



RASSEKH, MEHRI

RASSEKH, MEHRI, née Arjomand (b. Tehran, 6 October 1922; d. Geneva, 15 November 2008; [Figure 1](#)), a leading research scholar in the field of psychology and education, professor of psychology at the University of Tehran.

Mehri Rassekh was born into a prominent and well-educated Bahā'i family. Her maternal grandmother, Monireh Ayādi, was among the founders of one of the first modern girls schools in Tehran. Her mother, Bāhereh, too, was active in the field of public education, and her father, Masiḥ, was for many years the director of the Post Office in the Māzandarān Province. He was also a physician and ran a surgery for a while.

Mehri Rassekh was a gifted student. In 1951, having scored the highest rank in her final undergraduate examinations in Psychology and Education at the [Faculty of Letters and Humanities](#), she was granted a government scholarship to complete her graduate studies in Europe (Milani, p. 269). [Moḥammad Bāqer Hušyār](#) and 'Ali Akbar Siāsi, two of her eminent professors in the University of Tehran, were surely influential in the formation of her strong personality and successful academic career.

It was with the objective of continuing her graduate studies in the field of developmental psychology with Jean Piaget (1896-1980) at the University of Geneva Rousseau Institute (also known as Institut Jean-Jacques Rousseau) that Rassekh chose to settle in Switzerland in 1951. In 1961 she submitted her dissertation, prepared under the supervision of Jean Piaget, to the faculty of the Rousseau Institute. Rassekh's dissertation, which she shortly thereafter



published as *L'enfant-problème et sa rééducation: Principes, organismes, méthodes* (Neuchâtel, 1962), deals with the concepts and techniques of psychotherapy, such as music therapy, which by then were considered ground-breaking methodological innovations in French-language academic milieus. Harry Feldmann, a prominent neuropsychologist who had written a foreword to Rassekh's book, found it a "singular and original work ..., exhausting all medical, psychological, psycho-educational and psycho-economical aspects of difficult children." Another of her tutors, Professor André Rey (1906-1965), who first developed the Rey-Osterrieth Complex Figure and the Rey Auditory Verbal Learning Test, impressed Rassekh and led to her choosing clinical psychology and psychotherapy as her favorite topics. While in Switzerland, Daniël Quirin Mulock Houwer (1903-1985), a pioneer of child welfare in the Netherlands and general secretary of the International Union for Child Welfare (Union Internationale de Protection de l'Enfance, or UIPE), offered Rassekh a position in his organization, which she declined, as she already had a commitment to return to Iran and work for the Iranian government. Before returning to Iran, Rassekh visited a number of major clinics and psychotherapy institutions across Europe, from France to the United Kingdom to the Netherlands.

Upon her return to Iran in 1962, Rassekh began to teach as an assistant professor at the University of Tehran Department of Psychology and Education. She was soon promoted to the full professorship of clinical psychology and in 1973 was appointed as the head of the Department of Psychology and Education, becoming the first woman in Iranian universities to function as head of an academic department (Milani, p. 269; Keyhān-e Havā'i, 11 August 1973). During this period, her research focused on a comparative study of mental abilities of female and male students. Concurrently, Rassekh opened up a private clinical practice to narrow her focus on women's problems and became famous after successfully treating some difficult cases previously considered as hopeless by her colleagues. One of her techniques for diagnosing her patients' problems was the use of paintings and graphics. Rassekh was in favor of "reality therapy," a method first used by William Glasser (b. 1925), an American psychiatrist whose method was to be known as "choice therapy" (Rassekh, pp. 34-39). Rassekh was also interested in the researches done by Viktor E. Frankl (1905-1997), a professor of psychotherapy at the University of Vienna and pioneering exponent of the methods of logotherapy and existential analysis, whose book, *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy*, had been read

and annotated by Rassekh.

Mehri Rassekh hosted two highly popular radio programs, “Mental Health of Family” and “Ways for a Better Living,” which attracted large number of listeners. She was the founder of a psychological clinic in Tehran, whose aim was to treat the psychological anomalies originating from the development of urban life in modern Iran. In addition, Rassekh joined, as an appointed member, the central board of the Iranian Women Organization (Sazmān-e zanān-e Iran). This took place under the auspices of Princess Ashraf Pahlavi. In 1973, Rassekh represented the organization in the International Conference for Women in Vienna as well as in the UN Conference for the Year of Women, which was held in 1975 in Mexico. Furthermore, she collaborated with the Social Work College in Tehran, by then headed by Sattareh Farmanfarmaian, to educate and train professional social workers. At the same time, she was a distinguished and active member of the Bahā’i community in Iran, being particularly interested in, and contributing to, the propagation of Bahā’i teaching among women and children. She was deeply committed to the social principles of her faith such as the oneness of mankind, the equality of sexes and compulsory education for everyone.

Shortly before the 1979 revolution, Rassekh had travelled to Zurich to visit the Red Cross hospital for a medical check-up. As Iran was in turmoil, family and friends suggested she and her husband delay their return. They went to Geneva, and subsequently were never able to return to their homeland. Their assets in Iran were confiscated by the new regime, and their house plundered. Mehri Rassekh’s valuable notes of the medical cases treated by her over seventeen years of practice in Tehran were also lost. In Geneva, she resumed her clinical work in collaboration with Harry Feldmann. During her Geneva years Rassekh dedicated herself to family and friends, worked as a family adviser, was active in the Interfaith Association of Geneva, and contributed to the establishment of the Society for Persian Arts and Letters in Switzerland. Various Persian-language radio and television channels broadcast her talks and interviews for Iranian diaspora in Europe. Rassekh remained active for many years until her death in 2008 in Geneva.

In 1946 she married Shapur Rassekh, later professor of social sciences at the University of Tehran and concurrently deputy-chairman of the Plan and Budget Organization (see [BARNĀMA-RIZI](#)) of the Country. They were together for sixty-two years and had two children, Rāmeš and Moždeh.



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