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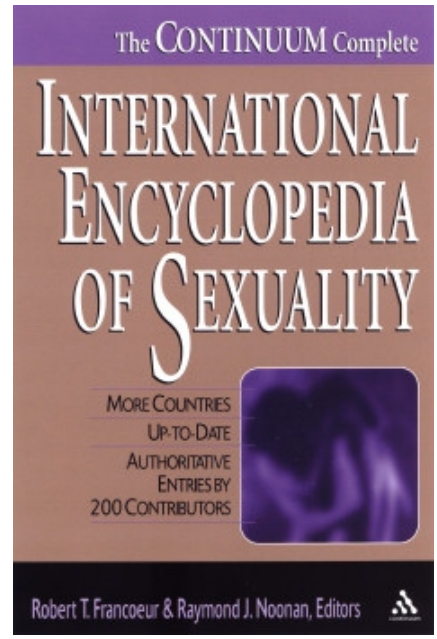

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Demographics and a Brief Historical Perspective

ROBERT T. FRANCOEUR

A. Demographics

In the Middle East, the Islamic Republic of Iran occupies 636,363 square miles (1,648,173 km^2) of mainly salt desert area, with many oases and forest areas, surrounded by high mountains. Iran is bordered by the former Soviet republics of Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan in the north, by Turkey and Iraq in the west, Afghanistan and Pakistan to the east, and the Persian Gulf on the south. It is slightly larger than the state of Alaska. The climate is mostly arid or semiarid, with subtropical along the Caspian coastline.

(CIA 2002)

In July 2002, Iran had an estimated population of 66.62 million. (All data are from *The World Factbook 2002* (CIA 2002) unless otherwise stated.)

Age Distribution and Sex Ratios: *0-14 years*: 31.6% with 1.05 male(s) per female (sex ratio); *15-64 years*: 63.7% with 1.01 male(s) per female; *65 years and over*: 4.7% with 1.1 male(s) per female; *Total population sex ratio*: 1.03 male(s) to 1 female

Life Expectancy at Birth: *Total Population*: 70.25 years; *male*: 68.87 years; *female*: 71.69 years

Urban/Rural Distribution: 40% to 60%; an estimated 4 to 6 million Iranians reside outside the country, the majority of these in the United States

Ethnic Distribution: Persian: 51%; Azeri: 24%; Gilaki and Mazandarani: 8%; Kurd: 7%; Arab: 3%; Lur, Baloch, and Turkman: 2% each; other: 1%

Religious Distribution: Shi'a Muslim: 89%; Sunni Muslim: 10%; Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian, and Baha'i: 1%

Birth Rate: 17.54 births per 1,000 population

Death Rate: 5.39 per 1,000 population

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***Editors' Note*: Of all the countries examined in this *Encyclopedia*, Iran is among the most controversial. Major factors in Western/Iranian misunderstandings include the history of British imperial expansionism into Iran, influence struggles between the Soviet Union and the West over oil-rich territories, post-World War II efforts of Iran to nationalize its oil production, and several decades of armed and unarmed conflict between Iran and the United States. Another factor in Iran's negative image in the West has been the Salman Rushdie affair. These circumstances conspire to make an objective and scholarly study of sexuality in Iran very difficult.

Fluent in Farsi, Dr. Paula Drew is a British-born-and-educated cultural anthropologist. While married to an Iranian, she held consecutive tenured positions at the University of Tabriz in northern Iran and the National University of Teheran between 1964 and the fall of the Shah in 1978. In these universities, she taught Iranian women French, German, English, and psychology. For three years, she served as academic and personal advisor to female students in the humanities. She also ran a clinic for mothers and babies in an Iranian oasis community for almost ten years. Her field-note observations formed the basis for her doctoral thesis in anthropology on arranging marriages in Iran. Dr. Drew presents her view of a society torn by modernization, yearnings for traditionalism, undertows of ancient customs, conflicts between urban and rural segments, tensions between newly affluent classes and the historically poor, and the influx of petro dollars, all of these surmounted by intensely complex religiopolitical conflict and warfare. Since Dr. Drew left Iran in the late 1970s, Iran has seen a revolution, a major war with Iraq, and an upsurge in Islamic activism.

Several Iranian commentators, all men, reacted strongly to Dr. Drew's depiction of sexuality and gender in Iran. They provided important clarifications and alternative viewpoints. As Dr. Drew's essay makes clear, sexuality and gender have been crucially affected by large-scale changes in Iran's modern history. In a world torn as painfully as Iran, it is probably impossible to attain consensus about the recent tidal changes in sexuality, women's roles, and gender in Iran. In the editors' view, these disagreements exist in a matrix of conflicts between West/Middle East, developed/developing economies, native/foreign, Judeo-Christian/Islamic, and male/female perspectives. There is also a strong overtone of national pride in Iran and its achievements, both under the Shah and the Ayatollah.

This chapter represents a starting point for disentangling the web of changes that have affected sexuality, gender, women, and reproduction in Iran.

***Pseudonym for an Iranian historian and social researcher.

Infant Mortality Rate: 28.07 deaths per 1,000 live births

Net Migration Rate: –4.46 migrant(s) per 1,000 population

Total Fertility Rate: 2.01 children born per woman

Population Growth Rate: 0.77%

HIV/AIDS (1999 est.): *Adult prevalence*: < 0.01%; *Persons living with HIV/AIDS*: 3,473 reported through January 2002 (however, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimated the more realistic figure was 19,000); *Deaths*: 350. (For additional details from www.UNAIDS.org, see end of Section 10B.)

Literacy Rate (*defined as those age 15 and over who can read and write*): 72.1% (1997 est.: 79%); (*male*: 78.4%, *female*: 65.8%) (1994 est.); education is free and compulsory from age 6 to 10

Per Capita Gross Domestic Product (*purchasing power parity*): $6,400 (2001 est.); *Inflation*: 13% (2001 est.); *Unemployment*: 14% (1999 est.); *Living below the poverty line*: 53% (1996 est.)

B. A Brief Historical Perspective

Iran, once known as Persia, emerged in the second millennium B.C.E., when an Indo-European group supplanted an earlier agricultural civilization in the Fertile Crescent of the Tires and Euphrates Rivers. In 549 B.C.E., Cyrus the Great united the Medes and Persians in the Persian Empire. Alexander the Great conquered Persia in 333 B.C.E., but the Persians regained their independence in the next century.

When Muhammad died suddenly in 632, he had designated no successor (*caliph*). Despite the ensuing struggle over religious leadership, the second *caliph*, Umar (in office 634-644), captured the ancient city of Damascus, defeated the Byzantine Emperor Heraclitus, and annexed all of Syria. Jerusalem and all of Palestine fell to the Muslims in 638; Egypt in 639-641. Islam arrived in Iraq in 637, and in Iran between 640 and 649, replacing the indigenous Zoroastrian faith. After Persian cultural and political autonomy was restored in the 9th century, the arts and sciences flourished for several centuries while Europe was in the Dark Ages. The Caliphs of the Umayyad dynasty (661-750), who ruled from their capital in Damascus, masterminded and extended the great Arab-Islamic conquests of Palestine, Syria, Iraq, and Egypt, across North Africa, through Spain, and into France in the west. In south and central Asia, the Caliphs extended their rule to the Indus and as far north as the Jaxartes River. Turks and Mongols ruled Persia, in turn, from the 11th century until 1502 when a native dynasty reasserted itself. In the 19th century, the Russian and British empires vied for influence; Britain separated Afghanistan from Persia in 1857 (Denny 1987, 32-39; Noss & Noss 1990, 552-556).

When Reza Khan abdicated as Shah in 1941, his son, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi succeeded him. Under the Pahlavis' rule (1921-1979), Iran underwent major economic and social change, strongly influenced by Western culture. Despite the repression of political opposition, conservative Muslim protests led to violence in 1978. The Shah left Iran January 16, 1979, and was replaced two weeks later by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, an exiled conservative religious leader. An Islamic Constitution was adopted, setting up a theocracy with the Ayatollah Khomeini as the final authority, the sole contemporary representative of the last divinely guided Imam. The complete takeover by very conservative Islamic clerics brought revolts among the ethnic minorities, a halt to Western influences in society, and a tension between the clerics and Westernized intellectuals and liberals that continues to the present. The new regime quickly revoked the Family Protection Act, which, under the Shah, allowed mothers some custody rights of their children in cases of divorce, and restored the *Shar'ia* provisions giving child custody to the father. The war with Iraq (1980-1988) was particularly devastating to Iran. In addition to the death of thousands of young males, Iran's economy suffered severely following the 1979-1981 seizure of the American embassy and the break in international diplomatic relations.

Following the Persian Gulf War in 1991, some one million Kurds fled across Iran's northern border into Turkey to escape persecution. Following the 1989 death of the Ayatollah Khomeini, the Islamic authorities were faced with pressure from the business community and middle class to moderate somewhat their opposition to Western influences. In the 1992 Parliamentary elections, President Rafsanjani and his supporters easily won control of the government against the anti-Western opposition.

[*Update 1997*: In 1997, reform-minded Mohammed Khatami was elected president; he was easily reelected in 2001. The new President's powers, however, were severely limited, as hard-liners retained control of the judiciary, security forces, army, large economic centers, the press, and the government-run television. One of the most substantial obstacles to change has been the religious panel called the Guardian Council. Members of the panel are appointed by the supreme religious leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and are authorized to reject any legislation they consider counter to the Constitution or Islamic law. By mid 2002, with the Guardian Council frustrating Khatami's every effort at reform, the President openly challenged the Council and moved to regain powers assigned his office by the Constitution. In late 2002, the outcome of this challenge, and efforts to improve the status and freedom of women, was still uncertain (Fathi 2002c). (*End of update by R. T. Francoeur*)]

1. Basic Sexological Premises

A. Character of Gender Roles

Gender roles in Iran must be discussed in terms of different stages of the lifecycle and in terms of different kin roles: mother, father, aunt, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, and so on. Iran is a dependency culture.

B. Sociolegal Status of Males and Females

Children are raised to be dependent on other family members and to remain so throughout their lives. Children are taught to contribute their labor to the family as part of their duty, with no expectation of financial reward or praise. Teenage boys help their father, uncles, or grandfathers in their business. Girls help in the home and with the care of younger siblings. They make few choices with regard to their clothing or the way they spend their time, and have little or no access to money. Working outside the family is frowned upon.

At a suitable age, determined by the parents and other older kin, a husband or wife will be selected for a daughter or son by the mother. She will investigate the health, wealth, and character of the proposed spouse and bring about the agreement of the person's parents that the marriage will take place. She will also ensure the compliance of her son or daughter. The father will negotiate with the proposed spouse's male kin with regard to all financial aspects of the marriage.

Since loss of virginity invalidates these financial agreements, female offspring are physically supervised by older relatives from cradle until the post-nuptial proof of a hitherto-intact hymen. It is thus part of the female role, in the capacity of mother, aunt, or grandmother, to participate in the continual supervision of younger females, leaving no opportunity for behavior that might jeopardize nuptial agreements. Once the marriage occurs, the mother-in-law takes

over from the bride's mother the responsibilities of supervising her new daughter-in-law, ensuring her fidelity as a wife. The importance of this particular role depends both on the education level of the groom son and the residential situation, i.e., whether patrilocal or neolocal. As a wife, a woman is subordinate to her husband and his older kin, particularly his parents and older sisters. Regardless of her age, a woman's friendships with males are confined to those with her father, brothers, and sons. This is particularly true for upper-class women; the greater her family's wealth, the more likely the female is to be controlled and supervised. At the same time, there is a strong emotional component in father-daughter and brother-sister relationships, including familiar touches Westerners would likely consider somewhat erotic, if not lightly sexual.

Like the female, the male has a set of gender-defined kin roles. He remains subordinate to his father, uncles, and grandfathers until the age when his own children are marriageable. As he ages, he acquires more say in the financial affairs of the family. His major arena of power until well into middle age is the control of his wife. His mother, maternal aunts, and older sisters act as allies in enforcing his rules when he is away from home. This makes opportunities for shirking household duties, unmonitored phone calls, or unaccompanied shopping expeditions highly unlikely—let alone opportunities for infidelity. In the 1970s, wives in college and the workforce were more often than not accompanied to and from their places of study or business by an older relative or the husband. At the National University of Iran, the guard at the gate would not allow a father or brother to escort a daughter or sister to class within the enclosed campus.

As a father, uncle, and father-in-law, a man's power of veto in family decisions increases with age. He is likely to exercise strong veto over the education of his daughters and the way they dress. In this respect, he sets the rules, and his wife carries out the necessary supervision. The gender roles are thus closely tied to maintaining the rules and upholding the honor of the extended-family unit.

When the Shah of Iran was ousted in February 1979, the country reverted from a legal system, based on that of Switzerland, to the *Shar'ia* or Islamic law, under which females are not considered legally or mentally the equal of males. A woman must be represented in all legal transactions by a man, by her father or brother if she is unmarried, or by her husband if she is married.

At any time, a woman is at risk of repudiation. Divorce—male-initiated, incontestable, and brought about in a matter of days—can bring the immediate loss of her children to the husband's family. Children under Islamic law are perceived as the "substance of the male," merely incubated by the female body without any biological or genetic contribution. Children thus belong to the male, and Islamic law reflects this by allocating custody of children to the father. It is thus part of a woman's concept of her own sexuality that it is inextricably linked with the production of children; she will love them but forever risk losing them through repudiation. To keep her children, she must not risk repudiation by her husband. In a culture that has not encouraged romantic attachments leading to marriage, and discourages affection and companionship between spouses, the fear of losing her children often sustains the woman's efforts—culinary, domestic, and sexual—to please the husband, at least until the children are into their 20s. This fear of repudiation is stronger today, because of the 1979 restoration of the father's rights to child custody.

This fear of repudiation is further exacerbated by the lack of acceptable societal slots for divorced women. In a country where houses are not rented to single people, especially female, a repudiated woman must inevitably return to the home and control of her parents. Remarriage usually means becoming the wife of a man with custody of children from a previous marriage, who will often address her and refer to her by the title *zan baba*, "Daddy's woman/wife." If the children by an earlier marriage are on friendly terms with the new wife, they may refer to her by her first name or a more appropriate title.

Legal adulthood has little practical meaning, because children are always the responsibility of the father, regardless of their age. The war with Iraq (1980-1988) saw compulsory conscription to active combat of all males over the age of 12, other than only sons of widows. If a man dies, his brother automatically takes on the financial burden and social responsibilities of the widow and children. In this dependency culture, custom, not law, compels him in this.

If children do not like the arrangements made for them, it is not their place to comment, nor are there social agencies to which they could appeal. Kinship binds more strongly than law. There is also little infrastructure concerned with legalities other than blatant criminality or property disputes.

It is apparent to the careful observer that the legal and social status and rights of Iranian women are very much in transition, creating an unexpected blend of "traditional Islamic" and modern Western values. While the government still warns against a return to the near-Western freedoms that women experienced in Iran under the Shah, the strict fundamentalist practices introduced by the 1979 Islamic Revolution have undergone a major shift. Iranian women are still subject to fines, and sometimes flogging, for not wearing the *chador* (veil); they also suffer from the persistent denial of gender equality in Islamic law. Still, many Iranian women maintain that wearing the *chador* is not repressive, but in fact protects them from sexual harassment when they go out in public.

[*Update 1997*: In November 1994, thousands of Iranian women marched in a Teheran stadium to celebrate Women's Week and show their support for women's rights and a shift in government policy which started in 1991. The celebrations for the 1994 Women's Week included exhibitions by female artists, award ceremonies for female factory workers, and amnesty for 190 women prisoners. In recent years, a dormant family-planning program has been restarted. State-approved prenuptial contracts allow women the right to initiate divorce proceedings. Restrictions banning women from higher education to become engineers and assistants to judges have been lifted. As a result of these and other developments, the number of women in the workplace and in institutions of higher education have increased. In 1994, 30% of government employees were women as were 40% of university students, up from about 12% in 1978.

[Faezeh Hashemi, the Iranian President's oldest daughter, has become the chief spokeswoman for the emerging women's movement. In 1993, the 31-year-old former volleyball coach organized the first Islamic Women's Olympics in Teheran in 1993. "Our goal was to give women a sense of self-confidence," Ms. Hashemi announced. "In most of the Islamic world, women have cultural problems. They are regarded as a commodity. For Iranian women, the values have changed." She does not see restrictions, such as wearing the *chador*, as necessarily impeding a woman's career.

[Iranian secularists are not satisfied by this slow return to women's freedoms. They compare an event like the Women's Olympics, which attracted 700 athletes from 11 countries, but was closed to men and photographers, as a continuation of harem seclusion. Meanwhile, fundamentalists are equally unhappy, warning against the subversion of traditional Islamic values by "obscene Western values."

[The younger generation among Iranian government officials and administrators, who are more open to the West, are working to create their own complete and comprehensive version of Islamic fundamentalism that will rival Western liberalism and be viewed as better than it and other alternatives (*The New York Times* 1994). (*End of update by R. T. Francoeur*)]

C. General Concepts of Sexuality and Love

Iranian culture is quite comfortable with speaking openly about all the physical aspects of sexuality and sexual responses. This includes open teasing about the physical side of sexuality. There is, however, a strong taboo when it comes to mentioning or discussing the emotional aspects of relationships.

The onset of attraction to the opposite sex is generally spoken of in physical terms. Teenage boys are openly subjected by older kin to routine inquiries as to their health and capacity for erections as soon as hair appears on the upper lip. "Your mustache is beginning to sprout. Do you need a wife yet?" is a more coy version of the same inquiry. The physical maturation status for young girls is measured by the onset of menarche.

Among young people, feelings of love for a person of the opposite sex are, if suspected by older kin, thought of as something to be ignored or ridiculed away rather than respected and indulged. Such feelings are only considered if they are directed towards a person found suitable for marriage after investigation by the older kin. Love is not considered a basis or prerequisite for marriage, which in turn is the only acceptable social matrix for sex.

Popular Iranian songs speak of love. Soap operas on Teheran television make much of love matches thwarted by economically more viable arrangements made by parents. Both songs and soap operas reflect the social reality. Young people see and are attracted by the face and form of members of the opposite sex, but such feelings cannot be nurtured and encouraged by dating into a situation where emotional and physical inclinations coalesce, unless there is social and financial eligibility for an imminent marriage approved by the older kin on both sides.

Even where a boy and girl meet these requirements, they will be most carefully watched to make sure they do not anticipate financial settlements. A girl who loses her virginity before such financial matters are agreed upon is not considered as having behaved immorally, but as having given the other side an advantage in negotiations, in that the girl's parents cannot now threaten to withdraw from the match, however poor the terms offered. Emotional attachment in marriage is considered desirable on the part of the wife towards the husband, but not vice versa. The male's power and control over his wife is considered in jeopardy if he is overly fond of his wife. In the early months of marriage, the husband's father and older brothers will often set up competing demands on the young man's time should they become privy to any prior arrangements he has made with his new wife. A husband will be ridiculed if he shows the weakness of acceding to his wife's wishes. A man's mother and older sisters will also often erect barriers in the way of companionship and intimacy between spouses by their continual presence and superior claims on the husband's time.

2. Religious, Ethnic, and Gender Factors Affecting Sexuality

A. Religious Factors

[*Update 1997*: Islam, the dominant faith of Iranians, has two traditions or divisions: Sunni and Shi'ite. The Shi'ites, who account for 93% of Iranians, regard 'Ali, the son-in-law of Muhammad, as the founder's proper successor, while Sunni Muslims follow the three caliphs who actually succeeded Muhammad. Shi'ite Muslims believe that God guides them through the divine light descending through 'Ali and several Imams, or divinely guided "leaders" of Shi'ism. Shi'ites have never ceased to exercise *ijtihad*, the intellectual "effort" of Muslim jurists to reach independent religiolegal decisions. Shi'ite Muslims are generally considerably more flexible and adaptive than the Sunni Muslims. However, both Shi'ite and Sunni Muslims consider each other to be members of the same tradition of faith, order, and community. To understand the connection between Islam and sexual attitudes and behavior, it is important the keep in mind that the worldwide Muslim community or *Umma* can be compared with a triangle whose sides represent history, the religious doctrine/ritual, and culture. In different historical eras in Iran's long history, as well as in other Muslim countries and communities, the balance between these three elements varies. At times, doctrine and ritual are emphasized over culture and history. At other times, cultural and ethnic identity within particular regions have been emphasized. At still other times, Muslims have emphasized the ideal of certain historical eras of Islam. Still, all three dimensions are essential to the *Umma*. (Denny 1987, 5-12, 32-71; Noss & Noss 1990).

[While the number of Sunni Muslims in Iran is much smaller than that of the Shi'ites, they and other minorities of Christians, Jews, B'hai, Zoroastrians, Ismailies, Sikhs, and Buddhists quietly reside in isolated communities. There are also seven to eight million ethnic Kurds and Belouch, the majority of whom are Sunni Muslim (Denny 1987; Noss & Noss 1990). (*End of update by R. T. Francoeur*)]

Islam, like other monotheistic religions, prohibits pre- and extramarital sex. Sex between two adults married to others is condemned as the most serious of sins (*zina*)—under Islamic law, adultery and fornication incurs the penalty of stoning to death. Some Islamic countries have at different points in time lifted the death penalty for adulterous males, while retaining it for females. In Iran and probably most Islamic countries, adultery is rare, not because of Islamic prohibitions, but because of social mores that segregate the sexes and allow no privacy. [*Comment 1997*: In the upper classes, it is rampant, for both men and women! (*End of comment by F. A. Sadeghpour*)] The Islamic sense of pollution, which prohibits all acts of worship under certain conditions of spiritual and physical uncleanliness, makes public—and therefore amenable to control—otherwise private, biological events, such as menarche, menstruation, sexual contact, and ejaculation.

Males who have ejaculated, females whose external or internal organs have had contact with seminal fluid, and females who are menstruating may not pray or touch a copy of the Qur'an without first performing ablutions. Since these ablutions were not possible in the majority of Iranian houses in the 1970s, these necessary ablutions had to be performed at public facilities and were, therefore, open to public scrutiny. Prayers were said individually within the home, but audibly and in full view of others at the prescribed times of the day. Thus anyone who, through fear of committing sacrilege, had to abstain from ritual recitation of prayers or from the obligatory periods of fasting set down by the Islamic calendar, would be subject to scrutiny and interrogation by older family members about the reason for such abstention.

Most Iranian housing consists of a one-story, single large room, or two-story, two-room, with-curtain-hung alcoves, a private courtyard enclosed by a high wall, and a toilet/bath in one corner of the courtyard. The wealthy can afford to live in moderate high-rise apartments, but these are

limited because of the danger of earthquakes. This architecture and the desert environment makes privacy a premium.

Menarche announces itself to the entire household when a young girl is unable to recite her prayers. This is often the signal for parents to conclude marriage arrangements, so that the girl can be wed before her second menstruation. Intercourse between married members of the household is similarly monitored. Conception or failure to conceive is similarly apparent to all. The approximate time of any woman's ovulation can be informally calculated by interested parties. Wet dreams and visits to houses of prostitution can be surmised by the family in the same way, by watching who does and does not pray and when. Wash basins or pools for routine washing of the face, hands, and feet are set in full view of all household members in the hallway or yard. Bathing the body under a shower takes place at the neighborhood bathhouse where abundant hot water is available for a modest sum. Taking a shower, for the most part, is seen not so much as a hygienic measure, but as a way of ridding the body of anything that makes it spiritually unclean and the person unfit to participate in religious activities. The body parts are washed in ritualized sequence with prescribed prayers. The bathing practices of family members reveal a great deal of otherwise private information to those interested in monitoring them. The rituals of Islam thus abet the older members of the family in their task of controlling the sexual behavior of all those potentially reproductive or sexually active within the household.

There is a strong resistance among older women to the growing practice of installing hot water systems in the home. Although simplifying their dishwashing and laundry tasks, an automatic hot water system interferes with their ability to supervise the bathing practices of their husbands, offspring, and daughters-in-law, and thereby keeping tabs on their sexual behavior. Even in houses with a shower, the matriarch of the household often controls the means of igniting the hot water system. Similarly, she controls the supply of laundered undergarments and towels, keeping them tied up in bundles so that nobody can retrieve these essentials without her help.

Although the Qur'an does not prescribe the covering of the head for women nor the separation of men and women in public places, Iranians follow a style of dress and segregation of the sexes characteristic of Islamic societies of the Middle East. In Iran, some cities have always been more conservative than others in this regard, but the Ayatollah Khomeini did much to bring about conformity to the strictest code by making violations subject to immediate physical punishment at the hands of the young revolutionary guards, the Pastoran. [*Comment 1997*: Commentators strongly agree with this observation. (*End of comment by R. T. Francoeur*)] The traditional veil or *chador*, which in many villages and towns often concealed only the back of the head and the general outline below the waist, is now supplemented with bandannas pulled low over the forehead, and thick stockings to conceal lower limbs not completely covered by loose pants. The outline of the ankle has to be obscured because its dimension is thought to be related to that of the vagina. The veil itself is pulled firmly across the face and chest, as was always the custom in Qum, Mashad, and most of Tabriz. Now "modesty" is a requirement for all girls over the age of 9. No hair must show around the face.

By custom, certain times of the day are "women's hours" on the streets and few men are about. At other times, only men throng the streets, so a woman would be conspicuous and likely to be harassed. Many stores have sex-segregated service lines, often with a curtain separating the two. Public baths have days for women and days for men, identified by the color of the flag hoisted above the establishment. Schools, too, are segregated to the point that girls' schools employ only female personnel at any level. Places of worship are divided into men's and women's quarters with separate entrances. Informal prayer meetings are only for one sex or the other. Many celebrations and funerals in private houses send males and females into separate rooms. Women are barred from many places, such as some cinemas, restaurants, and teahouses. Other places, such as swimming pools and ski areas, allow families to enter but not young men or women, either singly or in same-sex groups. Young multiage groups of cousins might be allowed into a cinema, if several of the older males are obviously in charge.

The Iranian culture, especially now with its conservatism bolstered by the Islamic regime, is not one in which people of the opposite sex can meet casually. Clandestine meetings, for which there are few arenas, are made dangerous by the pervasive armed guardians of Islamic law, the Pastoran, who demand to see marriage certificates of couples on the street, at beaches, and parks.

B. Ethnic Factors

Just over half of all Iranians are Persian, 25% Azerbaijani, and 9% Kurd. Although the vast majority of Iranians are Muslim, each has its own distinctive character with regard to the extent to which Islamic dress codes for women, and sexual segregation in streets and public buildings are enforced. [*Comment 1997*: For instance, the Baktiari, Quashquai, and Lore tribes, who live in the Zagros Mountains in the west, do not follow the Islamic dress codes or the practice of female segregation in public places. Although these tribes are Muslim, they do not comply with the Islamic regime's heavy handedness. (*End of comment by F. A. Sadeghpour*)]

3. Knowledge and Education about Sexuality

A. Government Policies and Programs for Sex Education

Under the Shah's regime, which ended in 1978, the state school biology curriculum for the second year of high school included a section on human reproduction, showing the mechanics of meiosis, or egg and sperm production. Such information, revealing that males and females both contribute genetic material to the production of a fetus, runs counter to a central underpinning of Islamic law with regard to child custody, i.e., that the child is the product solely of male seed. When Islamic law was reinstated by the Ayatollah Khomeini, it was necessary to suppress any dissemination of the idea that males and females both contribute materially to the production of a child.

Even before the 1978 revolution, and despite the passage of the Compulsory Education Act of 1953, many female children were withdrawn from school before the onset of puberty. The Compulsory Education Act required children to remain in school until age 15. However, the birth of a newborn girl was commonly recorded as having occurred two years prior to her actual birth date among all but the educated elite. The parents then had government documentation in hand that their daughter was 15 and old enough to leave school, when in reality, she may not even have reached puberty. During the Shah's regime, efforts to curb this practice were frustrated by the fact that few births took place in a medical setting with personnel able to provide documentation.

The other chief formal source of information on human sexuality is provided by the compulsory religious instruction curriculum in the public schools. In religious instruction classes, students are taught the format of prayers to be said at the five daily prayer times prescribed by Islam, and the rules of purity and pollution surrounding them. Details of prerequisite ablutions of the genital and other orifices of the body provided information on anatomical differences between the sexes. Information is also given on the measures to be taken prior to prayer to counter the polluting effects of urination, defecation, expectoration, expulsion of nasal mucus, menstruation, childbirth, ejaculation, and penetration of the vagina (human and animal) to restore spiritual purity. These measures require that the student have detailed knowledge of the reproductive organs and sexual practices. The Islamic clergy, or *mullah*s, also disseminate this type of information on television, in the mosque, and in the many informal neighborhood prayer meetings.

The general trend of this information, whether given by lay teachers or *mullah*s, is to present sexual behavior as the most polluting form of elimination, which renders the participant spiritually and physically unclean. Sexual behavior of any kind obstructs spiritual readiness. Whereas the polluting effects on the body and spirit of urination or defecation can be washed away in a bathroom with a sink or a shower, orgasm or sexual contact with a person or animal requires a more ritualized bathing with accompanying spiritually cleansing words.

Television programs in Iran regularly deal with the finer points of Islamic observance, such as determining the readiness or otherwise for prayer in ambiguous situations such as nursing mothers, sufferers from vaginal discharges, and males awaking in a state of sexual arousal. Often, the format of the program is one in which viewers' letters are answered by experts in Islamic practice.

B. Informal Sources of Sexual Knowledge

Sexuality Education Within the Home

The nature of Iranian family and social life offers a major informal source of sexual knowledge.

There is little coyness about the physical aspects of sex. Because it interrupts fasting and prayer schedules, menstruation is openly mentioned by men and women. Pregnancy's physical aspects are not only discussed in intimate detail, but the taboos against males' touching women are lifted during pregnancy, so that males can feel free to pat a pregnant woman approvingly on the abdomen. Breastfeeding is also subject to few social taboos. Women breastfeed in public places and in mixed company in private houses with no attempt to cover the breasts. A little milk, believed to be stale, is usually expressed quiet openly from each breast before beginning to nurse. So although faces and limbs are assiduously covered, the nursing breast is displayed quite blatantly. [*Comment 1997*: This is characteristic of provincial and lower-class urban Iranians. (*End of comment by F. A. Sadeghpour*)]

Little girls of all ages are kept well covered. In many provincial towns, girl babies are hidden completely under their mother's *chador* on the street. Toddler girls wear *chadors* often with only a pacifier protruding from its folds.

Little boys are often bare from the waist down, obviating the need for diapers outside. At any age, males may urinate openly in the street or at the roadside. Older males often seek the partial privacy of a tree or wall. Most, however, orient themselves in a way so as to avoid the sacrilege of urinating while facing Mecca, even if it then means facing an audience. Many men, subsequent to urination, bend down and bathe the head of the penis in any convenient pool or stream of water, to avoid the spiritual defilement of a drop of urine before prayer. Females' visual knowledge of male anatomy is derived largely from seeing little boys unclad and males of all ages urinating and washing in public.

Prior to puberty, male children gain a much more extensive knowledge of female anatomy at all stages of the lifecycle, and at all stages of pregnancy and lactation, by virtue of the fact that their mothers take them to the public baths with them on "women's day." The public baths consist of waist-deep bathing pools for communal bathing and private shower rooms for families. No one bathes completely alone. Women of all ages are unclad. Most wear loose drawers in the public areas, but are otherwise nude. Within the privacy of the shower rooms, little boys therefore observe their grandmothers, mothers, aunts, sisters, and female cousins taking showers and being depilated of all body hair. Female bath attendants, who assist in applying the leefah and pumice stone, also assist in the removing of facial and leg hair with a kind of scissor made of twisted threads, and in the shaving of the pubic regions and armpits. The bath attendants enter the cubicles wearing a *chador*, which they then remove to work in the nude. They themselves are devoid of all body hair. It is up to the bath attendants to decide, based on their own observations, whether a young boy is too old to be present on women's day. Clearly, men retain in adulthood images of what they saw in the bathhouse during childhood. Many speak openly, with disgust and derision, of the effects of pregnancy and the aging process on the female body. Females, however, lack this kind of longitudinal information on males, because fathers do not take children with them to bathe. [*Comment 1997*: These observations do not apply to upper- and rich-class families, which commonly have showers in their homes. (*End of comment by F. A. Sadeghpour*)]

Children are aware from an early age that an intrinsic part of wedding preparations is the setting out of the wedding night sleeping quarters for the bride and groom. The first night after the wedding has to be spent within the supervised setting of the family. Children learn, too, that something painful involving blood is going to happen to the bride, and that for her protection against excessive brutality on the part of the groom, older female kin have their bedding set out within earshot, often with only a curtain separating them from the bridal couple. (The prevalence of voyeurism, mentioned in Section 8, Unconventional Sexual Behaviors, below, also provides a rich informal source of sexual knowledge.)

Another informal source of sexuality information is American and European adult magazines such as *Playboy* and *Penthouse*. Until the crackdown of the Islamic regime, these magazines were on sale everywhere and openly displayed in homes. They were a source of pictures to decorate the walls in private houses, particularly in the kitchen and areas of the house off-limits to formal visitors. Although the magazines can no longer be openly sold, back issues still abound and old centerfolds still adorn some family rooms.

Television as a Source of Sexual Information

In the absence of many other forms of recreation, watching television has become a major urban pastime. Since there are only three Government-run television channels, and since their regular scheduled programming is often supplanted, without announcement, by religious broadcasts, satellite-dish television keeps the general public aware that the position of women, and patterns of courtship, marriage, and sexual behavior, are much more liberal outside Iran. In 1994, Iranian-made satellite antennae cost $700 and small, low-tech antennae sold through the black market for as little as $400. An estimated 200,000 Iranian families have dishes,

but it is common for several neighboring families to reduce the cost even more by tying in their television sets to a single jointly purchased dish.

For some years, Iranian satellite dishes were able to bring in everything from late-night soft pornography films from Turkey to the BBC news. Most satellite programs were handled by the Hong Kong-based Star TV. The most popular satellite programs were "Dynasty," "The Simpsons," "Baywatch," "Moonlighting," "Wrestlemania," professional American basketball, and an Asian version of MTV. The Donahue and Oprah Winfrey talk shows, which regularly deal with sexual and relationship issues, were also very popular in a society where a woman's ankle cannot be exposed in public. Until December 1994, when the Government outlawed satellite television antennae, this source of sexuality information encouraged the adoption of Western ideas of fashion and relationships. [*Comment 1997*: For the rich, this has always been the norm. (*End of comment by F. A. Sadeghpour*)] Of necessity, even before they were outlawed, satellite antennae were carefully hidden from the representatives and enforcers of religiously conservative dictates from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance.

In 1994, threatened with a loss of their captive audience, the *mullah*s fought back with Government efforts to jam the satellite reception. Members of the popular militia, known as *bassijis*, began barging into homes to smash satellite receivers (Hedges 1994). On December 25, 1994, after months of debate, the Iranian Parliament ratified a ban on satellite dishes. Once the ban is routinely approved by the Guardian Council, dish owners would have 30 days to remove them or face confiscation and trial with unspecified penalties. The Interior Ministry and Secret Service agencies were ordered to prevent the import, distribution, and use of satellite dishes "with all the necessary means." Some lawmakers warned that, if people refused to comply with the ban, the forcible removal of satellite dishes would violate their right to privacy and could lead to serious political repercussions for the Islamic Government.

Sexual Information on the Internet

In addition to their interest in controlling sexual information and sexually explicit material available to Iranians on satellite television, the government has very mixed feelings about allowing access to the Internet. *Sobh*, the monthly newspaper of the most puritanical clergy, has called for a ban on the Internet, similar to the ban on satellite-television antennae enacted in 1994. However, as of late 1996, the Parliament had yet to take up the issue. Rapid upgrading of telephone lines, growing pressure from scientists interested in communicating with colleagues around the world, and clergy interest in spreading the message of Islam by making computerized texts of both Sunni and Shi'ite law available on the World Wide Web are forcing the government to open up some access to the Internet. The government is trying to centralize all access through the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications, which is struggling to screen the rapidly increasing number of sites on the World Wide Web, and block access to objectionable sites with a "firewall." The Ministry is constantly updating its list of banned Web sites and information, ranging from pornography sources like "playboy.com," to opposition groups like the Mujahedeen Khalq, based in Iraq, and abhorred religious faiths like the Bahai, as well as any information seen as Western propaganda (MacFarquhar 1996b).

Cost remains a major hurdle for most Iranians seeking information on the Internet. The Government charges large initiation fees, and bills Internet use at the same high rates as long-distance phone calls.

Outside the Government, a few services have established Internet links. Since 1994, much of the Iranian university system has depended on a trunk line established by the Institute for the Study of Mathematics and Science to a sister institution in Austria. But with an estimated 30,000 people having accounts, and the trunk line limited to six users at a time, getting through requires patience. There is also an ongoing feud between the universities and the Telecommunications Ministry over whether the universities will be allowed to keep their independent access once the government's system is operational. In 1996, Teheran's energetic Mayor, Gholam Hussein Karbaschi, had a municipal bulletin board and an email system that forwarded messages internationally, but exchanges often took at least 24 hours. Professors and students were suspicious that messages sent and received on this municipal service were screened and deleted when found objectionable, but the Mayor denied messages were vetted, blaming the huge backlog for lost exchanges. Government officials have already admitted they cannot control access to objectionable information on the Internet mechanically, so the future of access to sexuality information on the Internet remains uncertain.

[*Sexual Information in Iranian Cinema*

[*Update 2001*: A report on "Subliminal Sex in Iranian Cinema" by Shakla Haeri describes how Iranian cinema has adapted to strict government censorship while accommodating the general interest of Iranians in sexual issues. The cinema has developed all kinds of symbols and codes so that the cinemagoers may assume sexual contact between lovers without any explicit mention or showing. Riding a motorcycle in tandem is one device. Another movie shows quivering lovers both holding on to the same branch of a tree, fully clothed, the girl neatly head-scarfed despite turbulent weather. The tree branch is briefly submerged in a torrent and emerges to show the lovers still perfectly kempt but devoid of former tension (*Anthropology News* March 2001). (*End of update by R. T. Francoeur*)]

4. Autoerotic Behaviors and Patterns

The subject of self-pleasuring is apparently taboo or unacknowledged, because its only reference appears to be within the context of preprayer ablutions requirements on the male after voluntary ejaculation.

5. Interpersonal Heterosexual Behaviors

A. Children

Children do not play unsupervised. An invitation to a child to play at the house of a neighbor or a schoolmate always includes the mother. Such invitations are in any case rare, as are all social interactions with nonkin. Children, in general, play with their cousins under the watchful eye of all mothers. Female children are watched very carefully. Access to information on sex-rehearsal play would be severely hampered by cultural taboos on admitting anything detrimental about one's children, especially to nonkin.

B. Adolescents

Puberty Rituals

The male puberty rite of circumcision, which formerly celebrated the onset of manhood, has for many years now been more customarily performed at the age of 5 or 6 for children born at home, and at two days old for those born in a medical setting. Boys circumcised after infancy wear a girl's skirt for several days, ostensibly to prevent chafing of the unhealed penis, but also to proclaim their status to others. By puberty, all Muslim Iranian boys must be circumcised if they are to participate fully in religious activities.

Female circumcision, common in African Muslim cultures, does not occur in Iran. For Iranian girls, there is some ambiguity about her societal status from the age of 9 on. In the Iranian brand of Shi'ite Islam, a girl of 9 is judged to have reached the age of understanding. She is therefore expected to say her prayers and abstain from food during periods of prescribed fasting. As a fully participating Muslima in many layers of society, she is expected to assume modest dress, i.e., the *chador*, if she has not already done so. More-conservative *mullah*s in Iran have construed the phrase "age of understanding" to mean age of readiness for marriage. The Islamic regime of the Ayatollah Khomeini has encouraged a return to this interpretation, promoting child marriages in which the 9-year-old girl joins her husband's household (patrilocal). The marriage, however, is not consummated until after her first menstruation. The child bride often shares a quilt at night with her mother-in-law, who, because of the prevalence of cousin marriage, is more often than not the bride's paternal or maternal aunt.

Premarital Sexual Activities and Relationships

It can be said that there are no societally approved premarital sexual activities. The sexes are separated by adolescence. Young single males join male kin for most social activities. Young single females stay with the women in the family. Many young girls are married immediately after menarche. [*Comment 1997*: Several commentators questioned this broad generalization. (*End of comment by R. T. Francoeur*)]

A young virgin who joins a household as a live-in maid, is often required by both her parents and her employers to submit to a medical examination to establish whether her hymen is intact. Written into her employment contract is the amount of cash penalty payable by the employer should she lose her virginity (as determined by a second medical examination) during her employment. This contract protects her from the advances of male members of the household, as well as from male visitors to the house, by placing the onus on her employer to protect her and supervise her. In her subordinate capacity, she is extremely vulnerable to rape and seduction. Households employing young girls are also vulnerable to extortion by her parents. Her certificates of pre- and postemployment virginity are also documents that feature in her own prenuptial negotiations. Despite these precautions, young servant girls are usually considered fair game for sexual advances and harassment by males in general.

[*Teenage Runaways*

[*Update 2000*: There are no official statistics on young Iranians who run away from home, although a November 2000 story in a Tehran newspaper estimated that the police round up close to 100 male and female runaways every day. The report also noted that runaways can be found in Iran's railroad and bus stations and public parks, where they often become prey of criminal gangs. For years, the government chose to ignore the problem of runaway youths, because problems of family honor should be dealt with within the family. But with more and more Iranian youth running away from home and falling prey to prostitution, crime, and addiction to cheap and plentiful heroin, the government has been forced to act. In early 2000, the city of Tehran funded the nation's only shelter for females who run away from their homes because of "divorce, addiction, poverty and the bizarre demands of parents."

[In addition to protecting the runaways from relatives bent on restoring their family honor by punishing or even killing the runaway, the shelter's main problem is to figure out what to do when a reconciliation with the runaway's family is not possible. If runaway girls are prostitutes, drug addicts, and go bareheaded, pretending that they are boys, they are turned over to the police and arrested. If they are just runaways, they are delivered to the shelter. The shelter has a strict regime, teaching basic math and language skills, a range of crafts, sewing, flower arranging, painting, and candlemaking. The hearty lunch is better than that served at many restaurants, and the girls can watch television, read newspapers, and listen to the radio (Sciolino 2000b). (*End of update by R. T. Francoeur*)]

C. Adults

Premarital Courtship, Dating, and Relationships

Courtship takes place in a supervised, formalized setting. All marriages are arranged, even those based on love matches and mutual inclination. Since male kin, especially the father, passes on the groom's portion of the family estate when he marries, the bride's kin have to know how much is involved before they consent to their daughter's betrothal. The older generation, therefore, controls all meetings between those seeking to marry each other.

A young man visits the girl he intends to marry accompanied by at least three older members of his family. He will be received in the dining room by her parents and relatives. The girl herself will often appear only fleetingly and not speak unless questioned directly. Marriage often follows betrothal by a matter of days. Often a contract is signed in the presence of a *mullah*, making the couple legally married and all financial agreements legally binding. The wedding celebration for the families is held off for up to a year. In some families, especially in Teheran, the couple is allowed to go out together between the official signing of the marriage contract and the wedding celebration. Sometimes the groom's family and sometimes the bride's family will prohibit such contact because, during negotiations, proof of virginity has been spelled out as a prerequisite to the finalization of property transfers. Urban and landless families usually have no such considerations.

Mild public displays of affection are tolerated between urban middle-class couples during the prewedding period. The couple, however, is seldom completely alone, even when allowed to go to the cinema or an ice cream parlor. Usually, there are siblings on either side in tow as a precaution against anything beyond hand holding or chaste kisses on the cheek.

Marriage and the Family

Temporary Marriages. [*Update 2001*: The custom of "temporary marriage" (*mut'a* or *sigheh*) appears to be unique to Iran. Originally, it was meant to provide female companionship and domestic services for Muslim men on long trips, especially on pilgrimages to Mecca and while serving in the military. During the Shah's regime, it existed for a variety of somewhat similar circumstances. A temporary marriage could provide female companionship and comfort for businessmen traveling outside Iran who preferred to leave their wife or wives at home. In this case, the marriage contract had clearly specified a certain duration of days or weeks after which the marriage ended. While this form of marriage became more and more rare over time, its legal authority was never removed. After the Iran-Iraq war, *mut'a* allowed widowed women to find some financial support as "temporary wives" in a society not structured to deal with widowed women with no family support system. Temporary marriages were publicly approved in the early 1990s, when then-President Hashemi Rafsanjani endorsed it as a way to channel young people's sexual urges under the strict sexual segregation maintained by the Islamic Republic.

[The essence of the *mut'a* contract is its legal and binding character. It may be witnessed by a religious authority (*mullah*), who is paid a fee for his official witness, or it may be less formal, but equally as legal in effect, with anyone reading a verse from the Qur'an in the couple's presence. The *mut'a* contract specifies the legitimacy of any offspring conceived during the time of the contract and the inheritance rights of these legitimate offspring, with a claim to the father's support and a right to his name on the birth certificate. Normally, the woman receives some money for entering the contract.

[In 2001, correspondents in Tehran reported a revival and new application of the "temporary marriage" by unmarried consenting adults who just want to go out together in public without being arrested for doing so. The *mut'a* is particularly poplar now for two divorced people who are dating. The *mut'a* allows them to visit areas, such as restaurants and ski resorts, which otherwise would be closed to them as an unmarried couple. (Fathi 2002a; Sciolino 2000). (See also Update 2002 in Section 8B, Significant Unconventional Sexual Behaviors, Prostitution) (*End of update by R. T. Francoeur*)]

Monogamy and Polygyny. Monogamy has long been established as the norm for both urban and rural households. Traditionally, newly married couples were given quarters in the household of the groom's parents. This pattern persists in rural areas. Young couples in the cities now often rent an apartment, usually in close proximity to the groom's parent's house. The groom's mother, and sometimes the bride's younger sister, stay with the newlyweds for the first few weeks of marriage. The groom's mother sets her guidelines for the way the house is to be run. From the beginning, everything serves to compartmentalize the aspects of the marriage relationship and prevent any spillover of feeling to be expressed in physical expressions of affection or the companionship of shared daytime activities.

The bride is prepared for her wedding night at a prenuptial bath in which her pubic hair is removed for the first time. Her mother-in-law and her own mother will sleep in close proximity to the marriage bed on the first night. Both will inspect the specially prepared handkerchief, which will provide evidence of both a broken hymen and ejaculation. If a honeymoon trip is undertaken, the couple will seldom travel alone, but be accompanied by a couple of younger siblings, or maybe an older sister. Honeymoon companions are particularly common for females of the middle class and among university students.

At home, the couple cannot retire until the groom's mother deems it is a fit hour for everyone. Generally, sleeping arrangements are such that the couple cannot rely on uninterrupted privacy. Iranian houses do not have rooms set aside exclusively as bedrooms. Nothing prevents a mother-in-law from setting up her bedding adjacent to that of her son and his wife, or in such a way that she has an excuse to walk by during the night en route to the kitchen or toilet. A pattern is then set for sex in marriage to be quick and almost furtive with ejaculation of the male as the prime or even sole goal.

Divorce. [*Update 2002*: In August 2002, Iran's reformist Parliament approved a bill that would grant women a right to seek a divorce equal to that of men for the first time since the Islamic revolution in 1979. The bill requires approval by the hard-line Guardian Council to become law. While that approval seems unlikely, Parliament's approval of the bill was considered a major victory both for women and reformist politicians, who have consistently sought the support of women because it creates public pressure on the country's conservative Islamic rulers.

[Under the civil code adopted after the 1979 revolution, "a man can divorce his wife whenever he wishes." The new bill would replace that section of the code with a provision that gives men and women equal right to divorce, but sets the grounds on which a divorce could be sought—addiction, mental illness, or violent behavior. This would make divorce equally difficult for both men and women. Another provision of the bill would require a man to pay for healthcare if his wife became ill. At present, if a man refuses to pay for his wife's care, the case is sent to court, and judges have not consistently ruled in favor of the wives.

[Reformist women in Parliament have previously tried to change laws that discriminate against women, but their efforts have been blocked or altered by the clerical establishment. The Guardian Council, for instance, blocked a bill that would have raised the legal marriage age for girls from 9 to 15, contending that it went against *Shar'ia*, or Islamic law. After months of dispute, the Expediency Council, which resolves differences between Parliament and the Guardian Council, approved raising the minimum age, but only to 13. In another instance, women in Parliament proposed that Iran join the United Nations Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, but members abruptly dropped consideration of the plan after hard-line clerics in the religious city of Qum declared that the convention was against Islam. (Fathi 2002ab). (*End of update by R. T. Francoeur*)]

Incidence of Oral and Anal

The general lack of privacy inhibits all but the most perfunctory intercourse. Anal penetration of the female is a common means both of birth control and avoidance of possible contamination with menses. Khomeini's writings provide guidelines for preprayer ablution after penetration of the anus and animals under separate headings, though he considered the latter practice unworthy of practicing Muslims.

6. Homoerotic, Homosexual, and Bisexual Behaviors

In the same way that admissions about sexual behavior in children are impossible, homosexuality in a family member cannot be acknowledged. The derogatory term *cuni* (from *cun* = backside) is used to describe men outside the family, whose gait or voice is considered effeminate. Men who do not marry stay with their natal family all their life. Within the family, some such men are described as *na-mard* (not-men). Implicit in the term is a suggestion of phallic underdevelopment or dysfunction. Other older single men are described as not having found a wife yet, the implication being that they are physically normal but financially ineligible for marriage.

Male homosexuality is condemned by Islam and overt homosexuality is unknown. Just as most heterosexual relationships lack an emotional component, it is to be expected that homosexuality be predominantly physical and without an emotional component. Long-term, companionable homosexual relationships are rare. Two unmarried men (of whatever sexual orientation) would be unlikely to be able to set up house together, because of strong societal pressures against any unmarried person living beyond the pale of family control. However, since there are many exclusively male social arenas—teahouses, political and religious organizations, and men's days at the bathhouse—there are more opportunities both for male-male physical contact and for the setting up of clandestine meetings between males. Women, as noted earlier, do not have similar occasions for privacy in same-gender relationships. Ira-

nian culture also allows men a great deal of public touching, embracing, kissing, and holding hands for prolonged periods while walking or in conversation.

[*Update 2003*: As indicated in the above comments of Dr. Drew, Iranian men who have sex with men do not fit the Western categories of homosexual or gay. Although somewhat closer to the cultural reality, the descriptor "bisexual" is also not accurate. In the Iranian mind, a man's masculinity and heterosexuality are not affected by the sexual relations he has, be these with women, men, or animals. As Zarit (1992, 56) notes, *kuni*, one of the Farsi words for "queer," reveals the importance of the role one plays in any sexual activity. A *kuni* is someone who gives himself in anal intercourse. Farsi has two complementary words for "pimp": *koskeš* means a procurer of vagina, while *kunkeš* means a procurer of ass (*kun*). Taking the active role in anal intercourse with a male is more acceptable than being the receiver in oral sex, which is better than being the giver of oral sex, though all three are enjoyed almost as much. Oral sex is considered a perversion introduced from the West. The acceptability of being the penetrator in anal intercourse—and oral sex—varies according to social class and religious conviction, according to Zarit. Because premarital virginity is so prized for women, a great many Iranians, particularly among the lower class, regard male-male anal sex as normal, particularly before marriage. The more educated and wealthy classes share this view, but tend to be more hypocritical about doing it, maintaining that sodomy simply does not exist in Iran. Vaginal intercourse, active anal sex, and penetrator in oral sex share one common character in Iran: They are equally and predominantly physical and without an emotional component. Long-term male-male sexual relations are very rare.

> Homosexual love hardly exists there, at least with foreigners, without some price tag on it: free meals, free jeans, or possibly help in getting a U.S. visa. In a sexual encounter Iranians rarely kiss, and even more rarely on the lips, never with the tongue. . . . When it comes to oral sex, they find it better to receive than to give. And when they *do* get involved, they often literally 'come and go', zip sip. . . . [When an Iranian male was asked about having anal sex], he would respond, "But I was the man." (Reed 1992, 63, 65)

For the male who is the recipient of anal intercourse or takes the female role in fellatio, money is the lubricant that makes it excusable. (*End of update by R. T. Francoeur*)]

Other than among siblings, women do not enjoy an equal freedom. Although a similar situation applies to females with regard to touching and embracing, most are married or have marriages already being arranged for them before they reach a stage of physical/hormonal development at which they are aware of their own sexual orientation. Homosexual orientation in females has, therefore, little chance for expression.

Lesbianism is reported to occur in one of the very few residential situations for unmarried women, nurses' training hostels. It is possible that homosexually oriented females select a nursing career as one that allows opportunities for intimate contact with other women.

7. Gender Diversity and Transgender Issues

Since each person's behavior is strictly controlled by older family members, no overt expression of gender conflict, such as transvestism, would be tolerated. A child suffering from a physical or emotional deviation from narrow, accepted norms is generally kept from public view. Expression of any kind of individualism in unconventional dress or hairstyle is almost impossible, because of the power and the control of access to funds of the parent generation throughout the lifecycle of the offspring. The burlesque theater with its morality plays (*tazieh*) performed in the street or market place could provide a niche for gender-conflicted males, because female roles are played by tradesmen. This theater is largely thought of as a disreputable arena for the marginalized, providing a normal social framework for those without kin.This theater plays no part in upper-class mores.

8. Significant Unconventional Sexual Behaviors

A. Coercive Sex

Sexual Abuse

Since marriages can be contracted at any point after a girl has reached the age of 9, it is legally feasible for a very little girl to be married to a man of any age, and thus be physically at his mercy. This no doubt constitutes the broadest category of potential sexual abuse of children. One of the strongest arguments made in Iran against the custody of children, particularly girls, being given to the mother, is that on her remarriage, the children will be in danger of sexual abuse from the new husband.

Sexual abuse of children, particularly little girls, often occurs at the hands of uncles and cousins staying under the same roof. In such cases, the child's mother is inevitably blamed for leaving her child unguarded, and little outrage is directed at the abuser. Sexual abuse of children in a family setting is not the concern of the police, nor are there any relevant social agencies to which it could be reported. A young servant boy would be withdrawn from the household by his parents if he were the victim of abuse. Only in the case of a young servant girl could the police be implicated, and then only if her virginity had been certified prior to employment.

Incest

Incest always requires a cultural definition at two levels. To be considered incestuous behavior within a culture, the sexual behavior must take place between people of the opposite sex who are not allowed to marry because of genetic or affinial relatedness. Secondly, the behavior itself must be considered erotic in nature and somehow shocking by the members of that culture. In Iran, marriage between cousins is the norm. Even the marriage between the offspring of two sisters, considered incestuous in most cultures, is very common in Iran, as it prevents the splitting up of parcels of land inherited jointly by two sisters by passing it on to their children at marriage. Within the same generation in a family, only brothers and sisters are off-limits to each other as marriage partners.

In Western cultures, certain zones of the body are described as erogenous, and any touching of these zones by another person is generally interpreted as sexually motivated behavior. Similarly, slow dancing, with bodies touching and the arms of one partner about the neck of the other, would be assumed to be motivated by either sexual attraction or a desire on the part of one or both of the partners to stimulate themselves or the other. In Iran, however, fairly intimate touching is common between opposite-sex siblings, although such behavior would not be tolerated among those of the opposite sex more distantly related. Teenage siblings of the opposite sex, even those who are married, have the license for close "accidental-on-purpose" body contact in rough-and-tumble play. They often display phys-

ical affection, kissing on the face, lips, and neck that border on the erotic. They may be seen grooming each other and, for example, anointing each other with suntan oil in a sensuous way. Such behavior continues with siblings until late in life. At any age, touching high up on the inner thigh or on the outer periphery of the breasts between opposite-sex siblings is allowable in public as a way of drawing attention to points made in conversation, even though it would be deemed indecent public behavior between nonsiblings.

Similarly, in large family gatherings, weddings for example, Western-style dancing is often mixed with Iranian-style dancing. Married couples, fathers and daughters, brothers and sisters, and occasionally mothers and sons, may be seen dancing together very closely. An Iranian would not interpret this behavior as incestuous or in any way distasteful, and would probably find any such suggestion rather warped on the part of the observer. This, of course, raises very interesting questions about what is and is not sexual behavior.

Sexual Harassment

The general pattern of sex segregation makes opportunities for sexual harassment rare. Should it occur and be mentioned, the female, and more particularly her mother, would be blamed for affording anyone the opportunity. The most common forms of sexual harassment are those of frottage and furtive pinching in crowded shopping areas.

Rape

The legal concerns of rape are not connected in Iran with the indignities suffered by the victim, but with the financial damages incurred to the family as a result of rupture of the daughter's hymen.

Opportunities for rape are rare. When it does occur, it is likely to involve the police at the instigation of the girl's parents. The police are empowered to force a man who has robbed a girl of her virginity, with or without her assent, to marry her legally. He is allowed to divorce her immediately if he wishes, but the legal procedures and documentation of marriage must be followed through. A divorced woman is more marriageable than an unmarried girl with a ruptured hymen. In the case of a servant girl, her parents may choose between a cash settlement from her employer or a forced marriage between the employer and their daughter, even if he already has a wife. Under the law, a girl can force into legal marriage any man with whom she claims to have had intercourse. The procedure is swift and uncomplicated, involving simple arrest and handcuffs. However, since the girl must be represented in this by her father, few girls would initiate this procedure frivolously or maliciously. This is especially true because there would be few legal repercussions against a father who killed his daughter for dishonoring the family.

Marital rape is not a legal category, in that a woman is her husband's property. If a woman shows signs of physical abuse, her male kin, especially older brothers, will threaten or assault her husband. In general, it is the duty of different members of the kin group to protect the females in the group. In most instances of sexual violence, punishment will be dealt out by the group without fear of intervention from police.

B. Prostitution

Prostitution is one of the few subsistence slots available for women marginalized by the death of those kin vital to their functioning in society. Daughters of repudiated women and childless widows are particularly vulnerable. Every village seems to have its "fallen woman," who is rumored to serve as a prostitute. People speak too of brothels in the bazaar area of large towns. Veiled women can be seen at night walking alone on the outskirts of towns. A woman walking alone at any time, particularly after dusk, unless obviously bent on shopping or an urgent errand, would be assumed to be a prostitute. Maids commuting from their place of employment carry large totes, a pair of men's shoes, or a garment on a hanger in a dry cleaning bag, so as not to be mistaken for prostitutes and harassed.

[*Update 2002*: Despite strong enforcement of anti-prostitution laws enacted after the Islamic revolution deposed the Shah in 1979, Iran's Parliament suggested establishing state-approved "decency houses" or "chastity houses" to reduce the explosion of "kerbcrawlers" (street prostitutes). The proposal surfaced in mid 2002 after eight members of the Iranian national football squad were sentenced to as many as 170 lashes of the whip after incriminating photographs of them turned up in a police raid on a whorehouse in the capital.

[About the same time, in a suburb of Tehran, a revolutionary court judge was jailed for ten and a half years for pimping young girls, including a 17-year-old who had been detained against her will. Conservatives, who still run the courts and security services, were quick to condemn the proposals as anything but decent, making it far from certain they will ever be put into practice. However, the very fact that they are being openly aired in the press shattered one of conservative Islam's strongest taboos and turned the proposals into an open discussion.

[The proposals being floated take advantage of the Shiite custom of "temporary marriage"—*mut'a* or *sigheh*. If the proposals are adopted, street prostitutes picked up by the religious police or other security forces would be given a choice: Take the assistance of social services to give up their profession, or accept placement in a state-sponsored "decency house" where they could contract temporary marriages with their clients. Such contracts may be for a few minutes or 99 years. Customers would pay a dowry, rather than a fee, and would be able to set the duration of the "marriage contract." The "decency houses" would only be open to males with identity cards proving they were bachelors, widows, or married to women incapacitated by physical or mental illness. Newspapers reported that certain Tehran hotels had already been earmarked for possible use.

[With Iran in the midst of an economic crisis and an estimated over 300,000 women supporting themselves as "kerbcrawlers," the proposals found some unlikely supporters, including the head of the Imam Khomeini Research Center, named after the revered founder of the Islamic Republic. The proposal for state-tolerated prostitution has precedent in Iran. In the days of the pro-Western Shah, when the country was awash with American advisors, the capital's Shahr-e-no district housed hundreds of brothels, which operated openly and legally. After the revolution, some supported keeping the brothels open and legal instead of driving them underground. Soon, however, the hard-line clergy forced their closure.

[After decades of severe repression by the police, Revolutionary Guard, and the courts, a string of high-profile prostitution cases in 2002 made it clear that the Islamic punishments handed out by the revolutionary courts have been and are ineffective. As conservatives put mounting pressure on the reformist administration of moderate President Mohammad Khatami, the whole question of prostitution was poised to become the keystone in elections to be held in late 2002, with the fate of the proposed "decency houses" being intimately connected to the fate of Khatami's government (Arabia.com 2002). (*End of update by R. T. Francoeur*)]

C. Pornography and Erotica

During the Shah's regime, copies of American magazines such as *Playboy* and *Penthouse* were widely sold at newsstands, openly perused by men and women, and left lying around in full view in homes (see Section 3B on informal sources of sexual knowledge). Despite the Khomeini regime's ban on all depictions of the unclad human form and the sale of such magazines, this material is still available.

Displays of belly dancing in restaurants and private weddings and parties were staple entertainment prior to the Islamic regime. Although the dancers often showed great skill, male members of the audience clearly viewed them as prostitutes, or at least women with whom liberties could be openly taken. In mixed family audiences, older males often greeted their performances with exaggerated leering and lip-smacking. Young males would be inhibited by the presence of their parents. Middle-aged men, however, would tuck bills into the spangled brassiere or the low-slung waistband of the fringed skirts of the dancer as she passed their table.

[*Update 1997*: In December 1993, the Iranian Parliament approved legislation providing for capital punishment for the producers and distributors of pornographic videotapes. First offenders would receive a maximum five years' prison term and $100,000 in fines; "principal promoters" face the death penalty. Experts doubt that this attack on the "Corrupters of the Earth" will discourage the immensely profitable business. Videotapes of Western and pornographic films are already widely available through a network of unlicensed distributors. Also feeding the trade, according to official statistics, are three million Iranian homes with video recorders and 25,000 satellite dishes—analysts say the real figure is more like six million and 50,000, respectively (Hedges 1994). (*End of update by R. T. Francoeur*)]

D. Domestic Sexual Controls

Living quarters in the cities are similar to private homes and apartments found in European countries. However, the traditional architecture of Iranian homes in small villages and the rural areas have curtained alcoves, rather than closets, for storing bedding and clothing. In these more traditional homes, people unroll mattresses and bedding from these alcoves to sleep at any convenient spot on the floor in any of the rooms, or on the roof or balcony. Often the choice seems to be dictated by the opportunity it provides for spying on others as they sleep or disrobe. Females, particularly those in their 30s, 40s, and 50s, seem particularly prone to spying on married couples, as well as on other women as they bathe, undress, or use the bathroom. Women gossip openly about information they have obviously garnered by such spying. Some intimate information is clearly used at times to discredit other females, as it is presented to listeners as if revealed by a male confidant with carnal knowledge.

There appears to be a strong interest, not only in details of other women's bodies and personal hygienic measures, but in the frequency and urgency with which they urinate. One who urinates often is spoken of in disparaging terms. Houses with outhouses often have no doors, with walls that conceal only the midsection of the occupant. It is considered a basic precaution to check that one is not being observed.

It is easy for a female to wander from room to room, from roof to balcony to yard without arousing suspicion as she goes about domestic tasks like rounding up soiled dishes and laundry. There are few internal doors in some Iranian houses and any stealthiness can be explained away as consideration for those engaged in the national pastime of brief and frequent naps.

Males do not have such freedom of movement in the house, and thus male voyeurism is less of a day-to-day problem in the typical large multigenerational household. Male voyeurism more often takes place outside the home. It usually takes the form of the male wearing a woman's all-concealing veil to insinuate himself into female enclaves or the bathhouse on women's day. While the success of such endeavors appears to be largely hearsay, there seems to be an acceptance of voyeurism as a far-from-infrequent fact of life embedded into the culture.

9. Contraception, Abortion, and Population Planning

A. Contraception and Abortion

Condoms are openly sold on every street corner in the towns in Iran. Itinerant vendors display trays of condoms, together with cigarettes and chewing gum. Anal intercourse and coitus interruptus were previously the main male-initiated forms of contraception before the widespread distribution of condoms.

Abortion remains, in rural areas and among the urban poor, the most common female-initiated form of contraception. Untrained midwives induce abortion by introducing a chicken quill into the cervix. From the 1950s on, abortions were widely available in clinics, hospitals, and doctors' offices, restricted only by a woman's ability to pay. Neither male consent nor religious considerations seemed to be issues raised. The conceptus has neither legal nor spiritual status, nor, for that matter, has an apparently nonviable term-born child. Efforts are often not made to succor a weak newborn in the home. Mothers often abandon sickly babies born in a hospital. Only a viable offspring becomes a male concern and an object of his proprietary rights.

Tubal ligations are the contraceptive method of choice among the urban middle class. Contraceptive pills are freely available without prescription and are in common use by young, urban married couples.

B. Population Control Efforts

Efforts on the part of the Iranian Women's Organization to educate women about safe contraception since the mid-1960s have been mainly aimed at improving female health rather than affecting the population size. Life for women among the rural and urban poor, until the 1960s, was more often than not one of an endless chain of pregnancies, spaced by prolonged and intensive nursing and unskilled, unsterile abortions. High infant-mortality rates in the villages, rather than contraception, kept the population size stable. The Shah set up a network of rural government clinics in the late 1960s and early 1970s to provide free primary healthcare, which included the distribution of contraceptive pills. This latter measure, together with the sudden widespread availability to all of antibiotics, had a dramatic effect both on the birthrates and the survival of those born.

[*Update 1997*: Between the Islamic revolution of 1979 and 1996, Iran's population almost doubled, from 35 million to more than 60 million. Faced with internal and external threats to the revolution, including the 1980-1988 war with Iraq, Iran's spiritual leaders regularly extolled large families as a way of preserving the revolution. The legal age of marriage was dropped to 9. Today, at least 43% of the population is under 17. Despite official support for larger families, many Iranians in the early 1980s found themselves faced with soaring inflation and eroding wages, a common deterrent to large families. Dr. Alireza Marandi, then Iran's Deputy Minister of Health and its current Minister of Health, recognized that Iran's population growth rate was rocketing out of control. At the time, considering the very conservative religious climate, Marandi did not deem it wise to bring the population issue into public debate. In-

stead, he quietly kept alive a prerevolutionary program of distributing free condoms and IUD's while maneuvering for an opening. One word from the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and all contraceptives would disappear throughout the country. In 1988, after the Cabinet approved birth control by a single vote, Marandi asked for a public statement supporting contraception. But the internal opposition was so strong, the Cabinet vote was not announced. Instead Ayatollah Khomeini suggested a public discussion that sent Muslim scholars digging through their texts for religious sanctions that could be cited in support of birth control.

[The debate culminated in a 1993 law that enshrined birth control and lifted subsidized health insurance and food coupons for any child after the third. Condoms, vasectomies, and the birth control pill are free. The state also introduced mandatory prenuptial birth control classes. Couples seeking a marriage license must submit a stamped form documenting their participation in an hour-long lecture on contraception. Abortion, however, remains illegal, except when the mother's health is in danger. As a result, Iran's population growth rate, which in the 1980s was 4%—one of the highest growth rates seen anywhere—declined to about 2.5%. Rural families still tend to have many children. Despite the fact that the nation's growth rate is now below 2.5%, Iran's population will pass the 100 million mark early in the 21st century (MacFarquhar 1996a). (*End of update by R. T. Francoeur*)]

10. Sexually Transmitted Diseases and HIV/AIDS

A. Sexually Transmitted Diseases

The major endemic sexually transmitted disease has for decades been syphilis, although it is suspected that the term "syphilis" has become a generic one in Iran to include all sexually transmitted diseases. It is assumed that men contract syphilis from prostitutes and then infect their wives. Many babies in the villages are born with syphilis, contracted during the birth process. Standard neonatal ward procedure in hospitals involves medicating the eyes of newborns against the onset of syphilis-related infections. Part of the prenuptial inspection of prospective brides by the mother-in-law in the bathhouse is a search for what are thought to be symptoms of syphilis, notably patchy skin and thinning hair. Treatment for syphilis is available in clinics, but there is no government attempt to eliminate or track down sources of infection.

B. HIV/AIDS

At present, there is no information on the prevalence or otherwise of AIDS in Iran. Although prostitution anywhere can bring about a spread of infection, there are cultural patterns in Iran that would minimize the spread of HIV infections. Consorting with prostitutes is not common for married men because of the strong cultural belief that variety adds nothing to the spice of sexual behavior. Since the main object of sex is seen as the relief of phallic tension, this goal is thought to be more safely achieved with one's wife. Advice to this effect is a common subject of sermons and religious writings. Visits to prostitutes are also seen as signs of immaturity, as "real men" have achieved the financial eligibility prerequisite to marriage and uninterrupted access to a woman.

[*Update 2002*: Until recently, the Health Ministry reported that the HIV virus was transmitted in Iran primarily by the sharing of contaminated needles. In 2002, the Health Ministry reported that HIV was increasingly being spread by sexual contact and prostitutes. This trend prompted Ayatollah Moussavi Bojnourdi to support establishment of "decency or chastity houses" where men could enter into temporary marriages with a prostitute. In August 2002, *Etemad*, a Tehran newspaper, quoted Bojnourdi as saying: "If we want to be realistic and clear the city of such women, we must use the path that Islam offers us" (Fathi 2002b).

[Public health experts and epidemiologists have been ordered by the religious leaders to fight the spread of AIDS, but promoting AIDS-prevention programs to teach teenagers about safe sex without even whispering the word condom is not very effective. A pamphlet designed for adolescents by the Iranian Center for Disease Control suggests, for instance, that the "best way to avoid AIDS is to be faithful to moral and family obligations and to avoid loose sexual relations. Trust in God in order to resist satanic temptations." In mid 2002, the word condom was introduced to AIDS pamphlets for adults, although it continued to be banned on radio and television talk shows. Condoms are available in pharmacies. But the basic government point of view is that telling teenagers about them will inspire the youngsters to start having sex.

[Added to the limits on the mention of condoms is the fact that homosexuality is illegal. In view of Iranian macho and religious traditions, gay sex remains so deeply in the closet that few patients will even confide to their doctors that it could be the source of their disease. Premarital and extramarital sex are similarly hidden. Although drug addiction is now widely acknowledged, tolerance has limits. The Islamic revolution was supposed to eliminate all these social blemishes. To recommend condoms would be to admit the revolution was not a 100% success.

[Despite these restrictions, a small group of activist doctors are determined to exorcise the taboos that surround AIDS. Through January 2002, Iran had identified 3,438 people who were living with HIV, mostly male drug addicts, 35 persons with full-blown AIDS, and 350 who had died from AIDS. The Centers for Disease Control estimates the actual number of HIV-positive Iranians at 19,000, but other sources suggest higher figures. Although these are not epidemic statistics in a country with a population of 70 million, the potential for disaster looms, given widespread needle-sharing among Iran's 1.2 million confirmed drug addicts. Three years ago, Iran had identified just 300 people with HIV.

[In 2002, an anti-AIDS organization provoked outrage by suggesting that the prisons, where addiction is endemic, start needle exchanges. The idea was officially rejected as encouraging addiction. But the organization persuaded a few wardens individually to try it on the sly because the method has worked in lowering incidence of the disease in other countries.

[Government hospitals treat AIDS patients free, at a cost of $1,000 a week per patient for the cocktail that suppresses the disease. But Iranian doctors will not give AIDS medications to prisoners, because their compliance with the strict schedule of taking the medications is too random in the chaos of the overcrowded prisons.

[The practice of religiously sanctioned temporary marriage (*mu'ta*) has also been recommended by some clerics and members of Parliament. The hope would be that young men in a temporary marriage would be less likely to visit prostitutes who have a high rate of HIV infection (MacFarquhar 2002). (*End of update by R. T. Francoeur*)]

[*Update 2002*: UNAIDS Epidemiological Assessment: Based on the reported data, the HIV epidemic in the Islamic Republic of Iran appears to be accelerating at an alarming trend. According to reports by the National AIDS Program, the number 1,159 of newly diagnosed HIV infections and AIDS cases in 2001 shows a threefold increase in comparison to both years 2000 and 1999.

[This considerable increase may indicate another outbreak. The previous dramatic increase had occurred in 1997, when the number of HIV/AIDS cases had reached 815 new infections.

[Injecting drug use drives the epidemic in Iran. In 2001, 64% of AIDS cases were injecting drug users. The data on HIV seroprevalence among injecting drug users shows the highest rates of infection compared to all other tested groups. Injecting drug users were tested positive in 1996 and a prevalence was found of 5.7% of the cases in 1996, with 1.7% in 1997. The data are variable, as it relates to occurrence of well-known outbreaks among injecting drug users in prisons. Consequently, it is not surprising to note that HIV rates among prisoners rose up to six times higher in 1999 compared to 1996. Likewise, we observe a high rate of HIV-seropositive tests among attendees of voluntary counseling and testing centers, because these centers mainly serve drug users. The voluntary counseling and testing centers were introduced in 1999 and account for a considerable percentage of all annual HIV infections. The HIV prevalence rate among center attendees was around 3% in 1999 and 4% in 2001. There has been a significant increase of total numbers of reported STD cases in the country during the period of 1995 to 1998. Candidiasis, trichomoniasis, chlamydia and gonorrhea are the four main causes, accounting for over 60% of the total diagnosed cases.

[The estimated number of adults and children living with HIV/AIDS on January 1, 2002, were:

Adults ages 15-49:	20,000	(rate: < 0.1%)
Women ages 15-49:	5,000	
Children ages 0-15:	< 200	

[An estimated 290 adults and children died of AIDS during 2001.

[No estimate is available for the number of Iranian children who had lost one or both parents to AIDS and were under age 15 at the end of 2001. (*End of update by the Editors*)]

11. Sexual Dysfunctions, Counseling, and Therapies

A. Concepts of Sexual Dysfunctions

In Iran, there is generally very little concern and a great deal of impatience with psychological considerations. Children who receive regular meals and are kept clean are considered well looked after, regardless of how happy or unhappy they are. A woman who complains about having nothing to wear would be taken more seriously than one who complains that her husband never talks to her or approaches her sexually. Sexual functioning and satisfaction are similarly measured without regard to the emotional component. Tenderness and attention to the state of arousal of the female are not valid considerations.

A male is judged to be sexually adequate if he is capable of erection and ejaculation, as proven by the presence of both semen and blood from the ruptured hymen of his bride on the nuptial handkerchief used on his wedding night. A female is inspected before marriage by her prospective mother-in-law to check for mammary development, nipples sufficiently protruding for nursing, and the width of pelvis for childbirth. The main proof of sexual adequacy, however, is her ability to conceive. Failure to conceive within two years of marriage is grounds for repudiation.

B. Availability of Counseling, Diagnosis, and Treatment

Counseling in all marital matters is strictly a family affair. There is a strong taboo against discussing family problems of any kind with a nonfamily member. It is not even acceptable to admit, however casually, to a friend or person outside the circle of close kin, that anything is wrong with family, children, or finances. Iran is thus not very fertile ground for any kind of psychotherapy. On the one hand, the therapist would be perceived as a stranger and, therefore, not one to whom confidences should be made. Secondly, after long years of dictatorship under the Shah, backed up by the secret police, or S.A.V.A.K., and more than a decade of the repressive Islamic Republic with its brutal guardians of public morals, the Pastoran, no clear line would be seen between professionals of any kind asking questions and government officials collecting incriminating information.

Under the Shah's regime, gynecologists in Teheran and other major cities offered help to women with fertility problems. Western-trained medical personnel, however, for the most part fled from Iran after the ousting of the Shah. Most women in small towns and villages seek herbal and spiritual measures to overcome fertility problems. Bitter infusions, thought to aid conception, are concocted and drunk by the desperate. Large, old trees, thought in this mostly desert area to hold the power of fertility, often have their branches completely covered with little pieces of rag into which are knotted the prayers of supplicants who cannot conceive. Advice on the formulations of such potions and the text of such prayers is perhaps the closest one comes in Iran to therapy for sexual dysfunction.

12. Sex Research and Advanced Professional Education

Other than a concern with physical causes of infertility in women during the reign of the Shah, sexual research has been nonexistent in Iran. Surgical measures to correct reproductive dysfunction were widely available under the Shah. The psychosexual component of reproduction and sexuality itself were, even then, seldom considered to be of academic or medical interest.

Conclusion

Within the family, sexual activity between married people can be alluded to in a jocular way. In mixed company, men may be teased for looking tired as a result of suspected sexual activity. Members of households exchange innuendoes about suspicious sounds heard during the night. However, alluding to extramarital sex is considered to be in extremely bad taste and discussion of one's sex life absolutely taboo. Friendships with nonkin are rare. The composition of marital households and informal networks is such that most social contact involves in-laws within the group. Discussion of anything intimate is thus inhibited. There are strong cultural constraints on revealing anything of a personal nature within the family, and even stronger ones on mentioning anything to strangers. Because of this lack of exchange of information, there tends to be an overestimate of the strength and longevity of the human sex drive, and a wildly exaggerated sense of the amount of sexual behavior that occurs in places, such as the U.S.A. and Europe, where Islamic cultural constraints are not in effect. This belief serves to reinforce the notion that such constraints are vital.

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