



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## Identification of Effective Factors Influencing Professional Ethics among Staff Experts in the Medical Vice-Chancellor's Office of Iran University of Medical Services

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Ethics is defined as a set of principles used to guide and direct. Professional ethics has an important impact on the activities and outcomes of an organization. Professional ethics promote efficiency, improve communication, and reduce threats.

**Methods:** The present study is qualitative and has an applied purpose. Based on the opinions of experts, the researcher pursued the identification of the components of professional ethics among the experts of the Vice President of Treatment of Iran University of Medical Sciences and Health Services. Information was obtained through interviews with experts. Given the complexity and multidimensionality of the issue, the concepts were examined from the experts' perspective to discover the hidden dimensions of this issue. Purposive sampling was carried out until data saturation and interviews were conducted with 40 experts. The information was collected and, after confirming the face and content validity by the experts, open, axial and selective coding was carried out and the result was determined.

**Results:** Information includes 8 topics, including responsibility, honesty and integrity, justice and fairness, loyalty, respect for others, sympathy for others, compliance with laws and guidelines and competition were detected.

**Conclusion:** In order to improve professional ethics among experts, it is necessary for the authorities to pay attention to the categories of responsibility, honesty and integrity, justice and fairness, loyalty, respect, sympathy for others, compliance with laws and guidelines, and competition. Given its importance in organizational culture, appropriate incentive and punishment mechanisms should be used to improve the current situation.

**Keywords:** Professional Ethics, Staff Experts, Iran

### Introduction

Ethics is defined as a set of principles, often used as a charter for guidance and direction. This set of principles provides a framework for action. Professional ethics has a positive impact on the activities of the organization; it improves efficiency and communication, and reduces the level of risk. Because when professional ethics govern the system, the transfer of information is facilitated, and managers are informed before the event. (1) Achieving goals and perfectionism depend on

establishing ethical management in the organization. System ethics begins with building trust. More confidence in the organization, programs, and managers (senior, middle, and basic managers), the greater the level of commitment to the organization and tasks are. Trust-building will lead to an increase in organizational capacity in responding to environmental needs, because it will create synergy in the organization's capacity. As employees' trust in managers and the organization decreases, the

managers must pay to control employees' behavior, which will also achieve fewer results. Trust is created by predicting behavior (2). We need to define the characteristics of professional ethics, such as work commitment, participation and trust and confidence, creating conditions for cooperation, etc., and building a culture to achieve it. Today, many countries in the industrialized world have come to the conclusion that not considering ethical issues and avoiding collective responsibilities and obligations will lead to the destruction of the economic enterprise. For this reason, several successful companies have felt the importance of developing an ethical strategy and have come to believe that an ethical culture should permeate the company. Therefore, they have tried to consider a special place for research and study in ethics (3).

Professional ethics is derived from Mora's, meaning character, and the Latin word Ethos. The Latin word ethics is derived from two Greek words for customs and traditions. The combination of these two words, as mentioned, expresses the state in which individuals decide to interact with each other. Ethics involves examining principles, values, and norms, and considering the available options to make the right decision and strengthen the character of individuals. Therefore, ethics as a practical principle and rule requires the application of moral knowledge and the skills with which this knowledge can be applied to real-life problems of everyday life (4). -Ethics can be defined as a branch of philosophy that deals with values related to human behavior, the rightness and wrongness of his actions, the goodness and badness of the goals and consequences of such behavior, and the content of such actions (5).

Compliance with professional ethics in the organization is essential so that the organization does not conflict with society on the one hand, and on the other hand, ensures its long-term interests by making rational and wise decisions. Various commercial and financial organizations seek to train employees who can live in the global community without prejudice and narrow-mindedness, believe in high ethics and values, and

respect the rights of others. It is difficult to name a commercial organization that has achieved a degree of success without having goals, values, and ultimate ideals that are deeply accepted at the organizational level. (6) Loyalty to the organization, ethical considerations, a sense of belonging, and permanence in the system create a commitment that leads to the health of the organization (7). Professional ethics affect the attitude of individuals towards their jobs. In scientific sources, organizational commitment, organizational health, job satisfaction, and job attachment are mentioned as job attitudes (8). Ethical considerations, as voluntary and optional ethics and beyond their role in current systems, are vital because systems in today's diverse and changing environments cannot accurately and well reflect the demands and requirements of work in their job descriptions and make clear what behavior is necessary to achieve goals. Because health and success are provided by facilitating, creating the possibility of more effective allocation of human and financial resources (9). Based on the studies mentioned, given the importance of professional ethics in the performance of experts in the field of medical vice-presidential office of Iran University of Medical Sciences to examine the provision of diagnostic, therapeutic, and care services in affiliated centers and the importance of the issue of community health, the present study was considered to investigate the status of professional ethics in the medical vice-presidential office of Iran University of Medical Sciences.

### Materials and methods

The present study was applied and sought to identify concepts related to professional ethics of experts in the Deputy Head of Treatment of Iran University of Medical Sciences to improve the current situation. Therefore, the number and type of interviews determined the sample size. The process was as follows: after each interview, the data were coded, analyzed in detail, and the dimensions raised by the experts were identified, and these dimensions were followed up on in the next interview. The interview continued until the

findings were repeated, and new interviews were conducted if more information was not received. Given the complexity and multidimensionality of the subject, the concepts were discussed from the perspective of experts in the above field, and an attempt was made to discover the hidden dimensions of this issue and the data were obtained through interviews with 40 experts (Table1).

To begin the investigation of ethical components, the research method (qualitative content analysis) was used according to Strauss's theory (10). Given

the importance of the subject, content analysis to determine the ethical components of the field of experts of the Medical Vice-Chancellor's Office of the University of Iran requires more than objective observation through a questionnaire, and the subjective interpretation of the content of textual data should be examined based on the subjectivity of individuals. Therefore, the qualitative achievement of this research will be the identification of effective components in professional ethics among the experts of the office.

**Table 1.** The steps of qualitative research

First step: Reviewing Study Background and Preparing for Qualitative Research	Second step: How to Conduct Qualitative Research
1- Review of history, forms and concepts in the field of professional ethics 2- Analysis of research related to the field of identifying the components of professional ethics	1- Explanation of experts and academic specialists (people knowledgeable about identifying the components of professional ethics) 2- Determining the sample with a purposeful method 3- Following up on semi-structured interviews with experts to identify the components of professional ethics 4- Examining interview data with qualitative content analysis 5- Identifying the components of professional ethics

### Qualitative research process

-Given that the effective components in professional ethics go beyond objective observation through a questionnaire and are examined based on the individuals' mentality to mentally interpret the content of textual data, and based on the research objective, the research method (qualitative content analysis) was used to explain the research topic.

1- The population in qualitative research is the statistical population of experts in the field of treatment at the Deputy of the Medical Affairs Office of Iran University of Medical Sciences who have a history of activity and experience.

2- Sample size in qualitative research: In the content analysis method of the research, semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain the opinions of experts in the field of the research topic. The number of interviews was not predetermined, and the interview process continued until the latent components were clearly

identified and theoretical saturation was achieved. Theoretical saturation is a state in which the researcher has subjectively concluded that the data and information do not provide new information or more knowledge than the development of categories (10). The interview was conducted in person and in advance. Before starting, the research design and study objectives were explained to the individuals for further preparation, and permission and verbal consent were obtained to record qualitative data. Interview questions were designed and conducted. To supplement the interview data, note-taking was also done during the sessions. The interviews were conducted individually, and the average duration of each interview was between 30 minutes. In this study, data were obtained through interviews with 40 experts. For this research, the activities were carried out as follows:

Following coordination with academic and research experts, a description of the research design, objectives, and interview questions was

provided to them. On the day of the meeting, after reviewing the summary of the previous discussions, interview questions were posed, and they were asked to explain their opinions. (The semi-structured interview guide with the experts is given in Table 2)

To record the interviewees' responses, an interview form was developed, and then the opinions and

views of each expert were noted. The interview process with the experts continued until the effective components in the professional ethics of the experts of the Medical Assistant staff were identified and theoretical saturation was achieved. It was held until 40 people were satisfied.

**Table 2.** Interview participant guide

The main question	Sub questions
What are the opinions of experts on the issue of professional ethics?	-If possible, explain the concepts of professional ethics. -In your opinion, what are the effective components in observing the standards of professional ethics in performing the duties of the staff experts of the Medical Vice President? -What are the challenges of professional ethics in the field of the staff of the Medical Vice President? -What is the impact of factors outside the organization on the professional ethics of the staff experts of the Medical Vice President of the University of Iran? - What are your suggested solutions to improve the current situation?

### - Qualitative method of examining data

Data monitoring from semi-structured interviews and systematic coding were carried out in five main stages (1: data review, 2: data organization, 3: data classification, 4: coding, and 5: results), and the research results were presented.

### Coding data related to interviews

#### - Open coding

Open coding was conducted according to Strauss's theory, which identifies concepts and their dimensions in the data (1). In other words, in this type of coding, concepts in interviews and documents were categorized based on their relationship to similar items and the classification was done by summarizing the information obtained from the interviews. A closer analysis of the identified codes showed that many of them, although expressed in different terms and interpretations, had the same meaning. The interviews were manually recorded and coded according to the experts' opinions, which were

aggregated in the open coding stage and reduced to the number of codes as the final product.

Table 3 summarizes the results of the data obtained from the open-coded interviews, indicating how many interviewees mentioned these codes in the interviews or not.

### Results

#### -Data coding axially

With axial coding, the categories created (in the open coding stage) are linked to the main category. In this study, axial coding was the process of linking categories to subcategories and linking categories at the level of features and dimensions. This coding is called "axial" because the coding is carried out around the "axis" of a category. In this stage, the categories, features and dimensions resulting from open coding were compiled, and the relationships were examined (2).

Information related to the results of axial coding is explained in Table 4, with subcategories and main components identified.

**Table 3.** Interviews in which the relevant code was mentioned about to professional ethics

Raw	Codes (concepts)	Interviews in which codes related to professional ethics are mentioned	
		People who mentioned the code	Percentage
1	Work discipline	35	87.5%
2	Completing tasks on time and within the specified time	34	85%
3	Efforts to increase work accuracy	33	82.5%
4	Performing assigned tasks correctly	34	85%
5	Prioritizing actions based on importance	35	87.5%
6	Reporting errors and trying to correct errors	36	90%
7	Providing work reports in accordance with confidentiality and professional principles	37	92.5%
8	Not accepting bribes or privileges in any way and under any circumstances	36	90%
9	Preventing the intervention of intermediaries and influential people in the service process	36	90%
10	Not having undue bias	39	97.5%
11	Not paying attention to the client's economic status, social and ethnic status	39	97.5%
12	Paying attention to religious beliefs and work conscience in providing services	39	97.5%
13	Desiring to do things in a desirable manner	38	95%
14	Feeling of belonging to the organization, and trying to improve the current situation and remove obstacles	37	85.5%
15	Having initiative and innovation to solve problems	39	97.5%
16	Dealing appropriately with colleagues and clients	40	100%
17	Efforts to satisfy colleagues and clients, and respect clients	40	100%
18	Respecting clients' rights and providing appropriate information about the process of actions and progress	40	100%
19	Performing work due to the inability of the relevant colleague to prevent wasting time	36	90%
20	Benevolence	35	87.5%
21	Helping others	39	97.5%
22	Implementation rules for carrying out assigned tasks	38	95%
23	Maintaining documents related to actions appropriately	34	85%
24	Refraining from applying personal taste and opinion in carrying out duties and making decisions	35	87.5%
25	Paying attention to promoting status and improving job and financial status, and career advancement	39	97.5%
26	Effective role in carrying out tasks	36	90%
27	Observing the administrative hierarchy	35	87.5%

**Table 4.** Results of axial coding of effective components in professional ethics of experts

Main category (dimensions)	Classification resulting from open coding
Responsibility	Work discipline Completing tasks on time Efforts to reduce errors and increase work accuracy Completing assigned tasks correctly Prioritizing actions based on importance
Honesty and work integrity	Reporting errors and attempting to correct errors Providing work reports in accordance with confidentiality and professional principles Not accepting bribes or privileges in any way and under any circumstances Preventing the intervention of intermediaries and influential individuals in the process of providing services
Justice and fairness	Lack of undue bias Not paying attention to the economic status, social and ethnic/tribal status of the client Paying attention to religious beliefs and work conscience in providing services
Loyalty	Desire to do things well Feeling of belonging to the organization and striving to improve the current situation and remove obstacles Having initiative and innovation to solve problems
Respect for others	Appropriate treatment of colleagues and clients Strive to satisfy colleagues and clients and respect clients Respect clients' rights and provide appropriate information on the process of actions and work progress
Sympathy for others	Doing work due to the inability and inability of the relevant colleague in order to avoid wasting time Benevolence Helping others
Compliance with laws and regulations	Implementing the applicable laws in carrying out assigned tasks Maintaining appropriate documentation of actions Refraining from applying personal taste and opinion in carrying out duties and making decisions
Competition	Attention to the promotion and improvement of job and financial status and career advancement An effective role in doing things Respect for administrative hierarchy

**- Selective**

8 general categories include responsibility (work discipline, completing tasks on time, striving to increase work accuracy, performing assigned tasks correctly, prioritizing actions based on importance), honesty and integrity (reporting errors and trying to correct mistakes, Providing work reports in accordance with confidentiality and professional principles and professionalism, not accepting bribes or privileges in any way and under any circumstances, preventing the intervention of

intermediaries and influential people in the process of providing services), justice and fairness (not having undue bias, not paying attention to the economic status and social and ethnic and tribal status of the client, paying attention to religious beliefs and conscientiousness in providing services), loyalty (desire to do things in a desirable way, feeling of belonging to the organization and trying to improve the current situation and remove obstacles, having initiative and innovation to solve problems), respect for others (dealing appropriately with colleagues

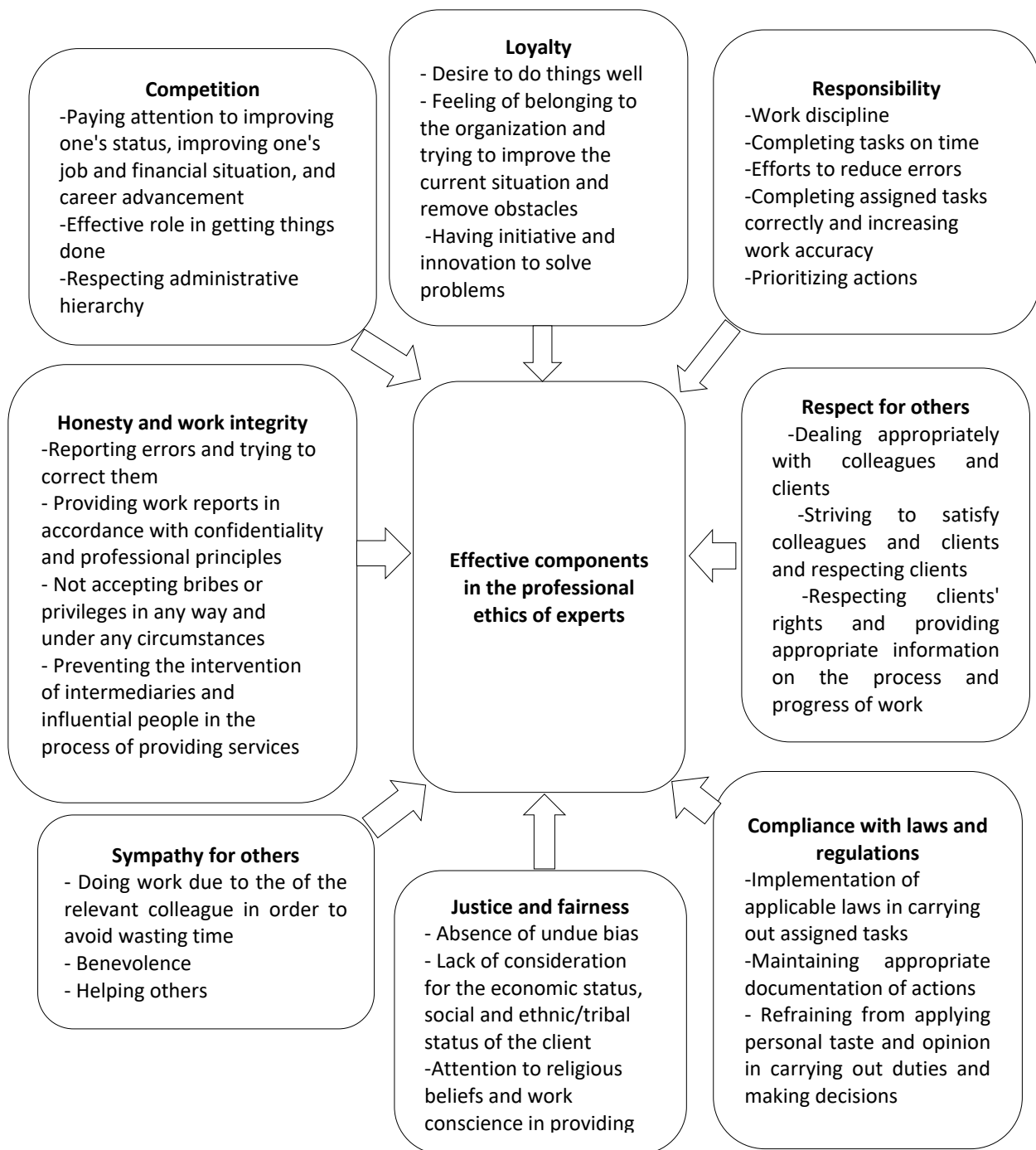
and clients, trying to satisfy colleagues and clients and honoring clients, respecting clients' rights and providing appropriate information about the process of actions and progress of work), sympathy for others (doing work due to inability and .The relevant colleague was identified in order to prevent wasting time, benevolence, helping others), compliance with laws and guidelines (implementing established laws in carrying out assigned tasks, maintaining appropriate documentation related to actions, refraining from applying personal taste and opinion in carrying out duties and making decisions) and competition (paying attention to promoting status and improving job and financial status and career advancement, playing an effective role in

carrying out tasks, observing administrative hierarchy).

In examining the demographic information of the participants in the study, out of a total of 40 people, 17 were men (42.5%) and 23 were women (57.5%), 15 were single (37.5%) and 25 were married (62.5%), in terms of age, the highest frequency was in the age group of 36 to 45 years with 16 people(40%), and in terms of educational level, the highest number was in the undergraduate group with 25 people (63.5%); in terms of employment type, the highest number was in the official employment with 27 people (67.5%), and in terms of work experience, the highest number was in the group with 16 to 20 years of experience including 11 people (27.5%) (Table 5).

**Table 5.** Demographic information of the research participants

Variable	Group	Number	Percentage of frequency
Gender	Male	17	42.5%
	Female	23	57.5%
Age	25-35	8	20%
	36-45	16	40%
	46-55	11	27.5%
	56-65	5	12.5%
Marital status	Single	15	37.5%
	Married	25	62.5%
Education degree	Bachelor's degree	25	63.5%
	Master's degree	9	22.5%
	Ph.D.	6	15%
Work experience of the participants	1-5	5	12.5%
	6-10	3	7.5%
	11-15	8	20%
	16-20	11	27.5%
	21-25	4	10%
	26-30	7	17.5%
	31-35	2	5%



**Figure 1.** Effective components in the professional ethics of experts

## Discussion

Based on Figure 1, which contains effective components in the professional ethics of experts and the results of this study, eight broad categories were identified, including responsibility, honesty, work safety, trustworthiness, fairness and equity, loyalty, respect and empathy for others, compliance with the law and competition. In any

profession, ethics form the invisible backbone that supports trust, credibility and accountability. Professional ethics are not just guidelines – they are the very essence of working with integrity and responsibility. Ethical choices affect not only your reputation but also the wider community you serve, which is consistent with Fitts' study. Adhering to these ethical principles creates a culture of trust,



respect and honesty that is crucial to maintaining public trust and ensuring sustainable success in any profession, promoting actuality and contributing to a better society (11). According to Biswas et al., awareness/honesty/ transparency/value instillation/respect/responsibility/code of conduct/fair practices are important, and some respondents considered broader concepts such as democracy, efficiency, environmental concerns, honesty, leadership, loyalty, and law-abiding. Business ethics, more specifically, refers to the application of appropriate business policies and practices in controversial issues, and other issues, including corporate governance, insider trading, bribery, discrimination, social responsibility, and fiduciary responsibility are also important. While there are many laws to set basic ethical standards in the business community, the development of codes of conduct that go beyond strict enforcement of the law depends largely on leadership in business (12), which is in line with the current study.

According to a study by Hashemi et al., establishing a foundation of professional ethics and an ethical climate in an organization can increase organizational trust, and thus ensure, the long-term benefits of the organization (13). Ethical leadership has its requirements, including the need for individual action as well as group action and commitment. Professionals of all types can be influential. We need ethical leadership as a moral responsibility, obligated to act based on true and best moral motives (14), which is consistent with the present thesis.

Although ethical considerations and education are very old and long-standing topics, the current conditions of human societies have made them acute and urgent issues, to the extent that today the ethical crisis is one of the crises that the world is facing, and promoting ethics requires education. Ethical principles in education include empowering the scholar, impartial communication with the scholar, confidentiality, respect for the institution, mastery of content, valid evaluation of scholars, and mastery so that learners are competent in terms of ethics and behavior (15). According to a study by

Salehi et al., there is a relationship between organizational justice and job engagement and the mediating role of teachers' professional ethics, indicating the importance of professional ethics (16).

The results of the study by Ashrafi et al. (17) indicated that the moral responsibility of every human being, regardless of age, gender, race, skin color, physical and mental ability, language, religion, political views, or national or social origin, is to have an inalienable and inalienable dignity. Each individual, as well as the government, must respect and protect this dignity. Human beings must always be the subject of rights; they should be considered goals, should never be mere means, and should never be the subject of commercial and industrial activities in the economy, politics, media, research institutions, and industrial establishments (17). A study by Ahqar et al. to determine organizational excellence and professional ethics in elementary school teachers showed that the greatest relationship was between professional ethics and reform, which indicates the importance of the issue of professional ethics in organizational improvement and promotion (18), which are consistent with the present study.

## Conclusion

According to the results of the present study, to improve professional ethics among professionals, officials must pay attention to the categories of responsibility, honesty and integrity, justice and fairness, loyalty, respect, sympathy for others, compliance with laws and guidelines, and competition. Given its importance in organizational culture, appropriate incentive and punishment mechanisms should be used to improve the current situation. Our society, by utilizing the categories of professional ethics, needs to build a culture to realize it. Today, many countries in the industrialized world have reached the point where ignoring ethical issues and evading social responsibilities and obligations lead to failure to achieve organizational goals and success.

For this reason, many successful companies have felt the need to develop an ethical strategy and have come to believe that a culture based on professional ethics, empathy, and organizational consensus should be institutionalized in the organization. Therefore, it is essential to improve compliance with the desired professional ethics standards, while identifying motivational factors and obstacles, and using the experiences and information received to adopt appropriate solutions for its development in the organizational culture using appropriate incentive and punishment mechanisms.

### Ethical considerations

The present study was conducted in accordance with the principles of scientific integrity and professional ethics with code IR.IUMS.REC.1404.286.

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### Authors' contribution

F.NM, H.F, and A.M, conducted the research, developed the concept, designed the study, analyzed and interpreted the data, and edited the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

### Conflict of interests

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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