



## Personnel Attitude toward Power Distance in Hospitals Affiliated by Qazvin University of Medical Sciences

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Human resources have a significant role in improving organizational performance specifically in healthcare institutions. This study aimed to study the hospital staff perception toward power distance in 2016.

**Methods:** A cross sectional, descriptive study was conducted among 668 hospital staff affiliated by Qazvin University of Medical Sciences. A standard questionnaire developed by Hofstede consisted of 31 questions in seven domains including hierarchy, reward, climate, communication, decision making, learning and management was applied to gather data. SPSS Software package version 20 was used to analyze data using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation), t-test and ANOVA analysis.

**Results:** Study findings showed a low level of power distance perceived by employees (mean score =  $67.6 \pm 2.3$ ). The most inequality perceived by study staff belonged to decision making aspect and the method of applying managerial authority in the organization.

**Conclusion:** Applying strategies to improve staff participation in work decisions and job responsibilities would help organizations maintain and develop employees with positive perception toward justice.

**Keywords:** Power Distance, Hospital Employee, Perception

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## Introduction

In recent years organizations are more interested to attract motivated workforce to help them perform their responsibilities in an effective and proper manner. Such institutions mainly focus on employee autonomy and their active participation in organizational decision making processes (1). For the purpose, managerial strategies should convert to supportive modes in a way that welcome employees' participation in achieving organizational goals (2). In fact self-actualization as a significant mankind's need belonging to higher levels of need hierarchy affects personnel attitude toward workplace and motivates them in carrying on effective activities (3). Respecting employee autonomy, giving them adequate information and authority are also helpful in this regard.

Power distance among several dimensions proposed for organizational culture is closely associated with relations among managers and subordinates. Hofstede defined power distance as "social acceptance of unequal distribution of the power" (4). The level of power distance existing in an organization actually explains the extent to which prevailing culture endures inequality (5). Mead in a study emphasized that in low power distance cultures employees prefer indirect supervision and have a preference for participatory managerial style. Conversely in high power distance cultures managerial style is autocratic so that the manager makes decisions without the employees' participation and guides them through particular defined instructions of how performing the decisions (5, 6). Such a condition is not unexpected or unusual for employees because in high power distance cultures inequity is accepted as something natural (7). Furthermore in organizations with low power distance, there are open communications with considerable amount of necessary information transferred in different hierarchical levels which help employees to be acknowledged about work objectives and actively participate in required decisions need to be made (7).

Literature affirmed that high power distance culture in the workplace weakens the positive work atmosphere and consequently reduces personnel

commitment and job satisfaction (8). In addition, those institutions with high levels of power distance face with employees' undesirable performance. In fact when employees recognize fairness in the organization, they definitely are provoked and organizational performance will relatively improve (9). In a study conducted among hospital staff in Iran, findings revealed a significant association between employees' attitude toward power distance, perception of discriminatory and job satisfaction (10). Francesco and Chen also mentioned the important role of employee participation on their job satisfaction and readiness to accept work responsibilities (11). Regarding the importance of the issue, we conducted a study to determine employees' attitude toward power distance in hospitals affiliated by Qazvin University of Medical Sciences in 2016.

## Material and methods

This was a descriptive, cross-sectional study conducted among hospital employees affiliated by Qazvin University of Medical Sciences, Iran in 2016. Study population consisted of 835 non-clinical staff working in administrative, financial and support units of five training hospitals who have been selected to take part in the research through a census method. Among 835 members who received study questionnaire, 668 individuals completed the questionnaire and returned it to the researchers (response rate = 80%). The data collection tool was a standard questionnaire designed by Hofstede consisting of 31 questions categorized in 7 domains for measuring power distance index (4). Related questions were included: a desire to promote innovation among personnel, provide necessary opportunity for staff to pursue their own desires, respect their autonomy, receive individual recognition at work, have opportunity to play role as a leader, conform to company norms in order to reach organizational goals, keep group harmony, behave equally with subordinates and work as a team member to pursue job objectives. These questions are belonged to seven aspects of organizational hierarchy (6 items), reward (3 items), climate (4 items), communication (4 items),



decision making (4 items), learning (3 items) and management (7 items). Items were measured on a 5 point likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). A high power distance score showed that an organization affirmed a hierarchical distribution of power and inequality in work position among employees while low power distance score depicted that organizational power was equally distributed among members. The questionnaire was applied in similar studies and its validity has been confirmed (12). Furthermore the questionnaire reliability was tested through calculation of alpha cronbach (0.87). Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation), t-test and ANOVA analysis tests assuming normal distribution of data were used to analyze gathered data through application of SPSS 20.

### Results

Among 835 study participants from five hospitals affiliated by Qazvin University of Medical Sciences, 668 members filled questionnaires and returned them to researchers. Majority of respondents (78%) were female and in the age group of 35-40 years old. 56% of them had diploma and 84.4% were married. Furthermore, most of them (59.5%) had one to ten years hospital work experience and 76.9% worked in

current hospital unit for utmost 5 years. Study participants disagreed with statements representing high power distance which emphasized that reducing the communication and behavioral distances among employees and superiors might be pleasant. Study findings showed a low level of power distance perceived by employees (mean score=67.6±2.3). As the maximum achievable score for employees regarding to power distance attitude was 155, the obtained score represented low level of power distance. The most inequality perceived by study staff belonged to decision making aspect and the method of applying managerial authority in the organization. On the other hand the least inequality perceived belonged to organizational hierarchy and communication.

Analyzing the differences among age, gender, marital status, educational level and work experience groups on scores for power distance, table 3 depicts the ANOVA results. As findings reveal there are statistical differences among personnel attitude toward power distance in different groups of hospital work experience. Individuals with higher levels of work experience showed positive attitude toward power distance.

**Table 1.** Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants and their relationship with power distance attitude

Demographic characteristics		frequency	%Frequency	p-value
Age	20-35	92	13.7	0.6
	35-40	521	78	
	40-45	42	6.2	
	≥45	13	2.1	
Sex	Female	521	78	0.06
	Male	147	22	
Marital status	Single	105	15.6	0.03
	Married	563	84.4	
Educational degree	Diploma	374	56	0.6
	Bachelor	260	39	
	Master	32	4.71	
	PhD	2	0.29	
Hospital work experience	<1	33	5	0.04
	1-5	140	21	
	6-10	257	38.5	
	>10	238	35.5	
Unit work experience	<1	96	14.4	0.6
	1-5	417	62.5	
	6-10	66	10	
	>10	89	13.1	

**Table 2.** Personnel Attitude toward Power Distance

Power distance domains	Maximum score	Mean	Standard deviation
organizational hierarchy	30	12	1.7
reward	15	7	0.6
climate	20	10	1.2
communication	20	12	0.7
decision making	20	15	0.5
learning	15	5	0.2
management	35	25	1.5

**Table 3.** Personnel Attitude toward Power Distance in Different Demographic Characteristic Groups

Variable		Mean score	df	F	p-value
Age	Between groups	730.7	40	0.47	0.7
	Within groups	1551.01	627		
Hospital work experience	Between groups	15003.8	33	18.77	0.00
	Within groups	799.03	634		
Marital status	Between groups	125.6	3	0.08	0.9
	Within groups	1508.04	664		
Educational level	Between groups	304.3	4	0.2	0.6
	Within groups	1511.3	662		

## Discussion

Study findings showed a low level of power distance perceived by employees. The most inequality perceived by study staff belonged to decision making aspect and the method of applying managerial authority in the organization. These results have been affirmed by similar study conducted in hospitals of Tehran University of Medical Sciences by Farzianpour et al. (13), in 2016. Findings revealed that power distance was lower than its average level from the study population's viewpoint. In a similar study entitled "effects of power distance diversity within workgroups on work role performance and organizational citizenship behavior", power distance dimension got a moderate to low mean value demonstrating that employees had a positive attitude toward the existence of power distance. Consequently, superiors perceived that employees were mainly acting more than organizational expectations so that they make considerable efforts in their workplace to encourage job effectiveness (14). In such institutions, employees were committed

to work and willing to continue their job affairs in current workplace. Literature added that high power distance culture is no longer acceptable in nowadays' organizations and staff are seeking for working conditions in which autonomy, self-control and equality regulations are respected. Similarly Nazaripour et al. (15), concluded that the level of power distance in Iranian organizations is going to decrease. Consequently based on Hofstede viewpoint and achieved findings, it can be concluded that hospitals are no longer organized and monitored in a centralized manner; but job functions are delegated to employees with essential qualifications to solve organization problems more effectively (4, 6). The decrease in power distance actually leads to participatory decision-making, asking employees' opinion in work processes and approval of meaningful important tasks for the staff. Among different aspects of power distance, studies affirmed that having access to adequate information about job affairs and the way of being evaluated in an organization rewarding system play significant role in



employees' attitude toward equity provoking in the workplace (16). Likewise, Greenberg declared that managers should behave their subordinates in a fair manner and guarantee that all existing job affairs are organized in a condition that is in line with nondiscrimination and in compliance with personnel competency (17).

### Conclusion

Study findings revealed that the most dominant inequality perceived by employees belonged to decision making aspect and the method of applying managerial authority in the organization. Therefore it is suggested that in order to make employees feel motivated in showing innovative behavior and performance in their workplace managers should focus on supportive strategies and participatory management. Such a managerial strategy helps employees to successfully conduct

their work affairs beyond the expectation and make considerable endeavor to encourage organizational effectiveness in line with defined objectives.

### Conflicts of interest

Authors declared no conflicts of interest.

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### Authors' contribution

Rafiei S designed research; Rafiei S and Sadeghi P conducted research; Rafiei S analyzed data and wrote the paper. Rafiei S had primary responsibility for final content. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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