

## Original Article

**The Experiences of Healthcare Providers Regarding Professional Ethics of Front Line Health Workers (A qualitative study)**Ghasem Abedi<sup>1</sup> Ghader Momeni<sup>2\*</sup> Samad Rouhani<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract**

**Background and purpose:** There is a return to rationality and ethics in the approach of current world. After several eras, humanity comes to consider rationality and ethics in addressing its physical and moral needs. From this point of view, ethics could be considered as a center of evolution in the future. This approach mainly influences those practices that are in the lead in serving people. Therefore, in this study, the aim was to investigate stakeholders' points of view about Phenomenological ethics and professional behavior of auxiliary health workers at first level of health services delivery.

**Materials and Methods:** This qualitative study was conducted through semi-structural interview in 2017. The study population included nine principals of staff technical unit, five physicians in charge of rural comprehensive health centers, and 12 auxiliary health workers of affiliated health houses who were selected purposefully. After conducting the interviews, the data was transferred to paper and analyzed using content analysis with emphasis on core and non-core factors that influence behavior and professional ethics of auxiliary health workers from inter-organization stakeholders' viewpoints.

**Results:** The results of this study included two general domains of the main elements (ethical and behavioral), and a total of 12 sub-areas of each of the two main elements, including three sub-domains that comprised the moral criterion: (secrecy, censorship, good behavior), as well as three behavioral criteria (accountability, expressive power, motivation), and ultimately 107 basic categories from 3 perspectives, which were all selected by institutional stakeholders: technical units, physicians of comprehensive health centers, as well as healthcare providers.

**Conclusion:** The expressed experiences have shown that the issues surrounding the ethics and behavior of auxiliary health workers who are providing health services at the front line of health system, is inevitable in order to intervene in improving and promoting the quality of morality and behavior of this group of health professionals.

**Keywords:** Professional Ethics, Professional Behavior, Front Line Services, Qualitative Study

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## 1. Introduction

The approach of today's world can be seen as a return to rationality and ethics. Humanity goes through various periods to have a rational and ethical approach to its material and spiritual needs. So, ethics can be seen as the centerpiece of future world developments. This approach affects most disciplines that are at the forefront of human Service delivery (1). One of the most important topics in medical ethic is Professional ethics or professionalism. The word (Profession) is derived from the word *Professio*, which means a general declaration or a requirement to fulfill particular Promises (2). Measuring Professionalism or Professional Commitment is one of the most important issues that has attracted the attention of professional ethics development Professionals and is done in various quantitative and qualitative ways (3). In fact, some people with specific abilities declare to the general Public that they guarantee "a Social benefit and that the public statement is accepted by the Community and that Community members expect their particular profession to have important Social purpose and interest (4). In fact, being a professional is not an inherent trait, but a privilege conferred by the community, and of course, this is one of the most important privileges, whose maintenance depends on the community's belief in capabilities of its members (5). The weakness of professional ethics can turn complex energy into negative energy and divert the ability of the organization to go elsewhere rather than simply to adhere to professional ethics, which has a profound impact on organizational outcomes and increases productivity (6). Accountability, excellence and competitiveness, honesty, respect for social values and norms, justice

and fairness, compassion for others, and loyalty are the hallmarks of people with professional ethics. In an organization that has a healthy atmosphere, information exchange is trustworthy, and has flexibility and creativity to make the necessary changes based on information, it has unity and commitment to the goals of the organization, and it provides a safe and healthy atmosphere free of threat. Being moral is the result of knowledge, desire, attitude and skill.

Professional ethics empower individuals to be self-controlling and self-healing (7). The prevalence of professional ethics in organizations not only creates a vibrant and conducive environment for productivity growth, but also plays an effective role in society, and affects the community (8). The four elements of professional ethics include attachment and interest in work, perseverance and seriousness at work, community spirit, participation at work, and healthy human relationships in such a workplace (9). The results of one study showed the status of Shahid Beheshti University faculties 13 Components of research as the components of communication were loyalty and commitment, work ethics, credit and dignity, ethic, goal path, leadership, employee development, high health and safety participation components practice identification, optimal use of resources, and low evaluation physical conditions(10). Professional ethical features about today's concept and expression include: having a scientific and student identity, authoring applied role may be the brainchild of valid ideas, native and culturally specific, possessing a principled system in times of conflict in interest (11). Professional ethical governance in organization, especially

among healthcare personnel significantly contributes to reducing stress and success in achieving goals effectively, and responds to the organization. Nowadays, having a professional ethic especially considering it and promoting it on patient and staff rights issues, as a competitive advantage, has a significant impact on activities and outcomes, and enhances organizational productivity (12). Also, in another study, Baharifar et al. (2011) investigated the ethical behavior and organizational citizenship behavior, and concluded that employees with ethical behaviors are more likely to engage in voluntary behaviors and activities, and that ethical behaviors can contribute to the general atmosphere of the organization, increasing the voluntary behaviors and efforts. Expectations of Voluntary behavior and effort will then increase when the organization environment is identified as a healthy ethical environment (13). One of the most common tools for professional ethics is ethical codes formulating, educating, and monitoring, which is also one of the tools for realizing professional ethics currently practiced in many countries of the world (14). In fact, being professional in ethics means knowing about a set of human behavior standards that determine the behavior of individuals and groups in a Professional Structure, the concept of which is derived from the ethics. In other words, a set of ethical rules are derived from professional nature of the job. A creative professional deals with how a person behaves when doing a job. This profession can be consulting research, teaching, writing, medicine, or any other profession (16). Professional ethics in the knowledge of management as a branch of organization is one of the fundamental issues of all in human societies in the west

that has emerged as a scientific concept since the second half of the twentieth century (17). Therefore, with regard to the importance of professional ethics, this group of health workers, who are part of the health system and work where the first level of public contact with the health system, if this level does its job properly, people with good memories will certainly praise all levels of the health system.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This research was a qualitative study with free interview method in 2017. Qualitative research often refers to methods and is used to obtain subjective data by applying the main approaches to 2 observations (direct or participatory) approaches (narrative or in-depth) and non-interventional approaches. Interviewing is a common tool for gathering information through direct verbal interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee, who can be individuals or groups (18). The target population consisted of 9 heads of technical units, 5 physicians in charge of comprehensive rural health service in centers, and 12 health workers of affiliated health centers. After the free interviews, the data on the implementation paper were finally analyzed purposefully with a common emphasis on the different main and sub-dimensions affecting the ethics and professional behavior of healthcare professionals (beneficiaries). The interviews were on the main topics in the form of 2 questions about behavioral professional ethics including: ethical characteristics, as well as behavior from the point of view of selected intra-organizational beneficiaries in technical unit officials, physicians of rural health services centers. They were coordinated and inquired by telephone or in person at an

appropriate time, when they were free from the stresses and concerns of the stakeholders. While expressing the purpose of the study, the interviewers assured the individuals that their views would be kept confidential. The interviews lasted 15 to 30 minutes. The implementation of the data was performed by the researcher immediately after the end of each interview in order for the interviewer to be aware of the data saturation so as to increase the accuracy in the text implementation. In order to analyze, extract, and conclude the data within the framework of the identified topic, two separate tables were also used to classify the main and sub-dimensions of professional ethics with two ethical and behavioral approaches by inter-organizational stakeholders.

### 3. Results

**Table 1. Main and subcategories and basic topics in the field of Behavioral Ethics (Opinions of the heads of technical units and physicians responsible for Rural Health Centers)**

Main part	Subpart	Basic topics
Ethics	Privacy	Feeling Secure Feeling comfortable to express problems Gaining people's trust Being kind and compassionate
	Criticism	Privacy Thinking positive Having top-notch and controlling anger in the face of criticism Flexibility Lack of personal conflict with people Admitting your mistakes and shortcomings Being good-looking Patience Honesty Privacy of communication between men and women Humility Positive interaction with client Having a good tone and high social relationships Personal disagreement with people and colleagues
Behavioral	Good behavior	Self-cultivation Honesty in behavior and speech Kindness and sacrifice Hard work and tirelessness Courage Ability and competence having a sense of kindness and popularity Moderation in humor Dividing organizational success between groups Not sharing your mistakes with others
	Responsibility	Respect for clients and colleagues No joke for no reason Full aristocracy on the environment Conscientious Providing fair service Ethical and behavioral discipline Punctuality Careful work Observing the principle of cooperation Having proper office and office cover Mandatory law Commitment Being well-known Being indigenous Having strong relationships with councils and tenants realism Serious perseverance and perseverance in the affairs of the organization Being up-to-date and sensitive to environmental events Work order (proper layout)
Behavioral	Power of speech	Kindness or sweet speech Having a proper and respectful tone (chastity) The expression of societal speech A convincing answer to the client's questions Loving the job Continuous and serious pursuit of people's problems being up to date Having peace and tranquility in the business environment
	Motivation	Initiative and creativity Having a happy face Being active and working in the workplace Loving working with people Being talented and energetic

Table 2. Principles and Sub-categories and Basic Issues in the field of Behavioral Ethics

Main part	Subpart	Basic topics		
Ethics	Privacy	Trying to keep people's secrets Gaining people's trust Being faithful		
	Criticism	Interest in liquidity Having desirable behavior with clients Good morals Non-involvement of personal and family distress in the job Adhering to the correct treatment of Ms. and Mr. Employee Respect for colleagues Non-discrimination between clients Kindness High social relationships		
	Good behavior	Kindness and compassion to the people Having a healthy spirit and body Having clean eyes and heart Having a spirit of self-sacrifice and helping others Controlling his own behavior Failure to receive cash from clients as far as possible Showing respect to the customers of his area of service Non-interference in the personal affairs of others Courage Honesty People pattern Being popular		
		Behavioral	Performing tasks well Observance of Islamic standards (especially veil) Bureaucratic compliance Performing tasks on time Keeping track of daily activities Being believer and religious Being conscientious and committed (loyalty) High self-esteem Fairness and equality Being indigenous Honesty Understanding the ethical and behavioral characteristics of people Good leader and guide (good guide) Making good use of others' knowledge and information Preventing waste and degradation of the property of al- Mutual No misuse of your name or title for personal affairs Appropriate job awareness Importance to order (proper arrangement) The importance of cleanliness and cleanliness of the workplace	
			Responsibility	Speaking skills Simple and polite language Desirable scientific information Having the right spirit and diligence
			Power of speech	Having a sense of popularity
			Motivation	

The present study included a total of two main topics in behavioral professional ethics including ethical characteristics, as well as behavior from the perspective of three selected stakeholders within the organization: technical unit managers, physicians, rural health service providers, in addition to the health workers speaking of the ethical and behavioral characteristics of the sexes who were male and female with minimum and maximum years of work

experience within the themes. The obtained data from the participant's responses to the research question were categorized into main and sub- categories and basic topics, and the main categories were ethical and behavioral. The main classes and sub-classes and the relevant basic topics are shown in the above tables (1, 2).

One of the extracted themes was ethics, the fundamental issues in professional ethics. Participants identified ethics as an

important challenge. They stated that neglecting this would lead to a negative attitude to the nature of professional ethics. This main class had three subcategories: Secrecy, criticism, and kindness.

Participants stated that the principle of confidentiality was a very important and influential factor in gaining the trust of the client for subsequent follow-up on the clients' health, and failure to adhere to this will lead to lack of confidence in clients, and subsequently a reduction in the burden of referrals to the health house.

Contributors, because of the important view that considers everyone, though at least to some degree with ethical deficiencies, have taken criticism for modifying and following ethical patterns, in such a way that the lack of liquidity for the correction of their ethical issues was interpreted as the popularity of the client over the client.

Participants described popularity and morality as having an ethical appeal, and lack of ethical appeal to clients to the extent that having a well-behaved mood is seen as reducing the volume of public complaints, and increasing the volume of client referrals was not needed to reduce thing under employment, preventing waste and waste of organizational resources, and increasing organizational productivity and client satisfaction.

Owner's responsibility and work conscience were needed to underemployment, preventing waste and waste of organizational resources, and increasing organizational productivity and client satisfaction. They had the power of expression and the technique of speech in order to transfer scientific concepts and work experiences to the clients to the extent that power and technique of communicating health messages to change unhealthy behavior to healthy behaviors of

the client were long-term essential to the organization's goal of promoting the health of the community, and it was absolutely necessary.

The participants considered all work activities in the workplace to create a good motivational spirit and hope for a bright future, to the extent that lack of job motivation was interpreted in all dimensions as affecting organizational productivity and ultimately misery, and declining the organization.

#### 4. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the experiences of health service providers in professional ethics. In this regard, the results showed that the most important ethical criteria (confidentiality, criticism, good behavior) as well as the main behavioral criteria (responsibility, power of expression, motivation) as the focus of attention and other sub-dimensions were repeatedly emphasized, and confirmed the opinion of selected stakeholders within the organization: chief of technical units, physicians of rural health centers, as well as health workers. What appears to be a consequence of the discussion is the need for professional ethics to be dominated in by healthcare professionals from a stakeholder perspective. In the main behavioral dimension, serious attention was paid to the responsibility as well as the confidentiality of the health support staff, while the study of Peasant and colleagues included most of the ethical issues observed by nurses, including responsibility, non-discrimination, and patient privacy which were highlighted (19). In the main ethical as well as behavioral dimension, the subscales of well-being and responsibility of the health support staff with clients and colleagues in the present study showed that

in general, the majority of nurses and patients had good views toward ethical issues. Nurses and patients had almost similar points of view, since among the three dimensions of accountability, promotion of patient care, and patient respect addressed in this study, nurses' and patients' views were similar on the extent to which ethical compliance was respected. However, the views differed in terms of adherence to professional ethics, standards in terms of responsibility, and promotion of patient care quality (20).

In the context of the main behavioral criterion dimension, incentives for health support staff, along with other research on professional ethics, indicated that motivation plays an important role in ethics. In a qualitative study conducted to elucidate the factors influencing nursing professional ethics, the results showed that motivational factors consisting of individual gratitude classes played an effective role in how nurses worked together to meet the client's expectations from them, in such a way that one's religious and ethical beliefs motivated one's work conscience, and in parallel, experiences of hospitalization, and gratitude were important motivating factors for their cooperation, which has been the focus of interest in this study (21). Also in another study that is considered in the inter-organizational stakeholders of this study, accountability, as an internal desire and feeling, was reinforced by conscientiousness before it emerged as behavior. The sense of responsibility of nurses to caregivers for the care they provided was an internal obligation and commitment that nurses were bound to believe in. In addition, the nature of nursing care delivery was found to be with responsibility, the lack of which leads to

negligence and indifference, which in turn leads to a decline in the quality of nursing care (22). The dimensions of accountability and secrecy in professional ethics were also partly relevant in this study, and it was noted that the American nursing association drafted the 1985 code of professional nursing ethics, and in 1996, the code of professional ethics was reviewed and highlighted by a special committee, and with regard to the most important component of the patient confidentiality dimension of care, the study by Afshar et al., indicated that ethical decisions, truth-telling and secrecy were essential issues. It is for this reason that the code of nursing ethics stipulates that information obtained during patient care should be treated as a secret and not shared with the patient (23). Numerous studies have shown that in the professional ethics training of medical sciences, it is necessary to pay attention to the acquisition of critical thinking in graduates. Therefore, university education needs to educate knowledgeable and empowered individuals. In order to achieve these goals, universities must train people who, in addition to their expertise, have sufficient knowledge and skills to adapt to changes in society. Therefore, it is suggested to consider the role of cognitive learning styles and styles of learners in educational decision making that are related to academic performance and, critical thinking attitude. This could be one of the most important strategies for enhancing education as well as the future performance of medical university staff which was also highlighted in this study by Stakeholders (24). The present study also emphasized the need to have appropriate expression of health support staff which was considered as the main behavioral criterion in professional ethics and was



strongly emphasized in all three stakeholders' groups.

The development of skill-training programs provides the basis for the inner development and spiritual development of employees, and in order to improve their behavior and health of the administrative system, they must first reinforce their bod cultural, responsibility, integrity, and trustworthiness. One of the most fundamental underpinnings of creating healthy and effective communication among employees is the observance of human ethics, but today due to the ever-expanding technology and widespread communication in the virtual environment and the lack of attention to the spiritual dimension of human beings, many ethical principles have been neglected among the employees of the organizations, and the lack of attention to ethical standards by the managers in organizations has caused creation of problems in those organizations. Therefore, according to the results of this study and the comments of stakeholders within these organizations (main and subordinate) in these cases, there has been a strong relationship with professional ethics which is a good predictor for enhancing professional ethics and communication skills of future practitioners. Finally, in order to enhance the professional ethics of employees, it is recommended to employ people based on the skills required by their jobs and expertise, since adherence to professional ethics, especially in the work place, can improve administrative health and enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization. It also gives employees greater job satisfaction. It is also recommended that university officials activate, alongside the revitalization of employee ethical and behavioral criticism

and suggestion systems, the system for training and scientific and technical development of staff professional ethics and provide complete feedback along with skills development, so as to change the organizational culture towards professional ethics to ensure productive performance of employees in the organization.

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