

# Psychology in Iran

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It was not the career trajectory I planned. I never imagined I would fly to Iran for a conference in 1993, return 17 times and counting, live with Iranian families, teach at Tehran University, co-direct Iran's first center for social psychology research at Shahid Beheshti University, and start a web site about psychology in Iran with funding from the Association for Psychological Science. But it all happened, and what an amazing turn it has been!

Iran. Is that the place where evil dwells? The country that fun forgot? Fans of Fox News and CNN would likely answer yes to both questions — as, naively, did I before my first visit. Since then, observations of the everyday experiences of living in Iran have gently taught me the errors of my stereotypical ways. Behind the political headlines remains a rich and diverse culture, full of well-educated, well-read, thoughtful, and hospitable people who somehow manage to navigate the fascinating complexities and contradictions of their society — a society that can teach us so much about our own psychological and cultural assumptions.

Consider psychology. The discipline is alive and well in Iran, but takes a somewhat different form than the one constructed in the West. For example, Iranian psychology departments are branches of education faculties, not of arts or science faculties. Applied research is prominent, as is research on the psychology of religion. Iranian university students can pursue a BA in clinical psychology as well as general psychology. And something to envy: There are no Institutional Review Boards in Iran. Still, a Western psychologist can find some remarkable similarities. Most Iranian psychology professors, for example, think their students are lazy, most Iranian students think their psychology professors are boring, and all students hate their courses in statistics.

Research grants are scarce in Iran. Economic, political, and infrastructure constraints limit the kinds of research that can be undertaken. At least 80 percent of all psychological research in Iran is correlational, most of it related to individual differences measured with Farsi translations of Western questionnaires. Still, the range of topics of current research is surprising. Included are studies of addiction, depression, hyperactivity, marriage, and prayer. Much of the research is published in Iranian psychology journals, among them: *Psychological Research*, the *Journal of Iranian Psychologists*, *Contemporary Psychology*, and *Advances in Cognitive Science*. All the journals have English abstracts, and the first two are now included in *PsycINFO*.

Two years ago, the government began encouraging researchers through a points-for-promotion scheme to publish more in international journals, especially journals listed by the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI). Although the ISI initiative is a topic of heated debate in Iran, it has, for better or worse, prompted psychology researchers to rethink their research topics and strategies, brush up their English writing skills (a solid majority of psychologists and their students speak passable English), and follow the APA style guide. It has also prompted Iranian psychologists to seek more international research collaboration — yes, even with Americans!

How can collaboration be promoted? Perhaps a good way to begin is to teach psychologists and students outside Iran more about psychologists, students, and their research inside Iran. With kind support from the APS Fund for Teaching and Public Understanding of Psychological Science, Said Pournaghash, Zinat Esbati, and I have developed a web site for this purpose. The site has profiles of Iranian psychologists and students, English abstracts of articles from Iran's main psychology journals, links to Iranian psychology departments, news about interesting activities related to Iranian psychology, photos, and a few other surprises. We add new material every week or so to keep the site fresh. Please have a look: <http://spring.carleton.ca/~thorngate/iran-psych>. I also recommend the new web site of the *Iranian Psychological Association*: <http://iranpa.org/Default-EN.aspx>.

If you are interested in collaboration and wish to know more from me, feel free to write. My e-mail address is included in my author bio. You can also write directly to colleagues in Iran (see the web site). Not all topics can be studied in Iran, but those that can offer wonderful opportunities to increase our dialogue of civilizations. ?