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extra

Usage of the Persian word *del* in psychiatry

Cyrus Abbasian

Witness *del*, what love's sadness did again
Became *del*-taker, calamity brought to faithful friend
Hâfêz (14th century)

Psychosomatic symptoms are a common presentation of mental health problems in Iran. The word *del*, which usually means the heart and can signify love, also symbolises the stomach or abdominal region. It can be used with a plethora of words and an online dictionary (<http://farsilookup.com>) highlights almost 400 words incorporating *del*.

Del is frequently used to express anxiety and mood-related symptoms: for example, terms such as *del-frenzy* or *del-excitement* describe anxiety whereas *del-intransigence* is worry. Sadness is *del-tightness* and melancholy *del-congestion*. Uncertainty is *two-del* and worry-free is *peaceful-del*. Whereas *cold-del* means hopeless, hopeful is *warm-del*. *Black-del* is vengeful, *lion-del* courageous and *turbulent-del* upset. Whereas *stone-del* is cruel *thin-del* is sensitive.

Given the links between mental illness and bowel symptoms this connection is unsurprising. Terms such as 'stomach aches' or 'butterflies' are commonly used in English and symptoms such as constipation, diarrhoea, nausea and vomiting are related to mood and anxiety disorders. Conversely, patients referred for bowel disorders significantly suffer from higher psychosocial distress. *Del*-pain remains a common method of depicting psychosocial distress among Iranians. Not surprisingly, the word *del* also crops up frequently in Persian poetry.

The poem is the author's own translation from the original Persian.

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