

1. Description

1.1 Name of society, language, and language family:

Tarahumara, Tarahumaran, Southern Uto-Aztecan (ethnologue.com)

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

thh (ethnologue.com)

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

25°57'22"N 107°2'52"W

1.4 Brief history:

"A common belief among Tarahumara Indians was the fact that it all started with the sun and the moon that lived alone disguised as children. They were dressed with palm leaves and they lived in shacks made out of sticks and mud and a palm roof. They didn't have any earthly belongings, neither cows, nor goats, nor chickens, nor sheep, nor turkeys. The skin of the two children was very dark and the morning star was the only thing that shed light upon the sinful earth. The moon swallowed the lice from the head of the sun, while the morning star watched over them. Soon afterwards, hundreds of Tarahumara Indians did not know what to do in such darkness. They could not work and they had to hold each other's hands to prevent them from tripping down with the rocks and falling off onto the canyon. One day, they healed the sun and the moon by placing tiny redwood crosses soaked in "tesquino" (corn alcohol beverage) and, gradually, the sun and the moon started shining with a bright light. Then, there was a flood and a boy and a girl, both Tarahumara Indians, went to the top of the Lavachi Mountain, south of Panaláchic. After the flood, they returned carrying with them three corn kernels and three beans. Since everything was so soft and moist, they planted them in a rock and fell asleep. Later, they fell asleep and that night they had a dream. On time, they harvested and it is said that all Tarahumara Indians come from them." (website:

<http://www.tarahumara.com.mx/english.asp>)

"It is possible that the ancestors of the Tarahumara Indians arrived from Asia, crossing the strait of Bering, approximately twenty thousand years ago. However, the oldest human traces, which have been found in the mountain range (sierra), at a site close to Sonora State, are the famous Clovis spearheads. Hunters typically used these weapons, during the Pleistocene megafauna and date back to 15,000 years. This fact enables us to date back the presence of the first settlers of the Tarahumara mountains ("Mexico Desconocido" Magazine). It was until 1606 when the missionaries established contact with the sierra natives for the first time. It was during the 17th and 18th Centuries when a group of Spanish farmers and merchants invaded this region dispossessing them of a big portion of their land by trading it for soap, salt, blankets, and other trinkets. Some Indians started working for the Spaniards and were forced to work as peons with very little pay. Some other natives fled to the mountains to hide and to protect themselves from being forced to work in haciendas of mines." (website)

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

Missionaries: They brought Christianity and Catholicism to the Tarahumaras.

1.6 Ecology:

They live in the mountainous region of the Sierra Madre. Here they are supplied with many oak trees, rivers, and a land for cultivating. They utilize this land to cultivate their crops and survive off of. The oak trees are used to create the many products they trade, as well as for products they use in food preparation and their daily life. (Bennett and Zingg)

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

50,000. They tend to live with just their family on their personal farms, but occasionally they will live with more people due to the fact that one particular area may have the best chance of growing crops. Even in an occasion where they all live in the valley together, they rarely resemble a village. The average distance between one family's home to another is between 1 to 5 miles. (Bennett 183)

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

Their main carbohydrate is maize (corn) and they use it to produce many of staple dishes; such as Pinole, Atole, Esquiate, Tortillas, Tamales, Olíki, etc. Some other common carbohydrates consist of squash, which is third to corn and beans. They also utilize wheat for many dishes, but don't utilize it nearly as much as corn. When food becomes scarce, they use leaves from okay and ash trees to prepare foods similar to the foods they use corn for. (Bennett and Zing)

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

The main protein-lipid source for the Tarahumaras is the bean. They may also consume a rabbit, mouse, or rat for extra protein. (Bennett and Zingg)

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

Utilize bow and arrows; usually the arrows are arrow-poisoning spears. (Bennett and Zingg)

2.4 Food storage:

They build storehouses for grain, which helps to prevent moisture from coming into the house. They also utilize cornhouses, which stores corn and a family's valuables. (Bennett and Zingg)

2.5 Sexual division of production:

Men: Build house, cultivates fields, provides firewood, and brings fruit to Mexican towns to trade it for salt and cloth

Women: Take care of all housework, prepare food, and make pottery, basketry, and textile weaving

(Bennett and Zing)

2.6 Land tenure:

Land is acquired from relatives and is considered an individuals property, not something shared by the community. (Bennett and Zhing)

2.7 Ceramics:

They utilize clay deposits to make ceramics such as pots, but I was unable to find the name of exact pots or ceramics that they make.

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

2.9 Food taboos:

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f):

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

The typical family size for an average family is about 4 or 5. That includes the husband, wife, and two or three children. (Bennett 231)

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

I don't know the exact proportion of marriages that end in divorce, but I do know that divorce is not a common procedure within their culture. Essentially, they are going through what we would constitute as a divorce, but for them it is common to switch spouses. (Bennett 231)

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

I don't know the exact percentage of marriages like this, but I do that it is rare. There are a "few Tarahumaras [that] support two wives, thought never in the same house." (Bennett 229)

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:

Doesn't seem to be evidence that leads me to believe that they purchase brides.

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

When a parent dies the property and valuables they owned are then divided equally among all his children, no matter if they are a male or female. (Bennett 189)

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these "other fathers" recognized?

Paternity is partible, but it is uncommon for the children to have many unknown fathers.

4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., "receptacle in which fetus grows")

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin)

They prefer that one does not marry or have “sexual relations with [a] brother, sister, parent, child, first cousin, aunt, uncle, godmother, or godfather” due to the fact that it would be considered incest. (Bennett 228) Other than these rules, it appears they can marry whomever they want as long as the both partners agree.

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

Adulterous relationships are actually encouraged, but not supported by their church and could result in divorce or punishment. Many women still take part, especially at fiestas. Before marriage women are found to be rather promiscuous, which is widely accepted because they don't believe that virginity is essential for marriage. (Bennett 230)

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females

4.22 Evidence for couvades

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

It appears to me from what I have read that the children usually know who their father are, so they don't differentiate between potential fathers.

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?

4.24 Joking relationships?

Consist between brother-in-laws and sister-in-laws and is known as mutcímuli. (Bennett and Zhingg)

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

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

“Sexual relations with brother, sister, parent, child, first cousin, aunt, uncle, godmother, or godfather are regarded as incestuous.” (Bennett 228)

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

Couple and parents have a ceremony that is performed by the mayor. The ceremony usually takes place at the female's house. During the ceremony the couple holds hands and the mayor makes a speech to give the couple advise about married life. This is not recognized as a proper ceremony, the only way to be properly married is to be married within a church. This is the typical ceremony for a couple getting married though. They tend to be wed by the mayor, while they wait for a church leader to be in town. (Bennett 225)

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

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

Usually within a community. They tend to not marry into other races, but they occasionally will marry a Mexican. (Bennett and Zhingg)

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

From what I have read, I have found no evidence that there are arranged marriages.

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

The women chooses who she would like to marry, so it appears that conflict is limited. “When a young man wishes to marry, he or his father goes to the mayor and expresses the desire, naming the girl in mind. The mayor, if he thins the young man industrious and deserving of the girl, goes to her parents and delivers the message. He then gives them a few days to discuss the matter with their daughter. He returns; and if the girl has agreed, the match is made.” (Bennett 224) There is some evidence that they do have bigamous or polygamous relationships though, but they are rare.

Warfare/homicide

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

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

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

4.18 Cannibalism?

No proof of cannibalism.

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

There are typically no villages. Each family tends to live by themselves and off their land, but many families may be located in one valley. Even though this may happen, they still don't consider themselves to be a “village”. (Bennett and Zhing)

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

Many families have 3 or more farms that they care for, so depending on the season they will move from farm to farm. Usually each farm contains its own house and so they typically change homes during the winter and summer months, and occasionally a couple other times throughout the year. (Bennett and Zhing)

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

They have a political system that includes a goberador (governor) who is the leader, and most important, member of the Tarahumara tribe. They also appoint officers to fill the positions such as a capitanes, who run messages for the goberador, and three assistants who also help the goberador. The issues that are brought up in the meetings these officials have every Sunday are brought to the people and are decided on as a group. (Bennett 201 -209)

5.4 Post-marital residence:

Typically the couple lives with the wife's parents until a house of their own has been established.

For example: "Walupa had no fields of his own. He married a daughter of Hervacio and went to live in his father-in-law's house, working in the latter's fields. After several years, the old man gave a small field to his daughter." (Bennett 226)

5.5 Territoriality? (Defined boundaries, active defense):

They are very territorial because each family has their own division of land, with their own farms. Also, they believe that every piece of property they have must have an individual owner. So, each individual item will be considered the private property of a particular individual. (Bennett and Zhing)

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

They are allowed to interact with each other but within their language there are different words to clarify if someone is a boy or girl and what age they may be. (Bennett and Zhing)

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

Mutcímuli is the word they use to refer to a joking relationship with a brother-in law or a sister-in-law. They also have a special relationship between grandparents and grandchildren that is known as Noráwa. (Bennett and Zhing)

5.8 Village and house organization:

There are not any villages so the organization of that cannot be determined. Many live mainly in isolation, only having contact with their family, and speaking to others just to do business or have fiestas.

As far as house organization, the man is typically the one to go out in the field and do most of the work, while the women tend to stay home and care for the daily household chores. (Bennett and Zhing)

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):

Men and women usually live in the same house; similar to the way we live. (Bennett and Zhing)

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

They sleep on the ground inside their homes, which can be one of two types; in a valley or sierra they build a plank house, but in a cave their house is composed of mainly rocks. (Bennett and Zhing)

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

Their social organization consists of a government somewhat similar to ours.

5.12 Trade:

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6 Time allocation to RCR:

They devote much of their time to fiestas and ceremonies, but I am not sure about the actual amount of time they allow for them.

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

They have shamans who are there to perform in ceremonies that deal with "birth, death, and the curing of sick people, fields, and animals." (Bennett 252)

6.2 Stimulants:

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

Birth: There is a fiesta provided for the pregnant women when she gives birth and then another fiesta is given to the baby after birth. The baby's fiesta is known as the "curing" fiesta and male children have 3 of these fiestas, while female children have 4 fiestas.

During these fiestas the “shaman dedicated the tesguino (made from a killed goat) and serves part of it. Then the family kneels down before the doctor, who takes incense and marks crosses in the air on the four sides of each individual. Next he takes three lighted sticks of pitch-pine (four for females) and makes more crosses in the air. Then he burns a bit of the hair off the top of the head of each member of the family before kneeling before him. With water in his mouth, he blows a cross on the head of each person. The curing is finished and the tesguino drinking continues.” (Bennett 234-235)

Death: “After three days (four for a woman) food must be given to the dead. This ceremony is accompanied by a small fiesta. [...] Three weeks later after a man has died a fiesta is given. It is a large fiesta.”

6.4 Other rituals:

A few other rituals that they perform consist of:

- Curing fiestas
- Rain fiestas
- Green-Corn fiestas
- A Harvest Ceremony
- Fiesta Functionaries
- Guadalupe Fiesta

6.5 Myths (Creation):

“A common belief among Tarahumara Indians was the fact that it all started with the sun and the moon that lived alone disguised as children. They were dressed with palm leaves and they lived in shacks made out of sticks and mud and a palm roof. They didn't have any earthly belongings, neither cows, nor goats, nor chickens, nor sheep, nor turkeys. The skin of the two children was very dark and the morning star was the only thing that shed light upon the sinful earth. The moon swallowed the lice from the head of the sun, while the morning star watched over them. Soon afterwards, hundreds of Tarahumara Indians did not know what to do in such darkness. They could not work and they had to hold each other's hands to prevent them from tripping down with the rocks and falling off unto the canyon. One day, they healed the sun and the moon by placing tiny redwood crosses soaked in “tesguino” (corn alcohol beverage) and, gradually, the sun and the moon started shining with a bright light. Then, there was a flood and a boy and a girl, both Tarahumara Indians, went to the top of the Lavachi Mountain, south of Panaláchic. After the flood, they returned carrying with them three corn kernels and three beans. Since everything was so soft and moist, they planted them in a rock and fell asleep. Later, they fell asleep and that night they had a dream. On time, they harvested and it is said that all Tarahumara Indians come from them.” (website:

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6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

Games: They hold weekly races, dihibála (they throw disks into goals in the ground and whoever gets to 10 or 12 points first wins), throwing sticks (stick closest to the goal wins more points and a total of 10 points makes the winner), shooting arrows (similar to throwing sticks, but with bow and arrows), etc. (Bennett 335-345)

Music: They construct violins, guitars, rattles, simple drums, and tambourines. (Zingg 63)

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

It appears to me that men are more valuable in a RCR setting than women are. Men make up most of the religious.

6.8 Missionary effect:

6.9 RCR revival:

Many of the religious events are new due to the fact that they are mainly Christian, specifically Catholic, events that have changed from their old practices. They also still believe that the sun and the moon created them.

They still perform the same birth and death ceremonies that they have been practicing for several years though. (Bennett and Zingg)

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

According to Bennett, they believe that the dead can harm a family by making them ill after someone has died. Also, they believe it's common for animals, children, and wives to die shortly after someone's death because the spirit is taking their souls to heaven along with him. Typically a family will leave the house of the dead while they wait for his soul to pass on. They commonly believe that the dead take on animal forms such as coyotes or bears to return and cause damage to the herds and fields of his living family members.

The fiestas each deceased member receives is given to help speed up the spirit's journey to heaven. Once all the fiestas have been completed the dead can no longer come back to harm the living due to the fact that he has reached his destination. (Bennett and Zingg)

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

I didn't find evidence that they had taboos for naming dead people.

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

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

Many of the Tarahumaras are catholic and follow by the values set forth by the Catholic Church. The few members who oppose the church are none as gentiles. (Bennett and Zhingg)

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

Wasn't able to find enough information to prove that they used body paint.

7.2 Piercings:

Couldn't find information saying they regularly received piercings.

7.3 Haircut:

Their hair is typically long for both sexes and put into braids.

7.4 Scarification:

It appears that they do not partake in any form of scarification.

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

They mainly just focus on beads. Both men and women utilize beads to make rosaries. They usually prefer to use medium-sized strands of glass beads that are bright colors. Also, they like to put ribbon into their braids, and they like their braids to be a bright color. (Bennett and Zhingg)

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

I know they wear special costumes for ceremonies, but I couldn't find information that said exactly what they were.

In church ceremonies, there are dancers known as matachines that wear home-made costumes that are very bright and fancy.

Their outfit also consists of a traditional hat, cape, bandana handkerchiefs, colored stockings, and shoes.

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

Men: Breechcloth, wealthy Tarahumaras wear short shirts, sandals, headband, hats, rosary, and in the cold they use warm blankets.

Women: shirt, skirt or many skirts in winter for warmth, girdles, and a shawl.

(Bennett and Zhingg)

7.8 Missionary effect:

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

The Tarahumaras have now begun to wear more clothes that consist of a cheap cotton cloth over the wool cloth they used previously. The wool cloth was very warm, so they tended to wear minimal clothing during that time too. (Bennett and Zhingg)

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

Siblings are classified by age.

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

They participate in both of these types of kinship systems. It is common for "a widower to marry the single or widowed sister of his deceased wife. Likewise, a widow commonly marries a single brother of her deceased husband." (Bennett 229)

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

Typically they do not associate with Mexicans, but occasionally they do marry a few. (Bennett and Zhingg)

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

Numbered references

1. "Welcome to Tarahumara." *Tarahumara.com.mx*. Ah, Chihuahua, Chihuahua Gobierno Del Estado, 2000. Web. 23 Sept. 2011. <<http://www.tarahumara.com.mx/english.asp>>.

2. Bennett, Wendell Clark, and Robert M. Zingg. *The Tarahumara, an Indian Tribe of Northern Mexico*,. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1935. Print.

I believe the Tarahumara of Mexico were agriculturalists. Their main source of protein comes from beans, not hunted animals. They rely heavily on corn, which they grow in regularly cultivated fields. Also, they have many domesticated animals, which I believe shows that they have had to be agriculturists for a lengthy amount of time.

