

Summary

Social Psychology Research in Türkiye: 1990 - 2022

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The aim of this paper is to survey published empirical research on social psychological topics carried out with Turkish participants from 1990 to 2019, as well as some from 2020-2022, and to identify changes over time in the volume, subject matter and methodology of research.

Social psychology research in Turkey has a significant history, with pioneering studies on social norm formation conducted by Muzaffer Şerif beginning in 1937, as well as studies on the social-psychological effects of social change carried out by Şerif's students (e.g., Başaran, 1969; Kıray, 1964). From the 1960s onward, various topics such as changing family structures, attitudes, values, socialization processes, gender roles, urbanization, and industrialization were explored in Turkish social psychology research (Acar & Şahin, 1990; Gitmez, 1983).

As the number of psychology departments in Turkey has increased rapidly since the 1980s and 1990s, empirical research and publications across psychology subfields have surged. Despite the lack of dedicated Turkish journals for different psychology subfields, the visibility of social psychology research has grown in recent years, with articles appearing in Turkish and international journals, and well-attended social psychology congresses beginning in 2016.

A comprehensive assessment of Turkish social psychology publications was presented in 2016, revealing an increase in both the quantity of publications and degree of international collaboration (Demirutku & Yalçındağ, 2016), although noting that the publications often appeared in journals with relatively low impact factors.

In a report based on a foresight study for the period 2003-2023 prepared by the Turkish Academy of Sciences (TÜBA), Social Psychologist Çiğdem Kağıtçıbaşı (2007) called for social scientists to contribute to the understanding of social change and dynamics in Türkiye and the world, and also to develop applications and interventions that would benefit society, targeting social problems such as repressive gender and other social norms, intergroup prejudice and conflict, and the strengthening of democracy. The present survey, covering most of the

intervening period, will shed some light on the extent to which Turkish social psychology has met these goals.

Method

For inclusion, a publication had to meet the following criteria: 1. Published in 1990 or later; 2. Reported at least one empirical study in some area of social psychology; 3. At least one participant sample was drawn from people living in Türkiye, or Turkish populations living in other countries; 4. At least one of the authors of the article is from Turkey (including foreigners working at Turkish universities), or Turkish living abroad. Theoretical or review articles, articles reporting only translation or adaptation of tests or scales into Turkish, and studies by Turkish investigators without Turkish participant samples were excluded.

Search Process

Publicly available resumes of social psychologists in Turkish universities, issues of Turkish psychology journals, and other sources were searched for eligible articles and book chapters. The final collection consisted of 412 publications with full bibliographical information and abstracts, comprising 351 publications between 1990-2019 and an additional 61 between 2020-2022. Only seven were book chapters, while 405 were published in periodical journals.

Classification of Articles by Topics

The articles were classified according to 11 basic areas of social psychological research, which closely parallel typical chapter headings in social psychology textbooks: I. The self: The self, self-perception and self-construction, the relation of self with culture; II. Socialization and social development; III. Culture and values: Culture and values, intercultural interaction, cultural dimensions, cultural norms, cultural values and norms, honor, socioeconomic structure; IV. Attitudes, attitude change, and measurement of attitudes; V. Stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination; VI. Social perception and social cognition; VII. Group structure and dynamics,

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social influence, and social identity; VIII. Intergroup relations and political psychology; IX. Interpersonal relations: Interpersonal attraction, close relationships, marital satisfaction; X. Interpersonal relations: Aggression and psychological violence, altruism, morality; XI. Applied psychology: Industrial/organizational psychology (including leadership, conflict management, institutional culture, institutional citizenship, cross-cultural and multicultural relations, and work-family conflict and balance), as well as traffic, forensic, health, and environmental/ecological psychology.

Coding of Articles According to Specific Criteria

Each publication was coded for *characteristics of the publication itself* (whether journal article or book chapter; number of authors; number of Turkish authors; language and place of publication; inclusion in citation indices; whether the publication included more than one study; and whether it focused on a single culture or included cross-cultural comparisons or comparisons of cultural subgroups). They were also coded for the *research methodology* employed (qualitative, correlational, and/or experimental) and the *types of predictor variables* (personal characteristics, relational or situational/context variables, or manipulated variables) and *outcome variables* (intrapersonal states or behavior).

Coding was carried out by two graduate students trained by the researchers. Most items were binary (yes/no, present/absent), but the five items referring to types of variables and methods required some interpretation by coders. Interrater agreement on these items was calculated for a sample of 20 articles, and was found to be satisfactory, as presented in Table 1.

Assessment of Changes Over Time

Increases and decreases between time periods were evaluated by calculating the percentage change using a 10% criterion.

Results

Characteristics of the publication

The articles were classified according to decade: 1990's, 2000's, 2010's, 2020 and later. The most striking finding is the rapid growth in social psychological research: the number of articles published has roughly tripled in each successive decade, and the number of recent publications indicates that rapid growth is continuing (see Table 2).

Most articles (over 75%) have one, two, or three authors, while only 10.2% have six or more, primarily those reporting extensive cross-cultural research (see Table 3). Although nearly three-fourths of the articles

were published in English, 70% of them had only Turkish authors. No significant change was observed among articles published in journals indexed by SSCI and UL-AKBİM.

82.3% of the articles reported only a single study. 21% of the articles included some form of cross-cultural comparison, while 75% focused only on the Turkish context. The frequencies of reporting multiple studies, inclusion of non-Turkish coauthors, publication in English (or another foreign language), and cross-cultural comparisons have all risen across the decades.

Three basic research strategies were coded: qualitative, correlational, and experimental. Only seven articles reported solely results of a qualitative study, but another 41 (10%) reported using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Similarly, experimental designs (including manipulation of an independent variable and a control group) were seldom reported (15.5%), and use of a behavior as a dependent variable was even more rare (9%). The overwhelming majority of studies relied on correlational analyses: correlation, regression, multiple regression, path analysis, and related techniques (see Figure 1). Both qualitative and experimental approaches have increased to some degree over the three decades; but the exponential increase in social psychological studies has been primarily channeled into correlational approaches (see Table 4).

While publications reporting only the translation or adaptation of a scale or other measurement into Turkish were excluded from the sample, a very few (about 7%) of the included articles reported development and validation of a new measure as part of a larger theoretical or applied contribution to the field, the frequency increasing slightly over the years. Likewise, very few articles reported development of an intervention and its evaluation (3.2%).

A large proportion of the publications (72.8%) used relational or situational/contextual variables as predictors, such as interaction with parents versus teachers, or friends versus strangers; or a public versus a private setting. A majority of studies (62.4%) used demographic or personal characteristics of the respondents such as age, sex, socioeconomic status, personality traits, education level, past experience, attitudes, group identity or moral foundations as predictors. Only 15.8% of the articles reported experimentally manipulating an independent or predictor variable. Over the three decades, use of relational or contextual variables has decreased slightly, from 79.3% to 71.2%, while use of personal characteristics as predictor variables has risen more dramatically, from 41.4% in the 1990's to about 68% in the years after 2000.

Outcome variables can be classified in two categories: behaviors (the participant actually does something,

like making a choice, keeping an appointment, or eating something), or subjective states (for example, the participant indicates the extent or intensity of an attitude, a feeling such as anxiety or disapproval, or certainty in a judgment). Just under 10% of the articles – primarily those using experimental methods – reported measuring behavior as an outcome variable, and the frequency declined slightly over time. The vast majority of studies across all three decades used subjective states of the individual participant as outcome variables.

Distribution of publications in different topic areas over time

The number of articles in each category, sorted by decade, can be seen in Table 5. The table also shows the percentage of articles in each category both for the decade of publication and across the three decades. The amount of research attention paid to different topics has varied widely, both across topics and over time. One of the topics – Applied Social Psychology, comprising several subareas – accounted for a full 25% of the publications. In contrast, Socialization and Social Development contributed only 3% of the total, with other topics in between. Additionally, the percentage of publications in some areas increased across the three decades (Intergroup Relations and Political Psychology, Group Dynamics and Social Identity, Stereotypes, Prejudice and Discrimination, and Interpersonal Relations – Aggression, Altruism and Morality) (see Table 6), while others declined (Social Perception and Social Cognition, Interpersonal Attraction and Close Relationships, and Applied Social Psychology) (see Table 7). Three topics (The Self, Socialization and Social Development, Culture and Values, and Attitudes and Attitude Measurement) showed increases in the 2000-2009 period but then declined again (see Table 8).

Discussion and Conclusion

The study reveals several clear trends in empirical social psychological research in the past 30 years in Türkiye. Most notably, the number of publications has tripled in each decade compared to the previous one. This growth is consonant with the increase in number of universities with psychology departments, as well as increased publication requirements for academic promotion to associate or full professorship. Even though the rising popularity of psychology as an undergraduate major is often thought to reflect mainly an interest in the profession of clinical psychology, these changes have also been associated with a burgeoning empirical literature in social psychology.

The preponderance of single-author and single-study articles among the publications may be partly due to the lack of doctoral programs and associated re-

search laboratories in psychology in most Turkish universities.

The trends toward increased publication in English and greater focus on international and cross-cultural collaboration likely reflect the world-wide popularity of the English language as a medium for scientific publication and an emerging interest within psychological science in the reproducibility of psychological findings in more than one culture.

One notable finding is the infrequent use of both qualitative and experimental methods. Over 90% of the outcome variables are subjective states, perhaps influenced by ethical concerns with participant welfare. The scarcity of behavioral observation studies aligns with patterns observed in leading international social psychology journals (Sunar, 2019), indicating consistency with changes in the global literature.

The study identifies other parallels with international trends as well, such as increased interest in cross-cultural research, the significance of individual characteristics as predictor variables, and the prevalence of multivariate correlational analyses. These trends may be attributed, in part, to constraints in resources and time, as well as the world-wide trend toward increased use of the online environment for both sample selection and testing.

Also, the recent upsurge in studies of intergroup relations, political psychology, aggression and violence, and altruism and morality parallels a similar upsurge in Western social science, benefitting from highly generative theories such as social identity or moral foundations theories.

In reference to the “foresight” report prepared in the early 2000’s (TÜBA), we can see that the call for a focus on applied areas has been at least partially answered: a quarter of all empirical social psychology publications address some aspect of applied social psychology, especially industrial-organizational psychology and traffic psychology, which have gained importance with increasing urbanization and industrialization. Health psychology seems to have been studied more often from the clinical than the social perspective. The paucity of intervention programs shows that much of the accumulating knowledge has yet to be applied for the amelioration of social problems.

The present study has obvious limitations. Despite efforts to collect all eligible publications, it remains likely that some articles have been missed. Also, during the preparation of this report, new articles have continued to appear; the articles from 2020 and later are certainly not exhaustive. Nevertheless, we have attempted to portray the characteristics and development of social psychology research in Türkiye over the last 30 years as clearly and objectively as possible.