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## Cross-cultural Applicability of the 12-Step Model: A Comparison of Narcotics Anonymous in the USA and Iran

### Abstract

**Objective:** Narcotics Anonymous (NA), a nonprofessional 12-step fellowship for people seeking recovery from addiction, reports 27,677 meetings in the USA, where it was founded, but there is limited literature on its adaptability cross-culturally. We studied NA within the Islamic Republic of Iran to ascertain its relative adaptation in a different cultural setting.

**Method:** We surveyed 262 NA members in Iran, supplemented by member interviews, and compared demographic and substance use related characteristics of members, and also the nature of their respective involvement in NA, to the survey results of a previous US survey.

**Results:** NA in Iran reports 21,974 meetings. The Iranian respondents surveyed differed relatively little ( $d < 0.50$ ) from US members on demographics and prior ambulatory substance use disorder treatment, but did

have fewer female members (means for Iran and US: 42.4 vs 39.0 years; 77% vs 87%; 6% vs 28%, respectively). They were, however, more involved in the fellowship ( $d > 0.50$ ) in terms of reporting service as sponsors, experience of spiritual awakening, and achievement of diminished craving (scores of 1–10) (85% vs 48%; 95% vs 84%; 1.03 vs 1.89, respectively). Surveyed NA members in Iran publicized the fellowship with public (36%) and religious (20%) figures, and systematically worked the 12 steps in large sponsor-led groups ( $X = 19$  members).

**Conclusion:** NA, a 12-step program developed in a Western, predominantly Christian-oriented country, was adapted widely in the Islamic Republic of Iran, a setting different in culture, language, ethnicity, and religious orientation. The growth in its membership derives, in part, from specific innovations that may have broader applicability in other settings.