

# Ian Baker

Ian Baker is a psychologist at the University of Derby who has carried out ESP research.

## Career

Ian Baker is a senior lecturer in psychology at the University of Derby, UK. He gained both an MSc and a PhD in psychology from Edinburgh University, being supervised by the late professor [Robert Morris](#). His doctoral work concerned the remote detection of staring. Baker is the programme leader for the university's BSc (Hons) psychology degree and also the leader for several psychology and parapsychology modules. His research interests include parapsychology, paranormal belief, religious belief, and the use of biological monitoring technology.

## Dream-ESP

Baker and co-workers investigated the role in dream-ESP research of the experimenter and 'sender' (the person who attempts to 'send' mental images to the 'receiver'). Forty participants, acting as 'receivers', recorded their dreams. Nights in which a sender was active alternated with nights when there was no sender. On 'no-sender' nights a video clip was randomly selected as the target and played repeatedly in the early morning. On sender nights a person watched the clip and tried to communicate its content to the receiver. Both sender and no-sender conditions resulted in above chance scoring (30% and 35% respectively); however, neither reached statistical significance ( $p = 0.18, 0.14$ , respectively) failing to provide evidence for the need of a sender in dream-ESP research.[1](#)

## Experimenter Effect

Baker collaborated with [Caroline Watt](#) to test the effect on participants in an ESP experiment of suggestion by the experimenter, who greeted them beforehand in either a psi-positive or psi-negative manner. No ESP effect was found, and there was also no measurable impact of psi positive or negative suggestions on psi performance. There was a statistically significant effect of suggestion on a variety of psychological factors but not on the psi task itself.[2](#)

## Remote Staring Detection

Experiments carried out since the 1980s provide support for the idea that humans can [sense when they are being stared at](#). To eliminate sensory clues, in some experiments the staring is done remotely via closed circuit television cameras. Baker and Stevens ran three such experiments, examining subjects' brain responses to a remote person staring via CCTV. The first gave significant evidence of a remote staring effect ( $p = 0.004$ ). The second unexpectedly produced a significant reversal

of the staring effect ( $p = 0.02$ ). Because of this reversal, a third experiment tested for a potential artifact, of which half was run in the absence of a starrer. This still gave significant results where no effect was expected ( $p = 0.003$ ). A difference in screen luminescence levels between staring and no staring trial visual displays was found, but of a very small magnitude – around 5% the difference found in null mainstream studies<sup>3</sup> – and only for 20 ms ( $1/50^{\text{th}}$  of a second) at the beginning of each trial, making it unlikely to account for the effects found in these experiments.<sup>4</sup>

Many experiments have confirmed the reality of the sense of being stared at. However, little effort has been made to understand what people believe about the phenomenon. Baker carried out two surveys, obtaining responses from 2,500 people.<sup>5</sup> These indicated that the further the distance between the starrer and the person being stared at, the less likely they were to believe there was an effect. Baker points out that this may reflect the influence of classical physics, in which effects attenuate with distance.

## Supernatural Scale

In an exploratory study, Baker and Malcolm Schofield tested a new Belief in the Supernatural Scale that measured five entities: ‘mental and psychic phenomena’, ‘religious belief’, ‘psychokinesis’, ‘supernatural entities’, and ‘common paranormal perceptions’. The scale, applied to 318 participants and a wide range of items, was shown to provide a clear demarcation between religious and paranormal belief.<sup>6</sup>

## Psychometry Test

Psychometry is the purported ability to obtain personal information from objects paranormally. Baker and Montague asked 45 experimental participants each to handle two personal objects. These were then passed to a person claiming psychic ability and also a non-psychic, who handled the items and reported any information they sensed. Contrary to expectation, readings by the non-psychic were rated as more accurate than those who claimed psychic ability.<sup>7</sup>

## Haunting Investigations

Baker and O’Keeffe presented a set of ethical guidelines for haunting investigations, the need for which is driven by the explosion in interest among both amateurs and professionals. They are grouped in three sections: (a) general issues such as informed consent and confidentiality; (b) specific methodological advice for interviewing, location investigation and overnight examinations; and (c) other ethical issues such as referral and the pastoral role of investigators.<sup>8</sup>

## Priming Influence

Baker and coauthors examined whether priming – a method in which a person’s thinking is influenced by subtle cues or prompts – can activate unconscious implicit beliefs. The study’s findings revealed that specific types of beliefs, particularly those related to the supernatural, can be influenced by primes,

suggesting that our minds are responsive to such cues. Religious primes were particularly effective, indicating that moral or religious convictions can be readily stimulated. The study also touched on the concept of [‘aliefs’](#), instinctive responses based on cognitive states. The authors argue that this research may reveal ways to encourage critical thinking, and is especially relevant in the context of the contemporary spread of misinformation.[9](#)

## Modelling Supernatural Belief

In a 2020 publication, Baker and co-authors offer a novel model of supernatural belief, exploring the interplay of cognition and personality traits. One study analysed the relationship between cognition, supernatural belief, critical thinking, cognitive reflection, and confidence, specifically concerning paranormal and religious beliefs. A second study integrated personality factors such as dogmatism, schizotypy, and personality dimensions into the examination of supernatural belief and cognition.[10](#)

## Understanding Anomalous Experiences

Research by Baker, Schofield and Irwin probed the interconnections between personality traits and psychological attributes and their impact on anomalous experiences. It found an extensive overlap between the factors influencing both anomalous experiences and the propensity to explain them through paranormal lenses, with dissociative tendencies substantially influencing both anomalous experiences and the tendency to interpret them paranormally. The authors also found that [sensory-processing sensitivity](#), linked with heightened awareness of stimuli, is linked to a broad spectrum of parapsychological experiences.[11](#)

## Personality and Supernatural Beliefs

Prior research has examined the relationship between dark personality traits and religious beliefs. In a 2021 publication, Baker and co-authors ran a survey to explore the connection between certain negative personality traits and paranormal and scientific beliefs, using the ‘Dark Tetrad’ framework comprising narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and sadism. Belief in psychokinesis and other paranormal phenomena was found to have a negative association with Machiavellianism but displayed a positive connection with psychopathy. Furthermore, religious belief exhibited a negative correlation with psychopathy but a positive correlation with sadism.[12](#)

Michael Duggan

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# Endnotes

## Footnotes

- [1.](#) Roe et al (2007).
- [2.](#) Watt & Baker (2002).
- [3.](#) Johannes et al (1995).
- [4.](#) Baker & Stevens (2013).
- [5.](#) Baker (2015).
- [6.](#) Schofield et al (2018).
- [7.](#) Baker et al (2017).
- [8.](#) Baker & O’Keeffe (2007).
- [9.](#) Schofield et al (2022).
- [10.](#) Schofield et al (2020).
- [11.](#) Irwin et al (2014).
- [12.](#) Schofield et al (2021).