts, uncles, etc. These "bands" drift from water hole to water hole and hunt for game and gather fruit and starches. The children are typically left at the camp with their grandparents or sometimes alone during their parent's hunts. Once they have utilized an area's resources or over consumed they will move on to another site and begin the process all over again. (1,2)

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

Carbohydrates mainly come from "bush" foods, such as roots and wild onions. (1,2,3)

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

The Walmajarri will hunt for wild game, such as wallabies, lizards, dingos, feral cats and other small games (even kangaroos). (1,2)

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

Evidence for weapons was limited, but most commonly was the spear. (1,2)

2.4 Food storage:

Food storage is limited to what will not rot. Seeds and fruits (sometimes) are stored, and water is placed into containers called coolamons. (1,2)

2.5 Sexual division of production:

Not entirely specified, but evidence suggests that when men and women were in the group, the men hunted the larger, more dangerous game while the women were in charge of gathering. Several stories suggest that (2) when a group was limited to women and children, the women would in fact hunt game as well as gather food.

2.6 Land tenure:

There is no evidence for land tenure as there is also no evidence for organized agriculture. Given the environment of the Walmajarri, both are highly unlikely.

2.7 Ceramics:

There is no explicit evidence for pre-colonized Walmajarri ceramics.

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

There seems to be no pattern of specified food sharing within groups. Several accounts (2) even speak about inter-group sharing, though more times than not the groups were related. (1,2)

2.9 Food taboos:

There is a taboo for women who have lost a child that specifies that they can only eat snakes, lizards and frogs for a period of time of up to 3 or 4 years. The Walmajarri also consider ant eggs a delicacy and will go through a separating process to gather them. (1,2)

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

There is no evidence for watercraft, but considering their environment it is highly unlikely.

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

Not specified.

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

Not specified.

4. Life History, mating, marriage

- 4.1 Age at menarche (f):
Not specified.
- 4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):
Not specified.
- 4.3 Completed family size (m and f):
Family size appears to vary amongst groups. (2)
- 4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):
Not specified.
- 4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):
No age was specified.
- 4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:
Not specified.
- 4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:
There was no evidence for any polygamous relationships within the Walmajarri people, but the possibility cannot be eliminated from the group given other examples within Australia.
- 4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:
No evidence for bride service or dowry indicated.
- 4.9 Inheritance patterns:
No specified patterns of inheritance are presented. However, in the traditional hunter-gather groups, it is highly unlikely that there is anything other than weapons and tools to be inherited.
- 4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:
There are specific language terms that are used to refer to individuals that are of a higher and lower generation. You are not to joke with individuals in either of these generations, and like in western civilizations respect is given to your parents and grandparents. The attitude you have around your siblings and others of your generation is much more relaxed. (1)
- 4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:
No references to homosexual activity were presented in the sources.
- 4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):
There are 8 "skin groups" within the Walmajarri, which correspond to different tribes within their nation. Each of these groups has a male name and a female name, and they are as follows (The male name being first, the female second):
1. *Jangala-nangala*
 2. *Jungkurra-nanyjili*
 3. *Jupurru-nyapurru*
 4. *Jawanti-nyapana*
 5. *Japalyi-nyapajarri*
 6. *Jakarra-nakarra*
 7. *Jangkarti-nangkarti*
 8. *Jampiyirnti-nampiyirnti*
- These 8 groups are separated into 2 "moiety." Individuals are expected to marry outside of their moiety, with no real specification between the other 4 skin groups. There are documented instances of marrying within your moiety, and while there is no hard evidence of public humiliation, it does change the way that the family refers to itself in a very complex way. The skin group you are in is of matrilinear decent. (1)*
- 4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these "other fathers" recognized?
There is no evidence of partial partible or multiple fathers within the tribes. It seems that the moving bands are too small for these to even be a possibility.
- 4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., "receptacle in which fetus grows"):
There are no beliefs towards the mothers role in procreation presented in the literature.
- 4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?
No evidence of an incremental system is presented within the available literature.
- 4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape
Not specified.
- 4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin)
See 4.12. Preferences is based upon the moieties of skin groups within the Walmajarri nation. (1)
- 4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?
No evidence specifies sexual freedoms in females. Again, it seems that the band sizes and time spent gathering resources inhibits such behavior.
- 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring
No evidence specified in literature.
- 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?
Not specified.
- 4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females
Unfortunately, no sources presented populations
- 4.22 Evidence for couvades:
No evidence provided in the available literature.

4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older):

Not specified. Again, the small sized nature of the traveling bands seems to inhibit this type of thinking and behavior.

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?

See 4.12 for more details. When marrying, certain skin groups avoid one another, but as far as within the family goes there is no evidence for direct avoidance of elders, etc. Respect is given and expected by younger generations to the elder generations (parents, grandparents, etc.) (1)

4.24 Joking relationships?

Joking relationships are strictly limited to individuals within the same generation—joking between generations is strictly prohibited. (1)

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations:

Children inherit their skin grouping from their mother. (1)

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

See 4.12 for more details. It seems that this skin group/moiety system has been successfully developed to suppress incest relationships with the Walmajarri nation. (1)

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

Not specified.

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?

No information is given about formal names, however your skin group and moiety affiliation is inherited from mother.(1)

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)

The skin group/moiety to which your born determines who and where you marry. The sources indicate that more times than not the other moiety groups are indicative of other “tribes” within the nation, so it would seem that marriage is preferable outside of one’s home group. (1)

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?

See 4.12.

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

Conflicts seem limited unless they disobey the moiety rules of the nation. (1)

Warfare/homicide

Limited evidence for warfare was presented. The Walmajarri seemed to be more interested in gathering food than fighting one another. However, stories from when the European settlers appeared they were very timid and would flee direct conflicts rather than fight. (1,2)

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

Not specified.

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

Not specified.

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:

Not specified.

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):

In terms of warfare, nothing was specifically specified. However, traditional stories do not suggest war like aggression, and the moiety system leans toward a peaceful alliance between separate tribes within the Walmajarri nation. (1,2)

4.18 Cannibalism?

No direct evidence for cannibalism—however, in a traditional story it speaks of a man and his tribal group that would kill and eat other aborigines until 2 men killed him and his tribe. Based on this, it would seem that cannibalism within the Walmajarri tribe is highly unlikely and frowned upon if practiced. (2)

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

No numerical data was presented, however stories suggest that groups were generally very small based on the limited resources within the desert (1,2)

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

Groups would migrate from waterhole to waterhole, looking for wild resources such as starches and game species for food and sustenance. (1,2)

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):

No specific systems were presented in the literature.

5.4 Post marital residence:

Neither male or female influences on residence are presented within the literature.

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

There is some territoriality presented (North vs. South, East vs. West), but for the most part waterholes are inhabited and abruptly vacated as resources become limiting, so rigid territories seem very improbable (1,2)

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

Social interactions are divided into generations. Certain acts and topics are unacceptable when speaking up or down a generation level (1)

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

Joking relationships are limited to peers within your generation. Joking with anyone above or below your generation is unaccepted within the Walmajarri nation. (1)

5.8 Village and house organization:

There is no direct evidence for villages per se. By all accounts the Walmajarri people travel in close knit bands consisting of immediate relatives, and in some larger groups extended family members such as aunts, uncles, cousins, etc. (1,2)

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):

No evidence for any specialized structures.

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

There are accounts of digging into the ground in the desert to stay cool during the day, but there are no true forms of sleeping structures presented in the literature (1,2)

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:

The societies are broken down into 8 skin groups, with 2 larger groups called moieties that are conglomerates of four of the skin groups. There seems to be no real distinction between these moieties as rivals or friends, but these moieties play a large role in spouse selection. (1,2)

5.12 Trade:

There is some evidence for trading with Arab traders on camelback presented in some of the literature, but details about the encounters were limited. One tale suggest that the trading was more forceful than equal. (2)

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

No indications of social hierarchy other than age/generation gaps. Younger generations are expected to respect those of an older generation. (1)

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR:

Not specified.

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

The tribes have medicine men who use "medicine of the bush" to treat certain ailments. Most of these treatments come by the way of sap of trees (body sores) and tree bark (fish stings). (1)

6.2 Stimulants:

No indication of stimulant uses.

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):

More than once individuals refer to going into the desert and "becoming a man," although they were not forthcoming on details of the process. However, one story referred to "games" that the adults played with the children. Men would play a throwing game to teach the boys accuracy and strategies when throwing the object, which seem to directly correlate to hunting. Women would play a game with their girls similar to playing "house" with girls in western societies. Playing with leaves, girls would set up a camp for their dolls (leaves). According to the account, when the girls were older, thanks to the game they were already accustomed to preparing camp which sped up the process. (1,2)

6.4 Other rituals:

Not specified.

6.5 Myths (Creation):

No myths specified about creation, although there are myths about other common occurrences. The first was about the creation of a land formation of the hills at Looma. 3 women lived at a nearby waterhole, and one woman went by herself to the north, chopped down a large tree that was filled with water. The water continued to rise up and cover the earth. She build a mud damn to stop the rising water, but it was of no use. She swam away to the west, and carried her children on her back when she swam. She drowned (she was called the blue toung lizard) and her children were left ontop of a large hill at Looma (they are rocks). Another story, (told above) is about a man who ate people and was killed by two brave men. Furthermore, rivers are referred to as a water snake. When people drown, it is said that the snake pulls them into its belly. Some are lucky and pulled out of the belly before they die, and others are lost forever. (1,2)

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

There are multiple examples of paintings in the second book (2), which exhibit a very unique and simplistic art style built around bright colors such as red, yellow and green.

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

6.8 Missionary effect:

Not specified, other than the white settlers brought new foods and clothes to the people as well as work that provided them with a more stable environment than traveling from waterhole to waterhole. It is possible that this was a large factor in the Walmajarri coming out of the desert and settling near cattle stations. Religious impacts are not discussed. (1,2)

6.9 RCR revival:

Not specified.

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

There are food taboos as mentioned above, and individuals that are of relation to the deceased will physically harm themselves. Evidence of cutting and hitting themselves on the head are told in multiple stories of Walmajarri individuals. (1,2)

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

Not specified.

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

There is a similar practice of this in the Walmajarri, but not full blown teknonymy. In the language, there are reciprocal terms for certain relationships, such as jaja, a woman's daughter's offspring, and her mother's mother. Similarly with the male equivalents (ngawiji, the man's great grandfather and his daughter's children, kilaki, aman's grandmother and his son's children), and a woman's father and her son's offspring (jamirti). (1)

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.)

There is no presented evidence of supreme deities, but there are folk tales similar to that of Native Americans, such as those listed above. (1,2)

7. Adornment

Information on this topic was nearly nonexistent. However, it was described that before coming to the white settlements and cattle stations in the 1950's and 1960's, the Walmajarri were not accustomed to dresses or fully sleeved clothing of the western world. One particular story (2) speaks of a child being carried around naked, and another tells of the difficulties adjusting to wearing clothing. Photographs suggest a very plain people with minimal clothing coverage.

7.1 Body paint:

Not specified.

7.2 Piercings:

Not specified.

7.3 Haircut:

Not specified for traditional Walmajarri, however in book 2, there were many photograph of current Walmajarri individuals, and their haircuts were fairly short. Of all the photographs there was not a woman with hair past her shoulders, and men had hair in similar and shorter lengths. Most males also have a beard.

7.4 Scarification:

No evidence of scarification.

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):

No special types of adornment were listed.

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

Not specified

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

Not specified.

7.8 Missionary effect:

White settlers brought beef cattle to the region as well as new clothing and delicacies to the area. After many difficulties, the Walmajarri became accustomed to wearing the new clothing. (2)

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

The white clothing seems to have forced out the traditional minimalist clothing styles. (2)

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

As listed above, there are 2 moieties, each with 4 subclasses called skin groups. Siblings are able to talk to one another with a relaxed tone and are able to joke with one another. There are 2 separate words in the Walmajarri language for an older sibling and a younger sibling of both sexes, totaling to three words (the younger sibling is the same for both sexes). For a brother, the older brother is papaji, while the younger is ngaja, and the older sister is ngapurlu and the younger sister is again ngaja. (1)

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

No evidence of either sororate or levirate marriage systems in place within the Walmajarri

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

No significant other types of kinship relations.

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

Numbered references

1. The Walmajarri: An Introduction to the Language and Culture.

Hudson, Joyce and Eiryls Richards. Printed 1978

2. Out of the Desert: stories from the Walmajarri Exodus

Honey Bulagardie, John Charles, Mona Chuguna, David Downs, Mary-Anne Downs, Olive Knight, Limerick Malyapuka, Nora Nguwayir, Ivy Nixon, Jimmy Pike, Pompey Siddon, Peter Skipper, Emily Sullivan, Amy Vanbee, Adeline Wanangarra, Honeychild Budgie Yankarr and Boxer Yankarr. Edited by Eiryls Richards, Joyce Hudson and Pat Lowe. Copyright 2002.

3. Talking Country-Walmajarri Story- story of a burned woman saved by her relative and settling near a lake.

YouTube Video

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NOHVbpW7zmo>>

4. Talking Country 2-Yi Marutwarra Walmajarri-story of Walmajarri workers at a sheep station.

YouTube Video

< <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EuMHJdgCnZU> >

5. Ethnologue: Languages of the World
<<http://www.ethnologue.com/>>