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The Role of Organizational and Ethical Values in Reducing Occupational Stress in the view of Directors and Deans of Guilan University of Medical Sciences

Fardin Mehrabian[1], Sakineh Keshavarz-Mohammadian[1], Parvin Ebrahimi[2*]

[1] Faculty of Health, Guilan University of Medical Sciences, Rasht, Iran

[2] Department of Health Services Management, School of Health Management and Information Sciences, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran

*correspondence should be addressed to Parvin Ebrahimi, Department of Health Services Management, School of Health Management and Information Sciences, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran; Tell: +982188671614; Fax: +982188671615; Email: parvin_eb@yahoo.com.

ABSTRACT

Occupational stress is the most significant cause of stress in today's societies and a major factor leading to decline in the productivity of organizations. The identification and institutionalization of workers' values is an important fundamental source guaranteeing growth, survival and efficiency of organizations. The present study was conducted to examine the role of organizational and ethical values in reducing occupational stress in the view of directors and deans of Guilan University of Medical Sciences. The present descriptive, correlational study with its cross-sectional approach had 44 directors of staff of Guilan University of Medical Sciences as its statistical population. Data collection instrument was a 3-section questionnaire consisting of one section for personal and demographic information (7 items), one for the role of organizational values in stress (22 items) and another one for the role of ethical values in stress (10 items), which were scored on a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire validity was examined and confirmed by means of surveying the university professors and its reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Data collected were analyzed in SPSS software using descriptive statistics, and the correlation among components was determined through Pearson's correlation coefficient and regression analysis. There was a direct, significant correlation between organizational and ethical values and reduction of occupational stress (P=0.0001). The statistical difference between the mean score obtained by gender for the role of organizational values in reducing occupational stress was also significant (P=0.017). However, the difference between the mean score obtained by gender for the role of ethical values in reducing occupational stress was not significant (P=0.056). Observing ethical and organizational standards paves the ground for reducing occupational stress and job tension. In general, adherence to values provides the basis for reducing occupational stress.

Key words: Organizational values, Ethical values, Occupational stress, Guilan University of Medical Sciences

1. INTRODUCTION

Occupational stress is a major concern of directors, workers and other beneficiaries of organizations. In general, higher levels of imbalance between individuals' desires and abilities lead to more stress (1). Occupational stress is defined as a condition resulting from the interaction between workers and their jobs and is characterized by the workers' inner change distancing them from their normal performance (2). Occupational stress is a major factor reducing the productivity of organizations and causing physical and mental complications. Today, occupational stress is very common among ordinary people, education and health experts and other people responsible for assisting people (3). Occupational stress and dissatisfaction have been recognized as risk factors for healthcare personnel leading to reduced occupational performance, reduced quality of care provided and the personnel's own health impairment (4). Occupational stress has evident negative effects on individuals and harmful effects on organizations and the economy. The costs of stress might be massive due to wasted time, reduced productivity and incidents (5). Long-term stress can cause adverse changes in humans, such as depression, heart disease, cancer, stroke, ulcers, back pain,

headache, high blood pressure, indigestion and various kinds of other problems (6). Over the last three decades, numerous studies have examined factors contributing to occupational stress and extreme fatigue, and have proved the increasing need for detailed examination of the causes of occupational stress, particularly for the purpose of developing a safe workplace and healthy workers (7). Moreover, values count as important elements in the lives of humans (8); they play a critical role in daily work, make life meaningful, contribute to people's conception of identity, influence moral decisions in practice and guide interactions with patients, colleagues, other specialists and the society. Individuals' values determine which situations are stressful (i.e. challenging values) and which are cheerful (i.e. determining values) in the sphere of work (9). Furthermore, healthcare stress is affected by ethical factors (10). Values are beliefs or ideals about what is appropriate or desirable, and act as guidelines for choices, attitudes and individuals' behaviors (11). The alignment of personal values and experiences at the workplace is associated with the purposeful nature of the job and productivity (11). The general belief is that ethical values are related to the individual's feelings about the attainment of their personal rights (12). Moreover, a study conducted by Seyedin (13) showed a significant correlation between organizational commitment and ethical values of healthcare personnel working in governmental and non-governmental hospitals. Review of literature on the topic indicates that although various studies have been conducted on occupational stress in different societies, few comprehensive studies have been conducted to date on the role of organizational and ethical values in reducing occupational stress. Furthermore, due to their particular work structures, different organizations have stressors proportional to their activities that they need to identify, modify and reduce. The present study was therefore conducted with the purpose of examining the role of organizational and ethical values in reducing workers' occupational stress in the view of directors of the University of Medical Sciences. It will be a wish fulfilled if the results of this study can facilitate increased productivity, higher job satisfaction, reduced absenteeism and improved physical and mental health in healthcare personnel.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present descriptive correlational study was done as a cross-sectional research and the whole statistical population including 44 directors of staff of Guilan University of Medical Sciences was studied, and because of census, any sampling methods were not used. Data collection instrument was a researcher-made questionnaire

consisting of 3 sections. The first section included personal and demographic information; the second section included 22 items on the role of organizational values in occupational stress; and the third section included 10 items on the role of ethical values in occupational stress. The questionnaire items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale. Each questionnaire item on the role of organizational and ethical values in reducing occupational stress was assigned 5 options; 1 points for "very low", 2 points for "low", 3 points for "moderate", 4 points for "high" and 5 points for "very high". The questionnaire validity, that is, the face and content validity, was examined using opinion surveys from experts and university professors, and slight modifications were subsequently made to certain parts of the questionnaire. The questionnaire reliability was determined using Cronbach's alpha, which was calculated to be 0.78 and 0.83 for the items on the role of organizational and ethical values in reducing occupational stress, in respective order. Data were analyzed in SPSS software using descriptive statistical indexes (mean, frequency, standard deviation, etc.). Pearson's correlation coefficient and regression analysis were used to determine the correlation among components. The scope of the study was limited to the staff at Guilan University of Medical Sciences.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The majority of directors studied (that is, 40) were male (90.9%) and only 4 were female (9.1%). The majority of participants (72.7%) were aged 41-50, 15.9% were aged 31-40 and another 11.4% were above the age of 50. The majority percentage of directors studied (97.7%) were married and only 1 was single (2.3%). The majority of participants (75.0%) had a work experience exceeding 15 years, 13.6% had 11-15 years of work experience, the minority percentage (4.5%) had less than 5 years of work experience and the remaining 6.8%% had 5-10 years of work experience. The majority percentage of directors studied (61.4%) had a PhD degree, 20.5% had a bachelor's degree, and only 18.2% had a master's degree. Using the one sample t-test, the mean score obtained for each item on "the role of organizational values in reducing occupational stress" was compared against the score of 3 (the moderate option) and it was determined that the mean score of the 20 items exempting items 9 and 10 (P=0.523, P=0.441) was significantly higher than 3 (*P<0.0001* for all). The mean total score obtained for items on "the role of organizational values in reducing occupational stress" was 91.2 ± 8.7, so that the minimum score obtained was 73 and the maximum 110 (Table 1).

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Responses to Items on the Role of Organizational Values in Reducing Occupational Stress Given by Participating Directors of Guilan University of Medical Sciences

No.	Response to Item	Very Low		Low		Moderate		High		Very High		Mean	P
1	Clear employment status	0	0	1	2.3	4	9.1	12	27.3	27	61.4	4.4±0.7	0.0001
2	Delegation	0	0	3	6.8	7	15.9	21	47.7	13	29.5	4.0±0.8	0.0001
3	Team work instead of individual work	0	0	2	4.5	9	20.5	18	40.9	15	34.1	4.04±0.8	0.0001
4	Mutual trust between the employer and the employee	0	0	0	0	2	4.5	15	34.1	27	61.4	4.5±0.5	0.0001
5	Interest in the job	0	0	1	2.3	0	0	10	22.7	33	75	4.7±0.5	0.0001
6	Desirable workplace conditions	0	0	1	2.3	2	4.5	21	47.7	20	45.5	4.3±0.7	0.0001
7	Having the support of authorities if necessary	0	0	0	0	2	4.5	17	38.6	25	56.8	4.5±0.6	0.0001
8	Being encouraged by the supervisor if necessary	0	0	1	2.3	7	15.9	17	38.6	19	43.2	4.2±0.8	0.0001
9	Being punished by the supervisor if necessary	1	2.3	11	25	18	40.9	11	25	3	6.8	3.09±0.9	0.523
10	Job rotation	2	4.5	10	22.7	15	34.1	15	34.1	2	4.5	3.1±0.9	0.441
11	Fixed work shifts	0	0	5	11.4	15	34.1	19	43.2	5	11.4	3.5±0.8	0.0001
12	Colleagues' support	0	0	1	2.3	8	18.2	21	47.7	14	31.8	4.09±0.7	0.0001
13	How to deal with customers	0	0	1	2.3	11	25	21	47.7	11	25	3.9±0.7	0.0001
14	Loyalty to the organization	0	0	0	0	8	18.2	19	43.2	17	38.6	4.2±0.7	0.0001
15	Adherence to doing the job properly	0	0	0	0	7	15.9	16	36.4	21	47.7	4.3±0.7	0.0001
16	Knowledge and positive attitude toward working	0	0	0	0	4	9.1	15	34.1	25	56.8	4.4±0.6	0.0001
17	Believing in work discipline	0	0	0	0	7	15.9	19	43.2	18	40.9	4.2±0.7	0.0001
18	Empowering the personnel	0	0	0	0	5	11.4	22	50	17	38.6	4.2±0.6	0.0001
19	Being responsible at work	0	0	0	0	2	4.5	19	43.2	23	52.3	4.4±0.5	0.0001
20	Planning for fulfilling duties	0	0	0	0	7	15.9	19	43.2	18	40.9	4.2±0.7	0.0001
21	Time management for fulfilling duties	0	0	0	0	8	18.2	17	38.6	19	43.2	4.25±0.7	0.0001
22	Type of job	1	2.3	0	0	8	18.2	21	47.7	14	31.8	4.06±0.8	0.0001

Using the one sample t-test, the mean score obtained for each item on "the role of ethical values in reducing occupational stress" was compared against the score of 3 (the moderate option) and it was determined that the mean score of all 10 items was significantly higher than 3 (*P<0.0001* for all).

The mean total score obtained for items on "the role of ethical values in reducing occupational stress" was 43.04±4.9, so that the minimum score obtained was 29 and the maximum 50 (Table 2).

Table 2. Frequency Distribution of Responses to Items on the Role of Ethical Values in Reducing Occupational Stress Given by Participating Directors of Guilan University of Medical Sciences

No.	Response to Item	Very Low		Low		Moderate		High		Very High		Mean	P
1	Avoiding accusations	0	0	0	0	1	2.3	14	31.8	29	65.9	4.6±0.5	0.0001
2	Patience at work	0	0	1	2.3	5	11.4	17	38.6	21	47.7	4.3±0.7	0.0001
3	Commitment to God	0	0	0	0	3	6.8	10	22.7	31	70.5	4.6±0.6	0.0001
4	Having professional honesty	0	0	0	0	2	4.5	15	34.1	27	61.4	4.5±0.5	0.0001
5	Self-assessment	0	0	1	2.3	10	22.7	21	47.7	12	27.3	4.0±0.7	0.0001
6	Confidentiality	0	0	1	2.3	9	20.55	14	31.8	20	45.5	4.2±0.8	0.0001
7	Having positive views about other colleagues	0	0	2	4.5	7	15.9	24	54.5	11	25	4.0±0.7	0.0001
8	Being independent at decision-making	0	0	1	2.3	3	6.8	24	54.5	16	36.4	4.2±0.6	0.0001

| 9 | Humility | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4.5 | 8 | 18.2 | 23 | 52.3 | 11 | 25 | 3.9±0.8 | 0.0001 |
| 10 | Taking account of the consequences of working in the afterlife | 1 | 2.3 | 1 | 2.3 | 2 | 4.5 | 13 | 29.5 | 27 | 61.4 | 4.4±0.9 | 0.0001 |

The Pearson correlation coefficient showed a correlation between the scores obtained for items on the role of organizational values and the role of ethical values in reducing occupational stress based on the views of directors studied. In other words, any increase or decrease in scores of one of the two sections increases or decreases the scores of the other section (Table 3).

Table 3. Correlation between the scores obtained for items on "the role of organizational values" and the scores obtained for items on "the role of ethical values" in reducing occupational stress

the scores obtained for items on the role of organizational values in reducing occupational stress		
Pearson Correlation 0.627	P	Type of Correlation
	0.0001	Positive

Using the t-test for two independent samples and with a confidence level of 95% and an error rate lower than 5%, a significant statistical difference was observed by gender between the mean scores obtained by the directors for items on the role of organizational values in reducing occupational stress (*P= 0.017*). However, no significant statistical difference was observed by gender between the mean scores obtained by the directors for items on the role of ethical values in reducing occupational stress (*P= 0.056*). According to findings of the present study, no significant statistical difference was observed by years of work experience between the mean scores obtained by the directors for items on the role of organizational values in reducing occupational stress (*P= 0.354*). However, with a confidence level of 95% and an error rate lower than 5%, a significant statistical difference was observed by years of work experience between the mean scores obtained by the directors for items on the role of ethical values in reducing occupational stress (*P= 0.038*). Based on other findings of this study, no significant statistical difference was observed by age range, marital status and level of education between the mean scores obtained by the directors for items on the role of organizational and ethical values in reducing occupational stress (*P> 0.09*). Findings of the present study demonstrated a significant correlation between organizational and ethical values and occupational stress. In other words, increased levels of adherence to organizational and ethical values and morality in the organization reduce occupational stress at the workplace. Findings of a study conducted by Rebecchi (14) showed that occupational significance values can be predictors of specific aspects of excessive fatigue, such as cases of emotional exhaustion. Based on their study, Fiabane et al. (4) concluded that major sources of occupational stress include injustice, conflict between organizational values and personal values, lack of rewards and the workload. According to results of a study conducted in China by Siu (15), occupational values and organizational commitment are revealed as significant moderators of stress. When occupational stress is very high, workers with high levels of work values reported lower occupational performance. Results of the study conducted by Lu (16) indicated that work stressors are negatively associated with occupational welfare. Meanwhile, work values are positively associated with occupational welfare. Moreover, occupational values have moderating effects on certain relations between occupational satisfaction and stressors. A study conducted by Knoop (17) clarified that the 12 intrinsic (internal) values studied are negatively associated with stress, while the 4 non-intrinsic (external) values studied are not persistently associated with stress. Findings of the aforementioned studies are somewhat in line with results of the present study with respect to the existence of a correlation between organizational values and reduced occupational stress. Results of a study conducted by Shatalebi (18) demonstrated that, from the personnel's perspective, all value factors have a stress-reducing role higher than the moderate level; and among the 3 value factors, ethical values have the maximum effect on reducing occupational stress. According to a study conducted by Nayeri (19), there was a significant correlation between ethical values and overall occupational stress, and the observance of value and ethical criteria in the form of ethical leadership facilitates the reduction of occupational stress in the organization. Results of the study conducted by Dalvi (20) demonstrated a significant negative correlation between ethical leadership and occupational stress. Ethical leadership can reduce nurses' occupational stress and consequently reduce intentions to leave the job. Results of the study conducted by Soleymani (21) demonstrated a significant positive correlation between the personnel's perceptions of the ethics governing their work and occupational satisfaction, while there was a significant negative correlation between the personnel's perceptions of the ethics governing their work and occupational stress. Furthermore, two aspects of work ethics (interest in work and perseverance at work) are significant predictors of personnel's occupational stress. In line with results of the aforementioned studies, findings of the present study, too, indicate a correlation between

ethical values and reduced occupational stress. Examination of the scores obtained for items on the role of organizational values in reducing occupational stress and the scores obtained for items on the role of ethical values in reducing occupational stress showed a direct positive correlation to exist between these two components. In other words, as ethical values increase in an organization, adherence to organizational standards and values increase as well; conversely, as ethical values decrease, organizational values are less respected, therefore suggesting the two components to be complementary to each other. Findings of the present study revealed no significant statistical difference to exist by gender between the mean scores obtained by the directors for items on the role of ethical values in reducing occupational stress, thus indicating the subject to be of equal importance to men and women.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the analyzed data, the two components, i.e. organizational values and ethical values, are correlated with reduced occupational stress in the view of directors studied. Therefore, healthcare directors can increase the confidence, loyalty and organizational commitment of their personnel by promoting organizational and ethical values aimed at reducing occupational stressors. As the observance of organizational and ethical standards and regard for religious and spiritual values prepare for reduced occupational stress in organizations and workplaces, policy makers and agents responsible for planning should primarily focus on a general regard for organizational and ethical values. Providing a safe workplace, holding workshops on spiritual and cultural empowerment for personnel, holding conferences on professional ethics and the directors own efforts at being practical models for the observance of ethical and professional standards should be emphasized.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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