Representative National Surveys of Psychic Phenomena

Representative National Surveys of Psychic Phenomena: Iceland, Great Britain, Sweden, USA and Gallup's Multinational Survey

by Erlendur Haraldsson

Abstract

During the last few years an increasing number of representative surveys on beliefs and experiences of psychic phenomena have been conducted—mostly by polling institutions—on national samples. The results of such surveys in Iceland, Great Britain, Sweden and the United States, as well as of a multinational survey by Gallup and affiliated companies in most countries of Western Europe, show interesting national differences, but on the whole a widespread belief in the existence of psychic phenomena. The percentages of respondents reporting a personal psychic experience also differed widely across countries. In Iceland, Great Britain and the United States more than half of the respondents reported a paranormal experience. In some countries education was positively related to reporting psychic beliefs and experiences.

Ever since the founding of the Society for Psychical Research a century ago, claims of spontaneous psychic experiences have been of considerable interest to psychical researchers. The great case-collections, like those of the founders of the SPR (Gurney, Myers and Podmore 1886), the late Louisa Rhine (Rhine 1969) and others (Sannwald 1959), were more or less self-selected, and not representative samples. Hence we cannot from these data properly assess how prevalent psychic phenomena were in the life or thought of the respective populations as a whole.

It was not until the last decade that many surveys of psychic phenomena were conducted using representative samples. (There were exceptions, such as West’s 1948 survey). Oddly enough, this new trend towards study of representative samples was in most cases initiated by persons outside the field of parapsychology, such as journalists, sociologists and professional pollsters. The high costs of such surveys may be one reason. This trend has developed such that we now have surveys from a few countries on nationally representative samples. These permit cross-cultural comparisons regarding the frequency with which various psychic phenomena are reported and the degree of belief or disbelief in these phenomena.

In this paper I shall present some of the results of a national survey conducted in Iceland in 1974 and review comparable findings from representative surveys in Great Britain, Sweden and the United States, as well as a survey conducted in most European countries by Gallup International and affiliated companies. All these surveys canvass belief in the existence of psychic phenomena as well as personal psi experiences. Such noteworthy and representative surveys as Palmer’s and Dennis’ (1975, Palmer 1979) community mail survey in Charlottesville Virginia and Blackmore’s postal survey of Bristol residents (1984) will not be dealt with in this paper since they are not made on national samples.
SAMPLES, ITEMS AND PROCEDURES

Iceland: We obtained in early 1974 from the National Registry a random sample of 1,132 persons from the ages of thirty to seventy. After up to three mailings of a 53-item long questionnaire, and phone calls when necessary, 902 persons (425 men and 477 women) had returned usable questionnaires when we brought the survey to a close in January 1975. This gives a highly satisfactory return rate of 80 per cent and should make the results representative for the Icelandic population as a whole. A detailed description of the sample, questionnaire and the procedure of the Icelandic survey has appeared elsewhere (Haraldsson 1978, Haraldsson, Gudmundsdottir, Ragnarsson, Loftsson and Jonsson 1977).

Great Britain: Audience Selection (1980) interviewed in December 1980 a quota sample of 896 persons representative of the adult population in Great Britain from the age 16 and up. The survey was conducted on behalf of the News of the World. This survey covered belief in psychic and some occult phenomena as well as personal experiences of the same. The survey contained nine items, each of them containing several sub-items.

Sweden: Institutet för Marknadundersöknings (IMU) in Stockholm interviewed in October 1978 a representative quota sample of 751 Swedish adults aged 15 and up. Six items, on belief and personal experiences (‘ockult oplevelser’), were included in this survey which was initiated by Lars Westman, journalist of the popular Swedish weekly Veckotidningen, after he wrote a report on the Icelandic survey.

In June 1980 IMU conducted another interview survey (‘annorlunda oplevelser’) on a quota sample of 502 respondents, this time on behalf of the popular Swedish weekly Allers. It contained six items on paranormal beliefs and experiences and psi-related topics.

United States: In 1973 McCready and Greeley (1976, Greeley 1975), sociologists at the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) of the University of Chicago, conducted an interview survey (N = 1,460) on what they termed ‘the ultimate values of the American population’. They used a ‘multistage NORC national sample with probability selection to the block level and quota selection of respondents within the block’ (Greeley 1976, pp. 8–9). The questionnaire included three items on paranormal experiences.

Gallup International (1984) in London and Gallup affiliated polling institutions in most countries of Western Europe have, on behalf of the European Value Systems Study Group, recently conducted the most extensive survey of human values ever made. It contained the three McCready and Greeley items on paranormal experiences. This was an interview survey, using national representative quota samples ranging from 467 to 2,303 respondents. The average national sample size consisted of 1,132 respondents.

HOW WIDESPREAD IS BELIEF IN PSYCHIC PHENOMENA?

As can be seen in Table 1 our Icelandic respondents believed strongly in psychic dreams; 54 per cent considered these phenomena certain or likely; only 3 per cent believed them to be unlikely or impossible. 38 per cent considered it possible that psychic dreams exist. The group that considered the phenomena possible is not
Table 1. Attitudes of respondents in Iceland toward paranormal phenomena and psi-related topics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consider the existence:</th>
<th>Impossible</th>
<th>Unlikely</th>
<th>Possible</th>
<th>Likely</th>
<th>Certain</th>
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<td>2</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poltergeist, hauntings:</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication with dead at seances:</td>
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<td>34</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* More detailed tables of the results of the Icelandic survey are available on request from the author.

Table 2. Percentage of respondents in Audience Selections British sample who believed in various paranormal or occult phenomena. ('Which of these phenomena do you believe exists?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All adults</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>16-34</th>
<th>35-64</th>
<th>65+</th>
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<tr>
<td>Telepathy</td>
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<td>67</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>77</td>
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<td>69</td>
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<td>Extrasensory perception</td>
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<td>70</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>60</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dreams that come to pass</td>
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<td>56</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>72</td>
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<td>55</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hauntings</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poltergeists</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reincarnation</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact with the dead</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satanism or existence of the devil</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witchcraft</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>29</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black magic</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>29</td>
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</table>

easy to evaluate, but the response indicates some degree of belief.

Clairvoyance and telepathy (no Icelandic word distinguishes clearly between them) are considered likely or certain by 41 per cent and possible by 45 per cent; only 5 per cent considered them unlikely, and less than 1 per cent responded 'impossible'. We can safely conclude that the majority of persons in Iceland believes in the existence of extrasensory perception.
Table 3. Attitudes toward some parapsychological phenomena (belief in %) among respondents in IMU’s two Swedish samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do you believe that people can have ‘supernatural’ experiences, such as precognitive dreams and premonitions?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, absolutely</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>59</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes, perhaps</td>
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<td>34</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
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<td>130</td>
<td>52</td>
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<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.2</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes, absolutely</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes, perhaps</td>
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<td>40</td>
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<td>No, hardly</td>
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<td>115</td>
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<td>21</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>1.9</td>
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<td><strong>Precognitive dreams:</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td>22</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>115</td>
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<td>105</td>
<td>83</td>
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<tr>
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<td>14</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td><strong>Mean value</strong></td>
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<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
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<td>1.9</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes, perhaps</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>No, hardly</td>
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<tr>
<td>No, not at all</td>
<td>51</td>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>Mean value</strong></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Figures for ‘don’t knows’ are excluded from the table.

We have data from Sweden (IMU 1978, 1980) and Great Britain, (Audience Selection 1980) on some of the variables we surveyed in Iceland and these can be seen in Tables 2 and 3. (Different response alternatives complicate the comparison of data across countries.) Table 4 shows some tentative groupings of responses for telepathy and psychic dreams. Those in Iceland who considered clairvoyance or telepathy ‘certain’ or ‘likely’ and half of those considering it
'possible' were categorized as believers. In the Swedish survey, respondents choosing 'yes definitely' and 'yes perhaps' were categorized as believers.

Using this rather crude method for classification of responses, the percentage of believers in telepathy were 66 per cent in Sweden and 73 per cent in Iceland and Great Britain.

In Iceland 54% considered the existence of psychic dreams likely or certain. By counting among the believers (as previously) half of those persons who considered psychic dreams possible, we obtain a percentage of 73 as believers. In Sweden the same figure is 71 per cent and in Great Britain 63 per cent. If our tentative grouping of response alternatives for Iceland and Sweden is valid, we may infer that the majority in these three European nations believes in the existence of psychic dreams.

How do these results relate to education? In our Icelandic sample our very small (42) college-educated group (consisting mostly of younger men) generally expressed more skepticism about psychic phenomena than the less educated groups. However, 28 per cent of our respondents did not answer our question on education and hence the generalizability of our finding is limited, as any statistic we calculate on the effect of education may be biased. In Iceland belief in both psychic dreams and ESP was slightly less among the more educated but only significantly so for belief in the existence of psychic dreams ($\chi^2 = 32.66$, df = 5, $p < 0.001$). In the British survey no information is given on the effect of education. For Sweden information is only available for the question from the 1978 survey, and there we find no significant relationship between educational level and the belief that people can have "supernatural" experiences.

Table 4. Percentage of believers in:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Telepathy</th>
<th>Psychic Dreams</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iceland (N = 902) 1974</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Britain (N = 896) 1980</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden (N = 502) 1978</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Roper Organization (1974)—one of the large U.S. polling institutes—asked in 1974 (on behalf of the National Enquirer) a representative national sample (size not given): 'There's talk from time to time about psychic phenomena, such as ESP, extrasensory perception. Do you believe in such things or not?' 53 per cent reported such belief; the college educated believing considerably more in ESP (68 per cent) than did those who had attended only high school (52 per cent) or grade school (26 per cent). In an older survey of 'second sight' in West Germany (Bender 1964) we find a similar relationship as in the U.S.A.; 49 per cent of the West German sample who had attended only primary school believed in second sight, 63 per cent of secondary school graduates did so and 70 per cent of college-educated ('mit Abitur') were believers.

Although there seems to be a positive relationship between education and belief in ESP among the U.S. and German populations as a whole, leading
scientists (at least in U.S.A.) apparently reveal a higher degree of skepticism than any other group. This finding is not from a national survey but noteworthy because of its relevance. It comes from a survey of opinions about ESP, parapsychology and anomalous experiences among Council members and the selected section committee representatives of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). Only 29 per cent of 352 respondents considered ESP a likely possibility (McClenon 1982). McClenon found further that 69 per cent of the same group of elite scientists considered the investigation of ESP a legitimate scientific undertaking and also that scientists in this group ‘who doubt the existence of ESP tended to cite a priori reasons’ (McClenon 1982, p. 127).

Let us now look at the more ‘other-worldly’ aspects of psychic phenomena, such as belief in contact with the dead. In Iceland we asked: ‘Do you believe that the dead can be seen?’ In Table 1 we see again a wide belief: 31 per cent are sure that the dead can in principle be seen, and a further 26 per cent think it likely whereas only 7 per cent reject it. We find some difference between Icelanders and their neighbours further south and east. 57 per cent of Icelanders consider it likely or certain that the dead can manifest apparitions; while 28 per cent in Great Britain think that the dead can be contacted. In Sweden this figure is lower, 4 per cent are ‘absolutely sure’ and 17 per cent say ‘yes, perhaps’.

Different wording of the questions may have some effect towards different response. In Britain, for example, 44 per cent believe in hauntings, though only 28 per cent believe in contact with the dead. In the United States, Gallup (1982) recently asked: ‘Do you think it is possible to have contact with the dead, or not?’ 24 per cent replied ‘yes’.

In the U.S. the more educated reported belief in the possibility of contact with the dead more frequently than did the less educated (college-educated 28 per cent, high school 25 per cent and grade school 9 per cent). Elite scientists were again an exception. Among a sample of scientists listed in ‘Who’s Who in America’ only 5 per cent believed in contact with the dead, and 9 per cent of a sample of physicians in the same book believed in such contact (Gallup 1982).

Elsewhere (Haraldsson 1981) I have reported how various non-psychical variables in the Icelandic survey (such as belief in survival, religiosity, reading on religion, attempting to interpret one’s dreams, sex and dream recall) were significantly related to belief in psychic phenomena. Since then Thalbourne (1984) has replicated some of these findings on a non-national sample from a section of the US ‘high-intelligence club’ MENS. (For a review see Schmeidler 1984).

What can we conclude? The surveys indicate that belief in psychic phenomena is widespread, probably more widespread than most of us had anticipated, and not only in a small and rather isolated society such as we have in Iceland. Belief in some of the phenomena are about equally widespread in Iceland and Britain, and Sweden is not far behind. These figures also indicate that the rejection of psychic phenomena by elite scientists has not managed to sway public opinion far in this matter, not even among the more educated classes.

The effect of education differs among nations. In the U.S.A. and Germany
education seems positively related to belief in psychic phenomena, in Iceland this relationship appears negative whereas in Sweden no such relationship is found.

**What Kind of Psychic Experiences do Respondents Report?**

This might be a proper place to emphasize that we are dealing with survey data of reported but uninvestigated ostensible psychic experiences. How likely it

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>primary</th>
<th>secondary</th>
<th>college</th>
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<td>44</td>
<td>34</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apparition of living person;</td>
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<td>Out-of-body-experience;</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apparition of dead person;</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediumistic experience (automatism, obsession);</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poltergeist;</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived in a haunted house;</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended seance;</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>useful;</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>useless;</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communicated with dead:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>possibly</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visited ‘Prophesy-psychic’;</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>useful;</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>useless;</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Astrologer;</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consulted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychic healer;</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>useful;</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>useless;</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6. Percentage of respondents in Audience Selections British sample reporting various paranormal or occult experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All adults</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>16–34</th>
<th>35–64</th>
<th>65+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, have been telepathic</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, have E.S.P.</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, do dream about things that come to pass</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, have been haunted</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, have been troubled by a Poltergeist</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, (believe that I) have lived before</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, have been in (verbal or physical) contact with someone who is dead</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended mediumistic seance</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended black magic session</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended an exorcism</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* less than 1%.

is that some or any of these experiences may in fact be paranormal in nature, we have no way of determining from the data. Survey data may tell us something about the prevalence of psychic experiences, but primarily they reveal only how readily people interpret some of their experiences as paranormal in nature.

In Iceland psychic dreams (see Table 5) were more commonly reported than any other psychic experience, by 36 per cent of our sample but with a significant sex difference: 27 per cent of the men against 44 per cent of the women.

Comparison of the Icelandic results with the Audience Selection (1980) survey in Great Britain (Table 6), IMU’s 1978 and 1980 surveys in Sweden (Table 7) and the McCreary and Greeley 1976 survey in the United States reveals some differences as well as similarities (Table 8). More persons report psychic dreams in Iceland (36 per cent) than in Great Britain (29 per cent) or Sweden (19 per cent “yes definitely” and 9 per cent “yes perhaps”). Waking ESP (or telepathy) is reported more frequently in the U.S. (58 per cent), than in Great Britain (29 per cent) Iceland (27 per cent) and Sweden (14 per cent “yes definitely”, 15 per cent “yes perhaps”).

Experiencing apparitions of the dead was the second most commonly reported experience in Iceland, reported by 31 per cent (26 per cent of the men and 36 per cent of the women). Visual apparitions were most frequent, followed by feeling of presence and tactile and auditory experiences. Apparitions of the living were reported by 11 per cent, with no sex difference among respondents. In the Swedish and British, surveys there were questions on ‘contact with the dead’ (see Tables 7 and 9). Affirmative responses were much fewer than Iceland’s 41 per cent; they were 26 per cent in Britain and only 9 per cent in Sweden. We later come back to this topic.
Table 7. Percentage of respondents in IMU's two surveys in Sweden reporting various psychic experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>15-29</th>
<th>30-49</th>
<th>50-64</th>
<th>65-74</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1978 survey N =</strong></td>
<td>751</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>(50-74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precognitive dreams:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, certainly</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, perhaps</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precognitive vision in waking state:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, certainly</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, perhaps</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-of-body experience:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, certainly</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, perhaps</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apparition:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, certainly</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, perhaps</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1980 survey N =</strong></td>
<td>502</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telepathy:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, certainly</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, perhaps</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premonitions:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, certainly</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, perhaps</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychic healing of respondent or someone he knows:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact with the dead by respondent or someone he knows:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only the Icelandic and the British surveys included questions about hauntings and poltergeists. They were reported by 18 per cent and 14 per cent in the respective countries and poltergeists by 9 per cent and 3 per cent.

How high a percentage of people reported some psychic experience? In Iceland we asked about 13 different kinds of experiences that may possibly be psychic in nature. 64 per cent reported a least one kind of such experience (57 per cent of the men and 70 per cent of the women).

We have comparable figures only from Great Britain and they are almost identical; 64 per cent of respondents reported at least one psychic phenomenon (56 per cent of the men and 71 per cent of the women). From Audience Selection's report it is not clear which of the items in Table 6, or if all of them,
Table 8. Percentage of respondents reporting psychic experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Iceland</th>
<th>Britain</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
<th>USA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychic dreams</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>19–28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waking ESP (telepathy)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>14–29</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact with the dead</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hauntings</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poltergeists</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-of-body experiences</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>6–12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some psychic experience</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

were included as psychic experiences. With that reservation in mind, we can state that around two-thirds of respondents in Iceland and Great Britain report personal psychic experiences.

In the U.S. survey we see a similar trend. Unfortunately McCready and Greeley did not give the percentage of persons reporting at least one of the three different experiences that they surveyed. Telepathy was reported by 58 per cent, clairvoyance by 24 per cent, and contact with the dead by 27 per cent so the total figure surely comes to 60 per cent, and more likely to 70–80 per cent.

To sum up, the surveys in Iceland, Great Britain, and probably also in the U.S., reveal not only that the majority of these populations believe in some psychic phenomena, but also that at least six people of every ten interpret some of their personal experiences as paranormal in nature.

The Multinational Human Values Study and Paranormal Experiences

The European Value Systems Study Group (Gallup International 1984)—which was initiated by Prof. Kerkhofs of the University of Louvain in Belgium—has recently released an interesting and unique multinational study. It is an extensive survey of human values which was conducted by leading polling institutions in most Western European countries as well as in some countries in Asia. McCready’s and Greeley’s (1976) three paranormal items from their survey on ‘the ultimate values of the American population’ were included. I was involved with the project in Iceland and present in Table 9 the results of these items for the Western European countries along with the original findings of McCready and Greeley for the U.S.A.

The items are as follows: ‘Did you ever have any of the following experiences: (1) Felt as though you were in touch with someone when they were far away; (2) Seen events that happened at a great distance as they were happening; (3) Felt as though you really were in touch with someone who had died’. Response alternatives for all three items were ‘no never’, ‘yes’, ‘don’t know’. (For convenience I refer in Table 9 to these items as telepathy, clairvoyance and contact with the dead.)

From the parapsychologist’s point of view, these items are far from being worded in an ideal fashion. The wording ‘felt as though’ (used in the first and third items) is particularly critical since respondents may have reported
**Table 9. Percentage of persons in the Human Values Survey reporting the following experiences:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Telepathy</th>
<th>Clairvoyance</th>
<th>Contact with the Dead</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Ireland</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rep. of Ireland</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Germany</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holland</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malta</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total for Western Europe</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S.A.</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

instances in which they were not sure that the experience was genuine, although they may have 'felt as though' they were having the experience.

The unique opportunity for cross-cultural comparisons was emphasized in the planning of this survey, even though an exact translation of items from one language to another can be difficult. Nonetheless, the representative survey data obtained from 16 countries—and there are more on the way—offer a unique opportunity for cross-cultural comparisons.

Here we have for the first time relatively comparable data from most nations of Western Europe and the U.S.A. although nuances of translations will remain a source of some variations in responses. Weighted figures have been given for the three types of experiences among the total population surveyed in Europe (Table 9). For the whole of the Western Europe telepathy was reported most frequently, by almost every third respondent (32 per cent); contact with the dead by every fourth to fifth person (23 per cent), and finally every fifth respondent claimed a personal experience of clairvoyance (20 per cent).

First, a few details on the telepathy results. The U.S. sample reported telepathy far more frequently (58 per cent) than any European nation surveyed. Italy comes next with the much lower figure of 38 per cent, followed by Great Britain (36 per cent), West Germany and Finland (35 per cent), France (34%) and Iceland (32 per cent). Norway and Belgium are second lowest with 18 per cent. On the bottom we find Denmark (14 per cent), which comes as no surprise to anyone familiar with that fine nation. Only 11 per cent of respondents reported a paranormal experience in a national two-item survey initiated by the Danish Society for Psychological Research (Gallup Markedsanalyse 1957).

Contact with the dead is the second most often reported phenomenon. We find
again rather large international differences. Iceland leads with 41 per cent of the respondents reporting a personal experience of contact with the dead, Italy comes next with 33 per cent, then U.S. (27 per cent) and Great Britain and West Germany (26 per cent). At the bottom we find again Denmark and Norway with 9 per cent. In our earlier Icelandic survey 31 per cent reported experience of the dead. This increase up to 41 per cent is probably due to slight differences in the wording of the questions; a difference which seems well nigh impossible to translate into English. Furthermore, our 1974 finding was widely publicized in Iceland when it was released in 1975 and I wonder if it may have boosted further the tendency to report contact with the dead.

The fact that Icelanders top the list in reporting contact with the dead calls for some discussion. It brings to mind some other findings of our 1974 survey. It was noteworthy that about every third person (32 per cent) had attended mediumistic seances. For the age bracket 50–59 the figure rose up to 47 per cent and was even a surprising 29 per cent for our college-educated group (Table 5). Only 209 respondents answered our subquestions about seances so any figure from them is of limited value; however, over half of them expressed the belief that they had communicated with the dead at a seance. More reliable is our finding (see Table 1) that respondents express a relatively strong belief in communication with the dead at seances; 21 per cent being certain of such a communication and a further 21 per cent thinking it likely, as opposed to 11 per cent who think it impossible or unlikely.

These figures may come as a surprise to anyone who is not familiar with the Icelandic scene. But imagine what would have happened to Britain if a large portion of the population had been repeatedly personally exposed to the seances of D. D. Home or Mrs Piper. This may explain in part what has happened in Iceland. From 1905 until the 1960s or even 70s we had a number of influential mediums in Iceland, about whom very little was recorded and who were left uninvestigated—with the exception of the first, Indridi Indridason (Hannesson 1924, Nielsen 1923, 1925), and, apparently, the last, Hafsteinn Björnsson (Haraldsson and Stevenson 1972, 1975a, 1975b, Haraldsson, Pratt and Kristjánsson 1978). Indridi Indridason, whose mediumship lasted only 5 years (he died at the age of 29), was little known outside Iceland, but was probably in many ways on a par with no one less than D. D. Home. Iceland having at this time only a population of about 85,000, a considerable part of the population personally observed many of the phenomena that also convinced many a person in Europe and North America of communication with the dead. After Indridason other mediums followed—from now on only of the mental type—about whom no reports were written but who had lasting effects and were widely attended. Now they have all died. The period of trance phenomena apparently lasted longer in Iceland than on both sides of the Atlantic. The gradually waning effect of the spiritualistic movement can perhaps also be seen in the Audience Selection survey where 17 per cent of those over 65 years of age had attended a seance but only 8 per cent of those aged 16 to 34.

Spiritualism is probably only one of the factors for wide reporting of contact with the dead in Iceland. The voluminous Icelandic folklore and sagas from the 13th century onwards are rich in accounts involving the dead. Even in the 16th century, according to Jacobus Zieglerus' book 'Descriptio Schondiae' (first
printed in Strassbourg in 1532), Icelanders had a reputation of experiencing the
dead, especially ‘apparitions of those who had drowned or died violently in some
other way’ (Davidsson 1887, p. 122) and to such an extent that they reportedly
did not distinguish the dead from the living until after they had disappeared.

Let us turn back to the multinational survey. Clairvoyance is much more
frequently reported in Italy (38 per cent) than in any other country, including
the U.S. (24 per cent). Next comes France (24 per cent), Malta (18 per cent),
Finland and West Germany (15 per cent) and Great Britain (14 per cent). At the
bottom we find Sweden, Norway and Iceland with 7 per cent.

No further analyses of this important survey are yet available. It would, for
example, be interesting to know the overall percentage in each country of persons
reporting at least one psychic experience. From the data released so far there is
no way to calculate such an overall percentage. However, a possible indicator of
the overall rate of reported psychic experiences might be the sum total of the
three percentages. This I have computed for each country. The United States
and Italy easily top the list with 109 points each. The second place is jointly held
by Iceland and France with 81 points, followed closely by Great Britain and
West Germany with 76 points each. At the bottom we find Denmark and Norway
(34 points).

I am somewhat familiar with the majority of these countries. Before starting
on the project of examining these results I did not state any explicit hypotheses
but I would have expected the U.S. and Iceland to be at or close to the top, and
Great Britain, Italy and Germany close by. I also would have expected
Denmark, Norway and Sweden to have among the lowest rates. As far as these
countries are concerned the findings come as no surprise to me. What surprises
me, however, is the finding that so many Frenchmen report psychic experiences
and that they report them more frequently than Britishers. My surprise probably
reflects my ignorance of the French people.

Earlier we discussed the effect of education on beliefs in psychic phenomena,
but is education in any way related to the tendency to report a personal psychic
experience? As previously stated our Icelandic data on education must be
interpreted with considerable caution. Apparently, however, the greater number
of years one has spent in educational institutions the less likely one is to report a
psychic experience.

In Britain the role of education is clearer. Audience Selection states in its
report that 60 per cent of blue collar workers and 69 per cent of white-collar
workers reported some psychic experience; thus, slightly more of the educated
respondents reported psychic experiences than did those with less education.
Comparable figures are not available from other countries. When the European
Human Values Study has been further analyzed the effect of education on the
reporting of psychic experiences will become much clearer. Then we will also
know how claims of psychic experiences relate to a number of other important
and interesting variables.

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