A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON ETHICAL BEHAVIOR OF UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS
AND ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH IN HIGHER EDUCATION CENTERS ACCORDING TO
VIEWPOINTS OF PROFESSORS OF NURSING AND MIDWIFERY FACULTIES
IN ISLAMIC AZAD UNIVERSITIES OF IRAN

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Research Article

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ABSTRACT

One of the most important issues in modern higher education is ethics. Universities may encounter variety of challenges. Since different generations interact with one another in higher education, there are several ethical issues in this sector. The present study aimed at qualitatively study ethical behavior of university professors and organizational health in higher education centers according to viewpoints of professors of nursing and midwifery faculties in Islamic Azad Universities of Iran. The sample consisted of fifteen members of boards in nursing and midwifery faculties in five universities. Majority of them ranged in age between 30 and 39 and the rest were in their forties. Three of them were assistant professors and the rest were instructors. The professors' responses were presented in five groups, i.e. description of professor's ethical behavior, problems of professor's ethical behavior, strengths and weaknesses of professor's ethical behavior, effective factors on professor's ethical behavior, description of higher education health and how it is influenced by professor's ethical behavior.

INTRODUCTION

Ethics is one of the most important religious subjects and it has been the most important goal of prophets because religion has no meaning without ethics. Ethics has been defined as a set of spiritual characteristics of human being which is manifested as behaviors arisen from internal temperaments; therefore, ethics can be tracked by its effects. Continuity of a given behavior indicates that it is rooted in one's spirit; this root is ethics (Gharamaleki, 2008). Ethics has been restricted to personal behaviors; however, when personal behaviors penetrate into society or social entities, it turns into collective behavior which is rooted in culture of society. Then, it becomes a predominant aspect by which the society can be known. Nowadays, ethics and ethical values are very important in analysis of behavior of organizations. Organizations are mostly known by their ethical behaviors which are manifested as a collection of various ethical behaviors in that organization (Tavallaei, 2009).

One of the most important problems in modern higher education is ethics. Universities face with ethical challenges. When professors encounter a challenging ethical decision, they can make use of ethical principles in order to direct their decision making process. But, what are the effective factors on ethical behavior of professors from viewpoints of different role players? If this question is answered, ethics can be visualized within the structure of higher education centers; this is very imperative since ethics in institutes, organizations, and higher education reduces utilitarianism and increases intimacy between addressees and beneficiaries (Robertson & Walters, 2007). Ethics in higher education determines boundaries of professors' behaviors and guarantees higher education health. Weakness in ethics in higher education may bring about misbehavior of professors, depression of students, job burnout, and life dissatisfaction (Mirkamali, 2003).

As a framework for interaction of different generations, higher education can be, on one hand, a celebrated basis for manifestation of ethical behaviors and formation of social cooperation in terms of personal and collective ethics and on the other hand, it can turn into a merely physical quality in which ethical relationships are the least important and people only try to take personal benefits even by disregarding obvious ethical principles. In order for higher education to have a

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valued role and position in development, it should have organizational health. It should be able to realize its goals and values, respond to external demands and requirements, and at the same time, preserve its integrity and rectitude (Nemati&Mohseni, 2010).

Ethics in nursing and midwifery includes values, codes, and principles which provide for clinical decision making and relationships. Nursing ethics is an evaluative discipline for merits, risks, and social concerns of nurses and midwives. Principles arisen from ethical philosophy are important for professional growth and development. Incentive of professional ethics is to solve ethical issues at workplace and define ethical commitments and responsibilities (Shahriari, 2006).

It is expected that employees of medical and paramedical sectors face with severe ethical challenges. Because they deal with people's health and living, corporal and financial meanness must be strongly avoided.

Therefore, it is very crucial to enhance professors' ethical behavior and organizational health in nursing and midwifery faculties. Despite the importance of this issue, only few studies have attempted to draw a qualitative framework for determination of professors' ethical behavior and organizational health in higher education centers of Iran. Taken together, the present study was formulated in order to qualitatively evaluate professors' ethical behavior and organizational health in higher education centers from standpoints of professors of nursing and midwifery faculties of Islamic Azad Universities in Iran.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is a qualitative investigation in which content analysis method was adopted. The participants were fifteen professors of nursing and midwifery faculties from five Islamic Azad Universities in Iran. The data collected by interviews were analyzed through qualitative content analysis.

Table 1 The codes derived from semantic units related to professors' ethical behaviors

Semantic units	codes
1. They behave fairly and ethically and with considering human values and politeness and they can make relationship and keep secrets.	Behaving according to human values
2. They make use of students' ideas and they are kind and flexible.	Suitable relationship with students
3. They are disciplined and punctual at workplace.	Discipline at work
4. They own enough and up-to-date information to teach.	Up-to-date information
5. They try to discover unrecognized talents.	Recognition of unrecognized talents
6. They feel responsible in their work and toward students.	Responsibility
7. They have ethical behavior by considering God and all religious aspects.	Faith in God and observing religious principles
8. They pay attention to dignity and status of other professor and benefit from them.	Ethical professors as role models
9. They use outdated references to teach students and they only rely on PowerPoint presentations in classroom.	Lack of proficiency in teaching
10. They have sexual view to students and give marks according to sexual relationship and they also accept embezzlements and gifts from students for giving mark.	Sexual view to and accepting embezzlements and gifts for giving mark.
11. They are very unfriendly with students and the do not consider ethics in behaving with students.	Weakness in treating with students
12. They commit plagiarism and they write articles in return to money by data making.	Fraud in publications
13. They abuse university facilities and students for personal goals.	Abusing
14. They take easy exams for gaining popularity among students.	Popularity through unusually easy exams
15. They encounter financial problems, bad condition of salaries and bonuses, negligence of professors' rights, and lack of true rewarding system.	Financial problems and salaries
16. They observe equality among colleagues and provide suitable working condition.	Suitable working condition
17. It is important how they were brought up, if they are introvert or extrovert, and if they have experienced social obsessions. Also, their cultural and social levels, experience and skills, and family and age conditions matter.	Upbringing and personal goals and skills
18. Economic, cultural, and political conditions, governmental regulations, the internet, IT, ICT, internal and external relations, managerial policies in micro and macro levels are important issues.	Managerial and regulation policies
19. Jab dissatisfaction and insecurity, job pressure, and lack of job opportunities are also important.	Job dissatisfaction
20. They have appropriate behavior management, leadership, and relations with colleagues and they have goals and program, intra-organizational ethics, organizational culture, and no managerial discrimination.	Management and behaving
21. They pay attention to scientific promotion of students and they are worried about employment of educated people in required sectors of society.	Progress of students in society
22. They try to be committed people in terms of social personality and they try to educate philanthropist and charitable people.	Promoting humanity among students
23. They try to preserve respect in university as well as disciplinary issues.	Respect in university
24. They try to spark creativity among students.	Students' creativity
25. They pay attention to their predefined route and reaching expected results according to educational goals.	Having clear goals
26. They try to provoke good mentality among people and increase incentives for cooperation and commitment in university along with job conscience.	Cooperation and commitment in university
27. They are concerned with higher creditability of university and creation of national capital.	University creditability and national capital
28. They try to be a model for students in order to enhance their scientific level and performance in higher education leading to enhancement of scientific production wealth in society.	Enhancement of scientific production
29. They always try to create new commitments, cooperation, and collaboration.	Cooperation and commitment
30. They are aware of direct and mutual influence of creative and ethical behavior of students on society and future generations.	Future generations
31. They can manage class well and they never neglect their tasks.	Class management
32. They control their anger and they never mistreat with students and they don't ridicule students in front of others.	Patience and courtesy to students
33. They try to use students' opinion and viewpoint in holding classes.	Cooperation of students in class

Participants were variable enough in terms of employment status, marital status, age, and ethnicity. Inclusion criteria include being Muslim, volunteering, and at least three year experience in nursing and/or midwifery. Data collection was performed through semi-structured interviews. Afterwards, standpoints and judgments of experienced members of faculty boards were adopted in order to find out the nature and dimensions of abstract and subjective definition of professor's ethical behavior.

After presenting required information to participants about the purpose of the study, a written consent was taken from the participants to record their voice and all the responses were kept anonymous and confidential. However, five respondents disagreed for voice recording and therefore, their interview were noted on paper. The interviews were in the form of questions and the recorded voices were later written down. After accurate reviews, the interview texts were analyzed as open coding system for creating primary classifications. For this purpose, the interview texts were first divided into semantic units and then, they were summarized and turned into codes. The codes were compared in terms of their similarities and differences and then were divided into distinct categories. The categories were considered to achieve prospects. In order to attain validity and acceptability of the data, simultaneous data analysis, selection of key informants, use of time integration, sequential handling and observation, and accurate description were performed.

Findings

Majority of the participants were between 30 and 39 years old and the rest were in their forties.

Only three of them were assistant professors and the rest were instructors. The lowest and highest job histories were 3 and 15 years, respectively. Table 1 shows the codes obtained from semantic codes derived from the interview text with professors about organizational health in higher education centers, professors' ethical behavior, description, problems, strengths and weaknesses and the effective factors of professors' ethical behavior on organizational health in higher education centers. Table 2 shows codes, levels, and contexts derived from qualitative interviews with professors on their ethical behavior and organizational health in higher education.

Although the primary goal of universities is to provide an educational atmosphere facilitating the growth of cognitive aspects in students, a successful university should also pay attention to growth of mental, social, ethical, and spiritual aspects of students and should provide a constructive basis for development of these important attributes (Bakhtiari, 1998). As one of the most important educational factors, professors should aid students in education, research, and ethical issues to make successful members of academic society in order to make use of educational and cultural opportunities for their edification. Therefore, improvement and enhancement of professors' ethical behavior will have great influence on different aspects of academic life. Nursing and midwifery graduates encounter several ethical issues and dilemmas. For example, they are not sure what information they are allowed to give to patients and their families, how they should treat with the colleagues with weak clinical performance, how they can deal with the conflicts between the wants of patients and policies of their organization, among others.

Table 2 Codes, levels, and contexts derived from qualitative interviews with professors on their ethical behavior and organizational health in higher education

Codes	Levels	Contexts
1. Good behavior according to human values, being a complete model for students, making humanity among students, keeping respect in university, no discrimination among students, and effect of ethics on next generations	Human values, respect in university, worry for next generations	Behaving well
2. Making good relationships among students, managing the way of behaving, and making good relationship between professors and students	Proper relationship between students and professors	Relationship
3. Having discipline in class, having goal and prospect and being able to manage class well	Discipline in class and class management	Discipline
4. Having updated and sufficient information on class material and having high self-confidence to teach students	High self-confidence and sufficient and updated information	Information and self-confidence
5. Being able to find unrecognized talents and to make creativity among students and being responsible toward talented students	Finding unrecognized talents and making creativity among students	Recognition of talents
6. Development of students and society, educating expert students, promotion of university, formation of national capital, increase in scientific production, education of expert human force	Progress of students, university and society, increase in national capital, education of experts	progress
7. Attention to spiritual values, understanding the presence of God and observing religious principles, faith in God and believing religious values	Attention to religious values and faith in God	Believing God
8. Inefficiency in behaving with students, disrespect to students, abusing students and facilities of university, impoliteness to students	Rudeness and disrespect to students and abusing students and facilities	Politeness and respect
9. Writing fake articles and disregarding university rules and regulations	Not observing university rules and regulations	Rules and regulations
10. Improper salaries and facing with several financial problems	Salary and financial status	Salary
11. Suitable working condition along with healthy relationships, security and intimate atmosphere at workplace	Suitable working condition and intimate relationships	Workplace
12. Discrimination between students, not observing the bounds between students and professor, disregarding students' boundaries	Disregarding the bounds between students and professor	Student-professor boundaries
13. Intra-organizational cooperation and commitment, collaboration of students in classroom	Students' cooperation and collaboration	Cooperation
14. Attention to justice and fairness in behaving with students and not violating their rights	Being fair in relationships with students	Fairness
15. Having outdated information, class cancellations without rational reasons, disregarding the teaching responsibilities, not using students' viewpoints in classroom	Outdated information, class cancellation, and not using students' opinions	Teaching quality

In solving these conflicts, they need suitable mental balance, which can be acquired in formal and informal educations during internship. The central issue in dealing with these challenges is ethics (Shahriari, 2011).

Education cannot be considered merely as a means of transferring information but it includes other areas such as cognitive and affective aspects (Blum, 1965). Professional merits are also not limited only to technical proficiencies. A network of people with various responsibilities play role in the career of education. In our case, role of professors is very imperative in educating nurses and midwives. Professors are responsible for fostering such definitions as responsibility, conscience, devotion, enthusiasm, and commitment, which are mostly transferred through professors' behaviors and their non-verbal manifestations.

Disregarding ethical issues in universities might bring about several adverse effects such as depression, job dissatisfaction and burnout, life dissatisfaction, and etc. (Mirkamali, 2003). One of the most important tools to overcome ethical problems in universities is development of ethical codes (Fazeli *et al.*, 2012). Improvement of ethical behavior of professors is achieved within a network of external and internal factors. Recognition of these factors can lead to enhancement of ethical regulations in different sectors,; this can lead to organizational health in higher education centers.

CONCLUSION

Ethical behavior of professors can have a profound influence on organizational health in higher education. In an atmosphere where professors observe ethical codes and principles about students, scientific efficiency of university will increase because students are able to attain progress in their academic career in an environment without any ethical Challenge. It should be noted that ethical behavior of professors is not limited to the way of their behavior toward students, but it also includes different kinds of behaviors in workplace. We found that in addition to the way of behaving with students, there are also other factors affecting ethical behavior of professors. It can be concluded that the factors affecting on ethical behavior of professors and therefore, organizational health in higher education centers can be divided into three groups: external factors which are related to external environment of university, internal factors which are attributed to the university itself, and personal factors which are concerned with the persons themselves.

Future studies are directed to find ethical codes in other universities and majors and also other organizations to increase organizational health.

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