

## **Sociology of Medicine and Health in Iran: a Report**

The Sociology of Medicine and Health is a rapidly emerging sub-field of sociology in Iran and courses are now introduced in the official curriculum of the university-level education. One of the founding fathers was Dr Manuchehr Mohseni, a sociologist by training and a member of the Faculty of Health at Tehran University. In 1969, he first introduced this field of sociology in Iran by teaching a course on medical sociology for students in the Faculty of Medical Sciences at Tehran University. In 1972 he taught the same course also in the Faculty of Health and in 1973 in the Faculties of Social Sciences at Tehran University and even in many other universities throughout the country. Thus, the course was formally added to the curriculum of the discipline of sociology at the undergraduate level in Iran.

In 1974, Tehran University Press published the first book entitled *Medical Sociology of Medicine and Health* by Dr Mohseni. Initially, the content of his book was mainly based on material translated from books in the Western countries. However, Mohseni managed to undertake research in the field in Iran, which subsequently was included in several new editions in the years to follow and greatly helped improving the teaching material available in Iran. A few other academicians also contributed to publications in the field of medical sociology in Iran but most of the books were translations of English and French publications.

Yet Medical and Health Sociology is not fully established at postgraduate level in Iran and consequently, there are only few medical sociologists by training in Iran. Those considered medical sociologist are mainly university professors and lecturers, such as for instance the author, who either had the opportunity to study this field abroad in the United Kingdom or in other Western countries, or to study general sociology at PhD level in Iran with an individual focus on medical sociology as their thesis subject.

In 2008, a further milestone was achieved by the foundation of an academic group of "Sociology of Medicine and Health", initiated by the author. This group was added to a list of overall 18 active scientific groups of the Iranian Sociological Association, and I was elected a member of the board of directors. The group rapidly expands; within a two-years-period more than 30 members from different educational levels and disciplinary backgrounds have joined us. The group now includes PhD graduates of sociology (who are also university lecturers in Tehran and other cities in Iran), Master graduates and MA students of sociology and a number of diverse disciplines (like for example, anthropology, women studies, cultural studies, social welfare) as well as medical doctors, dentists and professionals with a medical educational background who are interested in social sciences and collaborate with us as active members. The members of this group are living in Tehran and other provinces of Iran but also in the UK, the Netherlands and the US for work, study or educational reasons. Here, communication is facilitated by IT technologies such as the establishment of a google group ("medical-sociology-group" <medical-sociology-group@googlegroups.com>).

Unlike in the West, sociology of medicine and health is considered a relatively new and young branch of sociology in Iran. One of the tasks and goals of this group is to develop both original

and translational literature on medical and health sociology hoping to make those areas of interest more known and rich in this country. Amongst other things, members of this group lecture in seminars and conferences relevant to the field, publish articles in journals and medical periodicals, translate materials (articles, books) from English language into Persian (Farsi), collaborate in research projects and develop a comprehensive library of printed material and e-books of medical and health sociology. Overall, the group has organized 23 lectures and seminars covering wide ranging topics; these are documented at the Persian homepage of ISA (<http://isa.org.ir/specialized-committees/75>) and the website of the Iranian Sociological Association ([www.isa.org.ir](http://www.isa.org.ir)). Finally, we also managed to attend and present at the recent ISA World Conference of Sociology in Gothenburg.

Furthermore, research in the field of Sociology of Medicine and Health also makes progress. In response to recent interest of the Ministry of Sciences, Research and Technology to develop and run interdisciplinary fields of study, a comprehensive plan and syllabus of a Master Program in Medical Sociology was developed by the author in 2009; the Program attempts to recruit students from both sociology and medical sciences. Yet the Master Program has not been officially introduced into the Iranian academia, due to some general problems challenging the discipline of sociology in the current sociopolitical atmosphere in the country. Interestingly however, there are some chances for including the Program in Medical Universities under the Ministry of Health and Medical Education.

Overall, we are currently witnessing a growing interest in the sub-discipline of medical sociology among the faculties of medical sciences. For example, the author has taught medical sociology as a course for PhD students of Medical Ethics in Shahid-Beheshti Medical University in Tehran and also for the students of the Faculty of Paramedical Studies at the same university in Tehran; and she is invited to teach a class of medical sociology for the medical students who are specializing in the field of Social Medicine in Tabriz Medical Sciences University in East Azerbaijan province of Iran. Furthermore, a growing number of students of sociology and social research enrolled in Master Programs choose medical sociology topics as the subjects for their theses; thus the field is experiencing new horizons to its development.

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